



**THE HONG KONG INSTITUTE OF
SURVEYORS**



Your ref.: G12/02/EBDE

9 August 2004

Buildings Department
12/F Pioneer Centre
750 Nathan Road
Kowloon

BY FAX & POST
3162 0887

Attn: Mr S T Lam

Dear Sir

Building Classification Scheme Consultation Paper

On behalf of The Hong Kong Institute of Surveyors we write to confirm our support in principle to the introduction of the Building Classification Scheme (the "Scheme"), which could bring positive impacts to the built environment in Hong Kong. It is believed that a well-established and creditable classification system could provide to the public a quick reference to identify those properly maintained and managed properties, and thus promoting the importance and benefits of proper building management and maintenance in the society.

To ensure the success of the Scheme, its implementation needs further study. Otherwise, the Scheme will likely only attract buildings of better quality, which we believe, are not the prime targets.

Preliminary inspection of a building by a qualified profession will provide the owners with knowledge on the basic condition of their property. The follow-up actions, which may include detailed investigation and remedial works to the defective areas, would be much dependent upon the building owners concerned. These are, in fact, the more important steps to follow. It may be practically difficult for the owners of aged buildings to finance the building condition assessment fee; otherwise the resources would have been placed on regular building maintenance and repairs. We therefore suggest that the Scheme should be implemented in a more comprehensive manner and should be promoted in conjunction with the various technical and financial aid schemes offered by the Government and quasi-government organizations such as the Urban Renewal Authority ("URA").



Impact on the environment by the scheme

In Hong Kong, the 'problematic' buildings usually involve those over 30 years in age, strata-titled and usually without owners' incorporation or property manager. It is natural to think that the Scheme, as an accreditation on the well-maintained buildings, will only attract those expected to attain good ratings. We could hardly expect those owners to spend money on inspection if the anticipated assessment would be of a low rating. We feel concerned on the effectiveness of the scheme if it is implemented voluntarily. There is already voluntary building assessment schemes currently found in Hong Kong, e.g. HK BEAM, which is only able to attract quality buildings to be assessed for the purpose of pursuing excellence. Conversely, the proposed Building Classification Scheme appears to be much to pinpoint on buildings with maintenance and dilapidation problems.

Classification of buildings

The proposed three classes, namely Class A, Class B and Class U, may not properly reflect the true condition of a building and may offer different interpretation by building owners. In accordance with the rating criteria described in the consultation document, a building which had conducted general repair (but not comprehensive rehabilitation works) and was kept in just a fair condition in an old district may hardly obtain Class B, and is likely to get Class U. This shows no difference from the assessment on dilapidated buildings in the same district. Although a simple classification system is supported, we suggest developing sufficient ratings to better reflect the condition of the buildings under assessment.

Assessment Agency and qualifying assessors

The consultation paper proposed to set up an agency and a mechanism for accreditation of assessors. We are of the opinion that the existing system in certifying building professionals (i.e. Authorized Person, Registered Professional Architect, Registered Professional Engineer and Registered Professional Surveyor) is sufficient. The ability of these professionals in assessing the condition of a building is acknowledged by their relevant professional qualification. We do not see any logic to impose an extra layer on the existing professional qualification structure.

With regard to the administration of the Scheme, if the proposed Agency operates on its own turnover, we feel concerned on the financial sustainability if there is insufficient application. We are of the opinion that existing quasi-government organizations such as the URA and Housing Society, both involved in urban renewal and building rehabilitation are suitable candidates. Setting up a new agency will be less cost-effective when an existing organization has the capability and expertise to handle the Scheme. Moreover, the Scheme can be promoted hand-in-hand with the various technical and financial assistance offered by these organizations to provide a one-stop service to those building owners who are in need of assistance.



Possible occupier's liability and consequential enforcement order

A completed assessment report may result in a schedule of dilapidation to be attended. If the building owners are not yet prepared to implement building renovation, it is not sensible to conduct an assessment, as this would bring about occupiers' liability if prompt repairs were not carried out.

It is noted from paragraph 16 of the consultation document that the assessor owes a duty to report the hazard to the Building Authority. This may further discourage building owners to participate in the scheme because of potential enforcement order.

The above are overall views on the issue and we would be most pleased to meet you for discussion on the subject issue. Should you have any further queries, please feel free to contact the undersigned or our Secretary-General, Mr. Gordon Ng, at 2526 3679

Thank you for your kind attention.

Yours faithfully



Tony Tse
President

Encl.