

A brief introduction to Sarawak Heritage Society

Mission

To promote the conservation, permanent preservation and sustainable management of Sarawak's unique cultural heritage assets, both tangible and intangible.

Vision

A Sarawak where all stakeholders value the rich and unique cultural heritage and diligently contribute, directly or indirectly, to its ongoing sensitive and sustainable protection, conservation and management.



Over the years SHS has organised talks, film screenings and visits to raise heritage awareness for its members, the public and schools. It has been instrumental in the development of the Kuching Heritage Trail, which it hopes to continue to enhance. It has piloted community engagement programmes in Siniawan and the Fort Alice restoration project. It contributed to the training of tourist guides. It has raised the alarm on some threatened or disappearing heritage assets. The recently upgraded SHS website (sarawakheritagesociety.com) and Facebook pages provide an improved platform for knowledge sharing and exchange of views.

SHS View of the Heritage Situation in Sarawak

Sarawak has an extraordinary history with a diversity of peoples bringing about a real confluence over the years. This has created a unique fusion of architectures and monuments, customs and traditions, arts and crafts, song and dance, and generally lifestyle, sometimes called the "Sarawakian way

1 Managing & Protecting our Cultural Heritage

- Important to strengthen Sarawak's identity in a fast moving world
- Both tangible & intangible assets
- Protecting assets does not mean freezing developments

2 Heritage & Economy

- Studies have shown positive impact of heritage conservation on economy
- Well-managed cultural heritage brings in tourists/visitors
- Enhances perceptions

3 Heritage & Public Policy

- Sarawak's public policies require carefully articulated and coordinated policy, strategy, regulatory, institutional and financial frameworks

4 Heritage Legislation & Planning

- Sarawak Cultural Heritage Ordinance 1993 has been sparsely applied
- few heritage sites (if any) have been actually gazetted since 1986

SHS is confident it can contribute and value add to the conservation and promotion of Sarawak's heritage in the following ways

Focus Areas

Highlights

1 Conduct an assessment of the public policy, regulatory, financing and enforcement framework

- Assessment would **review existing frameworks**, and where necessary provide **insights** and **recommendations**
- To be headed up by a small SHS-led technical team
- Team would require relevant information and involvement from the following key stakeholders (non-exhaustive)
 - Ministry of Tourism Arts & Culture, Sarawak
 - The Sarawak Museum Department
 - State Planning Authority
 - Lands & Survey
 - DBKU & MBKS
 - LCDA
- This assessment could be followed by a workshop to discuss findings and chart the way forward.

2 Facilitate a **Baseline Technical Study** by independent consultants on Kuching's heritage zone

- The content of such a study would be the following 4 key areas:-
 - i. Provide an **expert assessment** of the **built** and **intangible heritage conservation potential** of the Kuching heritage core, taking into account current and proposed programmes and projects (e.g. Heritage Square, Heritage Trail, etc)
 - ii. Outline proposals for a **mid-term strategy** and **planning itinerary** for the **heritage core**
 - iii. Draft a Concept Paper / **Terms of Reference** for the preparation of an **Inventory of Heritage Assets** and a Special Area Plan for the heritage core
 - iv. Present a technical opinion and suggestions on **conservation itineraries** that could be envisaged for **specific assets** such as the old Brooke Dockyard and the old Hokkien school building at Jalan Tabuan.

3 Raise public awareness

- To continue to raise public awareness through site visits, field trips, study tours, outings, large and small conferences, forums, talks
- Social Media Communication
- better structuring of information on various aspects of Sarawak cultural heritage,
- collaboration with other stakeholders involved in heritage conservation: beyond Government agencies,
- sourcing sponsorship for project financing, building on existing tax incentives

In return, SHS are kindly requesting for the following commitments to be able to work effectively and efficiently

From the Government

① Strengthened public policy, regulatory, financing and enforcement framework

- There should be stronger enforcement of the existing building and heritage regulations. For example, the historical centre of Kuching is a landscape of rampant illegal, often unsightly building extensions, signages and loud colours



② Strengthened Cultural Heritage Management Framework

- The framework would have diverse facets, e.g. policy, strategy, regulatory, and financial
- Our view is that the first step should be to **commission a candid, independent review** of the current status of **Sarawak's heritage conservation and management**.
- The actual **gazetting** of **heritage sites** that have long been in the **pipeline** for listing, as well as additional sites and areas, e.g. the old Hokkien School, Siniawan Bazaar, the old Brooke Dockyard, and creation of a gazetted heritage zone

③ Government Budget Allocations

- The State may need to consider providing Government budgets or measures
 - i. commensurate to the **maintenance requirements** of the gazetted government-owned heritage sites
 - ii. providing **financial support** to **selected** heritage conservation **projects**
 - iii. providing **financial incentives** to **private owners** of built heritage to conserve and maintain their assets.

From all Stakeholders

④ Increased public awareness of heritage protection and conservation issues

⑤ Grassroot participation & willingness to highlight to SHS and relevant agencies those areas where heritage assets are being damaged or improvement to heritage management is required.

⑥ Active participation by holders of heritage assets in their conservation and management.