

"Amenity features" in buildings

1. The carrying out, without the exempting authority of Buildings Ordinance Section 41(3), and without my approval and consent, of alterations and additions to buildings after they have been certified for occupation, is a matter of concern to me and surely also to all responsible persons.

2. Many such building works are carried out to satisfy a desire for more accommodation, or perhaps simply for profit, while other works provide what may conveniently be described as desirable "amenity features" which may have been omitted from the original building design. In some instances these features are viewed by building residents almost to be essentials, rather than luxuries, and the sheer number of them clearly suggests that some Authorised Persons could usefully pay more attention to the demand.

3. Most "amenity features" improve the quality of a building, enhance the environment, and/or provide additional security or protection, and the purpose of this Practice Note is to encourage you and your clients to incorporate such features in the design of your new buildings, or to make adequate provisions so that they may easily be added later without contravening the Buildings Ordinance. If you do normally provide these features in your buildings you will not need to read any further.

4. The main types of "amenity features" to which your attention is invited, for incorporation as appropriate in suitable buildings, are noted below, together with my comments :-

(a) Air-conditioner boxes or platforms

In order to improve the structural security of window-type unit air-conditioners, wall boxes or platforms in reinforced concrete or other suitable material may be constructed as a permanent feature of a building, even over streets.

(b) Security gates

Provided they are of a type that does not significantly obstruct the means of escape from a building, and they have locks openable from the inside without keys they may be installed prior to the issue of an Occupation Permit, or may be indicated on floor plans in suitable positions as possible future installations. Suitable positions are considered to be :-

- (i) entrances to individual units,
- (ii) main staircase exits of a building,
- (iii) in a composite building, between the domestic part and the commercial part; in this case the gate would be across an exit route, preferably as part of a lobby, and would be designed to prevent the upward entry of undesirable elements into the domestic parts of the building.

(c) Counters, kiosks, offices, stores and lavatories for Watchmen

These facilities are normally necessary for the proper management of buildings in multiple ownership, and their provision will help in enhancing standards of control and maintenance. Similarly, the provision of water and electricity supply points for use in some common areas, and the provision of or reservation of space for communal and individual radio and T.V. aerials, and for relevant wiring, will also be of considerable use and add to the status of a building.

(d) Anti-burglar bars, laundry pole shoes, clothes-drying racks, and other similar household fixtures. These are almost basic necessities of domestic accommodation and they will benefit future occupants if available at any early date.

(e) Horizontal screens

These could be located in open areas frequently used by the occupants, either at ground floor or podium level, in order to provide general protection against falling objects where there may be a risk of this. They should not, however, materially affect the light and ventilation of the areas or nearby rooms, and they would not therefore provide much protection against the weather.

(f) Window hoods

These could be designed to provide local protection against sun and rain, and also to reduce part of the potential danger of falling objects.

(g) Prestige entrances

In multi-occupancy commercial buildings many companies desire impressive entrance doorways, but breaches of legislation often occur when approved entrances are altered after a building has been certified for occupation. The integrity of protected lobbies and protected corridors, related to means of escape and also to "firemen's lifts", presents restraints upon potential entrance alterations, but, with very careful design and planning, suitable provision can be made for such features to be installed at a later date.

5. In another way you, and your clients, may also assist by instructing staff to refrain from making statements to buyers which may give a false impression of the extent to which alterations and additions can be made to premises without obtaining my approval and consent. Care should also be exercised when preparing sales literature for distribution to the public, in order to avoid potential misunderstandings.

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6. It may be realised that some of the "amenity features" listed above may impinge slightly on some provisions of the Buildings Ordinance, particularly those concerning projections, window areas, and the requirement for certain spaces to be uncovered and unobstructed. You are reminded, however, of the possibility of obtaining exemptions or modifications by way of applications on Form 29. Provided the features are not excessive in scale, do not defeat the basic purposes of the Ordinance, clearly meet the needs of occupants and facilitate the maintenance and good management of buildings, without potential hazard, they may generally be accepted by me as possessing valid special circumstances when I consider any such applications for exemption and/or modification.

Chau Cham Son.

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