



ON-GOING ACTIVITIES



THE DESTRUCTION OF OLD HERAT

The unique historic fabric of the Old City of Herat is being destroyed at an unprecedented pace. At a crisis meeting held in AKTC's office in Kabul on 27th June, representatives of the government and civil society, including the professional community, were shown evidence of the ongoing demolition of important architectural heritage in the old city. Participants discussed ways that this unique heritage might be safeguarded, and how living conditions for the inhabitants could be improved. They also explored the scope for improvement in urban management, and specifically the enforcement of appropriate development controls by municipal staff.



Example of one of the surviving historic homes in the Old City

The meeting aimed to draw attention to the urgent need for action, at all levels. At the neighbourhood level, inhabitants need technical and material support for living conditions improvements. Owners and developers need to be made aware of the legal implications of demolition or illegal development.



Demolition of an historic house which had been subdivided between inheritors

Local officials with responsibility for urban planning need support in formulating neighbourhood plans, and a more substantive engagement from the line ministries in Kabul.



Modern 3-storey housing recently built in the old city

More technical assistance is required from international organizations, along with resources for upgrading and conservation.

Unless there is real progress on these fronts soon, the bulk of the historic fabric of the old city of Herat will in all likelihood be lost within 10 years.

Participants reviewed a draft "Herat Declaration" which was disseminated after the meeting, and which calls upon all parties to work more effectively in documenting, safeguarding and enabling an appropriate process of development for the old city of Herat.

Copies of documentation presented at the meeting are available from the AKTC offices in Kabul & Herat.



Marble lined pools between the terraces

WATER FLOWS AGAIN IN BAGHE BABUR

As part of a comprehensive rehabilitation programme in this 16th century garden, water is again flowing down the 8 levels of the restored central axis. The centre-piece of a garden originally laid out in the 16th century by the Mughal emperor Babur, the system of pools, channels and distinctive marble waterfalls has been reconstructed using traditional materials and techniques, above the traces exposed by archaeological excavations that took place between 2003-5.

Drawing also on historical accounts and images of the garden, there has been extensive landscaping of the terraces along the central axis, in order to restore something of the character of the original 'avenue garden' of which Babur was so fond, and where he is buried. Of the 3,500 trees planted to date, the majority are of species which he mentions in his memoirs, the *Baburnama*.

Since the re-location of the public swimming-pool outside of the garden, there has been a marked increase in the numbers of families groups having picnics on the shady orchard terraces that extend on both sides of the central axis. As the trees that have been planted beside the pools and channels grow in size, it will be possible for visitors to share Babur's delight in sitting under the shade of tall *panjachinar* trees, listening to the sound of water flowing down the waterfalls.



The completed central axis, with the 750-metre long water channel running over 8 terraces



Marble waterfall being carved prior to its installation between the terraces

Baghe Babur, which is a no-firearms zone, is open to the public every day of the week. Kabul Municipality charges an entrance fee, which helps to meet the costs of the operation of the garden. The recently-restored Pavilion is available for hire for public functions.

In addition to generous support provided by the German Federal Foreign Office, the Uzbek government donated the marble used in the reconstruction of the central axis in Baghe Babur.

ON-GOING ACTIVITIES

(continued)



The ruined *hammam* prior to restoration

■ RISING FROM THE RUBBLE OF THE OLD CITY

As part of a range of conservation and development initiatives in the old city of Kabul, community representatives had identified the upgrading of communal bath-houses as a key priority. This led to a survey of the existing *hammams* in the inhabited quarters of the old city, including Shaturkhana *hammam*, a privately-owned facility that had been destroyed during the conflict. The *hammam* follows a typical configuration, with semi-underground rooms grouped around two major brick-domed spaces, kept at different temperatures, covering the communal bathing areas, which have underfloor heating.



Work on the interior of the communal bathing spaces



Re-building of a brick masonry dome using traditional techniques



Work on the restoration of the structure of the *hammam* is now nearing completion

A chance encounter with the owner of the *hammam* led to discussions about its rehabilitation and operation by the community for an initial period of 3 years. As the building work nears completion, negotiations are under way about how the facility will be managed, and how resources generated from its operation will be used. AKTC is keen to hear from local organisations with an interest in assisting the community in developing a business-plan for the facility, and undertaking necessary training, so that the *hammam* can again serve the community, hopefully by spring 2007.

☞ *The second stage of repairs to the hammam has been funded by the British Embassy in Kabul.*



There is a huge pressure on the thoroughfares that run along the Kabul river

ISSUES & CONCERNS

■ KABUL RIVER – OR SEWER?

Few living in Kabul can fail to notice the fact that the central section of the Kabul river is now little more than a dump and a sewer, which presents a serious environmental hazard to those who live or work near it.



Steel containers have been dumped by the Municipality in the river beside Bagh-e Ali Mardan

The coming winter – and the ongoing drought – offers an opportunity to create significant employment through a labour-intensive clearance programme, which could be followed in spring 2007 by intensive planting trees along the banks, to provide shade for pedestrians and hawkers alike. AKTC is actively seeking partners and sponsors to undertake this work, which will provide the citizens of Kabul with a green belt through the heart of the city. Please contact us if you have any ideas or suggestions as to how this might be achieved.



The riverbed is even used for car parking in some places

COMING & GOING

■ LEARNING FROM CAIRO

In early July, Mr. M. Asif Akbari, director of cultural department, Kabul Municipality and Amanullah Sahibzada from AKTC visited the Al-Azhar park project in Cairo. Managed by Aga Khan Cultural Services Egypt, their visit was an opportunity to assess the system of park management, in the context of the ongoing collaboration in Baghe Babur.



■ ISTANBUL SUMMER SCHOOL

Dr. Abdul Wasay Najimi,

architect with AKTC, has just returned to Kabul from Istanbul, where he participated in the Getty Foundation Summer Institute / University of Washington Course 'Constructing the Past in the Middle East', examining approaches to national patrimony, cultural memory, and preserving and interpreting the past.



View of Suleymaniye mosque



Vendors have colonised the bed of the Kabul River

For more information about AKTC's programme in Afghanistan, contact us in Qala Moeen Afzal Khan, Gozargah Street, District 3, Kabul or Qala Ikhtyaruddin, Herat. information@aktc.akdn-afg.org