

Proposed private treaty grant of former Explosives Magazine

The Executive Council has agreed to grant formal approval for an application from the Asia Society Hong Kong Centre for a private treaty grant of the former Explosives Magazine site in Justice Drive, Admiralty at nominal premium.

In 2002, the society obtained Town Planning Board approval for the project and the Executive Council's in-principle support for the private treaty grant. The society has continued with its project planning since then, and is now ready to implement its plans.

The site, measuring about 7,460 square metres and mainly comprised of an upper and lower platform, is vacant at the moment. The upper platform contains old military buildings and structures built in the 1840s and 1860s and previously used for storage of explosives.

The Antiquities Advisory Board accorded it Grade I status in recognition of its historical significance. The lower platform contains a masonry building named GG Block that was erected in the 1930s.

The society, a non-profit organisation, plans to restore the historical buildings and structures at the site and convert them into facilities for exhibitions, arts and cultural performances, lectures, conferences, offices and other activities.

A covered pedestrian footbridge will be constructed to connect the upper and lower platforms. A new two-storey building will be erected at the lower platform to provide various facilities such as a reception area, visitor's centre, service area, bookstore and other multi-purpose areas.

The buildings will be open to the public free of charge. The services and programmes to be provided by the centre will be offered at a reasonable admission charge with concession prices for students and seniors in line with similar cultural venues in Hong Kong.

The society will complete the project and commission operation in three years' time. It will meet all project costs, estimated at around \$200 million, and be responsible for subsequent operation of the multi-purpose centre and maintenance of the historical

buildings and structures.

A spokesman for the Home Affairs Bureau said the project would promote heritage conservation, help bring a new cultural scene to the community, promote cultural exchange and tourism, and strengthen Hong Kong's status as a world city in Asia. "It also strengthens the partnership between the Government and the non-profit making sector in the promotion of heritage conservation, arts and culture in Hong Kong," he said.

The private treaty grant is for a term of 21 years. The Lands Department has completed the draft land grant document, and will arrange for its execution with the society shortly.

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