

20 November 2008

Dear Council Members, Alumni, Students, and Colleagues,

Expand the Library for "3+3+4"

Preserve the Beacon for Posterity

There are rumours that the Beacon, so long an icon of the Chinese University, would be demolished to make way for the new library extension. I write to reassure you that nothing could be farther from the truth. The Vice-Chancellor has reiterated on several occasions the non-negotiable position that no alteration would be made to the University Square and that the repository of so much of our history, the Beacon, must be reinstated in its existing form when construction is completed.

To allow the extension work to be carried out, the Square will be temporarily closed for less than a year, probably after the 2009 Congregation so that there is no disruption to the ceremonial ground of any Congregation. Upon completion of the new library extension, the Square will be re-opened with its signature features including the Beacon, the Forum, and the "Bushes" fully reinstated, on exactly the same spots with exactly the same appearances.

The University Library has to be extended to accommodate an estimated increase of 3,000 undergraduate students upon reversion to our long-cherished four-year curriculum in 2012. Initial designs would have developed the Library laterally and skywards, resulting in a multi-storey wing that surpasses the Tin Ka Ping Building in height. The incongruity with the view from the University Mall would be glaring, and such designs were rejected by the building committee convened for the project because the distortion of the central axis along the University Mall would be irremediable.

The alternative of developing the Library underground was then explored. Though technically more challenging and incurring higher costs, it was deemed a better option which could enhance library capacity while preserving the visual and architectural integrity of the neighborhood and, in fact, the entire Central Campus.

From the deliberation stages of extending the Library basement, the Vice-Chancellor has stressed that no alteration must be made to the Square and that the structures and architecture thereon including the Beacon must be preserved and reinstated when the construction is completed. This has been communicated by the building committee to

relevant parties such as the architectural consultant and the Library Users Group comprising both staff and student representatives. The architectural consultant will label and photograph components of the Beacon and the Forum to facilitate reinstatement.

The library extension must be completed on time. At the same time, the University Square, the Beacon, and the beliefs and history of CUHK these embody, must be preserved for posterity for what they are. I hope that with the understanding and support of all of you, we can see both the completion of the library extension for the future generations of staff and students, and the preservation of the Beacon, the Forum, and the "Bushes" as we have always known them.

Yours faithfully,

P. C. Ching
Pro-Vice-Chancellor