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## INFORMATION NOTE

### Built heritage conservation policy in Singapore

#### 1. Background

1.1 Singapore is a relatively latecomer in heritage conservation as compared with many other developed countries<sup>1</sup>. It was not until the mid-1980s that the conservation of historic heritage topped the national policy agenda of Singapore. Before that, the Singapore government did not consider preserving historic heritage as a high priority for the country. In the 1960s and 1970s, Singapore was faced with the problems of acute housing shortage, a rapidly expanding population and overcrowded slums, as well as the pressing need for rapid economic development. As such, urban renewal took precedence over heritage conservation so as to provide more housing and transform Singapore into a modern and efficient business and industrial centre. Large-scale government projects were carried out to clear slums, develop large tracts of city centre, and construct public housing and new infrastructures. Many of Singapore's built heritage had been demolished to make way for urban renewal as a result.

1.2 A couple of factors contributed to the reversal of the government policy towards heritage conservation in the mid-1980s. The completion of large-scale land reclamation in the Marina South in the early 1980s eased the pressure to demolish quality old buildings for new commercial developments. The decline in tourist arrivals in 1983 also further provoked the Singapore government into rethinking the precedence of urban renewal over heritage conservation.

1.3 In 1983, tourist arrivals in Singapore decreased by 3.5% year-on-year, the first decline since 1965. This setback prompted the Singapore government to set up the Tourism Task Force in 1984 to investigate the underlying problems and identify possible remedial measures. The Tourism Task Force attributed the setback in 1983 to the attrition of Singapore's tourist attractions, as the country had removed its oriental mystique and charm symbolized in old buildings, traditional activities and bustling roadside activities when striving to build a modern metropolis<sup>2</sup>. It then recommended, among other things, to conserve Chinatown and many other historic districts in order to woo tourists back to Singapore.

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<sup>1</sup> See Urban Redevelopment Authority (2006b).

<sup>2</sup> See Teo & Huang (1995).

1.4 Against the above background, there had been a shift in the government policy in the mid-1980s from the early preoccupation with just "demolish and build" to incorporate heritage conservation in the urban planning policy. In 1986, the Singapore government introduced the Conservation Master Plan to map out the criteria and methods for conservation of the historic districts in Singapore. In 1987, the national "conservation authority" – Urban Redevelopment Authority (URA) – led the way by carrying out several pilot restoration and conservation projects in the historic districts, in an effort to showcase the government's commitment and the technical and economic viability of conservation. In addition, the Singapore government introduced economic incentives to encourage private participation in heritage preservation.

1.5 In 1989, a new Planning Act was passed to establish conservation as a planning function. In particular, the Planning Act provided for (a) the designation of conservation areas where there would be special controls over development, and (b) the powers of the national "conservation authority" (i.e. URA) to issue guidelines for the conservation of any buildings or land within a conservation area. With the legislative framework governing conservation areas falling in place, URA gazetted the first 10 conservation areas in Singapore<sup>3</sup>.

1.6 As a result of the conservation efforts starting in the mid-1980s, many historic buildings have been saved from the fate of demolition and conserved in the ensuing years. In recent years, URA has looked beyond pre-war buildings to the conservation of significant buildings and areas built after the Second World War. According to URA<sup>4</sup>, these buildings and areas are important for their social and historical significance, particularly as symbols of Singapore's modernizing and industrializing era. In addition, they document the evolution of building styles in Singapore, and serve as fine examples of the work of Singapore's pioneering local architects.

## **2. Institutional arrangements for heritage conservation**

2.1 The Ministry of Information, Communications and the Arts and the Ministry of National Development are the principal government authorities responsible for heritage conservation in Singapore. The former operates through the Preservation of Monuments Board, while the latter functions through URA.

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<sup>3</sup> These 10 conservation areas are Kreta Ayer, Bukit Pasoh, Telok Ayer, Tanjong Pagar, Little India, Lampong Glam, Boat Quay, Emerald Hill, Cairnhill and Clarke Quay.

<sup>4</sup> See Urban Redevelopment Authority (2006b).

## The Ministry of Information, Communications and the Arts

2.2 The Ministry of Information, Communications and the Arts aims at, among other things, forging a strong sense of community, national identity, rootedness and inclusion among Singaporeans. Heritage conservation is considered as one of the contributory factors for attaining this vision. As such, the Ministry administers a statutory board, the Preservation of Monuments Board, to help conserve Singapore's national monuments.

### *Preservation of Monuments Board*

2.3 The Preservation of Monuments Board was established in 1971 with the enactment of the Preservation of Monuments Act on 29 January 1971. On 1 April 1997, the Board was transferred from the Ministry of National Development to become a statutory board under the Ministry of Information, Communications and the Arts. It consists of the Chairman and 10-17 members appointed by the Minister for Information, Communications and the Arts for renewable two-year terms. The objectives of the Board, as stipulated under Section 5 of the Preservation of Monuments Act, are:

- (a) to preserve monuments of historic, traditional, archaeological, architectural or artistic interest;
- (b) to protect and augment the amenities of the preserved monuments;
- (c) to stimulate public interest and support in the conservation of the preserved monuments; and
- (d) to take appropriate measures to preserve all records, documents and data relating to the preserved monuments.

2.4 The Preservation of Monuments Board is also empowered to make recommendations to the Minister for Information, Communications and the Arts on gazetting a particular building or structure as a national monument. In addition, the Board has the power to (a) inspect monuments, (b) receive donations, grants, gifts of movable and/or immovable property from any source, (c) contribute money by grant or loan towards maintenance, acquisition and disposition of monuments, and (d) regulate and control public access to monuments and charge fees for such access.

## The Ministry of National Development

2.5 The Ministry of National Development is responsible for the physical development of Singapore through long-term planning. It aims at enhancing Singapore's physical infrastructure and environment to make it a thriving and vibrant world-class city for business, living and leisure. The portfolios of the Minister for National Development encompass a wide range of areas, including land use planning, urban development and building conservation, public housing, the construction industry, and parks and greenery. The Ministry functions through its various departments and statutory boards, and URA is the statutory body taking charge of the planning and conservation responsibilities in Singapore.

### *Urban Redevelopment Authority*

2.6 As a statutory body of the Ministry of National Department, URA carries out strategic planning to ensure the efficient use of land. URA prepares long-term strategic plans and detailed local area plans for physical development. It then coordinates and guides efforts to bring these plans to reality, particularly through administering the land sales programmes to release a steady supply of government land for housing, industrial and commercial development.

2.7 Apart from serving as the national planning authority, URA is designated as the national "conservation authority" charged with powers under the Planning Act to issue conservation guidelines, advise the Minister for National Development on gazetting areas for conservation and grant planning permission for restoration works. The designation is symbolically important, not only in providing expressly for a definition of URA's role in heritage conservation, but also in formally drawing together urban planning and urban conservation in the same organization.

2.8 URA's role in heritage conservation encompasses five areas. They are:

- (a) planning and research – to identify and recommend buildings of historical, architectural and cultural merits for conservation;
- (b) facilitating and coordinating – to encourage the private sector to participate in the conservation programmes;
- (c) regulatory – to provide the legal framework for conservation as well as documents and materials to guide owners and professionals in their conservation works;
- (d) consulting – to seek the views of professionals and owners of conserved buildings before deciding on policies and guidelines; and
- (e) promoting – to create a better understanding of conservation and share with professionals and owners of conserved buildings the appropriate restoration methods so as to achieve quality restoration.

### 3. Legal framework

3.1 In Singapore, legal powers for conservation of historic heritage are conferred by the Preservation of Monuments Act and the Planning Act. In addition, the Urban Redevelopment Authority Act empowers URA to carry out the conservation provisions set out in the Planning Act. While the Preservation of Monuments Act is limited to protection of individual buildings recognized as national monuments, the Planning Act can be used for conservation of an area, a single building or groups of buildings within a conservation area.

#### Preservation of Monuments Act

3.2 The Preservation of Monuments Act was enacted in 1971 to establish and incorporate the Preservation of Monuments Board as a statutory board to preserve monuments of historic, traditional, archaeological, architectural or artistic interest for the benefit of the nation. The Act also sets out provisions governing (a) the membership, objectives and powers of the Board, (b) the powers to enter the monuments, (c) the power of the Minister for Information, Communications and the Arts to make preservation orders (see paragraph 4.9 for details), (d) the effects of preservation orders, (e) the maintenance of monuments, (f) the compulsory acquisition of monuments, and (g) the penalties for wilfully defacing, damaging or otherwise interfering with any monuments.

#### Planning Act

3.3 The current Planning Act was passed in 1998 to regulate land use planning in Singapore. All powers under the Planning Act are conferred on the "competent authority", who acts under the supervision of the Minister for National Development. It has been the practice for the Chief Planner of URA to be appointed as the competent authority under the Act to carry out the planning and conservation responsibilities<sup>5</sup>.

3.4 The Planning Act also allows the Minister for National Development to designate "conservation areas", which are chosen for their architectural, historic or aesthetic attributes. A conservation area may comprise an area, a single building or a group of buildings. Development is strictly limited within conservation areas, and the "competent authority" (currently the Chief Planner of URA) can issue guidelines for the conservation of any building or land within a conservation area.

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<sup>5</sup> According to Section 5 of the Planning Act, the Minister for National Development may, by notification in the Gazette, appoint such person or persons as he or she thinks fit to be the competent authority or authorities responsible for the operation of the Planning Act.

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### Urban Redevelopment Authority Act

3.5 The Urban Redevelopment Authority Act was enacted in 1989 to give effect to the merger of URA with two former departments of the Ministry of National Development, namely the Planning Department and the Research and Statistical Unit. As a result of the merger, URA has taken over from the Planning Department the overall task of control and management of land planning and development control, as well as advising the government on these matters. Before the merger, URA served as a statutory body under the Ministry of National Development solely for carrying out the urban renewal projects in Singapore.

3.6 The Urban Redevelopment Authority Act sets out the power and functions of URA, including its primary function of promoting the clearance, development and redevelopment of land. URA is also empowered under Section 6 of the Act to carry out the following two functions and duties relating to heritage conservation in Singapore:

- (a) making "*recommendations or proposals to the Government ... for the preservation and protection of any monument and land of historic, traditional, archaeological, architectural or aesthetic interest*"; and
- (b) carrying out "*such other functions and duties as are imposed upon the Authority by or under this Act or any other written law*". It is this power which entitles the Chief Planner of URA to serve as the "competent authority" appointed under the Planning Act with the powers to implement the conservation provisions set out in the Act.

## **4. Heritage protection system in Singapore**

4.1 In Singapore, historic assets are classified into two distinct categories: national monuments and conservation areas.

### National monuments

4.2 In Singapore, national monuments refer to individual sites, buildings, structures or memorials of outstanding aesthetic, historical, social and/or technological values<sup>6</sup>. The Preservation of Monuments Board has so far gazetted 55 historic buildings as national monuments, comprising 26 places of worship, 18 civic/institutional buildings, six commercial buildings, two hotels and three educational buildings.

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<sup>6</sup> See Section 2 of the Preservation of Monuments Act.

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4.3 National monuments are classified into four categories, each with different restrictions on conservation<sup>7</sup>:

- (a) the first category consists of national monuments whose original architecture and function are preserved. Most civic and religious buildings fall into this category;
- (b) the second category consists of national monuments whose original architecture and function are preserved, but with enhanced value in the function of the buildings after restoration<sup>8</sup>;
- (c) the third category includes those national monuments whose original architecture is preserved, but with a complete new function of the buildings after restoration;<sup>9</sup> and
- (d) the fourth category allows certain alternation to the original structure while preserving the historical and architectural merits of the buildings as a whole<sup>10</sup>.

#### *Criteria for designating national monuments*

4.4 In Singapore, four factors are considered in designating national monuments, namely aesthetic, historic, social and technological values<sup>11</sup>.

#### *Aesthetic value*

4.5 The aesthetic value of architectural work is reflected in its design, style, construction and age. The aesthetic value of the building or groups of buildings relates to both location and context, and is a sensory perception for which criteria are stated. Such criteria may include consideration of the form, scale, colour, texture and material of the fabric.

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<sup>7</sup> See Ministry for National Development (1996).

<sup>8</sup> Raffles Hotel is one such example. In 1989, the hotel was closed for an extensive renovation, at a cost of S\$160 million (HK\$829 million). It was reopened in 1991 with a new extension for a shopping arcade and new rooms. See Wikipedia (2008).

<sup>9</sup> For example, the former St Joseph's Institution, a premier Catholic boys' school, was gazetted as a national monument in 1992. It was restored and subsequently adapted for re-use as a museum in 1996.

<sup>10</sup> Partial preservation of some privately-owned national monuments is allowed, provided that the buildings in question are proven to be ineffective or inefficient in serving the intended use. See Chui & Tsoi (2003) and Home Affairs Bureau (2004).

<sup>11</sup> See Urban Redevelopment Authority & Preservation of Monuments Board (1993).

*Historic value*

4.6 Historic value encompasses works representing rare contribution by Singapore's pioneers. A place may have historic value because it has influenced, or has been influenced by, a historic figure, event, phase or activity. Some events or associations may be so important that the place retains historical significance regardless of the architectural design or subsequent treatment.

*Social value*

4.7 Social value embraces the qualities for which a building has become a focus for spiritual, political or national cultural sentiment for the nation as whole or for a social group.

*Technological value*

4.8 Technological value depends upon the rarity and quality of technology that was available at the time of construction and on the degree to which the building, structure, monument or area reflects a certain period.

*Protection of national monuments*

4.9 The Singapore government is given, under the Preservation of Monuments Act, the overriding power to place a monument under the protection of the Preservation of Monuments Board, through a preservation order served by the Minister for the Information, Communications and the Act upon the advice of the Board. Where a preservation order is in force, the monument to which the order relates shall not, without the written consent of the Preservation of Monuments Board, be demolished, removed, altered or renovated or have any addition made except in case of urgent and immediate necessity for the safety of persons or property. Objections to the making of the preservation order may be submitted in writing to the Minister within three months of its publication. Any refusal by the Minister to revoke the order would be final.

4.10 In addition, the Preservation of Monuments Board may request the Singapore President to acquire any land, site or monument currently under the protection by a preservation order. In such a case, where the land has been compulsorily acquired, the compensation payable to the owner will be based on the market value as at the date when the preservation order was made.

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## Conservation areas

4.11 According to the Singapore government<sup>12</sup>, the preservation of monuments, by itself, is insufficient to create a unique city with its own heritage and character. There is also a need to retain the rich history, architectural style and ambience of entire districts and areas so that a city can come alive and assert its individuality. As such, Singapore has designated more than 90 conservation areas for conservation.

4.12 In Singapore, there are four major groups of conservation areas with different restrictions on conservation, namely Historic Districts, Residential Historic Districts, Secondary Settlements and Bungalows Areas. Apart from this classification, there are smaller conservation areas comprising mainly: (a) outstanding streetblocks with a distinct urban identity arising from the presence of historic buildings forming the streetscape and (b) building(s) of special architectural, historic, traditional or aesthetic interest<sup>13</sup>.

### *Historic Districts*

4.13 Historic Districts are Singapore's oldest areas (including Chinatown, Kampong Glam, Little India, and Boat Quay) and comprise mainly shophouses built in contiguous urban streetblocks<sup>14</sup>. Historic buildings in these areas should be preserved entirely without alteration, while change of use to commercial operation is allowed.

### *Residential Historic Districts*

4.14 Residential Historic Districts are close to the city centre and have a quaint atmosphere characterized by intimate rows of terrace houses with attractive and ornate façade lining narrow streets. Owners are not restrained from adapting the interiors of their terrace houses to meet modern living standards. They are also allowed to build extension at the rear not higher than the main roof of the original house.

### *Secondary Settlements*

4.15 Secondary Settlements are districts developed in the early 1900s at the fringe of the city. Owners may have a new rear extension up to the maximum height allowed for the area.

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<sup>12</sup> See Urban Redevelopment Authority & Preservation of Monuments Board (1993).

<sup>13</sup> As stated in Section 9 of the Planning Act, a conservation area may comprise (a) an area, (b) a single building, or (c) a group of buildings.

<sup>14</sup> Shophouses were traditionally designed as a business-cum-dwelling unit, where the ground floor was used as shop space while the owners lived on the upper levels.

### *Bungalows Areas*

4.16 Bungalows Areas refer to the groups of old bungalows built before the Second World War. These bungalows are large detached houses built in a variety of architectural styles along the coastal areas or in areas with lush greenery away from the city centre. The main house of heritage bungalows should be kept, while new extensions can be added at the sides or the rear so as not to reduce the prominence of the historic main house. If the bungalow sits on a large piece of land, it can also be subdivided for new development plots.

### *Criteria for designating conservation areas*

4.17 According to Section 9 of the Planning Act, the Minister for Information, Communications and the Arts may designate any areas or buildings as conservation areas if he or she is satisfied that they are of special architectural, historic, traditional or aesthetic interest, and their character or appearance is desirable to preserve, enhance or restore. In addition, buildings selected for conservation may need to satisfy the criteria of rarity in terms of building type and whether they can enhance the identity and visual character of the area in which they are located<sup>15</sup>.

### *Protection of conservation areas*

4.18 Section 12 of the Planning Act prohibits conducting any works within a conservation area unless a written permission (i.e. conservation permission) is obtained from URA. Works within a conservation area means (a) any development of land within a conservation area, or (b) any decorative, painting, renovation or other works (whether external or internal) to any building within a conservation area which may affect its character or appearance. In granting the permission to carry out works within a conservation area, URA may impose conditions obliging the applicant to comply with any guidelines or requirements it has issued for heritage conservation.

## **5. Approach adopted for heritage conservation**

5.1 The Singapore government has adopted a multi-pronged approach for heritage conservation. The approach features adaptive re-use of historic buildings, implementation of the "old-and-new" approach, public-private partnership in heritage conservation, and integration of conservation with urban planning.

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<sup>15</sup> See Urban Redevelopment Authority (2006a).

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### Adaptive re-use of historic buildings

5.2 In land-scarce Singapore, loss of development potential of a site has been a major concern of heritage conservation. URA considers it necessary to strike a delicate balance between new development and heritage conservation. As such, it has taken a pragmatic approach to allow adaptive re-use of historic buildings, whereby the original forms of the buildings should be preserved as far as possible while allowing modifications to accommodate new uses.

5.3 In Singapore, a notable case of re-adapting historic buildings is the conversion of Chijmes for new uses. Chijmes, the former Convent of the Holy Infant Jesus, was sold in 1990 under the government land sales programme and restored under the guidelines set by URA. The original 19<sup>th</sup> century neoclassical architecture has been converted into a dining and entertainment attraction. In addition, the Convent's chapel has been restored as a multi-function venue for performance and special events. Most of the original architectural features of the chapel and the ceiling-high stained-glass windows in particular have been retained.

### Implementation of the "old-and-new" approach

5.4 URA has adopted the "old-and-new" approach for heritage conservation, whereby new and taller infill developments are allowed to locate between old, conserved buildings<sup>16</sup>. An example of the successful realization of this approach is China Square, a harmonious blend of old and new buildings next to the central business district<sup>17</sup>. In 1996, URA sold a parcel of land in China Square to a private developer for constructing a 16-storey office building. URA had also deliberately included 19 shophouses within the land parcel for restoration by the property developer. This deliberated mixed development of new and old buildings within the same land parcel was completed in 1998. The property developer has restored the external facades of the shophouses and modified the interiors to adapt to new uses. In addition, the design of the new office building takes into consideration its relationship with the adjacent shophouses, not only through coordinated use of materials and colours, but also through the provision of covered walkways and substantial upgrading of back entrances to the shophouses.

### Public-private partnership in heritage conservation

5.5 Singapore's heritage conservation programme features a close public-private partnership in the preservation of built heritage. This partnership has been built on the following incremental measures implemented by URA over the past two decades or so to encourage private participation in heritage conservation:

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<sup>16</sup> Infill development is the process of developing vacant or under-used parcels of land within existing urban areas that are already largely developed.

<sup>17</sup> See Urban Redevelopment Authority (2006b).

*Government's pilot projects to restore historic buildings*

5.6 In the mid-1980s, URA led the way by conducting five pilot projects to restore 141 government-owned historic buildings in Historic Districts. These projects not only stimulated public interest and awareness, but also assured the private sector of the government's commitment to conservation. In addition, the projects were crucial in imbuing the public with confidence that old buildings could be physically retained and restored, and that conservation was economically viable. Furthermore, the projects also served as an experimental ground, allowing adaptation, development and testing of various restoration techniques in conservation design, implementation and management.

*Land sales programme to encourage private participation*

5.7 After the successful implementation of the pilot projects, URA has embarked on selling government-owned conserved properties through the annual land sales programme to the private sector for restoration. Such a measure provides developers and entrepreneurs who do not own any historic buildings with opportunities to participate in the conservation programmes.

*Government's support for private participation in heritage conservation*

5.8 Private initiative in restoring historic buildings has been complemented by URA's provision of infrastructure and other supporting facilities (such as pedestrian walkways and intimate open spaces) in the conservation areas. For example, environmental improvement works, such as construction of pedestrian malls, have been carried out in various conservation areas to enhance the attractiveness of the public areas and encourage activities to spill out from the conserved buildings.

5.9 The Singapore government has introduced a number of incentives to further encourage private participation in heritage conservation. These incentives include waivers of development charges and car park provision (see paragraphs 6.2-6.11 for details of the incentives).

*Issuance of conservation guidelines*

5.10 Apart from encouraging and facilitating private participation in heritage conservation, URA also issues conservation guidelines to guide the restoration works in conservation areas. Owners, architects and engineers intending to carry out restoration works or development within conservation areas are required to comply with the guidelines.

5.11 The conservation guidelines stipulate, among other things, conservation principles, planning parameters and restoration guidelines for conserved buildings. For example, the guidelines specify the use of building materials and design characteristics required of the restored buildings in conservation areas. In addition, the conservation guidelines stipulate the restrictions governing the changes of use for the restored buildings in the core areas<sup>18</sup>, in order to maintain the ambience and character of these areas. Trades incompatible to the character of the core areas are not allowed, such as car showrooms, workshops and supermarkets.

5.12 URA's conservation guidelines also set out the fundamental principle for heritage conservation, i.e. "maximum Retention, sensitive Restoration and careful Repair" or the "3Rs". Under the "3Rs" principle, original structural and architectural elements of the conserved buildings should be retained and restored. In the event that such elements have to be repaired or replaced, their features shall be retained. No building or structure shall be altered or demolished if there is any conceivable way of preserving it in its original or current condition.

5.13 When upgrading and adapting a building to new uses, the existing structure should be retained by strengthening and repairing the structural elements. Any alteration or strengthening to structural elements should be done in the most sympathetic and unobtrusive way possible using original methods and materials whenever possible.

#### Integration of conservation with urban planning

5.14 In Singapore, heritage conservation efforts are integrated with urban planning and are not simply an optional add-on. For a start, heritage conservation and urban planning in Singapore are handled by a single centralized authority, i.e. URA. This arrangement facilitates the development of Singapore with due consideration to heritage matters, and enhances the compatibility and creativity between existing built heritage and future development through comprehensive and holistic planning.

5.15 Singapore has included conservation of built heritage as an important part of its strategic planning and development, as evidenced by the preparation of its strategic plans – the Concept Plan and the Master Plan – for medium- and long-term physical developments of the country.

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<sup>18</sup> The core area is the part of the historic district where the focal point of ethnic activities is located. See Urban Redevelopment Authority (2006a).

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### *Concept Plan*

5.16 At the apex of Singapore's planning and development process is the Concept Plan, a broad, long-term land use and transportation plan that guides the physical development of the country. The Concept Plan is reviewed every 10 years, and the latest review was completed in July 2001. The Concept Plan 2001 maps out a vision for Singapore over the next 40 to 50 years. In particular, it unveils broad strategies to develop Singapore into a thriving world-class city in the 21st century, where it is not just a workplace but also a home for a projected population of 5.5 million<sup>19</sup>.

5.17 The seven key proposals of the Concept Plan 2001 are: (a) *Focus on identity*, (b) *New homes in familiar places*, (c) *High-rise city living – a room with a view*, (d) *More choices for recreation*, (e) *Greater flexibility for businesses*, (f) *A global business centre*, and (g) *An extensive rail network*<sup>20</sup>. The proposal on *Focus on identity* calls upon retaining Singapore's sense of identity by conserving more buildings and other landmarks that can display the character and collective memory of places. In other words, heritage is taken as a key theme under the Concept Plan 2001 for making a thriving Singapore.

### *Master Plan*

5.18 The vision of the Concept Plan is translated into a detailed working plan and gazetted as the Master Plan, which is revised every five years to guide Singapore's development over the next 15 years. While the Concept Plan sets out the strategic direction, the Master Plan is a comprehensive land allocation plan describing the desired usage of land, the location of various activities in different areas, and the limits for development density.

5.19 The latest Master Plan gazetted in 2003<sup>21</sup> is conceived out of the Identity Plan formulated in 2002 to guide the review of the Master Plan. Central to the Identity Plan is the conviction that planning can help recognize, retain and enhance the sense of identity. As such, the Identity Plan starts with 15 significant areas that URA has identified having characteristics that hark back to a certain period in the development of Singapore. These 15 areas have unique streetscape, interesting architecture, and activities that hold a special place within the hearts of local communities.

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<sup>19</sup> The focus of various Concept Plans has evolved since its inception in 1971. The first Concept Plan targeted at addressing basic needs and infrastructure of a new nation. The latest Concept Plan, the Concept Plan 2001, focuses on sustaining economic growth and providing a good quality of life.

<sup>20</sup> See Urban Redevelopment Authority (2001).

<sup>21</sup> URA has already embarked on the preparation of the Master Plan 2008, which is scheduled to be gazetted at end-2008. In particular, URA convened a public exhibition of the Draft Master Plan 2008 during 23 May-20 June 2008 for public viewing and comments.

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5.20 The Identity Plan proposes to safeguard and sustain the history and identity of the 15 identified areas by:

- (a) identifying significant buildings for conservation;
- (b) retaining and reinforcing the existing character and scale of the built environment; and
- (c) recognizing and allowing existing community activities to continue and thrive.

As such, the Identity Plan goes beyond just conserving individual buildings, but also recognizes the distinctive areas and streetblocks where the existing community life, streetscape and activities contribute to the unique charms of the place.

## **6. Incentives available for heritage conservation**

6.1 Although there is no direct government subsidy or tax relief given to owners of conserved buildings, the Singapore government has put in place economic and planning incentives to encourage private participation in heritage conservation.

### Economic incentives

#### *Waiver of development charges*

6.2 Developers and land owners are required under the Planning Act to obtain written permission from URA before they could proceed with any land development proposals. Development charge would be payable on the grant of written permission that permits an increase in development intensity or an alteration to the use prescribed in the Master Plan. In other words, development charge is a tax levied on any enhancement in land value resulting from the government approving a higher value development proposal.

6.3 URA waives the payment of development charges for any development of land within a conservation area if:

- (a) the development is for the conservation of the buildings on the land; and
- (b) all the requirements of URA for the purposes of conservation are fully complied with.

If the conservation is for part of a building, the exemption of development is only applicable to the conserved portion<sup>22</sup>.

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<sup>22</sup> See Urban Redevelopment Authority (2006a).

### *Tax exemption schemes*

6.4 The Singapore government does not provide any direct tax relief to owners of conserved buildings. Nevertheless, there is an exemption of property tax for properties devoted to charitable purposes, meaning that non-profit-making monuments (e.g. those owned by religious institutions) are not liable for property tax. In addition, there are tax exemption schemes promoting donations to national monuments. For example, the Preservation of Monuments Board administers the "Tax Exemption Scheme for Donations to National Monuments" to help the owner/trustee or the management committee of a non-profit-making national monument to raise funds and use the donations to restore the monument. Donors to the scheme are entitled to double-tax exemption (twice the donation value) for monetary donations on or after 1 January 2002.

6.5 Under the "Tax Exemption Scheme for Donations to National Monuments", the Preservation of Monuments Board opens a bank account for each national monument for the deposit of donations, and provides the owner concerned with a receipt book for issuing receipts to donors. When a sufficient amount of donations have been received by the Board, the restoration works will commence and the owner will receive money from the Board to pay for the project costs so incurred<sup>23</sup>.

6.6 A similar tax exemption scheme, the National Heritage Fund-Central Fund, is operated by the National Heritage Board to support and encourage the development of non-profit-making organizations that promote Singapore's heritage<sup>24</sup>. The National Heritage Board is a statutory board of the Ministry of Information, Communications and the Arts established in 1993 to promote, among other thing, public awareness, appreciation and understanding of the arts, culture and heritage in Singapore.

### Planning incentives

#### *Waiver of car parking deficiency charge*

6.7 New developments have to provide parking spaces to meet their own demand. The current parking policy implemented by the Land Transport Authority enforces minimum car parking provision on new developments. Deficiency charge is imposed on those developers who fail to meet the parking requirement.

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<sup>23</sup> See Preservation of Monuments Board (2004) and McCleary (2005).

<sup>24</sup> The National Heritage Fund-Central Fund Scheme was established in 2002 to allow approved non-profit-making bodies to open tax-deductible accounts with the National Heritage Board. Cash and other approved donations made to heritage organizations that are members of the National Heritage Fund-Central Fund are given double-tax deduction.

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6.8 For conserved buildings, the requirement for the provision of car parks or payment of car parking deficiency charge is waived if the conservation guidelines are fully complied with, and the conservation works are completed according to the approved plans.

#### *Gross Floor Area Incentive*

6.9 URA introduced a scheme – the Gross Floor Area Incentive – in 2004 to enhance the economic viability of conservation of heritage bungalows. For sites with plot ratio control, the scheme entitles owners of heritage bungalows to compute the Gross Floor Area of their buildings as additional floor area over and above what is permitted in the Master Plan. This allowance benefits not only owners who volunteer their bungalows for conservation, but also those owners whose bungalows are conserved under the initiative of URA.

#### *Flexibility in conservation guidelines*

6.10 URA has adopted a balancing act when applying the conservation guidelines to conservation areas. As mentioned in paragraphs 4.12-4.16, there are four major groups of conservation areas in Singapore, namely Historic Districts, Secondary Settlements, Bungalows Areas and Residential Historic Districts. The strictest guidelines are applied to Historic Districts, where owners are required to conserve the entire historic buildings. Different conservation strategies are applicable to the other three groups of conservation areas.

6.11 The rear portions of the conserved buildings in Secondary Settlements could be developed up to the maximum height stipulated by the plot ratio and height control set out in the Master Plan. In Bungalows Areas, only the main house needs to be kept. The outhouse can be demolished to make way for new extensions to the main house. For Residential Historic Districts, a new rear extension lower than the main roof can be built so as to allow for greater flexibility in adapting the building for modern living. Such flexibility in conservation guidelines helps owners of conserved buildings offset the opportunity cost incurred in heritage conservation.

## **7. Funding mechanism available for heritage conservation**

7.1 According to the Preservation of Monuments Act, the Preservation of Monuments Board, at the request of the owners of national monuments, may contribute towards the cost of preserving, maintaining or managing the monuments or making any addition to them<sup>25</sup>. This apart, the Singapore government has not put in place any funding mechanism to assist private owners with the conservation of their historic buildings.

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<sup>25</sup> See Section 11(1) of the Preservation of Monuments Act.

7.2 According to URA, restoration and repair of historic buildings are initiated and paid for by the owners concerned. To promote private funding for heritage conservation, URA has provided financial incentives to encourage the private sector to conserve their own historic buildings or purchase unrestored government-owned historic buildings for restoration. The Preservation of Monuments Board also operates a tax exemption scheme to encourage private donations for conservation of national monuments in Singapore. In addition, the Singapore Totalisator Board contributes to the heritage conservation projects in Singapore. The Board is a statutory board established to manage the donations of surplus revenue generated from the operation of Singapore Turf Club (Singapore's main horse racing club) and Singapore Pools Limited (the legal lottery operator in Singapore) for the benefit of the local community.

## **8. Public participation in heritage conservation**

8.1 In the past, URA and the Preservation of Monuments Board dominated the identification of and decision on which buildings to conserve<sup>26</sup>. In recent years, the Singapore government has embarked on several initiatives to engage the public in heritage conservation, which include establishing the Conservatory Advisory Panel, implementing the "Conservation Initiated by Private Owners' Scheme", adopting a participatory approach in the policy making process, and running the annual "Architectural Heritage Awards" event to recognize quality restoration works in Singapore.

### Conservation Advisory Panel

8.2 Established in 2002, the Conservation Advisory Panel has served as the advisor to URA on heritage-related matters. In particular, it is responsible for proposing buildings to URA for possible conservation and promoting greater public education and understanding of the gazetted built heritage.

8.3 The establishment of the Conservation Advisory Panel also aims to facilitate greater public involvement in the conservation process, particularly providing a multi-disciplinary perspective on the conservation proposals put up by URA. To achieve this aim, the panel comprises members of diverse backgrounds such as government officials, medical doctors, academics, professionals from the building industry, and experts from the arts and heritage sectors.

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<sup>26</sup> See Ministry of National Development (2003).

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### "Conservation Initiated by Private Owners' Scheme"

8.4 In Singapore, property owners are encouraged to participate in the "Conservation Initiated by Private Owners' Scheme" to volunteer their buildings of architectural or historic interest for conservation. In return, they are entitled to a number of economic incentives, such as waivers of development charges and car park provision, for undertaking the conservation works.

### Participatory approach in the policy making process

8.5 In recent years, URA has made concerted efforts to consult relevant groups, such as the professional bodies, developers and other stakeholders, before deciding on new conservation areas, policies and guidelines. An example of such approach was the 2005 review jointly conducted by URA and the Singapore Institute of Architects on the conservation guidelines that had been put in place since 1989. The revised conservation guidelines, published in 2006, has taken into account the feedback and suggestions received from dialogue sessions held with owners/developers, architects, engineers and contractors who frequently submit conservation development applications to URA for approval.

8.6 In addition, when preparing the Concept Plan 2001, public feedback was gathered through various channels including the media, focus group discussions and public dialogue during the 10-month consultation period<sup>27</sup>. In particular, the focus group on "Identity vs Intensive Use of Land" involved 30 members of different social backgrounds to discuss what made up Singapore's identity, and suggest ways to retain and enhance this identity. The focus group held many meetings, site visits, and discussions with the relevant authorities and the public in order to elicit views from different stakeholders. Many of the recommendations provided by the focus group were subsequently accepted and incorporated in the Concept Plan 2001.

8.7 The preparation of the Master Plan 2003 also allowed for public involvement through the following avenues:

- (a) three subject groups comprising members from diverse backgrounds to evaluate the proposals mapped out in the draft Master Plan;
- (b) stakeholder discussion with local residents and non-governmental organizations to seek their views and feedback on the draft Master Plan; and
- (c) a variety of channels for the general public to give feedback and suggestion, including a three-month exhibition of the draft Master Plan to allow the public to visit and share their feedback on the ideas put up in the exhibition.

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<sup>27</sup> The public dialogue was chaired by the Minister for National Development to hear public comments and feedback.

### Architectural Heritage Awards

8.8 To recognize and promote quality restoration of heritage assets, URA has been giving out Architectural Heritage Awards annually since 1995. The Awards are given out under two categories. Category A is for national monuments and conserved buildings in Historic Districts and Bungalow Areas. These buildings are assessed on how far they adhere to quality restoration principles. Category B is for integrated old and new conservation developments in Residential Historic Districts and Secondary Settlements. Under Category B, conservation projects are assessed on both the quality of restoration of the old elements, as well as the innovation and architectural excellence of the new elements, and how they draw their inspiration from the old elements.

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