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Point 7 de l'Ordre du jour provisoire: Etat de conservation de biens inscrits sur la Liste du patrimoine mondial et/ou sur la Liste du patrimoine mondial en péril

MISSION REPORT / RAPPORT DE MISSION

**Town of Luang Prabang (Lao People's Democratic Republic) (479rev) /
Ville de Luang Prabang (République démocratique populaire lao) (479rev)**

22-28 November 2007 / 22-28 novembre 2007

This mission report should be read in conjunction with Document:
Ce rapport de mission doit être lu conjointement avec le document suivant:

☐ WHC-07/31.COM/7A

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☒ WHC-07/31.COM/7B

☐ WHC-07/31.COM/7B.Add



**Reactive Monitoring Mission to the
Town of Luang Prabang World Heritage Property
Lao People's Democratic Republic
22 - 28 November 2007**

MISSION REPORT



Giovanni Boccardi (World Heritage Centre) and William Logan (ICOMOS)

Executive Summary

The joint WHC-ICOMOS mission of November 2007, whose report is presented here, considered three main issues. These included the mandate and capacity of the Heritage House; pressure from development around the listed property (with orientations for the recommended establishment of a buffer zone, currently missing); and illegal building activities within the inscribed perimeter.

The Mission found that, despite the excellent work carried out in the past twelve years by the competent Lao authorities, especially the Maison du Patrimoine (MDP), increasing pressure from development poses significant risks for the future and has already led to a deterioration of the state of conservation of the World Heritage property (see Chapter 4), in particular as regards its traditional Lao component.

Around the perimeter of the Town of Luang Prabang, several proposed development projects, including a new airport and a new town on the right bank of the Mekong, would have an adverse impact on the World Heritage property, both in terms of visual integrity and noise pollution. Within the core area, illegal building activities include the demolition and reconstruction of listed properties, over-densification of the urban fabric and use of inappropriate typologies/materials/decoration for new buildings. This is leading to the loss of important elements of the historic urban landscape, in particular the Lao traditional structures, gardens and ponds. On the other hand, the current socio-economic trends within Luang Prabang are causing the progressive reduction in the size of local communities and, with the loss of their intangible heritage, to an alteration of the spirit of the place (*genius loci*). In the long run, this might compromise the viability of the monasteries of Luang Prabang, which traditionally rely on alms-giving for their support.

Following extensive consultations with the MDP, other concerned government departments and international partners, the Mission made a number of recommendations (see chapter 5 and 6) aimed at addressing the above-mentioned issues. These recommendations include the immediate and strict application of the existing Safeguarding and Enhancement Plan (PSMV), a moratorium on some of the most problematic development projects under consideration and a revision of the current Urban Plan at the district level, with an aim to establish a buffer zone that would prevent negative impacts on the World Heritage site.

The Mission felt that the Town of Luang Prabang is at a crucial stage in its development and that decisions taken now will determine the safeguarding of the Town's OUV or its progressive loss. Much has been achieved in the past twelve years to conserve the World Heritage property. At present, however, unprecedented pressure from development is posing new strains on the site which the existing conservation system appears unable to counter effectively. If the Lao traditional heritage, in particular, continues its steady decline, the Town of Luang Prabang is heading towards a situation that would justify World Heritage in Danger listing.

The Mission was reassured by the firm commitment expressed by the Lao authorities for the safeguarding of the Town of Luang Prabang, as shown by the recent adoption of a new law for the protection of the national heritage, as well as the reviving of the National Heritage Committee. It is hoped that the announced strengthening of the MDP, including by its sustainable funding, will take place rapidly with a view to ensure the long-term maintenance of the values which justified the inclusion of Luang Prabang on the World Heritage List.

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1. Background to the Mission and Acknowledgments

The World Heritage property of the Town of Luang Prabang (Democratic Republic of Laos) was inscribed on the List in 1995. Since then, the site has benefited from continuous technical and financial support through a joint UNESCO-Region Centre-Ville de Chinon Project, with funding from UNESCO, the French Government and the European Commission, aimed at developing the legal, administrative and technical framework for its conservation and management. This major effort resulted, notably, in the creation of an agency, the Maison du Patrimoine (MDP – or Heritage House) in 1998, with authority over the protection of the heritage, and in the establishment of a *Plan de Sauvegarde et de Mise en Valeur* (PSMV - or Safeguarding and Enhancement Plan), in the year 2000.

In this context, regular missions to Luang Prabang were carried out over the past twelve years by international experts, who assisted the Lao authorities in establishing a framework for the state of conservation of the property. Since 2002, moreover, the site has been the subject of continuous reporting to, and examination by, the World Heritage Committee (with the exception of 2006) due to concerns related to illegal building activities and inappropriate infrastructure works.

The joint WHC-ICOMOS mission of November 2007, whose report is presented here, was carried out at the request of the World Heritage Committee (paragraph 4 of Decision 31 COM 7B.73, taken at its 31st Session in Christchurch, New Zealand, July 2007 - see Annex 1), out of concerns prompted by new information collected in October 2006 by one of the expert missions conducted as part of the above-mentioned international cooperation programme¹.

The three main issues considered by the 2007 Mission were:

- 1) The appropriateness of the mandate of the Heritage House and the need for strengthening local capacities and involvement;
- 2) Pressure from development around the listed property and orientations for the recommended establishment of a buffer zone (currently missing), with consideration for major proposed developments, the uncontrolled growth of the town and risks related to settlements in areas prone to floods;
- 3) Illegal building activities within the inscribed perimeter, notably in relation to demolition and reconstruction of listed properties, over-densification of the urban fabric and use of inappropriate typologies/materials/decoration for new buildings.

The mission team, composed of Giovanni Boccardi (World Heritage Centre) and William Logan (ICOMOS), benefited from the full assistance of the MDP staff. In particular, the members of the Mission express their gratitude to Ms Manivonne Thoummabouth, MDP Director, as well as to Mr. Laurent Rampon and Mr. Pierre Guédant, Technical Advisers to the MDP, for their kind cooperation during the Mission's stay in Luang Prabang.

¹ M. Brodovich, *Rapport de Mission, Luang Prabang, Site inscrit sur la Liste du Patrimoine mondial de l'UNESCO*, 26 septembre - 7 Octobre 2006. Accessible from archive of World Heritage Centre

The full schedule of the Mission and list of persons met is enclosed in Annex 2.

2. Outstanding Universal Value of the Property

‘The Town of Luang Prabang, in the heart of the northern region of Laos, is situated on a peninsula formed by the Mekong River and its tributaries, the Nam Khan and the Hual Hop, in a clay basin surrounded by the limestone hills that dominate the landscape’ (ICOMOS, 1995). It became the capital of an important Kingdom between the 15th and 16th centuries, when it consisted mainly of royal complexes with adjacent temples and monasteries, around which clustered a number of distinct village communities. Following a long period of decadence, Luang Prabang was reconstructed as a royal capital and religious centre towards the end of the 19th century, when the French established there a Protectorate, which lasted until 1946. During these fifty years, under the impulse of the French colonizers, Luang Prabang acquired some of the characteristics of an urban centre (e.g. a street network, public buildings, markets, schools, etc.). For historical and social reasons, however, these new elements never managed to completely replace the traditional semi-rural mode of settling typical of the Laotian village. On the contrary, the colonial and Lao components of the town seemed to integrate quite harmoniously in a new, original Luang Prabang, which survived more or less unchanged until the end of the 20th century.

It is this ‘Town of Luang Prabang’ which was inscribed on the World Heritage List in 1995 under criteria (ii), (iv) and (v). At the time of inscription, a full statement of Outstanding Universal Value, referring to each of the criteria retained, was not required. In its evaluation document, however, ICOMOS stated that:

Luang Prabang is outstanding by virtue of both its rich architectural and artistic heritage and also its special urban development, first on traditional oriental lines and then in conjunction with European colonial influences. This is uniquely expressed in the overall urban fabric of the town. It may therefore be considered to be a unique combination of a diversity of communities – rural and urban, royal and religious – within a defined geographical area (ICOMOS, 1995).

In establishing a comparison with other historic towns of South East Asia, ICOMOS went on to state that Luang Prabang’s main quality was:

to have preserved almost intact the evidence of its pre-colonial urban structure, which is not the case for the majority of other cities in the region (ICOMOS, 1995).

Within the original Nomination document, this characteristic is briefly articulated with reference to the co-existence of monasteries (called *wat*), considered essential for ‘the stability of the traditional social structures of the community’, French colonial public buildings, vernacular Lao residential buildings, but also gardens and traditional cultivations on the river banks².

² DR of Laos, Official Nomination File for the inscription of the Town of Luang Prabang on the World Heritage List, 1994 – pages 74-76 [accessible online from: <http://whc.unesco.org/en/list/479/documents/>]

In 2003, in the context of the Periodic Report exercise, the Government of Laos produced a new statement of significance for the property. In this Statement, prepared after the studies for the establishment of the *Plan de Sauvegarde and Mise en Valeur* (PSMV - see Section 3 below) had been completed, specific reference is made to a number of important elements which characterize the heritage of Luang Prabang. These include ‘riverbanks, green space, a large number of ponds and several landmarks such (as) Phousi Mount, Pu Thao and Phu Nang Mountains’ as well as ‘living cultures (which are) rich, diversified and still vibrant’³.

In addition to the above-mentioned features, which were not captured by the original ICOMOS evaluation or in decisions adopted by the World Heritage Committee, the Mission noted the presence, around Luang Prabang, of other important components of the historic urban landscape. These include extensive paddy fields areas on both sides of the Mekong River, not existing to the same extent elsewhere in the region, that were essential to support the relatively large population living under the ancient feudal regime; as well as the network of rivers and roads which made Luang Prabang an important crossroad between China, Siam and Vietnam. It was thanks to these environmental characteristics, and the favourable conditions they provided for the development of the town, that Luang Prabang acquired its prominence as a Royal Capital and, later, a colonial centre. Many of these features lay outside the area listed as World Heritage and are not mentioned in nominations documents.

It appears, therefore, that there would be considerable scope for the drafting of a new, comprehensive Statement of Outstanding Universal Value which would integrate consideration for all the elements of the historic urban landscape of Luang Prabang, and not only focus on the architectural aspects. These should include green areas within and adjacent to the town, which are an integral component of the traditional settlement system, but also the wider natural context which provided the *raison d’être* of the town (paddy fields and water networks) and were associated to spiritual practices and beliefs of the Lao culture (e.g. main mountain peaks, linked to mythological figures). Moreover, consideration should be given to the living heritage, and the related social aspects, which form an integral part of its cultural significance and are essential to ensure the material sustainability of the World Heritage property.

In terms of boundaries, the Mission noted that the perimeter of inscription of the property, as shown in the original nomination document, does not exactly correspond to that of the PSMV, since it was drawn on the basis of a map associated with the previous planning framework now superseded (see Section 3 below). Although the area covered by the PSMV is larger than that of the World Heritage property, it does not comprise some minor elements which would contribute to the integrity of the site, such as portions of the ancient perimeter of the city walls. Moreover, and as mentioned above, the property has no buffer zone.

³ DR of Laos, Section II of Periodic Report 2003 – page 7 [accessible online from: <http://whc.unesco.org/archive/periodicreporting/APA/cycle01/section2/479.pdf>]

The Lao authorities, therefore, should submit a revised map of the World Heritage property with a request for “minor modification” (according to paragraphs 163 and 164 of the *Operational Guidelines*, which would include an extended boundary for the core zone and a newly established buffer zone. For more comments on the buffer zone and possible principles for its establishment, see Sections 4 and 5 below.

3. Conservation Framework

3.1 Legal and Planning Framework

At the time of inscription, the conservation and management framework for the World Heritage property of Luang Prabang was based on a decree issued in 1994, establishing a Heritage Protection Zone (ZPP), under the responsibility of the Ministry of Information and Culture and the local authorities. Religious buildings were protected under a 1978 Law and responsibility for their upkeep was entrusted to the Lao Buddhist Federation (LBF). The area currently inscribed on the World Heritage List corresponds to the Heritage Protected Zone established under the 1994 Decree.



Fig. 1. The Heritage Protection Zone according to the 1994 Decree. This is the area actually inscribed on the World Heritage List. No buffer zone was provided.

Starting from 1995, however, a new system was developed, in the framework of an international initiative involving UNESCO, the City of Chinon and the Centre Region of France, with funding from the French Development Agency, the European Union and UNESCO. Thus, based on a revision of the pre-existing Luang Prabang Urban Plan and ZPP, a *Plan de Sauvegarde et de Mise en Valeur* (PSMV) was established and officially adopted in 1999 by the Lao Government, and a special managing authority, the *Maison du Patrimoine* (MDP - or Heritage House), was created as a technical advisory body to assist the local authorities in its implementation. This planning framework replaced the

previous ZPP within the inscribed area, while the Urban Plan continued to regulate the surrounding areas.

The PSMV, resulting from extensive studies of the site and its surroundings, covers an area (708.53 Ha.) which is slightly larger than the former Heritage Protection Zone (see Fig. 2), as it includes sections of the colonial town to the west of the peninsula and the northern slopes of the hills along the right bank of the Mekong River (flowing from East to West).

The PSMV established a complex regulatory system, and related land-use provisions, structured around four main zones:

- a) Safeguarded Zone (Secteur sauvegardé – ZPP-Ua, 67.12 ha);
- b) Protected Zone (Secteur protégé – ZPP-Ub, 151.32 ha);
- c) Natural and Landscape Zone (Secteur naturel et paysager – ZPP-N, 545.66 ha);
- d) Monasteries (Secteur des Monastères – ZPP-M, 16.43 ha).

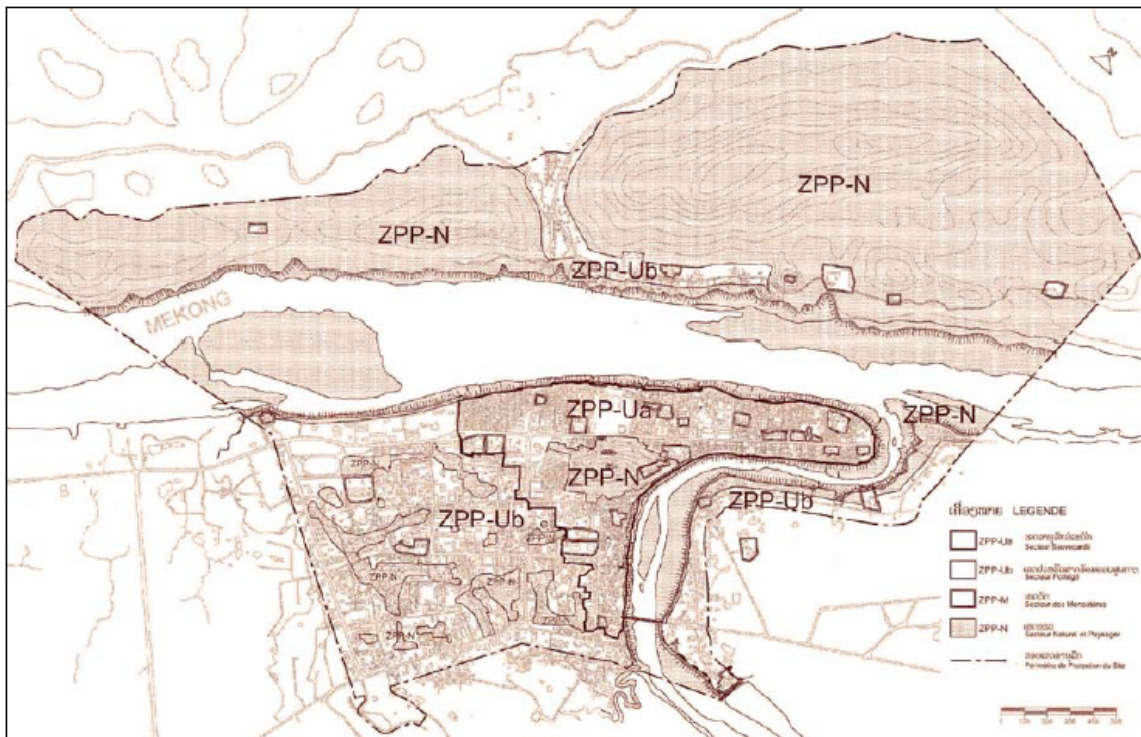


Fig. 2. Area covered by the PSMV, with indications of its four sub-zones

Outside of the PSMV area, the MDP has no competence and land use is regulated by the existing Urban Plan, under the control of the Provincial and municipal authorities. This Plan, which pre-existed the setting up of the PSMV and the inscription of Luang Prabang on the World Heritage List, is apparently going to be revised in the near future with support from the French Development Agency (FDA). *It is in the context of the revision*

of the Urban Plan that the World Heritage Committee requested Laos to establish a buffer zone for the World Heritage property.

In the face of increasing pressure from development and the growth of population due to rural immigration, moreover, a study was initiated in 2004 to develop a new planning framework at the district level that would be able to ensure the harmonious development of the Town of Luang Prabang. Funded by the French Development Agency (AFD), this Territorial Development Plan (SCOT 2004) identifies the main axis and strategic choices for the expansion of the city as well as the areas to be preserved due to their heritage and environmental importance. The SCOT is referred to in the decision taken by the World Heritage Committee in Christchurch (July 2007) as the basis to be used for the definition of the buffer zone of the World heritage property (see Annex 1). However, the SCOT has remained to this day a simple technical study, not yet integrated in the legal planning framework.

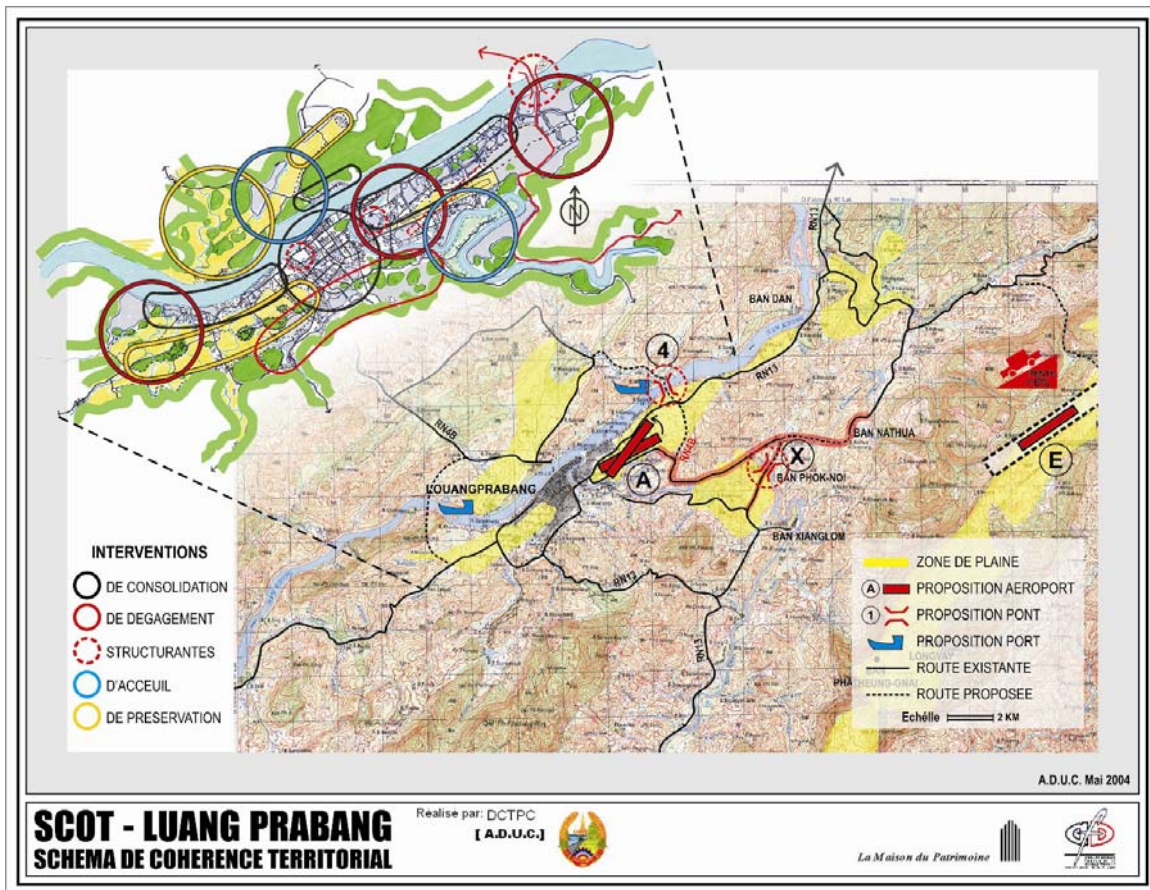


Fig. 3. The geographical scope of the Territorial Development Plan (SCOT 2004) is much larger than the World Heritage property

3.2 MDP's Mandate, Activities and Resources

Reporting directly to the Ministry of Information and Culture in the capital city, Vientiane, the MDP was initially conceived as an agency for the implementation of urban conservation projects and as a technical advisor to the bodies in charge of the actual application of the PSMV (i.e. the Provincial authorities). The MDP implements many of its projects through contractual arrangements with the heads of the 29 'villages' composing the Town of Luang Prabang.

In recent years, however, the MDP also acquired administrative responsibilities, notably as regards the granting of building permits which it administers, within the PSMV area, in coordination with the UDAA (Urban Development Administration Agency, under the Department of Civil Works, previously known as Ministry of Communications, Transports, Posts and Constructions – MCTPC). Building permits are also examined by a special Committee, at local level.

The MDP also offers technical assistance to owners who wish to undertake renovation works or new constructions and, compatibly with the available resources, can provide free building materials (until now only roof tiles, but starting from next year also timber). In addition, the MDP maintains a GIS data-base, open to the public through an IT Centre, containing information on number and type of buildings, history of the Town etc.

Its activities, operational costs and staff have been until now almost entirely covered through contributions from international donors, notably the FDA. As far as the Mission understands, regular and adequate funding sources to ensure the sustainability of the MDP have not yet been identified by the Government of Laos, at a time when the current project funded by the FDA is supposed to end in December 2007. Similarly, the issue of the resources for the completion and sustainable updating of the GIS database, currently being funded through an agreement with the University of Tokyo (Tokyo-Tech), remains an open question.

3.3 Other Institutions and their Coordination

Under the overall supervision of the Provincial Governor, moreover, a number of local Departments share with the MDP responsibility for various administrative and technical functions within the PSMV area. These include the above-mentioned Urban Development Agency, set up through an Asian Development Bank Project; the Department of Construction, Transport, Post and Communication; the Department of Information and Culture; the Department of Tourism; as well as religious institutions. Indeed, there seem to be areas of ambiguity in the current administrative regulations as to which authority has the final word on building permits, as well as on the way the different institutions coordinate their activity. For example, it appears that a proposed construction of a new guest-house in the centre of Luang Prabang may see its building permit refused by the MDP, while at the same time receiving the licence to open business from the Tourism Department.

The coordination of all institutional players to ensure the consistency of their actions with respect to the conservation of the cultural heritage should be ensured by the newly instituted 'Provincial Committee for National Heritage' (previously Provincial Committee for the Preservation of Historical, Cultural and Natural Heritage), chaired by the Provincial Governor. Above this, a National Committee for National Heritage (presided over by the Deputy Prime Minister) performs the same coordination role at the national scale, with particular focus on World Heritage sites.

The Mission was advised that, as requested in paragraph 9 of Decision 31 COM 7B.73, a coordination meeting was being arranged for the second week of February, or possibly March 2008. The meeting will include the participation of the Lao authorities, World Heritage Centre, bilateral and multilateral cooperation agencies and will have as its objective to coordinate the projects envisaged in the property and its periphery, in the framework of principles established in the SCOT.

3.4 Ongoing Changes in the Institutional and Legal Framework

The Mission was also informed, however, that some institutional changes are being implemented. Discussions are apparently under way for the elaboration for a new statute concerning the role of the MDP. This might involve the merging of the MDP and the Department of Information and Culture, as well as the establishment of a new Municipality composed of 67 villages (i.e. much larger than the current one, and including both the PSMV area and much of its potential buffer zone).

Moreover, in December 2005 a new national Law concerning the protection of the heritage was adopted. The new Law is said to be stronger and to give more authority and means to the MDP. The application texts for this new Law, however, are still being prepared, and therefore not all its provisions are operational. Among other innovations, the new Law envisages the setting up of a Heritage National Fund. The question of the regular funding of the MDP remains for the moment pending; however some nine staff, detached from the Ministry of Information and Culture, will be made available to the MDP during the next budget cycle. Concerning the possible establishment of a 'tourism tax', and how its revenues might be distributed, the Government has not yet made up its mind. Many options are on the table (e.g. whether to impose a tax on tourist visas, on airport fees, or on hotel bills, etc.), but a final decision has not been made.

The new Law, moreover, includes provisions for the establishment of three degrees of protection zones. Accordingly, Zone 1 (the core area) defines the location of the 'site', where no building activities are allowed. Zone 2 would correspond to an area surrounding the site, where only constructions 'supporting the site itself' are allowed. However, Zone 3, finally, is an area established to provide an added layer of protection to zones 1 and 2, and thus would appear to match the definition of buffer zone given within the *Operational Guidelines for the Implementation of the World Heritage Convention*. Although an improvement with respect to previous legislation, this zoning approach

appears to rest on a narrow definition of cultural heritage, that is, one which corresponds to monumental architecture. It is clear that in the case of an urban cultural property such as Luang Prabang, the above provisions would not be applicable.

4. State of Conservation

4.1 General Considerations

Much excellent restoration and related infrastructure work, such as the paving of lanes, has been done and the tourism industry is clearly booming on the basis of Luang Prabang's heritage assets. However, the present slow but progressive loss of the Lao component of the town's character and landscape is seriously affecting the state of conservation of the 'Town of Luang Prabang' World Heritage property.

ICOMOS noted in its 1995 assessment of the nomination that:

The rich architectural fabric of the city [which] is expressed through its mixture of styles and materials,... must be preserved at a time when urban development has a tendency towards demolition and the replacement of older buildings with new ones in discordant styles.

Serious threats to the World Heritage values of the property were noted in previous World Heritage Committee decisions (eg. Suzhou 2004 Decision 28COM 15B.60). These threats have been gathering pace especially since 2003. It is the view of the Mission that the Town of Luang Prabang World Heritage property has now reached a point where further change will threaten its Outstanding Universal Value, even in its current narrowly defined form, and would warrant World Heritage in Danger status.

The Report of the Mission carried out by M. Brodovitch in 2006 in the framework of the UNESCO-France Convention raised concern about governance problems limiting the effectiveness of the existing heritage controls⁴. Rather than being merely the result of a refusal by local property owners and other residents to abide by the regulations, these governance problems appear also to be linked to an inadequate understanding on the part of some stakeholders of:

- the overall value of the World Heritage listing to the local economy;
- the incremental impact of each small individual action;
- the nature of the controls, which are not intended to turn the town into a museum but to allow necessary change required to ensure the continued economic and social viability;
- the details of the regulations.

The Mission was heartened by the news that the National Committee for Heritage has been revived and will meet quarterly under the changed name of National Committee for National Heritage. Furthermore, the committee will be chaired by the Vice-Prime Minister, which raises its status. Because Vice-Ministerial participation will now be required, the committee has greatly increased potential to act as an effective strategy-

⁴ M. Brodovitch, *Rapport de Mission, Luang Prabang, Site inscrit sur la Liste du Patrimoine mondial de l'UNESCO*, 26 septembre - 7 Octobre 2006 – page 5. Accessible from archive of World Heritage Centre.

making and coordinating body. These changes indicate a great concern at the highest levels of government in the Lao PDR to protect the nation's cultural heritage.

4.2 Specific Considerations

With respect to the state of conservation issues raised by the World Heritage Committee in its Decision 31 COM 7B.73, the Mission observed the following:

4.2.1 Development pressure in and around the listed property

Numerous major developments have the potential to impact significantly on the inscribed property and its Outstanding Universal Value. Most are at the investigation stage and details of them are sketchy. Tourism infrastructure proposals already approved include a 900 ha tourist complex with golf course south of historic core, under an MOU signed with a South Korean company. If constructed, such developments will eat into the agricultural areas and further disrupt drainage patterns in the area and may overwhelm the town's tourist-carrying capacity. The town has managed until now to keep relatively moderately sized hotels, with maximum size being in the 20-30 rooms range. There has been continuous pressure in recent years for the development of larger-sized hotels. The 5-star hotel called 'Kunming' is an example of what is the emerging trend: it will be a 200-room hotel on a 30 ha plot of land located 5 km from the historic core. The Mission was told that the agreement with the Chinese funders was signed in December 2007.

The Japanese Bank for International Cooperation (JBIC) has already provided in 2006 the sum of US\$0.6M for a 'Luang Prabang Tourism Sector Development Project'. The project report has yet to be released but it was expected to reveal 'bottlenecks of sustainable tourism development, including conservation of heritage areas, and prescribe how to address them'.⁵ It will be of concern if this project leads to increased pressure for new tourism resorts in and around the inscribed site. One tourism 'bottleneck' from the Lao PDR Government's point of view is the Luang Prabang airport and it submitted a funding request to the Asian Development Bank (ADB) in 2005 for upgrading of the airport, which 'would be a valuable addition to the GMS [Greater Mekong Subregion] tourism network'.⁶ The Deputy Governor, Mr. Khampeng Saysompheng, informed the Mission that the new airport was to be funded by China through a USD 57M loan. With the substantial increase in runway size proposed, the airport would be able to accommodate large jet aircraft and inevitably open up Luang Prabang to mass tourism and greater pressure on the inscribed site. While the proposed realignment of the runway would shift the current flight away from the historic town centre, the increased size of planes would probably mean that noise pollution levels would not in fact be reduced.

Several substantial urban developments are foreseen which, while outside the inscribed area, threaten to engulf it. One of these is the Mekong bridge, a short distance upstream

⁵ The World Bank, *Lao PDR Economic Monitor*, The World Bank Vientiane Office, November 2006 (http://www-wds.worldbank.org/servlet/WDSContentServer/IW3P/IB/2007/02/16/000310607_20070216125514/Rendered/INDEX/386590ENGLISH01tor02006nov01PUBLIC1.txt).

⁶ Greater Mekong Subregion, *Report of Ninth Meeting of the Subregional Transport Forum (STF-9)*, Beijing, PR China, 1-2 June 2005 (<http://www.adb.org/GMS/stf9-minutes.pdf>).

from the site. Apparently already approved to be built, it provides an important link in the 'New GMS Flagship Road Project: National Road 4' which the Lao PDR Government proposed to the ADB in 2005.⁷ While the Mission agreed that the proposed location for the bridge was appropriate, the bridge will almost inevitably lead to the build up of urban settlement on the north-eastern outskirts of the inscribed site. In the view of the Mission, this urban development can be managed to have minimal impact on the inscribed site and, indeed, if Luang Prabang is to expand significantly as part of a Lao national urban strategy, this would be the favoured direction. It is our very strong preference that the current airport should be relocated to be closer to the Mekong bridge and associated urban development rather than being enlarged and realigned in its current location. The costs associated with this change will be minimised if the plan is revised now, before works are commenced. The site of the current airport would then become available for low-density, low-rise residential development that does not undermine the OUV and the residents facing removal due to the runway realignment would remain in their current homes. It is understood that, while JICA did a preliminary study for this bridge, funding for its construction has not yet been secured.

At the same time, another proposal, with Chinese financial backing, is for the construction of a major city expansion on the right bank of the Mekong opposite the historic town (see Photo 1, Annex 3). No compelling reasons were advanced to the Mission for this massive development; to the contrary, the view was put by some interviewees that there are viable alternatives for low-density, low-rise development for at least 30 years. While the area apparently under consideration is located behind the low hills on the northern limits of the World Heritage site, the danger is that it will have a negative visual impact on the site if the urban development is seen on hill crests or in the low valleys between the hills. It will also generate pressure for the eventual construction of another Mekong bridge and associated feeder roads and urban settlement downstream from the historic core, destroying the visual integrity of the river sections upstream and downstream from Prince Phetsarath Ratanavongsa's villa (now the Grand Luang Prabang Hotel) (Photo 2). It is the view of the Mission that such development should be avoided at all costs.

On a smaller scale but nevertheless threatening to have a negative impact on the inscribed site because of its more central location is the proposed tourist complex at the confluence of the Nam Khan and the Mekong rivers, opposite the end of the peninsula. This project has been on hold for a number of years but moves appear to be now afoot to revive it. A further concern is the additional proposal to construct a bridge from the tourist complex across the Nam Khan to the peninsula. The MDP informed the Mission that this is only intended as a bridge for pedestrians, bicycles and motor-bicycles. Already in 2003 the World Heritage Committee noted increasing vehicular traffic in the core protected area⁸; this proposed bridge will certainly increase traffic further, bringing noise and air pollution into what is now the most tranquil section of the peninsula where several of the most intact *wat* are located.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ World Heritage Committee (2003). *Decision 27COM 7B.50*.

Other proposals for infrastructure development infrastructure inside the inscribed property include the hospital project referred to in Brodovitch report 2007⁹. Agreement appears to have been given to Aman Resorts, an Indonesian company, to redevelop the hospital site into a luxury 20-room hotel. Proposals have been mooted for the redevelopment of the large primary school site on Sakkarine Road, Ban Vat Non (Photo 3), and the nearby Fine Arts School, formerly the Queen Mother's house, as tourist complexes. The conversion of these public buildings and associated open spaces into tourist facilities would impact negatively on the traditional social context of Luang Prabang.

4.2.2 Illegal building activities within the inscribed perimeter (Core Zone)

The World Heritage Decision 31 COM 7B.73 already recommends the State Party to undertake an evaluation of the quality of development projects and on developments noted since the inscription of the property, especially in terms of overpopulation and use.

Many positive achievements have been made by the MDP. It is notable that no high-rise buildings currently disturb the urban landscape. A regime of planning regulations has been established, there are some excellent examples of restoration, a scheme to make timber building materials more accessible to residents has been set up, and a Heritage Information Centre has been opened to public use at Ban Xieng Moane (Photo 4).

On the other hand, there seems to be a high level of illegal building activity within the Core Zone; indeed, the Mission was informed that there has been an increasing 'flexibility' in the application of the regulations such that annual statistics are now misleadingly giving the impression of a low level of non-compliance. The MDP Director indicated that studies funded by the FDA were to be done in December 2007 that will better enable the MDP to comment on the extent of non-compliance with the regulations, including the loss of and damage to listed buildings.

The impacts of non-compliance include the demolition of listed buildings and the construction of unsympathetic buildings that do not support the inscribed built form in terms of typology, materials and decoration. There is a gradual replacement of the traditional two-storey timber houses by concrete or timber and concrete two-storey structures. In some cases these capture some of the typological characteristics of the traditional Lao residences (Photo 5) but often they adopt French colonial forms as well as decorations (Photos 6, 7).

Over-densification of the urban tissue is occurring in several sections of the town and threatens to become much more general (Photo 8). Typically, over-densification is occurring through the construction of new private residences and guest houses that take up more than the prescribed proportion of the housing block (Photo 9), but the Mission noted that significant increases in building density are occurring in the grounds of at least

⁹ M. Brodovitch, *Rapport de Mission, Luang Prabang, Site inscrit sur la Liste du Patrimoine mondial de l'UNESCO*, 4-11 septembre 2007. Accessible from archive of World Heritage Centre

two *wat* (Wat Nong; Wat Pak Khan – Photo 10). The increase in building density is accompanied inevitably by a loss of tree cover, gardens and open spaces that have been part of the traditional environment and an important element in Luang Prabang's OUV. Further, numerous buildings and terraces now project through the vegetation screens along river banks, threatening river bank stability and promoting flood damage (see Photos 11, 12).

Illegal building is also disrupting the wetlands drainage systems within the inscribed site as well as south of it and subjecting flood-prone areas to increased risk (Photo 13). The World Heritage Committee has already noted that parts of the ADB public works (road widening and linking) were ill-designed, with concrete channels cut across and blocking the pre-existing drainage pattern¹⁰; now ponds are being filled to create sites for guest house and hotel construction, leading to further drainage disruption and reduction in rice and other agricultural production (Photo 14).

In order to arrest the filling-in of ponds and slow the process of land use conversion, tight enforcement of the regulations is essential. Illegal structures should be removed, the sites acquired and compensation provided to owners. Such compensation could be in the form of cash or, if a stock of land can be identified elsewhere, a land swap. So that the wetlands are restored for recreation and ecological tourism purposes the authorities should then embark upon the rehabilitation of those ponds that have been dried up or polluted and the re-constitution of the traditional drainage network to ensure communication between the ponds. Walking trails across the wetlands could be developed for tourist purposes as well as for the leisure and recreation of local inhabitants. A successful start in this direction has been made by the Wetlands project, with areas of wetland being restored with co-funding from the owners, who have now assumed responsibility for maintaining the areas. The project has also created a tourism path that is relatively well maintained.

The Mission sees, therefore, an extremely urgent need for very strong enforcement of the regulations in order to reduce the high level of non-compliance and its effects. It also is concerned that Luang Prabang authorities avoid approval of major developments that might compromise the World Heritage status of the Town of Luang Prabang until the revised plan taking into account the SCOT is formulated and promulgated.

At the same time, it also sees the need to reduce the level of misunderstanding between the local people and the MDP regarding the planning and building controls. It is essential that the economic, social and cultural benefits of heritage conservation to the whole Luang Prabang community are widely understood, as, too, the negative incremental impact that each individual act of non-compliance has on the overall quality of the environment as a tourism resource. The authorities should engage the community as a matter of urgency in a conservation awareness-raising program, making use of the village chiefs and village contract arrangements if and when appropriate.

¹⁰ World Heritage Committee (2002). *Decision 26COM 21B.54*.

4.3 Other Issues of Concern

Two additional issues observed by the Mission were the disrepair of religious structures within the inscribed World Heritage site on the right bank of the Mekong and the danger of losing the town's living, notably intangible heritage.

4.3.1 Disrepair of religious structures within the inscribed perimeter on the right bank of the Mekong

A string of religious and associated buildings in the hilly Chompeth district on the right bank of the Mekong are in various states of dereliction despite being within the inscribed World Heritage area. A landmark clearly visible from the historic centre across the Mekong is the Chompeth temple, of which only the *sim* (main hall) and one stupa remain. Further upstream is the Wat Long Khun, a religious complex where the king of Luang Prabang traditionally retreated for three days to prepare for his coronation (Photo 15). The complex was restored by the Lao Department of Museums and Archaeology in 1995, with the help of the Ecole Française d'Extrême-Orient, but is now falling again into disrepair. Along the forest track beyond Wat Long Khun are the Wat Tham Xieng Maen cave and other ruined structures, including a long prayer hall (Photo 16). These buildings have historical value as well as tourism potential. Some could be revived for active religious use. Currently the MDP is proposing to finish paving the road along Mekong and to decorate the Chompeth temple *sim*, the structural work having already been done. As an important element of the inscribed property the buildings merit better preservation.

4.3.2 Loss of the living heritage

Illegal constructions and rapid land use conversion represent a growing threat to Luang Prabang's significant intangible cultural heritage and to the spirit of the place (*genius loci*). The demolition of traditional Lao houses in favour of modern houses and tourist hotels and guest houses means that traditional building crafts are likely to be lost in the process. Moreover, the rapid conversion of local community residential uses to tourism uses leads to a reduction in the size of local communities and, since Luang Prabang is made up of a cluster of traditional villages (*ban*), each with its own social structure and religious and communal buildings, ultimately the viability of the communities is under threat. With the movement of local residents out into more peripheral areas and their replacement by tourists and commercial entrepreneurs, the continuity of attachment to place will be lost. Of particular concern is the fact that the decline in local population is leading to a reduction in support for the local *wat* communities of monks. Traditional reliance on alms-giving appears threatened and the monks may be forced either to abandon the *wat* in the historic core or to open the *wat* buildings to commercial tourism activities, including even guest house development.

Ways to protect the physical heritage at the same time as protecting the traditional constitution of the local communities are difficult to find. A possible course of action might be to establish a quota for tourist guest houses, although this is likely to be

unpopular with many property owners. Gentrification by expatriate Europeans or by the Lao themselves may save the physical fabric, but it tends to work against maintenance of the intangible heritage, except in highly commercialised forms such as fine arts, exotic crafts and tourism performances. It is fortunate that the new Lao heritage Law of 9 December 2005 embraces intangible cultural heritage and concern for dress codes, *baci* ceremonies, and other aspects of living heritage, appears to be high in the awareness of the Department of Cultural Heritage and the MDP. The earlier approach of focusing on the apparently more endangered tangible heritage has now been modified as a result of the rapid increase in foreign investment proposals since 2003 and the effect of increased international tourism and business visitors in the town.

Efforts to prevent the Lao residents of Luang Prabang from modernizing their houses can be problematic in that it can be argued that they have the right to taking charge of their own lives. Perhaps the best that can be hoped for from the heritage conservation point of view is that effective public awareness will at least provide Lao residents with better information about the range of possible courses of action available to them before they can make their decision to alter their environment. A number of efforts are being made by the MDP to ease the financial burden of Lao house owners faced with restoring or renovating traditional houses. Two schemes to provide low cost building materials are now under way, the first relating to timber and the second to roof tiles. It is important that this financial relief is directed to those most in need.

Another form of living heritage that seems to face problems is the agricultural practices that take place in the dry season along the silt-covered banks of the Mekong and Nam Khan rivers and on the Mekong sandbanks. The farming skills entailed, as well as the contribution to Luang Prabang's attractive visual appearance, will be undermined if illegal constructions along the rivers are permitted to continue.

5. Orientations for the recommended establishment of a buffer zone

As outlined previously, there is currently no buffer zone for the inscribed property. In fulfilling the World Heritage's request to make recommendations for the establishment of the buffer zone in the form of a revision of the Urban Development Plan and based on the recommendations formulated in the Territorial Coherence Plan (SCOT), the Mission suggests that the following considerations should be taken into account:

(1) *Core and Buffer Zones*

The currently inscribed area, modified slightly as indicated in (2) below, should be reconceived as the 'Core Zone', around which the supporting Buffer Zone should be defined and incorporated in the inscription and Lao planning documents..

(2) *Outstanding Universal Value*

The Outstanding Universal Value of the inscribed site (Core Zone) needs to be maintained. This is based on the fusion of traditional Lao and colonial French settlements types, particularly in the combination of architectural types, street patterns and vegetation to form a distinctive historic urban landscape. This is likely to be engulfed in the larger Luang Prabang that is apparently foreseen by the Lao government and the qualities upon which World Heritage listing has been based will be undermined.

All of the important components of the historic urban landscape – that is, the very reasons for the city to have been built here – should be encompassed in the inscribed area (Core Zone) and the Buffer Zone. These include the network of rivers and roads, which gave Luang Prabang its important crossroads function, as well as the rice fields, river banks and water system, which underpinned its economy and were associated with spiritual beliefs and practices. Together these elements provide the basis for economic and social sustainability of the Luang Prabang historic urban landscape and need to be included in heritage regime.

As noted in Section 2, recent research by the MDP has clarified the alignment of former city walls, one part of which is not currently included in the inscribed area (Core Zone). This should be rectified by a 'minor modification' under the Operational Guidelines. MDP investigations and the Mission's site visits suggest that the OUV would also be more fully captured by a revised statement and revised boundaries that took in several *wat* close by the inscribed area (Core Zone) that were of royal foundation and support. Further survey and evaluation is needed, with the possibility that these could be added to the Core Zone as 'islands'.

(3) *Vista protection*

The visual integrity of site needs to be assured, particularly in the context of the large-scale urban expansion of Luang Prabang apparently foreseen and especially in relation to the cosmological principles underlying the historic urban landscape. The

Phousi hill is Luang Prabang's Mount Meru¹¹ and the sweeping vistas from this point across the landscape, along the Mekong and Nam Khan, and to the distant mountain crests in the south-east should be respected by stricter application of controls within the inscribed area and the insistence on building height and vegetation cover controls within the buffer zone. The extension of the buffer zone to the crest of the mountain tops in the south and south-east would support the creation of the UNESCO Biosphere Reserve in the Nam Khan catchment area.

(4) Preferred directions for new urban expansion

If indeed a national urban strategy requires that Luang Prabang, which is the second largest urban centre in Laos, takes its share of economic and job growth,¹² it will be essential to protect the special character of the historic urban landscape if World Heritage listing is to survive. This can be achieved by confining urban expansion to the least sensitive areas which are to the north-east, near the Mekong bridge, and the south-west. This is consistent with the recommendations made in the SCOT 2004 (see map p. 170). It would enable urban development in the Chompeth district on the Mekong right bank to be limited, thereby avoiding any negative visual impacts on the inscribed site across the Mekong as well as precluding the growth of pressure for a second bridge to be constructed downstream from inscribed area.

(5) Location of the expanded airport

Realigning and expanding the airport in its current location to take larger aircraft will cause serious noise pollution in the World Heritage property and the tertiary education zone at Ban Don on the Mekong north of the Nam Khan where Souphanouvong University and adjacent colleges were scheduled to open from 2005/2006. An alternative that should be considered is relocation of the airport to a site closer to the urban development that will take place around the Mekong bridge upstream.

(6) Identification of areas for tourism development.

Rather than continuing to operate in a reactive fashion to the various tourism development pressures that occur in a scattergun pattern across the inscribed site and surrounding area, consideration should be given to identifying areas for specific use for tourism. This would allow a more effective separation of highly significant heritage features from new large-scale tourism developments within the World Heritage property and enable the establishment of an effective buffer zone to protect key vistas around it. Serious consideration should be given to the various proposals already made in the SCOT for the accommodation of tourism functions: these

¹¹ Mount Meru is a sacred mountain in Hindu and Buddhist cosmology and seen as the centre of all physical and spiritual universes. Many Hindu temples, such as Angkor Wat, the principal temple in Angkor, Cambodia, have been built as symbolic representations of the mountain. In the case of Buddhist Luang Prabang, Phousi acts as the centre of the town's cosmological layout. It is believed to have once sheltered a powerful *naga* (serpent or dragon). Tourist brochures refer to it as 'the Mount Olympus of Hindu-Buddhist cosmology', describing it as 'striking from a distance. Indeed, the golden spires are the first bit of Luang Prabang that visitors arriving will gaze upon' (Bangkok Air brochure).

¹² A draft urban strategy to 2020 has been developed with ADB support (www.was.org/filez/country/214200711327_Lao_PDR.pdf)

included the identification of some specific areas to accommodate tourist resorts and a more general ‘zone d’accueil’ for both housing and tourism uses.

(7) Other sub-zones

In addition to tourism zones, it may be appropriate to strengthen the references in SCOT to other activity and special interest sub-zones and to incorporate the sub-zone concept into future plan revisions. The level of regulation might vary between sub-zones.

Sub-zones to be considered would include at least the following:

- (a) Chompeth valley – protection of agricultural activities; maintenance of drainage systems; density and height control restrictions on any new buildings;
- (b) Mekong downstream – protection of vista along river banks and up to crest of visible mountains;
- (c) Wetlands – protection of agricultural activities and vegetation; any further residential development to be low density and low rise;
- (d) Nam Khan valley and mountains – protection of sweeping vista from Phousi along the Nam Kahn to the crest of mountains; restrictions might be limited to height control and preservation of vegetation cover.

6. Conclusions and Recommendations

The Mission is convinced that the Town of Luang Prabang is at a crucial stage in its development and that decisions taken now will determine the safeguarding of the Town's OUV or its complete loss. Much has been achieved in the past twelve years to conserve the World Heritage property, both in terms of building institutional capacity and actual restoration works. At present, however, unprecedented pressure from development is posing new strains on the site, in the face of which the competent authorities appear unable to cope. If the Lao traditional heritage in particular continues its steady decline, the Town of Luang Prabang is heading towards a situation that would justify World Heritage in Danger listing. There is an urgent need to prepare an up-to-date inventory and map to reveal the full extent of the changes that have occurred in the inscribed area since the establishment of the PSMV. This was requested by the Governor in 2007 and is the necessary basis for the development and implementation of a remediation strategy.

The current negative trend needs to be immediately reversed by much more thorough enforcement of the heritage protection regulations in the PSMV. Changes are needed at the level of governance to achieve this, including a review of the mandate and the capacity of the MDP to perform its key role. This would necessitate provision of regular state funding, the appointment of a technical director and training of professional staff, including provision for them to take study tours and training courses abroad. An additional, urgent strategy is also required to train local architects in vernacular building techniques and to educate them better regarding the traditional/cosmological planning concepts underlying Luang Prabang's urban form.

This would be part of a broader strategy to build stakeholder awareness of what is at risk if the current trends continue. Local involvement in the management of the town is essential if feelings of ownership, pride and custodianship are to be built up. The effort to engage the local community in the work of the MDP through village contracts is one approach and should be enhanced. The goals of the World Heritage inscription could be further promoted through annual award schemes, for example, awarding prizes for the best restored house, tree planting and garden regeneration, with appropriate media coverage.

It is now urgent to revise the town's urban plan and, as part of that, to identify a buffer zone to prevent inappropriate development that would negatively impinge upon the characteristics of the historic urban landscape. In the meantime, a stop should be put to the extension of the airport in its current location (even if realigned), the development of a new town on the right bank of the Mekong and the conversion of Luang Prabang's public buildings, such as the primary school and Fine Arts School, into tourist accommodation.

To make it easier to enforce the PSMV, compensation should be provided to owners of wetland properties (either in cash or by land swap). Once acquired, the authorities should rehabilitate ponds which have been dried up, been blocked or become polluted, and reconstitute the drainage network by ensuring communication between the ponds.

Walking trails crossing the wetlands should be created for tourist uses as well as for the leisure and recreation of local inhabitants.

Above all the political will must be rallied to ensure that PSMV regulations are strictly enforced and that the preparation, promulgation and implementation of the new plan, encompassing the redefined core zone and the new buffer zone, proceed efficiently and effectively.

The Mission considers that the above approach, based on the strengthening and integration of the existing legal, institutional and planning framework, would be the most appropriate and realistic with a view to ensuring the long term conservation of the OUV of the World Heritage property of the Old Town of Luang Prabang.

In a few years' time, should this strategy fail to deliver the expected results, perhaps another more radical approach could be given consideration – that of creating a management authority with over-arching responsibility for all decisions in Luang Prabang, focussed on World Heritage as a priority goal. Such managing authority might be supported by an over arching management instrument which preserves heritage as a priority (a management plan for example) and which enjoys political support at the highest level.

* * *

With respect to the World Heritage Committee in its Decision 31 COM 7B.73, the Mission makes the following recommendations, with related proposed timeframe for action by the Lao PDR authorities.

6.1 General Recommendations

- (1) A new statement of OUV should be prepared to encompass all of the environmental features supporting the World Heritage values as outlined in Section 2 above. This would include the hill Phousi as Luang Prabang's Mt Meru, vegetation cover, river banks, wetlands, vistas, and intangible cultural heritage.

Timeline: Submission to World Heritage Committee by 1 February 2010, with an interim report to WHC by 1 February 2009 demonstrating that substantial progress has been made towards the final submission due 1 February 2010.

- (2) A submission should be made to adjust the boundaries of the current inscribed (Core) area and to establish a Buffer zone according to the principles outlined in Section 5 above. This should be done in the context of the revised Luang Prabang Urban Plan and through a request for minor modification according to Paragraphs 163-164 of the Operational Guidelines.

Timeline: Submission to World Heritage Committee by 1 February 2010, with an

interim report to WHC by 1 February 2009 demonstrating that substantial progress has been made towards adjusting the Core boundaries and creating the Buffer zone.

- (3) A moratorium should be imposed immediately on major projects impacting on the OUV as outlined particularly in Section 4 above, and will extend until completion of the revised Urban Plan. This will include the new town in the Chompeth valley on the Mekong right bank, the airport extension and realignment, the conversion of the Primary School and Fine Arts College to tourism facilities, and the pedestrian/motorcycle bridge across the Nam Khan at the head of the town peninsula.

Timeline: Immediate imposition of moratorium and notification of such to the World Heritage Committee by 1 March 2009.

- (4) The revision of the Urban Plan should commence as a matter of urgency and be completed with all due expediency.

Timeline: Submission to World Heritage Committee by 1 February 2010, with an interim report to WHC by 1 February 2009 demonstrating that substantial progress has been made towards completion of the Urban Plan.

- (5) As an essential basis for the preparation of the Urban Plan, an up-to-date inventory and map(s) should be drawn up to show the full extent of the changes that have occurred in the inscribed area since the establishment of the PSMV and a strategy for remediation of negative changes shall be prepared for implementation within the context of the revised Urban Plan. The changes to be considered will include the demolition of listed buildings, new construction of illegal buildings; densification of the urban fabric, the loss of vegetation cover, intrusion of structures onto the Mekong and Nam Khan river banks.

Timeline: Submission to World Heritage Committee by 1 February 2009 of the inventory and map(s).

- (6) The PSMV should be strictly enforced and an annual inventory and map(s) of building and/or planning permit applications and decisions, indicating potential threats to the OUV, shall be prepared for the advice of the World Heritage Committee.

Timeline: Submission of the inventory and map(s) to World Heritage Committee by 1 February 2009 and, if requested by the World Heritage Committee, in subsequent years.

6.2 Specific Recommendations

6.2.1 *The appropriateness of the MDP's mandate and the need for strengthening local capacities and involvement*

- (7) A review of the mandate and the capacity of the MDP to perform its key role should be undertaken. This will include consideration of ways to achieve better coordination between the various authorities and committees involved in the management of Luang Prabang and its heritage; the continuity of funding for the MDP and its augmentation through such means as a tourist tax; and the strengthening of local capacities through further training of young MDP and UDAA professional staff in heritage conservation practice, which may involve tightly focused and organized study tours and workshops

Timeline: Submission to World Heritage Committee by 1 February 2009 of the review report and recommendations for strengthening the MDP to perform its key role.

- (8) A strategy to strengthen the capacity and involvement of the local community should be developed, with consideration given for the provision of guidelines to local architects, ensuring appropriate materials available at reasonable costs in market, and developing a reward system to recognise best efforts at building restoration, tree planting and garden regeneration, with appropriate media coverage.

Timeline: Submission to World Heritage Committee by 1 February 2009 of the report outlining such a strategy and a schedule for its urgent implementation.

6.2.2 *Illegal building activities within the inscribed perimeter*

- (9) A strategy should be developed to supplementing the strict enforcement of the PSMV regulations in the wetland areas with incentives to achieve property-owner cooperation and compliance, such as through a land swap scheme.

Timeline: Submission to World Heritage Committee by 1 February 2009 of the report outlining such a strategy and a schedule for its implementation.

6.2.3 *Pressure from development around the listed property and orientations for the recommended establishment of a buffer zone*

- (10) Urgent reconsideration should be given to the development of the airport, particularly to assess the advantages of relocating the extended airport on a new site closer to the proposed new Mekong bridge and the urban settlement that the bridge will attract.

Timeline: Submission of such reconsideration to World Heritage Committee by 1 February 2009.

- (11) A Heritage Impact Assessment of the proposed Chinese-funded new town on the Chompeth valley should be undertaken.

Timeline: Submission to World Heritage Committee of the Heritage Impact Assessment report before the moratorium on construction of the new town is lifted.

- (12) A Heritage Impact Assessment of the proposed pedestrian/motor bicycle bridge across the Nam Khan near its confluence with the Mekong should be undertaken.

Timeline: Submission to World Heritage Committee of the Heritage Impact Assessment report before the moratorium on construction of the bridge is lifted.

6.2.4 Disrepair of religious structures within the inscribed property on the right bank of Mekong

- (13) A strategy to improve the state of conservation of the religious structures on the right bank side of the Mekong should be undertaken.

Timeline: Submission to World Heritage Committee by 1 February 2009 of the report outlining such a strategy and a schedule for its urgent implementation.

6.2.5 Concern for the maintenance of the Living Heritage

- (14) Consideration should be given to finding ways to limit the conversion of buildings to guest houses, especially Lao houses but also colonial buildings that have an important role in the community, such as the primary school and Fine Arts College.

Timeline: Submission to World Heritage Committee by 1 February 2009 of a report outlining such a strategy and a schedule for its urgent implementation.

- (15) Final approval of licences for guest house, restaurants and other tourism-related activities should be made by the MDP

Timeline: Immediate imposition of moratorium and notification of such to the World Heritage Committee by 1 March 2009.

Annex 1 - Decision 31 COM 7B.73 of the WH Committee

73. Town of Luang Prabang (Lao People Democratic Republic) (C 479 Rev) Decision: 31 COM 7B.73

The World Heritage Committee,

1. Having examined Document WHC-07/31.COM/7B.Add,
2. Recalling Decision **29 COM 7B.60**, adopted at its 29th session (Durban, 2005),
3. Notes the considerable efforts made by the Heritage House in the exercise of its functions and calls for a better definition of the Heritage House's mandate and the strengthening of local capacities and involvement.
4. Recommends to the State Party the creation of a buffer zone, to mitigate the pressures on the World Heritage property, and requests the State Party to invite a joint World Heritage Centre/ICOMOS reactive monitoring mission, at the end of 2007, to evaluate the property's state of conservation and to make recommendations concerning the establishment of a buffer zone, in the form of a revision of the Urban Development Plan and based on the recommendations formulated in the Territorial Coherence Plan (SCOT);
5. Notes with satisfaction the efforts undertaken by the State Party for the creation of a biosphere reserve in the catchments area of the Nam Khan and encourages it to pursue this process which would contribute to improving the equilibrium between the World Heritage site and the region;
6. Calls the attention of the State Party to the need for implementing measures for the prevention of natural risks, flooding in particular, and requests it to carry out a study on risks involved with the urbanization of the flood run-off zones and the impact of the hydraulic projects envisaged on the Mekong and the Nam Khan;
7. Also recommends to the State Party to carry out an evaluation of the quality of the development projects and on developments noted since the inscription of the property, especially in terms of overpopulation and use;
8. Also requests the State Party to pursue the strict application of the Safeguarding and Enhancement Plan (PSMV), and especially:
 - a. to preserve the non-constructible status of the natural zones within the inscribed perimeter;
 - b. to control the densification of the site in application of the provisions of the PSMV.
9. Further recommends the organization of a coordination meeting of the funding agencies at the end of 2007, with the participation of the World Heritage Centre, to coordinate the projects envisaged in the property and its periphery by bilateral and multilateral cooperation agencies, in the framework of principles established in the SCOT ;

10. Also encourages the State Party to call upon support, if necessary, from decentralized cooperation between Luang Prabang Province, the city of Chinon and the Central Region, as well as from Technical Assistance provided by UNESCO in the framework of the France-UNESCO Convention, to facilitate the implementation of the recommendations above ;
11. Further requests the State Party to submit to the World Heritage Centre by **1 February 2008** a report on the state of conservation of the property and on the steps taken to implement all of the above recommendations, for examination by the Committee at its 32nd session in 2008.

Annex 2 - Schedule of the mission and list of persons met

Thursday 22 November

PM - Arrival in LP (13.30); Meeting at MDP with Ms Manivone Thoummabouth, Director of the Maison du Patrimoine, Mr. Yves Dauge, Mayor of the City of Chinon and French Senator, and Mr. Michel Brodovitch, Architect and Adviser to the Project implemented by UNESCO-Region France and the City of Chinon.

Friday 23 November

AM - Meeting at MDP with Manivone Thoummabouth, Mr. Laurent Rampon, Adviser to the MDP, Yves Dauge, Michel Brodovitch

Visit to areas along the perimeter of the WH property

PM - Meeting at MDP with officials from MDP (Mr. Saveuy Silavanh) and UDAA to discuss procedures for building permits and other issues

Saturday 24 November

AM - Visit of Chompet District (right bank of the Mekong River), including monasteries within listed property, accompanied by Mr. Laurent Rampon and Mr. Anda Yang Senexy, from MDP.

PM - Visit of Town of Luang Prabang, accompanied by Mr. Laurent Rampon.

Sunday 25 November

AM - report writing

PM – Visit to IT Centre of the MDP, accompanied by Manivone Thoummabouth

Monday 26 November

AM - Meeting at MDP with Manivone Thoummabouth, Thongsa Sayavongkhamdy, Mr. Sanoud Maniphonh, Head Office of Communication and Transports, and Mr. Khamvanh Vanvilay, Mayor of the Chompet District.

PM - Visit to wetland areas, accompanied by Mr. Thongsa Sayavongkhamdy, Mr. Pierre Guédant, Technical Adviser to the MDP and Head of the Project on Water Management for the Province of Luang Prabang, and Mr. Anda Yang Senexy.

Tuesday 27 November

AM – Meeting with Mr. Bounleane Bouphe, Dep. Permanent Secretary, Ministry of Information and Culture; Mr. Khampeng Saysompheng, Deputy Governor of Luang Prabang Province, and Manivone Thoummabouth.

PM – G. Boccardi departs from Luang Prabang

Wednesday 28 November

William Logan departs from Luang Prabang.

Annex 3. Photographs



Photo 1. Chompeth valley, site of proposed Chinese-funded new town.



Photo 2. Mekong vista downstream from Grand Luang Prabang Hotel.



Photo 3. Primary school, an important social asset and open space.



Photo 4. MDP's Heritage Information Centre and staff.



Photo 5. New house in central town shows some respect for Lao form but little for setback, design and materials regulations.



Photo 6. New house in Chompeth fails to respect heritage requirements.



Photo 7. New house, historical detailing.



Photo 8. Densification and loss of vegetation cover in a central town precinct.



Photo 9. Large house under construction in central town fails to respect plot ratio regulations.



Photo 10. Construction of new dormitory blocks leading to the densification of a wat compound.



Photo 11. Incursion of constructions onto the Nam Khan river banks.



Photo 12. Illegal dumping of building site waste onto the Nam Khan river bank.



Photo 13. Suburban sprawl on the agricultural lands south of the historic centre.



Photo 14. New multi-storeyed guesthouse recently constructed on a filled-in Wetlands pond.



Photo 15. Deserted Wat Long Khun compound, Chompeth district.



Photo 16. Derelict prayer hall, Chompeth district.