

Government decides not to declare Queen's Pier a monument

The Secretary for Home Affairs, Dr Patrick Ho, today (May 23) said that as the Antiquities Authority, having thoroughly considered all relevant factors and information, he had decided that Queen's Pier did not possess the requisite historical, archaeological or palaeontological significance for it to be declared as a monument under the Antiquities and Monuments Ordinance.

Dr Ho said he had thoroughly considered the research and analyses conducted by the Antiquities and Monuments Office on the heritage value of Queen's Pier, the views expressed by various concern groups and individuals as well as other relevant factors.

He had, in particular, taken note of the discussion of the Antiquities Advisory Board on May 9 about the heritage value of Queen's Pier and the views put forward by various groups at the public hearing held before the board's meeting.

According to the existing Antiquities and Monuments Ordinance, if the Antiquities Authority (i.e. the Secretary for Home Affairs) considered any place, building, site or structure to be of public interest by reason of its historical, archaeological or palaeontological significance, he may, after consultation with the board and with the approval of the Chief Executive, by notice in the Gazette, declare such place, building, site or structure to be a monument.

The intention behind the declaration of a historical building as a monument was to preserve the building in its present form. Once declared a monument, any demolition, alterations or disruptions could only take place with permits granted by the Antiquities Authority.

"Using the historical buildings which have been declared as monuments as a yardstick, it is plain that the threshold of historical, archaeological or palaeontological significance qualifying a building as a monument is very high indeed and the selection criteria very stringent," Dr Ho said.

"Up to now, there are only 63 historical buildings which have been declared as monuments across Hong Kong, all of which are pre-war buildings with relatively

longer building age and with significant historical value."

Queen's Pier also lacks significance in terms of archaeological or palaeontological values since it is not an antiquity.

Dr Ho agreed that Queen's Pier possessed certain historical significance for it bore a testimony to the colonial rule of Hong Kong, but it fell short of the requirements for it to be declared as a monument.

"There are currently a lot of pre-war historical buildings which bear testimony to Hong Kong's colonial past and have higher historical value, when compared with Queen's Pier."

As for building characteristics, Dr Ho said in terms of design, decoration and craftsmanship, Queen's Pier also compared less favourably with other similar structures or structures belonging to the same period in terms of its impact on and importance for the architectural development in Hong Kong.

Dr Ho explained that the grading system of built heritage was an internal mechanism of the board with no statutory basis. The aim of the grading was to identify and compare the heritage value of historical buildings. The grading made no specific requirement on how the building should actually be preserved, which would depend on such factors as its structure, condition, features as well as technical feasibility.

"Therefore, even for a Grade I building which is defined as 'of outstanding merit, which every effort should be made to preserve if possible', it does not necessarily mean that the building has to be preserved in-situ. So long as the preservation option of Queen's Pier is one which represents the best possible effort to preserve the Pier, this is not incompatible with its status as a Grade I historical building," Dr Ho stressed.

"The grading system and the declaration of monuments are two distinct mechanisms and there are no automatic links between them. In fact, not all Grade I buildings would automatically be declared as monuments, and not every declared monument must first be accorded a Grade I status. There are a total of 151 buildings which have been accorded Grade I historical building status by the Antiquities Advisory Board. Among them, only 28 buildings have been declared as monuments."

"Although the board has accorded Queen's Pier Grade I historical building status, over half of those members attending the meeting expressed reservations about the grading. This indicates that board members had diverse opinions on the historical significance of the pier."

"Following the board's decision, I have heard and received different views from the community. There are calls for initiating the statutory process for the declaration of the pier as a monument right away so as to give it the stringent protection by law. There are also groups and members of the public expressing doubts about the board's grading decision. As the Antiquities Authority, I consider it necessary to state clearly the Government position on whether Queen's Pier should be declared as a monument."

"I believe this position will facilitate the community in its discussion on the best efforts to preserve Queen's Pier," he said.

Ends/Wednesday, May 23, 2007

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