

BACK COVER

C O N C E P T P L A N R E V I E W

F O C U S G R O U P C O N S U L T A T I O N

FINAL REPORT ON

**IDENTITY
VERSUS
INTENSIVE
USE OF LAND**

Submitted to the Ministry of National Development

December 2000

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CONCEPT PLAN REVIEW Focus Group Consultation

TOPIC:

**IDENTITY
VS
INTENSIVE USE OF LAND**

FINAL REPORT

22 December 2000

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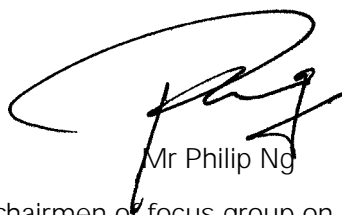
22 Dec 00

Mr Mah Bow Tan
Minister for National Development

CONCEPT PLAN REVIEW

FINAL REPORT OF FOCUS GROUP ON IDENTITY VERSUS INTENSIVE USE OF LAND

- 1 In August this year, you appointed us to co-chair the focus group on Identity versus Intensive Use of Land to discuss how to preserve a sense of place, history and belonging in the context of the intensive use of land.
- 2 Our final report is attached for your consideration. The report was finalised after extensive site visits and discussions. It also took into account the wide-ranging views of the focus group members, which comprises professionals, interests groups, academics and grassroots, as well as the views of the public obtained from the internet, the news media, and the public forum held on 8th Dec 2000.
- 3 We found the public response lively, varied and most often, well informed. People do care about the future of Singapore as their home and we are grateful that you have given them the opportunity to contribute to the shaping of Singapore's future. We see our role as the customer advisor in the Concept Plan Review process, giving URA our views on what Singaporeans want our city to become, in the next 40 to 50 years.
- 4 We are pleased to be part of the consultation process. We believe this is a significant milestone towards a more open and consultative government. We hope that this is a beginning of a continuous process of public engagement in government policies that affect all Singaporeans.



Mr Philip Ng



Mr Simon SC Tay

Co-chairmen of focus group on Identity versus Intensive Use Of Land

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MINISTER FOR NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT
SINGAPORE

19 January 2001

Mr Philip Ng and Mr Simon SC Tay
Co-chairmen, Focus Group on Identity versus Intensive Use of Land

Dear *Philip & Simon,*

**CONCEPT PLAN REVIEW
FINAL REPORT OF FOCUS GROUP ON IDENTITY VERSUS INTENSIVE
USE OF LAND**

Thank you for your letter of 22 December 2000 and the final report of your focus group.

2 When we embarked on the Concept Plan Review, one of the main dilemmas we faced was how to preserve our sense of identity and at the same time, optimize the use of our limited land. This is an issue which I believe is of concern to many Singaporeans. That is why we formed this focus group, to solicit views and ideas from a broad section of Singaporeans.

3 Over the last few months, your focus group analysed the issue of identity versus intensity in depth and carried out extensive site visits and discussions. I am very pleased to note that many people have come forward to contribute. As a result, your focus group has generated several recommendations on how we can preserve a sense of place, history and belonging within our limited land space.

4 The next step is for URA and the relevant government agencies to study carefully your proposals, with a view to adopting them for implementation wherever possible.

5 I thank all the members of your focus group and also all the individuals who have actively contributed ideas and feedback to the focus group.

Yours

Maah Bow Tan
MAH BOW TAN

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FOREWORD

This report presents the proposals and recommendations of the Focus Group on Identity versus Intensive Use of Land to be presented to the Ministry of National Development and the Urban Redevelopment Authority (URA) for consideration and as inputs for the formulation of the Concept Plan 2001.

URA intends to complete the Draft Concept Plan by the 1st Quarter of 2001, after which it will be published and the public will again be invited to give their comments on the Draft Plan proposals. In the meantime, should there be any further views from the public on the issue of Identity vs Intensive Use of Land, you may wish to send your comments to the following address:

Head, Public Relations

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45 Maxwell Road,

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Singapore 069118

<http://www.ura.gov.sg>

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- 1 The Focus Group on Identity vs Intensive Use of Land deliberated on the question of identity and how Singapore should seek to preserve a sense of place, history and belonging in the context of the intensive use of land.
- 2 The desired outcome is a Singapore with a distinctive identity that is recognisable and appreciated by citizens, residents, foreigners who work here, tourists and visitors. Conservation of our built and natural heritage must be emphasised as a necessary foundation of that identity. Planning for conservation must go beyond the physical state to include social and cultural dimensions.
- 3 Identity is not just found in buildings and activities but emanates from the character of the people, their sense of belonging, attachment and their contribution to their country. There are different levels of identity: national, regional, local and individual. Identity evolves over time.
- 4 There are costs and trade-offs in retaining identity, but these often can be met through changes in technology and innovation. The values we ascribe to our resources change over time. It is important to plan Singapore's development with the aim of keeping options for conservation and use open for the future, rather than closing them off here and now.
- 5 Efforts to date in conserving some of the more important buildings from the early years of colonial period Singapore have yielded fruitful results. A new focus should be given to buildings and areas that are more recent.
- 6 Successful conservation should capture social and cultural aspects and not only physical rehabilitation. Conservation should aim to retain the identity of a whole area where the character resides in more than individual buildings. The use of conserved buildings should be sensitive to the history and sense of place. Conserved buildings can be integrated with new developments.
- 7 New developments should strive towards achieving distinction as well as utility so that they add to the Singaporean identity. New developments should proceed

at higher densities to relieve pressure from existing areas. New developments should evolve around existing pockets of nature areas and natural features. However, identity should not be rushed or forced, but be allowed to develop over time, in tandem with the building of the community.

- 8 Physical diversity contributes to the strength of our identity. Some existing policies should be reviewed to encourage diversity, for example, planning parameters such as coverage control, usage, allocation mechanisms such as the tender systems and the level of private sector participation.
- 9 Singapore's natural heritage is richer than that of many bigger countries and should be given due protection, status and respect. The recommendations of the Nature Conservation Review Committee should be seriously considered and adopted.
- 10 Housing and other developments near or on nature areas should be allowed only if environmental impact analyses conclude that there will be no adverse impact from the construction of these developments. More parks and extensive planting should be provided to heighten the sense of Singapore as a Garden City. Significant parks and even roads should be protected through gazette.
- 11 Singapore's sense of identity as an island should be enhanced through retention of existing natural coastlines and parks and conserving our off-shore islands as far as possible. Where reclamation is necessary, it should innovatively create new waterfronts, beaches and coastal parks and be sensitive to any important natural coastal heritage.
- 12 Regional and local identity can be enhanced through conservation as well as a sense of community. A better alignment of planning, administration and political boundaries and the naming of streets, buildings and places would help. Policies should not inadvertently lead to an increasing uniformity between regions.
- 13 There should be proper institutions to evaluate and review the impact of new developments as well as past decisions to develop or conserve, and to consult the people and private sectors. More should be done to educate Singaporeans about the importance of identity. A Heritage Conservation Trust should be established as a key institution for built and natural heritage and the sense of identity that attaches to such places.

1 INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 In mid 2000, the Ministry of National Development organised two focus groups to assist URA in the review of Singapore's Concept Plan. The first of these groups considered the optimal utilisation of land and the balance to be struck between competing needs. The second group concentrated on the question of identity and how Singapore should seek to preserve a sense of place, history and belonging in the context of the intensive use of land.
- 1.2 The group on Identity vs Intensive Use of Land was chaired by Mr Philip Ng and Mr Simon SC Tay. It comprised 30 members from the private sector, community groups, professional institutions and of varying backgrounds. The Group met 12 times from 26 August to 9 Dec 2000. Members of the Group made a number of visits to sites in Singapore that illustrated many of the key issues relating to identity and the intensive use of land and were briefed by various experts and relevant government agencies. The Group also held a number of extensive and candid discussions among themselves. The schedule of meetings and visits is attached as Appendix 1.
- 1.3 The group's desired outcome is a Singapore with a distinctive identity that was recognisable and appreciated by citizens and residents, as well as foreigners who work here, tourists and visitors. The conservation of our built and natural heritage must be emphasised as a necessary pillar of that identity. Moreover, planning for conservation must go beyond the physical state to recognise the social and cultural dimensions.
- 1.4 In its deliberations, the Group reached a broad consensus on a number of general observations and principles as well as some specific recommendations.
- 1.5 The interim report was completed on 18 Nov and debated at a Public Forum on 8 Dec 2000. Feedback received and considered by the Focus Group from the Public Forum and through the Internet is attached as Appendix 2.

GENERAL OBSERVATIONS

- 1.6 Singapore has limited land. If the population should rise to 5.5 million or more, the competition for land between different needs and uses, such as housing, industries, commercial use, nature, heritage, recreation, water catchment, defence and infrastructure will rise. All these needs have their justifications and importance in our economic and social development.

- 1.7 Retaining identity is a vital aspect of Singapore's development. In the process of searching for land to meet the various land use needs, the need to retain and develop identity should be an assumption and a given, certainly not an afterthought.

- 1.8 While there are costs and tradeoffs in retaining identity, these may be resolved through technology, innovation, changes in planning parameters and constraints as well as the willingness to meet higher costs. Some examples follow:
 - 1.8.1 **Change in affordability.** Parking, storage and other facilities including petrol stations and car wash centres can be moved underground. Industrial and recreational developments can be built over expressways, e.g. PIE, thereby releasing more land for residential and other uses. This is technically feasible today in many areas of Singapore. The main constraint is one of construction cost and this may well change with rising affluence.

 - 1.8.2 **Change in relative costs.** With the rising cost of land, and with new construction methods and technologies that increase productivity, construction cost may become relatively cheaper.

 - 1.8.3 **Change in trends and tastes.** Present day private housing shows how trends and tastes change. Many private developments achieve higher densities than public housing, and yet meet the homeowners' needs and aspirations.

- 1.8.4 **Change in economic needs and infrastructure provision.** If our economy enters areas that are high in value creation and addition but relatively low in their needs for land, projections for the need for land should be revisited. The development of other infrastructure will also have a significant impact. For example, if public transport is sufficiently provided, land intensity can be increased without many of the negative aspects and congestion.
- 1.9 Therefore competition between different land uses need not be viewed as a one for one trade-off, and an “either or” situation between one need and another.
- 1.10 The values we ascribe to both physical and non-physical resources change over time. From the experience of many other countries, it is foreseeable that the value attached to identity and heritage will increase over time with increasing awareness and relative scarcity. Therefore, we should aim to keep options for conservation and other appropriate usages open for the future. This would necessarily mean conserving more in the short to medium term.
- 1.11 In considering the possibility of a 5.5 million population, the group believes we should not focus on solutions based solely on present-day parameters. Instead, we will suggest principles, processes and institutions to position Singapore to dynamically respond to situations as they change. These recommendations are for planning as well as other agencies as the Group believes that greater inter-agency cooperation is essential for meaningful developmental planning in Singapore. There must also be a concomitant effort for collaboration and consultation with the private sector, including academic and research institutions as well as independent NGOs.

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2 IDENTITY VERSUS INTENSITY

IDENTITY

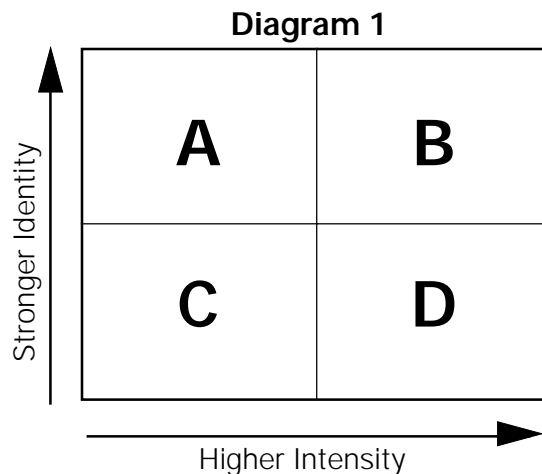
- 2.1 Identity can be viewed as rootedness, 'spirit of the place', a sense of place, home, national pride, distinctiveness, feelings of nostalgia and familiarity. The sense of identity is attached to places that evoke shared memories or are linked to significant historical events and/or personalities. It is not just found in buildings and activities but emanates from the character of the people, their sense of belonging, attachment and their contribution to their country. Identity can be found in pride in national achievements, including those in governance, education, health, defence, public housing and international communications (port, airport, etc.); in multi-cultural blend and special ethnic neighbourhoods; and in language, arts and literature. People's attachment to places grows from their use of these places. Identity is derived from such places that are important to everyday living.
- 2.2 There are competing needs for land which must be balanced. In this balance, cost-benefit analyses have to be recognised but should not be all-important. This is because identity, history and a sense of nationhood are priceless and a sense of belonging cannot be cultivated without a sense of history. Identity constitutes a heritage for future generations of Singaporeans. Singapore is not only a workplace but also our home. While economic development and opportunity are vital, the sense of identity and belonging to Singapore is equally important and deserves due attention and resources. Therefore, the Concept Plan must reflect an understanding of the social and cultural meaning of urban space and place to residents. This means that the city has to be more than an urban land market or a showcase for business and tourists alone.
- 2.3 Identity also provides 'tangible' benefits. As more Singaporeans work, study and live abroad, having something that is recognisable and identifiable - a sense of identity - will be an essential part of making them feel that Singapore is their home and give them a sense of ownership. A distinctive city with an appealing and strong identity can be an important asset to retain citizens as well as attract foreigners to live in and associate with Singapore. Identity, therefore, is an essential factor for economic growth.

- 2.4 The sense of identity and of home attaches not just to an individual's family house or flat, but to places that evoke shared memories. Such places include buildings and places that are recognised by the public as a whole at the national level, such as the Istana, Padang and City Hall. These sites are linked to important moments in our national history, both before and after independence.
- 2.5 The drive along ECP from Changi Airport that greets visitors to our island is another memorably unique aspect for both Singaporeans and visitors. The Garden City is, without doubt, an important and identifying characteristic of Singapore. It should not be taken for granted and should be built upon by providing more parks, nature areas and reserves as well as distinctive roadside greenery. This "green infrastructure" will complement other physical infrastructure and help make Singapore a distinctive and attractive city.
- 2.6 The identity of Singapore as an island city state should be enhanced. Popular coastal parks, such as East Coast Park and Changi Coast Park, as well as the offshore islands and nature areas like Pulau Ubin and Pulau Hantu are all part of this identity. Natural coastlines such as in Simpang should be retained and integrated with the development of a future coastal new town in the area. Where it is necessary, reclamation should be planned creatively and implemented sensitively to preserve the existing waterfronts while creating new ones, including new beaches, waterways and coastal parks.
- 2.7 Identity exists at many different levels: at the national, regional, local, and individual level. Besides our national identity that is strong, there clearly are regional and local places that are important to the sense of identity as they add complexity and diversity. This can be seen in the old ethnic enclaves, like Chinatown, Kampong Glam and Little India, which are distinctive districts in their own right and illustrate Singapore's historical and cultural mosaic. Local shopping areas at Katong or Geylang offer different shopping experiences from those at Suntec City or Orchard Road or HDB retail centres, contributing to diversity. There are also serendipitous public places such as Little Guilin, a disused granite quarry in Bukit Batok but now a centrepiece of the area. These are markers of the communities and are just as important as national landmarks.

- 2.8 Identity is also about pride in life at the everyday level. Different places in Singapore tell us and our children how people in our society are living, their lifestyles, favourite eating and drinking places, places of entertainment as well as recreation and hence, how rich and varied Singapore culture, both past and present, can be. These 'everyday' places would include the ubiquitous public housing estates, wet markets and schools.
- 2.9 Physical diversity contributes to our identity. Government agencies should encourage such diversity in their planning and work. Present policies that tend to lessen diversity and increase uniformity, such as planning guidelines applied island wide, should be reviewed. Instead, diversity can be created through special urban design guidelines, such as along Singapore River and Orchard Road, or through distinctive land uses, e.g. at Geylang.
- 2.10 The sense of identity has both physical elements such as buildings and places, as well as social and cultural components. In a number of cases, current conservation efforts have been more successful in conserving physical elements. Parts of Chinatown and Little India demonstrate this and are unfortunately not woven into the cultural fabric of these conservation areas. More attention should be given to the social and cultural components. It is likely that conservation projects that capture all these aspects will endure as valued manifestations of Singapore's identity.
- 2.11 Government should, therefore, welcome more bottom-up efforts to conserve, strengthen and develop identity as these efforts would be more effective due to the complexity and richness of identity. For instance, feedback should be sought from local residents, associations, professional institutions and other stakeholders to identify elements of identity in local areas, as such elements of identity may not be quite as obvious to policy-makers. Examples of identity in local areas could be like the banyan tree on a temple in the Toa Payoh Town Centre, the Tiong Bahru bird corner, or the Red House Bakery in Katong.

IDENTITY VERSUS INTENSITY

2.12 The trade-off between identity and intensity is not an 'either or' situation. For example, Manhattan is a place with high density and strong identity, whereas some American suburbs are of low density and weak identity. By strong identity, we mean unique and distinctive. Weak identity means a mundane and indistinct identity. The group visualises the situation as shown in Diagram 1.



2.13 In view of Singapore's land scarcity, Singapore should ideally aim to be in quadrant B, which has strong identity and high intensity. The group noted the following:

2.13.1 It is not inevitable for Singapore to be in quadrant A or D. As explained earlier, it is possible to exist in quadrant B (Manhattan) or C (suburbs).

2.13.2 Areas in quadrant A should not be moved to quadrant B, as there is a danger that identity might be lost and we might unwittingly move to quadrant D. For example, intensifying the existing Chinatown might destroy its character, leaving it a non-descript area with high intensity.

2.13.3 Though Singapore as a whole should be in quadrant B, we should have diversity such that some areas are in A. This can be compensated by developing new areas in quadrant D. In time, these would move to quadrant B.

2.13.4 Generally, any place or area that is in quadrant C can be intensified. Admittedly, it may be in D in the short term. However, with time, the place can take on an identity of its own, and 'migrate' to B.

3 BUILT HERITAGE

- 3.1 Buildings and places are part of Singapore's built heritage and are an important element in identity. Conservation should not be viewed as 'freezing' buildings or areas and denying access and use. Instead, it can be viewed as continuity and retaining the history of a place as the place evolves and develops. Development should not mean the wholesale demolition and replacement of buildings and spaces that are important to shared memories. Conservation is an important policy that must be continued as it links the past with the future and this enables a fuller understanding of history. Development too can meet the needs for identity provided that it is thoughtfully and sensitively planned and carried out. Sensitive conservation should give due recognition to the place in its entirety, and not just selected portions. Continuity of scale and use, wherever possible, are important watchwords.
- 3.2 At present, conservation areas constitute some 0.2% of Singapore's land area and are already significant anchors for the sense of identity. Many conservation buildings have been put to exciting re-use, for example, Chijmes, Boat Quay and the Club Street area. However, the Group feels that, where conservation buildings are re-used, the intrinsic values of identity in the proposed re-use should also be assessed. The Group recognises that conservation is expensive and may also imply high opportunity costs and thus should be considered carefully. But it would be a grave error too if conservation buildings become overly commercialised or always go to the highest bidder. Uses that are appropriate and sensitive to the history and sense of place should be given due priority. For example, the Singapore Art Museum and the Asian Civilisations Museum are projects which have successfully conserved and retained the 'spirit of education' in these buildings. More residential areas should be conserved, and their use be maintained as residential, to add more character and life into conservation districts.
- 3.3 Intensification in re-use can be allowed, provided this respects the scale, quality and identity of the building and the contiguous areas that set their context. For example, where shophouses are conserved, there should be appropriate guidelines, e.g. height control, for the development of building in the back of the properties and in back lanes.

- 3.4 If re-use is not feasible, new developments should strive to integrate while conserving significant parts and elements of the original. We now have many examples of such creative and functional integration in our midst, such as Far East Square.
- 3.5 Conservation efforts should recognise that neighbourhoods rich in collective memories, character and culture like Katong, are dynamic and will thrive only if preserved in totality. If only selected parts of these areas are conserved, problems of regeneration and continuance of the vitality can result. Hence, conservation should go beyond individual buildings to whole neighbourhoods or clusters of living interest, for example, those in transitional areas like Geylang, Katong and Serangoon Gardens. This can be carried out even if individual buildings are not deemed to have sufficient merit by themselves.
- 3.6 Efforts to date to conserve some of the more important buildings from the early years of colonial period Singapore have yielded visible and fruitful results. The Civic District has certainly come a long way in the last decade. More however can be done, and new dimensions added to conservation efforts to increase the sense of identity. A new focus should be given to buildings and areas that are more recent, such as in Katong, Geylang and earlier public housing estates, such as Tiong Bahru, Bukit Ho Swee and Queenstown. This recognizes that history and identity is dynamic and layered and is being continually added to. Conservation efforts should be promoted for these buildings and areas.
- 3.7 While the built heritage is important, it should not be our sole focus. It is crucial for the continued vitality and dynamism of the conserved areas that there be an understanding of the social and cultural networks as well as business life that made the areas tick in the first instance. Hence, physical planning must be complemented by social and cultural components that breathe life and give continued relevance to conservation buildings and places as historical statements of our physical and social development. The location of arts groups along Waterloo Street in tandem with schemes to conserve and creatively re-use the buildings in that area are an example of the twinning of planning and social policies. More can be done for Little India and Chinatown.

- 3.8 To add more life and character into conservation districts, more streets that have been predominantly residential within the conservation district should be conserved, and their use maintained.
- 3.9 The existing planning guidelines and documents, such as Development Guide Plans (DGPs) are limited in addressing the social and human aspects of development. To address these limitations, complementary mechanisms must be instituted to fully realise the conservation objectives. One way of doing this is to have an 'Identity and Heritage Plan' prepared for each planning area as part of the DGP review process. Areas of identity and heritage can be drawn up by URA in consultation with the relevant government and non-government bodies and interest groups, including the National Heritage Board, the Singapore Tourism Board, academics, professional institutions and NGOs such as the Nature Society, Heritage Society and community leaders, etc. Indeed, for the built heritage to be more than buildings, more multi-agency and multi-level coordination and collaboration are needed.
- 3.10 Conservation can affect development potential and economic value. While it is for the public interest, the government should take into consideration possible additional costs and hardships imposed by conservation on private owners and stakeholders. To ease the financial burden and encourage conservation of the built environment belonging to non-profit institutions, the government should consider a 'dollar for dollar' contribution for such cases. The government should also study if it is possible to allow 'transfer of development rights' for those properties whose development potential is stifled as a result of being gazetted for conservation.
- 3.11 An inventory and preliminary assessment of buildings and localities that should be considered for conservation should be undertaken systematically and proactively, incorporating this report's suggested principles and ideas.

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4 NEW DEVELOPMENTS

- 4.1 New developments too can add to the identity of Singapore.
- 4.2 In areas where there is little need for or value in conservation, or are newly opened to development, new developments can and should proceed at much higher densities in tandem with the provision of infrastructure such as public transport. This would help meet the competing needs and relieve pressure on other land areas as well as contribute to diversity in Singapore's land use and form part of the emerging identity of Singapore as a modern global city. Areas with great potential for high-density development are sites around MRT stations and the new downtown. These can be transformed into distinctive and imageable, vibrant business districts.
- 4.3 New developments need not be faceless and featureless places. Where possible, new developments should evolve around existing pockets of nature areas and natural features, such as hills and mangroves. Significant existing buildings, such as St. Anne's Church in Sengkang, can also be integrated as part of the new town. Such unique features, monuments, key buildings and specific landmarks can act as landscape cues that give residents a sense of identity and legibility, and act to create a sense of history and continuity. Some elements of the plan for Simpang are good examples of how this can be achieved.
- 4.4 In newer areas and public housing estates, or greenfield sites such as the new downtown, it is important for new developments to strive towards achieving distinction as well as utility so that they become new landmarks and elements that add to the Singaporean identity. To give greater identity to new towns, different planning and development guidelines can be applied so that diverse factors and experiences are created consequently.
- 4.5 The contribution of physical elements to identity in new developments should not however be over-emphasised, rushed or forced, as a sense of identity and of place can be developed over time, and in tandem with the building of community.

- 4.6 The Group feels that the size of towns has a bearing on the imageability and, thus, identity of towns. Smaller towns have stronger identities, as perceived by their residents as well as visitors. The design and planning of precincts can be a useful way to physically encourage a sense of community. For example, precincts in public housing estates can carve identifiable communities at an appropriate scale. Similarly, the provision of public meeting and gathering places can increase social interaction. The character of markets, shops and other local amenities can also encourage the building of the community.
- 4.7 In new developments especially, and other areas generally, allowing for mixed use with increased flexibility will be a key strategy in increasing both utilisation and diversity as well as allowing more people to live in the city, thus bringing more life and activity in the area. Existing policies that allow for flexibility but do not encourage it, such as 'white' sites should be reviewed as they do not enhance diversity but result in more of the same. This is because developers would develop such sites to the highest commercial use to ensure the best possible return on their investments. Policies to encourage mixed-use buildings should be integrated into the process of land allocation.
- 4.8 Government agencies should be encouraged and enabled to be more creative and innovative in their development of Singaporean buildings and areas. Existing parameters that are unnecessary impediments should be reviewed and minimised. An example is the site coverage control for both public and private housing, which can be lifted to allow for more flexible and innovative designs. This will create greater design options and identity in the physical landscape as well as the possibility of achieving higher densities even when there are height constraints.
- 4.9 The strength and creative energy of the private sector can be harnessed especially in the building of public housing estates. The participation of private sector architects, developers, planners, engineers, sociologists, grassroots leaders and others with expertise and interests should therefore be integrated into public planning to a wider extent and at the earliest stage possible. In this way, heterogeneity will find its way into new public housing towns and a greater variety of designs will contribute to stronger individual identities for these towns.

5 NATURAL HERITAGE AND PARKS

- 5.1 Nature areas and parks are a very important and distinctive element in the identity of Singapore as a garden city and a tropical city. Singapore has a rich natural heritage with a core of rainforest that gives the small island a wider bio-diversity than much larger countries. Dating as it does from the beginning of time in Singaporeans' collective memories, our natural heritage contributes greatly to our identity and sense of place. It gives Singaporeans a sense of permanence and pride in a fast-changing world. Nature areas also provide utility as water catchment, for military training, and for recreational use.
- 5.2 Existing nature areas account for 5% of Singapore's land area (including land within military areas). These should be enhanced to ensure their continuance in the longer term. Where there are areas of good and distinctive natural heritage, these should be added to the protected nature reserves or otherwise given special status. The recommendations of the Nature Conservation Review Committee in this regard should be seriously considered and adopted as far as possible.
- 5.3 Our distinctiveness as an island nation should be enhanced through protection of those coastlines which are either unique or are rich in biodiversity. Special care should be taken concerning reclamation and landfill that threaten coral reefs and marine nature areas. The planning process should incorporate measures that will identify the impacts of such developments and propose solutions that will limit the damage to these unique and rich coastal areas.
- 5.4 Developments in the proximity of nature areas can impact adversely on the ecology of the nature area and catalyse deterioration. Furthermore, if only selected or small parts of the nature areas are conserved, there may be problems of regeneration and continuance of vitality. Hence, if we have to develop land close to nature areas, we have to ensure that we minimise disturbance to nature areas. Some nature areas, including marine nature areas and coastlines, can be demarcated as special areas in the Concept Plan and Development Guide Plans (DGPs). Developments encroaching on these special areas are allowed only if

environmental impact analyses (EIAs) show the developments to have no adverse impact on the nature areas and after the public has been informed. In many cases, suitable buffers of open space, parks and low-intensity community use, like community farms, can be introduced to better protect the integrity of such nature areas. The possibility of 1- or 2-storey bungalows with larger plot sizes prescribed to those in Good Class Bungalow Areas should be explored and be allowed in buffer areas. In this way, such surrounding tracts of land would not be totally sterilised.

- 5.5 In addition to nature areas, parks and green spaces can also form a special element in Singapore's identity. This may arise from historical significance or a contribution to the sense of space and scale to the surrounding area. The gazetting of parks and green spaces as special areas should therefore be allowed. First consideration can be given to the Padang, and the Hong Lim and Bras Basah Parks within the civic district and city areas.
- 5.6 The provision of new and additional parks is essential to the quality of life in Singapore and should be extended to new developments as far as possible. Both larger central parks and smaller and more accessible neighborhood parks and park connectors should be integrated into planning. An example of one innovative approach is in the Tampines HDB Design and Build project which incorporates garden courtyards within the precinct. Similarly, underground car parks should be considered as a means of increasing the land available for parks in housing estates.
- 5.7 Where possible, pockets of nature areas, or the existing vegetation can be integrated as part of the park to give it a distinct identity. A good example is the mangrove area at Pasir Ris Park. We should strive not only to be a garden city, but to be a city in a garden.
- 5.8 Trees and greenery by the roadside should also be enhanced by a partnership between both the state and private landowners. Streets with "walls" of greenery and shade can be part of a distinctive urban environment and should be preserved

as part of our heritage. Selected roads rich in memory or lined with mature trees should be gazetted as 'heritage roads' and protected, e.g. East Coast Road, stretches of Bukit Timah Road, Dunearn Road, Upper Thomson Road, Mount Pleasant Road, etc.

- 5.9 In addition, overlapping and compatible uses of land should be facilitated, such as existing golf courses or water catchment areas to be used as parks. The Concept Plan should not safeguard more land for golf courses. The land can instead be used for community parks and community agro-technology farms to allow more people to enjoy the use of green spaces.
- 5.10 Policies should be reviewed to allow and encourage innovative ways to create green spaces without the use of more land. This would make high-rise living more conducive and comfortable. Roof gardens, sky terraces and high-level landscaped plazas should be encouraged in new designs and, where possible, by retrofitting. Other architectural innovations can be encouraged, such as mid-level gardens in high-rise buildings, platforms over highways and garden bridges, such as that attempted in Chinatown.

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6 REGIONAL AND LOCAL IDENTITY

- 6.1 The sense of regional and local identity is an important addition to identity at the national level. Here, regional refers to extended districts or public housing towns rather than the planning term of 'regions'. While grand monuments are important to collective memory, everyday structures form gathering points where we focus memory to the rhythm and flow of familiar landscapes. This would bring the sense of identity closer to the average citizen. Regional and local identity are strong in some areas, such as Katong, Geylang, Bishan and, in a different way, Tanglin. However, regional identity is not strong throughout Singapore and should be enhanced.
- 6.2 Conservation and, where appropriate, re-use of both built and natural heritage of local interest and distinction should be promoted to enhance local and regional identity, such as the shophouses in the Joo Chiat area. Schools are another focus for local and regional identity. Efforts should be made to sustain and evolve schools and their buildings, rather than relocating them elsewhere.
- 6.3 Another measure would be a better alignment of boundaries and demarcations. A better fit between planning, administration, physical development, and political constituencies and the naming of streets and community buildings can help increase the sense of a local or regional place. Place names should be enhanced as they have a shared collective memory. Changing traditional names like Bukit Panjang and Tekka (Serangoon) to Hanyu Pin Yin street names would sever the collective memory of these places amongst Singaporeans.
- 6.4 A sense of community is also a pillar in creating a sense of local and regional identity. The government should welcome more bottom-up efforts to conserve, strengthen and develop identity. This however takes time and effort, especially in newer public housing estates. Policies that encourage rootedness should be encouraged, and those that promote unnecessary uprooting should be re-examined.
- 6.5 Policies that inadvertently lead to an increasing uniformity should be avoided. In upgrading works, for example, improving the quality of amenities should not be equated with uniformity in physical appearance and design.

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7 PROCESSES AND INSTITUTIONS FOR CONSERVATION AND DEVELOPMENT

- 7.1 Identity evolves over time and conservation efforts must take this into consideration. It is possible that future generations might value dearly what we take for granted today. Conversely, it is conceivable that future generations may need land for other new uses. In this context, it can be considered that conservation is policy that gives the option of choice to future Singaporeans, rather than tying their hands.
- 7.2 Processes to evaluate the environmental and social impact of new developments should be instituted. Owners and other stakeholder groups should be recognised and engaged. Public and expert participation in these processes should also be facilitated. However, these processes can and should bear in mind the need for timely development and certainty.
- 7.3 For example, while authorities have decided to demolish the National Library, the process by which the decision was reached and conveyed to the public should be improved. Identity and memories are emotional issues and the public expects to be engaged and be included on an on-going basis in the decision-making process. Public consultation should have included full disclosure of the planning rationale as well as presenting the alternatives to the public in a transparent manner before the final decision was taken. Where decisions are taken over an extended period of time, changing public sentiments must be taken into account.
- 7.4 We believe that conservation policy and decisions over specific buildings and areas should be open to review from time to time. In the longer term, if there are pressing needs and changes in attitude, future generations should also be free to review decisions taken for conservation. Similarly, past decisions to develop can and should be revisited to ensure their continued relevance.

- 7.5 The main objective of conservation is to preserve parts of the physical landscape to enhance memories of the present for future generations of Singaporeans. Proper institutions, processes, timeframes and criteria for the due consideration of these decisions should be developed. However, the Group suggests that the following should be among the factors also to be considered:
- 7.5.1 Conservation should be selective;
 - 7.5.2 Opportunity cost. However, this should not be the sole consideration;
 - 7.5.3 Hardship to private landowners; and
 - 7.5.4 National development needs that are critical to be weighed against strong public sentiments.
- 7.6 More should be done to educate Singaporeans, especially the younger generations, about the importance of identity and our natural and built heritage. A good start is to recognise the importance of the ordinary Singaporean's attachment to the places that he/she grew up in, schools, libraries, parks and eating places he/she used and has become fond of. Conservation of places that matter to ordinary Singaporeans will boost confidence among the young that their sense of identity matters. An awareness and appreciation of the competing needs of land should also be inculcated.
- 7.7 A proper institution that is focused on the conservation of the natural and built heritage is timely and necessary. Such an institution should be appointed and facilitated by government and made sufficiently independent to stand as an equal in the planning process. It should help improve transparency, accountability and public participation in the process of decision-making in conservation and development. The institution should develop both public and private sector expertise and interest in conservation and heritage issues. It should be proactive in identifying issues of concern and proposing possible policies to address them.

8 SPECIFIC RECOMMENDATIONS

8.1 From the above observations and comments made during their discussions, the Committee proposes some specific recommendations, as follows:

8.2 **The Concept Plan should seek to allow and accommodate dynamic and changing factors in planning for the future, and target greater diversity and distinction.** Planning for the future is not the simple extrapolation of current practices. It should include changes in technology, the value of land in the future, and the value of our heritage. Existing parameters should be open to reconsideration as and when factors require and allow. To encourage diversity, present policies that tend to lessen diversity and increase uniformity should be reviewed.

Lead agencies: URA, MND

8.3 **The Concept Plan should seek to conserve more of the built heritage and nature areas in Singapore.** This creates an option for Singaporeans in the future to decide whether to develop and how to proceed with development, given technology and costs prevailing at that time. Good and distinctive natural heritage should be added to the protected nature reserves or otherwise given special status. The recommendations of the Nature Conservation Review Committee in this regard should be seriously considered and adopted where possible. For built heritage, a special committee should similarly be set up to recommend areas and places for adoption.

Lead agencies: URA, MND

8.4 **Social, cultural and environmental aspects of development are important.** The private sector, non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and related government agencies should work together to better plan Singapore so that planning can be more holistic and responsive to changing needs and technology.

Lead agencies: MND, URA

- 8.5 **A Heritage Conservation Trust should be established.** The Trust should promote the appreciation of conservation and evaluate proposals for conservation of built and natural heritage, or the deregistration of existing protected built and natural heritage. The Trust should be an independent body made up of experts and representatives from stakeholder groups and be chaired by a representative of the private sector, who is appointed by the Minister. The Trust should enjoy the patronage of the President as the built and natural heritage constitutes a part of our national reserves. The Trust should be transparent in engaging the public as well as stakeholders and then making recommendations to the Minister.

Lead agencies: NHB, NParks

- 8.6 **A new focus should be given to conserve buildings and areas that are more recent. Areas of living interest should be the aim of conservation policy and not just individual buildings.** Conservation should look beyond colonial and other early period buildings to places built in more recent periods, for example, public buildings and earlier public housing estates, as well as areas such as Katong and Geylang. The conservation of individual buildings may not be sufficient to retain the character of some neighbourhoods. In Katong, for example, there is a sense of life and activity that goes beyond the conservation of selected houses. For such areas, the conservation of the entire neighbourhood should be considered. An inventory and preliminary assessment of buildings and localities that should be considered for conservation should be undertaken systematically and proactively, incorporating this report's suggested principles and ideas.

Lead agencies: NHB, Conservation Trust

- 8.7 **The re-use of conservation buildings should be appropriate and sensitive to the history and sense of place. Any redevelopment must be sensitive to that sense of life and identity.** Where possible, the original or appropriate land use should be recognised. The aim of conservation is not preservation but to allow change to bring in newer elements of life at a manageable pace.

Lead agencies: URA, Conservation Trust

- 8.8 **The government should be sensitive to the effect of conservation on the land value and interests of private owners.** The government should provide financial assistance such as ‘dollar for dollar’ contribution to non-profit organizations if conservation requirements lead to higher development costs for such agencies. URA is to work out the details with the Conservation Trust and affected stake-holders.

Lead agencies: MND, URA, Conservation Trust

- 8.9 **The current tender system to award land to the highest bidder should be reviewed in order to promote buildings of distinction.** For conservation districts, the Conservation Trust should be involved in the tender process. Significant focal points and landmark sites are important and the government should discuss with professional bodies how best to change the tender system to facilitate distinction at these locations, for example, fix the tender price and award according to design.

Lead agencies: URA, Land Office

- 8.10 **Areas of significant built and natural heritage and identity should be identified and demarcated in the Development Guide Plans.** An inventory of the areas of heritage and identity should be mapped out within each Planning Area.

Lead agencies: URA, NParks, Conservation Trust

- 8.11 **Environmental and social impact studies of new developments affecting areas of natural or built heritage and identity should be made compulsory and supervised by the Conservation Trust.** The findings of such studies should be made public and be included as inputs in the decision-making process.

Lead agencies: URA, NParks, Conservation Trust

- 8.12 **Provide more park land per person and greater access to parks and landscaped areas.** NParks and the Conservation Trust should work out an appropriate provision standard. The Concept Plan should not safeguard more land for golf courses, and should instead use the land for parks. URA and HDB should review planning guidelines to encourage more landscaped areas within developments, including rooftop and mid-level gardens.

Lead agencies: MND, Conservation Trust

- 8.13 **Provide lush roadside planting. Selected roads with mature vegetation should be gazetted as 'heritage roads'.** NParks should identify roads with mature vegetation and recommend them to be gazetted as 'heritage roads'. Developments affecting these roads can proceed only with the endorsement of NParks.

Lead agencies: NParks, MND

- 8.14 **More significant parks which are popular or with heritage value should be gazetted for their protection.** NParks and the Conservation Trust should identify the significant parks, such as Bras Basah Park and Hong Lim Park for gazette, and developments affecting these parks would require their endorsement.

Lead agencies: NParks, MND, Conservation Trust

- 8.15 **Where possible, reclamation should be planned creatively and implemented sensitively to retain popular or unique waterfronts while creating more coastlines, beaches and coastal parks to heighten the identity of an island city state.** We should identify suitable coastlines including off-shore islands which need protection and/or where there are potential to undertake creative reclamation profiles that will enhance the use and ambience of our waterfront areas.

Lead agencies: URA, NParks

- 8.16 **Developments in new areas should be of higher density and evolve around existing natural and built features.** Where possible, undeveloped areas can be rezoned for higher density developments. The Development Guide Plans should respect the 'spirit' of the place and existing natural and built features, including topography, to ensure that they are retained amidst development.

Lead agencies: MND, NParks

- 8.17 **Local and regional identities are important to cultivate.** The conservation and re-use of both built and natural heritage of local interest should be promoted. Other desirable measures would be better alignment of boundaries and demarcations in planning, administration and political constituencies and the naming of streets, schools and community buildings.

Lead agencies: MND, PMO, Conservation Trust

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APPENDIX 1

SCHEDULE OF MEETINGS

Meeting	Schedule
1st meeting 26 Aug, Sat 10.00 am - 12 noon at The URA Centre	Launch of Public Consultation Briefing by URA on the planning dilemma and the proposals in the 1991 Concept Plan
2nd meeting 28 Aug, Mon 6.30 am - 8.30 pm at The Pavilion, Far East Square	Briefing by URA on Conservation & Heritage Site visit to Far East Square & China Square
3rd meeting 9 Sep, Sat 2.00 pm - 5.00 pm at Visitor Centre, Bukit Timah Nature Hindhede Drive	Nature Conservation briefing by NParks Site visit to Bukit Timah Nature Reserve
4th meeting 23 Sep, Sat 3.30 pm - 7.30 pm	Site visit to non-conservation areas - Katong & Geylang non-restored conservation areas - Joo Chiat & Geylang
5th meeting 7 Oct, Sat 1.30 pm - 5.00 pm	Site visit to old HDB estate - Bukit Ho Swee (Bukit Merah) new HDB town - Sengkang
6th meeting 9 Oct, Mon 6.00 pm - 8.00 pm at The URA Centre	Discussion
7th meeting 17 Oct, Tue 6.00 pm - 8.00 pm at The URA Centre	Discussion Briefing on the review of conservation guidelines Briefing on ideas on the planning of towns, demonstrated in Simpang
8th meeting 30 Oct, Mon 6.00 pm - 8.00 pm at The URA Centre	Discussion
9th meeting 11 Nov, Sat 2.00 pm - 5.00 pm at The URA Centre	Discussion, focus on interim report
10th meeting 14 Nov, Tue 6.00 pm - 8.00 pm at The URA Centre	Discussion, focus on interim report
Public Forum 8 Dec, Fri 6.00 pm - 9.00 pm at The URA Centre	Discussion with public
11th meeting 9 Dec, Sat 2.00 pm - 4.00 pm at Fullerton Hotel	Discussion, focus on final report

APPENDIX 2

FEEDBACK FROM THE INTERNET

Buildings, landmarks or natural features to be retained and how to retain them while making good use of the land they are sitting on?

What to be retained? (Frequency)		How to retain?
Buildings (historical/ architectural/ heritage value)	Sri Mariamman Temple	-
	Hajjah Fatimah Mosque	-
	St Andrew's Cathedral	-
	Disused coal powered station at PSA's Brani Terminal	Revitalising of old building into a mall/ gallery/ maritime museum.
	Old buildings with historical value (x2) and intricate designs	Stop tearing down for a year as renovated ones go unoccupied. Retain façade of buildings and use the interior for other uses. Extend interior (underground or back) as need arises.
	NTUC/ Singapore Conference Hall	Adaptive reuse of old buildings, building underground, respectful A&A.
	Colonial Bungalows	-
	National Museum	Do not make it too colourful.
	National Library (x5)	Recycle buildings.
	SIT flats	Redevelop.
	Old shophouses e.g. Chinatown - Telok Ayer Street, Ann Siang Hill	Selectively restore small parcels of shophouses that have historical value rather than restoring large areas and not retaining their character.
	Zoo	Generate revenue.
	Others (general)	Architectural competitions for the design of old buildings.
Landmarks (historical/ architectural/ heritage value)	Little India (x4)	-
	Kg Glam (x3)	-
	Chinatown (x8), Club street	To retain the shell of the shophouses while changing the interior use.
	Maxwell Market	-
	Boat Quay (x2)	Creative and innovative restoration, integrating them with new developments, with their distinctive character intact.
	Clark Quay (x2)	
	Botanic Gardens	Organise activities that draw families there.
	Ford factory in Bt Timah	-
Haw Par Villa*	Do not retain.	

What to be retained? (Frequency)		How to retain?
Natural Features (need more greenery)	Nature Reserves (x3)	Educate children on importance of nature.
	Bt Timah Hill (x5)	-
	Sungei Buloh Nature Park (x2)	-
	Little Guilin	-
	MacRitchie (x2)	-
	Beaches	East coast and offshore islands.
	Waterbodies e.g. Mangrove swamps, lakes, fish ponds	Developments to be planned around natural features.
	River systems of Singapore, like Punggol	Enhance or preserve the natural beauty of the place.
	Trees that have been around for >50 years	-
	Islands: Southern Islands, Pulau Ubin (x3)	Invasive species should be removed to retain our native organisms.
	Kelong and fish farms (x2) e.g. those in old Tampines	Have some fish farms relocated to Pulau Ubin.
Golf courses*	Reduce size or eliminate.	

* Do not retain

Other identity vs intensive land use issues:

Area of concern	Suggestions/ Comments
Buildings	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Keep old features/ conserve, especially those with valuable memories, 'adaptive reuse' of old buildings. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Buildings to be conserved can be adapted into studio apartments to meet needs of singles. Build flats that promote 3 generations living together. Blending old and new buildings. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> E.g. building a whole shopping center around an old building that will become the centerpiece, e.g. Melbourne. Rebuild or relocate conserved buildings. Involvement of private bodies in conservation.
Landmarks	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> They are precious and should be retained for our next generation. Moreover, Singapore has a very short history. Do not demolish a building and leave the plot empty (e.g. the National Theatre at River Valley Road). Try to build over the heritage structure like what Melbourne Central has done with their Shot Tower. Or make use of the space beneath these structures.
Natural Feature	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Create pockets of jungle on traffic islands, like plant rare trees, put in ponds fed by rainwater, etc. instead of grass.
Tourism	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Very little tourist attractions in Singapore.
Others	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Do not crowd the land with so many people. If it must be done, then do preserve what little forest that is left. Overcrowding of island. Is conservation just dollars and cents?

APPENDIX 2 *(continued)*

SUMMARY OF FEEDBACK RECEIVED AT PUBLIC FORUM ON 8 DEC 2000 ON IDENTITY VS INTENSIVE USE OF LAND

Topic	Comments
Process	
Heritage Conservation Trust	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Many in favour of Heritage Conservation Trust. - URA will no longer need to fulfill conflicting missions of development vs conservation. - Make heritage a national issue, like health and education. - Should be proactive in: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Identifying areas for conservation (natural and built), - Determining the degree of conservation, - Redefining conservation districts, - Scrutinising government proposals for conservation areas. - Build on expertise of URA Conservation Section, NParks and PMB, balanced by private sector players.
Environmental Impact Analysis	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - EIAs should be mandatory. - Singapore is one of the few countries where EIA is not compulsory. - Start an environmental agency.
Specific sites and more immediate cases	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Should recommend specific sites to be retained - Should look at specific issues. - Should look at more immediate cases as well, not just future processes.
Practicality vs Identity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Should consider the functionality and practicality of building. - Funds needed from government to retain identity, e.g. subsidise conservation, give another site for expansion, e.g. YMCA.
Heritage Guide Plans	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Prepare them to supplement DGPs. - Farm them out to private sector.

Topic	Comments
Identity vs Intensity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Identity has nothing to do with intensity, scale. - Has to do with people, meaning.
Natural Heritage	
Nature	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Weave nature into buildings and work spaces. - Marine bio-diversity should be protected.
Island Identity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Should respect coastlines. - Should visit island sites.
Golf courses	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Various opinions for less, more, or the capping of the number of golf courses. - Overlapping use, use for nature trails. - Use for parks, reservoirs or catchment.
Built Heritage	
Identity in Schools	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Relocation of schools is bad for identity. - Keep the schools, but can refurbish, renovate, or add-on.
Roads	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Keep identity of roads, e.g. Stamford Road, remove barrier in the middle of East Coast Rd.
What to retain	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - SIT flats. - Pioneer HDB estates like Queenstown, Bedok. - Early flats are like slums because not upgraded, but can cater to singles, professionals, small families, etc.
National Library	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Still have time to reconsider National Library. - Half of audience wants to conserve National Library.
Existing Conserved Buildings	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - What are we going to do to them?
Sensitive Re-use	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Thong Chai Clinic was turned into discotheque, which has since closed down.

