

A family gathers in its old cramped home and then enjoys its new home's cosy facilities.
一家人在未重建的狹窄舊居及享用新居寬敞舒適的設施。

In with the new

Some of Hong Kong's run-down areas are being redeveloped, with a close eye kept on ensuring classic architecture and local culture remains in place

Juxtapose two images representing the "before and after" of any project undertaken by the Urban Renewal Authority (URA) and the story they tell is most impressive.

One, for example, might be a photo from one of Hong Kong's run-down areas as it appeared a couple of years ago. In the foreground, there might be a retiree with just a bed and a few square feet to call his own, a "tenant" standing beside his rooftop shack, or a family of four sharing one cramped corner of a subdivided apartment. The background scene is of walls betraying large damp patches, peeling plaster, jerry-built partitions, ceilings in various states of disrepair, and dangling low-wattage light bulbs barely illuminating the shadows.

The twinned photo will show the same people, but here the smiles are bright. Old folk and young families are in their new homes, children are tucking into dinner around the kitchen table, all the usual domestic comforts are in place, and everything is spick and span.

Other pairs of the URA's comparative images tell similarly dramatic stories. You can see, for instance, how continuing work will transform Lee Tung Street in Wan Chai, known affectionately as "Wedding Card Street", into a future Mecca for everything to do with weddings. And other Wan Chai buildings are seeing similar makeovers, including the Wo Cheong Pawn Shop in Johnston Road, the art deco Wan Chai Market and 18 Ship Street.

Sharp contrast: A Lee Tung Street resident happily shows his new modern kitchen after renovation, and before.
一位利東街居民歡欣地展示重建後其單位內現代式的廚房及破爛廚房舊貌的強烈對比。

By studying the artist's impression of how today's dilapidated Kwun Tong town centre will look after redevelopment, you understand immediately that the integration of open areas, green spaces, and well thought out architectural features will totally transform the district.

And while these projects, plus others in progress or still on the drawing board, naturally excite URA chairman Barry Cheung Chun-yuen, he feels that one in particular best encapsulates the authority's overall mission to rehabilitate, preserve, revitalise and redevelop.

"The Peel Street and Graham Street project in Central is a microcosm of everything we are trying to do," Mr Cheung says. "We are taking the opportunity to replan the area, but also taking every possible measure to preserve its character."

The area is home to one of the oldest street markets in Hong Kong and is generally recognised as giving a real sense of vibrancy to the surrounding community. However, diligent hygiene and safety inspectors might have cause to question some of the existing conditions, as many of the buildings are decaying past the practical point of repair and are no longer equipped for 21st-century living.

As a result, the URA has stepped in with a comprehensive scheme aimed at achieving the right balance between sometimes competing priorities. It was put together with the help of architects, academics, urban planners and heritage experts, and took full account of

Wo Cheong Pawn Shop's transformation
和昌大押復修前後大變身

URA chairman Barry Cheung Chun-yuen
市建局主席張震遠

An artist's impression of the future Kwun Tong Town Centre project
構思中的觀塘市中心重建項目，設有休憩空間、綠化地帶。

The dilapidated Kwun Tong area
觀塘舊區現貌

feedback from local residents, stall holders, shop owners and interested members of the public.

As Mr Cheung explains, the approach adopted is "preservation is paramount". Buildings seen to have special architectural character will be restored. Those fronting the street will remain low-level in order to preserve the feel of the area, and there will be an "Old Shop Street" along Graham Street, with enterprises selling such things as Chinese medicine, herbal teas and traditional snacks, and reviving some of the household names known to Hongkongers from years ago.

To keep the street market thriving, essential shops selling meat, poultry and fish will move into new purpose-built buildings. Stalls will have safe and reliable supplies of water and electricity, more space for storage, and easier access for shoppers and pedestrians.

Mr Cheung is at pains to emphasise the immense care taken with each stage of the planning and redevelopment. Owners or residents, for instance, received generous compensation, sometimes several times the market value, to vacate their premises. They had a first option to return, if they chose to and buy a new flat at market rates after redevelopment work was completed. During the construction phase, disruption was kept to a minimum, with boardings to deflect dust and noise, and shops and stalls continued to operate.

As with each URA project, every effort was made to maintain the social fabric, incorporate features that will help sustainability, and focus on improving the overall living environment.

"We are ultra sensitive to criticisms and quite responsive," Mr Cheung explains. "Critics sometimes forget that people in older buildings may be living in terrible conditions and may have been waiting years for someone like us to come and help them."

護舊融新

若比較重建前後的照片，市區重建局的護舊融新工作，確是值得嘉許。退休老人瑟縮於陋室之中、星斗市民佇立在天台鐵皮屋旁和擠在分租板間房的一家四口。照片所見都是牆壁滲漏、天花剝落和孤燈昏影，訴說當年的坎坷。比對的照片中，同樣的老少主角、新的房子、井井有條的家居和伏案溫習的小孩、還有燦爛的笑靨，成了強烈對比。

在灣仔被港人暱稱蘭桂街的利東街，重建後將成為以婚嫁為主題的購物文娛中心。構思中的觀塘市中心，設有休憩空間、綠化地帶和各類特色設計，大大改善區內環境。市建局主席張震遠在記者會上表示：「秉承著市建局的工作方針，我們將重新規劃中環卑利街和嘉咸街，並盡力保留地區特色。」市建局是專責市區更新的法定機構，透過重建發展、樓宇復修、文物保育及舊區活化工作，為舊區注入新活力。嘉咸街街市是最歷史悠久的街市之一，位置便利，一直以來方便區內居民購物，可是衛生和安全條件欠佳，周邊樓宇亦日久失修，不符合現代的居住水準。因此，市建局經廣泛諮詢居民及社區人士後，在建築師、學者、城市規劃師和保育專家等的協助下，制訂卑利街／嘉咸街項目以「保育為本」的發展藍圖。百年街市將被保存及活化，街市樓宇的水電供應更安全可靠、存貨空間更大和行人通道更闊。昔日特色樓宇會被保留，嘉咸街的街道景觀及街號亦會被保存。嘉咸街兩旁，將設立首條匯集香港老字號的「老店街」，售賣中藥、涼茶和中式涼果等。售賣肉食、家禽和鮮魚等店舖則遷至新廈內。

他強調，市建局會小心謹慎去處理項目的規劃及重建工程，例如，業主將單位售予市建局，可以得到補償金，亦有優先權，以市價購買重建後新建的單位。施工期間，會用上欄板阻擋沙塵和噪音，務使影響減至最低，讓商戶仍可照常營業。在推行每一個項目，市建局以改善舊區居民的居住環境為首要任務，並會致力保留地方特色和其持續性。他補充說：「我們會小心處理所有批評，並作出回應。不過，反對人士有時會忽略了舊樓居民住環境境差劣，他們亦已等待多年，就是盼望生活有所改善。」

Breathing new life

Anyone strolling around the area of First and Second Streets in Sai Ying Pun will soon notice two things – the regular grid pattern of the roads and the unique historical character. The district's name, which roughly translates as "western military camp" gives a clue to the layout, while the rest stems entirely from the homes, customs and day-to-day lives of the tradespeople and families who have been part of the area, in some cases for generations.

Many of the buildings, though, are showing clear signs of wear and tear. So, with a view to upgrading where necessary, the Urban Renewal Authority (URA) has teamed up with Kerry Properties on a project to revitalise the district.

As part of the grand design, there will be fine dining areas, shops and green open space, creating a special ambience and changing the neighbourhood for the better. There will also be stylish new apartments with environmentally friendly features, and an MTR station on the doorstep to give residents and traders a real sense of convenience.

"First and Second Streets is a very nice location and was one of the best planned areas of Hong Kong back in the 1800s," said URA chairman Barry Cheung Chun-yuen. "We are now revitalising the area to make it more liveable, with street improvements and easier access."

注入新氣象

西營盤的第一街和第二街，街道井然、文化獨特，自成一格。「營盤」是指軍營，井然規劃溯源於此，地區特色則承傳自歷代商戶和居民。現時樓宇多殘舊失修，亟待修葺重建。因此，市建局正聯同嘉里建設開展重建計劃，更會顧及公眾訴求，保育及強化區內特色和歷史建築。

計劃包括設置休憩用地、綠化區和商店，以改善區內環境和創造獨特格調。建成後的環保概念時尚住宅、鄰近地鐵站，令居民和商戶信譽方便。張主席表示，第一街和第二街位置優越，自十九世紀起已是其中一個良好的規劃區。「我們正著手活化這個地區，並美化街道，讓它更顯活力。」

An artist's impression of the First Street and Second Street redevelopment in Sai Ying Pun
西營盤第一街及第二街重建項目的模擬建築圖