

'Amenity Features' in Buildings

The carrying out, without the exempting authority of Buildings Ordinance section 41(3), and without the approval and consent under the Buildings Ordinance, of alterations and additions to buildings after they have been certified for occupation, is a matter of concern to the Building Authority 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 because of possible plot ratio constraints. 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 authorized persons (APs) 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 the incorporation of such features in the design of new buildings, or to make adequate provisions so that they may easily be added later without contravening the Buildings Ordinance.

4. The main types of 'amenity features' (and not only those which appear after a building has been completed) to which attention is invited, for incorporation as appropriate in suitable buildings, are noted below:

(a) Air-conditioning

For residential buildings, it is to be expected that window-type unit air-conditioners will be installed. In order to improve the structural security of these installations, wall boxes or platforms in reinforced concrete or other suitable material may be constructed as a permanent feature of a building, even over streets.

In the case of other buildings which for some reason are not to be provided with a centralized air-conditioning system, such as factories, offices, restaurants and shops, it is equally desirable at the design stage to make similar arrangements for window-type units. However, the possibility of the installation of larger plant after these buildings are occupied should not be ignored as there might then be even greater scope for structural danger and nuisance, such as from noise, vibration, exhaust air or dripping water. It is therefore desirable to provide adequate ducting and trunking and allow for recesses, set-backs, open yards or other suitable spaces at and above floor levels where air-conditioning package units (or other plant and their accessories) may be suitably accommodated, if the need arises, and without any need to project over streets. In accordance with Building (Planning) Regulation 23(3)(b), any floor space genuinely intended for air-conditioning use may be excluded from gross floor area calculations.

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(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, security gates 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 from buildings; and
- (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 buildings.

(c) Counters, Kiosks, Offices, Stores and Lavatories for Watchmen and Management Staff

These facilities are normally necessary for the proper management of buildings in multiple ownership, and although they are normally accountable for gross floor area calculation 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, Clothes-drying Racks, and other Similar Household Fixture

These are almost basic necessities of domestic accommodation and they will benefit future occupants if available at an 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 lighting and ventilation of the areas or nearby rooms, and they would not therefore provide much protection against the weather.

In the case of domestic and composite buildings incorporating roof gardens/play areas at podium level around the perimeter of a domestic tower (paragraph (h) below relevant), solid screens of a width not exceeding 2 m may be permitted subject to the construction, planning and drainage being to the satisfaction of the Building Authority.

(f) Window Hoods

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

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(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.

(h) Podium Roof Gardens/Play Areas

The incorporation of such features at podium roof level in the design of domestic buildings is becoming increasingly prevalent. Where these amenities occur under and within the perimeter of a domestic tower above the Building Authority is generally prepared to consider granting a modification of Building (Planning) Regulation 23(3)(a) where the planning of the area would not negate the desired purpose, that is to say, the area is not encumbered with structural elements which prevent an open effect. At the same time the Building Authority is prepared not to take account of any staircases or lift shafts which pass through such floors provided they are not associated with an entrance to the building from outside the podium level, or do not serve otherwise accountable accommodation at that level.

5. Care should also be exercised when preparing sales literature for distribution to the public, to avoid potential misunderstandings by refraining 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 approval and consent.

6. It may be realized 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 like, and the requirement for certain spaces to be uncovered and unobstructed. APs are reminded, however, of the possibility of obtaining exemptions or modifications by 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 as possessing valid special circumstances when any such applications for exemption and/or modification are considered.



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