

# A Death Knell for Ipoh's Heritage

By Ian Anderson

For many months there have been rumours of a new 15-storey hotel to be built in Ipoh's Old Town on the site (now a private car park) of what used to house the Sun Cinema. Like most rumours, there was a lot of truth behind this particular gossip as there was indeed a planning proposal put into the last government for such a building by developer **PK Lee Sdn Bhd**. Heritage buffs breathed a sigh of relief when the proposal was rejected (three times we understand) by the former state government.

## Special Heritage Area

However, in April this year, the developer, a persistent fellow, came in with a new proposal that met some of the criticisms levelled against the previous plan. This new application was for a 14-storey hotel with a basement and a reduced density ratio. Presumably, he either did not understand (or chose to ignore) the **Ipoh Heritage Tin City Special Area Plan 2020**, gazetted by the City Council. This plan restricts all new buildings in the designated heritage zone to a maximum of five storeys and limits the density ratio. The proposed hotel breaks both of these restrictions.

Nonetheless, the council took the application seriously, advised those who had objected to the previous plan that there was a new application. **Ipoh World** was one of the original dissenters and we, therefore, attended the planning meeting in the MBI building in the afternoon of Wednesday, November 14. Apart from the developer, there was only one supporter for the application and we understand he is another developer who has a plan for a 10-storey hotel, also in the heritage area. There were five who spoke against the plan.

The next stage is for the state government to consider the application, weigh up the pros and cons and make the decision. Should they approve the building of this hotel it will open the floodgates to all other developers by setting a precedent.

## Objection to Proposed Development



It was here that the citizens took the matters in their own hands. Led by **Puan Sri Sandra Lee, owner of 22 Hale Street**, adjacent to the proposed development, a press conference was called for Tuesday, November 20 with the aim of presenting a memorandum, to the City Council, demonstrating why the application should be rejected. The memorandum covered three main points which can be summarised as:

1. Old Town is heavily promoted as a heritage tourism experience and any development should be sensitive to the existing heritage buildings.
2. The building plot is next to the Kinta River and sensitive buildings that are over 100 years old. Piling works will destroy those buildings.
3. Approval of the hotel sets a disastrous precedent for the future of Ipoh's heritage.



Around 100 people attended the Press Conference and the memorandum received 500 signatures in less than 24 hours. The citizens of Ipoh had spoken!

Apart from the press and public, the conference was attended by **Puan Sri Sandra, Perak State Legislative Assemblyman for Kepayang Dr Ko Chung Sen, State representative for Simpang Pulai and State Tourism, Arts and Culture Committee Chairman Tan Kar Hing, and project executive of 22 Hale Street Lim Yi Wen.** The memorandum was accepted by Tan Kar Hing on behalf of the Menteri Besar of Perak. The conference was well organised and ran smoothly. The YBs were introduced by A Death Knell for Ipoh's Heritage Puan Sri who then made a brief speech about her concerns for her century-old building. The memorandum was read by Lim who proposed that the authorities engage in an **extensive heritage impact assessment** on this project in order to integrate modern development within the historical landscape of Ipoh Old Town. This would be vitally important as the surrounding heritage buildings sit on easily damaged, sensitive foundations.

Then, it was time for the representatives of local and State Government to have their say. Of course, they had to be non-committal as in the end, the decision does not lie with them. Despite that, it was clear they were sympathetic to the idea of maintaining building height and density as it is gazetted in the 2020 plan.

Questions or comments were then opened to the floor, but typically in Malaysia, there did not appear to be anyone who wished to speak. Consequently, your author found it necessary to get on his feet and say something which he felt needed to be said: There were three points:

1. As the planning application clearly is not in accordance with the government's plan for Old Town, it should never have reached this stage but should have been rejected out of hand.
2. **No one seems to recognise the traffic congestion that this hotel will cause.** Its exit will lead on to a narrow one-way street (Jalan Bandar Timah) which is already congested. Hotel traffic will be forced to drive further into Old Town, already suffers severely from traffic.
3. **Does Ipoh really need any more hotels in the city?** Currently, there are 10 establishments in Old Town alone, where accommodation is available. Surely enough is enough!

### **Final Decision**

The conference closed with Tan Kar Hing saying it would be discussed at the State Exco meeting the following day. Lunch was served.

Let us hope that the government will listen to the people, who made their views clear, by rejecting this application. Any other decision will sound the death knell for Ipoh's heritage.

During the lunch break, the new 2035 local plan was discussed and the following points were raised:

- No mention of heritage as a consideration for the new plan
- MBI should engage people who know the history
- How will MBI enforce the plan?