

The Library Extension Project

Background

In 2012, Hong Kong will adopt a “3+3+4” normative curriculum. The reversion to a four-year university curriculum has been much looked forward to by members of the Chinese University. In as early as 2004, the University Grants Committee (UGC) had requested our University to make plans for the additional 3,000 undergraduate students. In 2005, the University decided that providing enough classrooms, laboratory and library facilities, and student amenities are the top priorities of the University in preparation for “3+3+4”. After consulting with the University Library System, it was decided to add a new wing to the University Library and not another library building on another location. The general consensus among University management and the University Library System is that a library extension is more desirable than a new independent library for service effectiveness and operational efficiency.

The planning process

In March 2005, application was made to UGC for the construction of various facilities, the so-called “3+3+4” capital projects, including the extension of the University Library. In November the next year, UGC approved the funding for the building of an extra 6,100 sq. m. (NOFA) in library space. Planning works started immediately.

The Building Committee responsible for the library extension held its first meeting in January 2007 to consider tender matters. At its second meeting in June, the Committee invited seven architectural firms to present their technical submissions. A number of the firms pointed out that adding a new wing of a NOFA of 6,100 sq. ft. on the library car-park would result in a structure which was higher than the Library building itself or even Tin Ka Ping Building and hence would be an undesirable option having regard to the outward appearance and the damage it would do to the axis of the Central Campus. The Committee had carefully considered all the options in the design of the library extension. To avoid building an incongruous Library complex, a world-renowned architectural firm even proposed to build the extension over the Library Boulevard or the Central Avenue.

This option was considered by the Campus Planning Committee in July 2007. The Committee was of the view that the extension would still be too mammoth if built over the Library Boulevard or the Central Avenue. The Committee finally supported a proposal to construct an extended basement beneath the University Square on the

condition that the outlook of the Square must remain the same after the completion of the project.

In February 2008, the basement extension proposal was approved by UGC and the Architectural Services Department. The Library Users Group had a meeting in April, at which Prof. Michael Hui, Associate Pro-Vice-Chancellor, presented the basement extension option and informed the meeting that, “the Square might be closed during the construction period, but the outlook of the Square should remain the same after the construction of the basement.” (extracted from the minutes).

From April to June 2008, as advised by UGC, the library extension work was re-tendered. At its fourth meeting in June, the Building Committee invited six architectural firms to present their technical submissions. In September, the University appointed Aedas Limited to be the project architect.

The Building Committee held its fifth meeting in October 2008, at which Aedas Limited presented its initial design and confirmed that during the construction work the University Square would be temporarily closed. It is stated in the minutes that the Committee instructed the architect that, “Excavation of basement must be commenced immediately after Congregation Ceremony in December 2009 in order to allow re-instatement of the Beacon, Forum and Garden for the ceremony in the following year.”

The Committee also instructed the architect that, “Three elements—Beacon, Brushes [sic] and the Forum needed to be re-instated exactly as it was—consideration for their temporary storage, method of removal and re-instatement—survey record of existing Forum, Garden and Beacon.”

Way forward

On 25 November 2008, Prof. Ho Puay Peng, University Dean of Students, attended the student forum at the Beacon and heard the views of those present. On 26 November, Prof. Hui, Prof. Fung Tung, Chairman of the Building Committee, and Prof. Ho met student representatives and explained the background and the progress of the library extension work. Communication sessions have been scheduled on 2 & 5 December for the exchange of views with students and staff. The University has accepted the invitation of the Convocation to meet with alumni from around the world on 13 December. In the new term that begins in January, representatives of the University and the Building Committee would attend the college assemblies and

report on the progress of the extension project.

It is the University's policy to preserve the University Square, in particular, the Beacon, the Forum and the "Bushes". In order to minimize the impact on the University Square during the construction of the basement extension, any reasonable option or method will be given careful consideration. However, being one of the "3+3+4" capital projects, the library extension work has to be completed by Fall 2012. While ensuring that the University Square will remain as it is before the extension work, care will also be taken to avoid any delay which would have substantial negative impact on students' learning.

1 December 2008