

## Recommendation report of the Consultative Committee on the Core Arts and Cultural Facilities of the West Kowloon Cultural District

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The Government today (September 12) released the recommendation report of the Consultative Committee (CC) on the Core Arts and Cultural Facilities of the West Kowloon Cultural District (WKCD) and started a three-month public engagement exercise to explain the recommendations and to solicit views from the public.

The Chief Secretary for Administration, Mr Henry Tang, extended his heartfelt gratitude to members of the CC and the three advisory groups, that is, the Performing Arts and Tourism Advisory Group (PATAG), the Museums Advisory Group (MAG) and the Financial Matters Advisory Group (FMAG). He thanked the members for their efforts in the past 15 months in completing a thorough and pragmatic report. Mr Tang pointed out that the recommendations in the report were a result of wide and in-depth consultation and discussion amongst the members of the CC and the three advisory groups as well as relevant sectors.

Mr Tang said, "WKCD is an important strategic investment to promote the arts and culture and for the future of Hong Kong. Investment in the arts and culture in a modern international city like Hong Kong is as important as investment in education, training, research and development or other major infrastructure."

The CC and its three advisory groups were set up in April last year to re-examine the need for the core arts and cultural facilities of the WKCD and the respective financial implications. In the past 15 months, the CC and its three advisory groups had held 37 meetings, four consultative forums, seven focus group meetings, four briefings and 11 tea gatherings. They also invited museum experts from Australia, the United States, Japan and France to Hong Kong for exchange. Besides, they had also visited a dozen or so museums and related organisations in the United States and Europe to conduct wide and in-depth consultations, studies and examinations. The CC had studied three related consultancy reports on the WKCD which include the report by the Financial Advisor engaged by the Government to assist the FMAG, the consultancy on the relations between museums and performance venues in the WKCD and Hong Kong's creative industries by the Cultural Policy Research Centre of the University of Hong Kong and the economic impact assessment report completed by the Government Economist, as well as the reports submitted by the PATAG, MAG and FMAG in September, November last year and May this year

respectively.

The report points out that the WKCD is more than a physical congregation and clustering of arts and cultural facilities. It is also an integrated cultural district for quality cultural, entertainment and tourism programmes. The WKCD is a major initiative to meet the long-term infrastructure needs of Hong Kong's arts and cultural development. In addition, it can foster organic growth and development of cultural and creative industries, attract and nurture talents, promote international exchange and co-operation, enhance the quality of life for citizens and make Hong Kong the cultural gateway to the Pearl River Delta.

The CC emphasises that there should be a balanced mix of arts and cultural facilities for organic growth in the WKCD. On the performing arts venues, the CC recommends to provide a total of 15 performing arts venues of various types and sizes. Phase One will see the construction of a mega performance venue, a Xiqu (Chinese opera) centre, a concert hall, a chamber music hall, a great theatre, two medium-sized theatres, and four blackbox theatres and piazza areas. Phase Two will include a great theatre and two medium-sized theatres, depending on market demand after the facilities in Phase One have come into operation. Land must be reserved in the master layout plan for Phase Two facilities there.

The CC considers that the concert hall/chamber music hall, Xiqu (Chinese opera) centre, great theatre and mega performance venue should be free-standing structures whilst the remaining performing arts venues should suitably cluster amongst themselves, or with other culture-related facilities, and commercial, catering and retailing facilities to achieve synergy. If the proposed facilities are implemented, the total seating capacity of Hong Kong's performing arts venues will be increased by 37%.

On the museum front, the CC recommends to set up a new cultural institution called M+(Museum Plus). It is a flexible and forward-looking cultural institution with a mission to focus on 20th to 21st century visual culture, broadly defined, from a Hong Kong perspective, the perspective of now, and with a global vision. Visual culture is selected since it is closely related to our daily lives and is the majority of the proposed themes received from the public during the consultation period. M+ is also a brand new concept, a museum community with both indoor and outdoor space and a platform for cultural exchange and activities. M+ will initially include four broad groupings, i.e. Moving Image, Popular Culture, Design and Visual Art

(including ink art). New groupings could be explored in the course of development. The CC suggests M+ to be developed in two phases with a total Gross Floor Area (GFA) of 78 750 square metres. If M+ is implemented, the total GFA of Hong Kong's museums will be increased by 52%. The CC also recommends to set up an interim M+, before the permanent M+ is completed, to provide a platform to start training professional staff, provide arts education to the public, start collecting and research with a view to laying a solid foundation for M+.

The CC proposes to launch an architectural design competition by invitation for M+, the Xiqu (Chinese opera) Centre, and the Concert Hall/Chamber Music Hall to attract innovative iconic designs.

In addition, the CC recommends the provision of an Exhibition Centre which should give priority to uses relating to arts and culture, creative industries as well as events/activities related to WKCD. The CC also proposes that space should be reserved for uses by the resident companies; meeting rooms and common facilities for artists and arts groups; arts education venues; arts and cultural information centre; space for international meetings/functions/events etc.; as well as space for office of international arts and cultural organisations in Hong Kong.

In response to the rising public aspiration for quality of life, the CC recommends that the following planning parameters should be strictly followed:

- (i) setting the maximum overall plot ratio for the whole WKCD site at 1.81, giving a total GFA of about 726 000 square metres;
- (ii) capping the residential development at no more than 20% of the total GFA;
- (iii) building height restrictions ranging from 50 to 100 metres PD; and
- (iv) providing 23 hectares of public open space (mostly at ground level).

Based on the above development parameters, the development mix recommended by the CC, in terms of GFA, is 57% for core arts and cultural facilities and related facilities, 15% for office, 8% for hotel and 20% for residential development.

"The CC has put forward a prudent and transparent financing approach which

separates the arts and cultural facilities from the commercial and residential developments in WKCD, whilst enabling WKCD to develop and operate on a financially self-sufficient basis," Mr Tang said.

The CC accepts the assessment of the Financial Advisor which estimates that none of the core arts and cultural facilities can recover the costs of operations and maintenance as well as the capital costs. Besides, cultural facilities in general could hardly be operated on a financially self-sustainable manner, hence they need to be subsidised by Government, with private sector involvement in development/operation. The most important principles the CC subscribes to when drawing up the financing approach for the WKCD project are that the approach should provide funding stability conducive to arts and cultural development without long-term subsidies from the government. In addition, the approach should remain flexible, ensure early delivery of the project and be affordable to the Government.

Based on the principles listed above, the CC proposes that the financing approach should be to finance the capital costs through an upfront endowment appropriated by Legislative Council (LegCo), vest the retail/dining/entertainment (RDE) part of the commercial sites with the WKCD Authority to provide a steady source of recurrent income through rental proceeds to subsidise the operating costs of the arts and cultural facilities. With this financing approach, the Government will need to apply to LegCo for an upfront endowment of about \$20 billion for developing WKCD's arts and cultural facilities.

Mr Tang pointed out that WKCD was a timely and worthwhile investment which would bring about substantial tangible and intangible economic benefits: creative industries being enhanced, the overall cultural and arts development in Hong Kong being strengthened, employment opportunities being created and local cultural and arts talents being nurtured.

"According to the study and estimates done by the Government Economist, WKCD will bring to the Hong Kong economy a value-added contribution of \$71 billion accumulatively (in present value terms) in the first 46 years of operation; construction works in WKCD (including residential and commercial) can create over 11 000 job opportunities in the construction industry, the various facilities will create more than 21 500 job opportunities for the community after 30 years, and over 4.5 million tourists will be attracted to WKCD every year, bringing an extra \$3.7 billion spending annually to Hong Kong," he said.

The CC recommends that the Government should proceed to draw up as soon as practicable the requisite legislative proposals for the setting up of the WKCD Authority to take forward the WKCD project. The CC entirely agrees that the successful realisation of the vision and objectives of the WKCD hinges on timely implementation of measures for developing cultural software, including more effective support for the development of major professional performing arts groups, nurturing budding and young artists, improving operation of performing arts venues and museums, enhancing training in the arts and culture, and strengthening cultural exchange and co-operation.

"The Government would not neglect the other measures that would support the development of WKCD. Knowing the importance of hardware, we are also mindful of the importance of software development and other supporting measures. This was also pointed out in the CC's report. The Government would work together with local cultural and arts groups to implement appropriate measures. This will include enhancing support for arts groups and young artists; a comprehensive study of the supply and demand situation of cultural and arts talents with a view to introducing measures to strengthen manpower training; augmenting arts education and audience building; enhancing cultural exchange and co-operation; improving the operational modes of existing performing arts venues and promoting private sector participation and development, including venue partnership scheme and the corporatisation of museum management," the Secretary for Home Affairs, Mr Tsang Tak-sing said.

Mr Tang said: "The WKCD project is very important to Hong Kong and should be implemented as soon as possible."

"At this stage, we will invite the public to participate in and promote the project. If the public supports the CC's recommendations, the Government will proceed as quickly as possible to set up the WKCD Authority, which will take over WKCD's planning and preparatory work," Mr Tang added.

The Government will launch a three-month public engagement exercise to explain the CC's recommendations and solicit public views. Members of the public are welcome to visit the website [www.hab.gov.hk/wkcd](http://www.hab.gov.hk/wkcd) for the CC's report and the details of the public engagement exercise.

Ends/Wednesday, September 12, 2007