



School of Architecture  
THE CHINESE UNIVERSITY OF HONG KONG



## OPERATION AND MANAGEMENT MANUAL MUI TSZ LAM COMMONS

PROJECT PLUM GROVE, MUI TSZ LAM  
RESTORING OLD HOUSE FOR VILLAGE COMMUNITY  
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## 1 Background

This operation and management plan is written for Old House in Mui Tsz Lam, an abandoned historical Hakka house restored and revitalised as a village community hub (MTL Commons: 众舍) since 2022 under Project Plum Grove II: Restoring Old House for Village Community, organized by the School of Architecture at CUHK and funded by the Countryside Conservation Funding Scheme. After the project period, Mui Tsz Lam Commons will continue to open to the public and serve the local community in a long-term basis. There is a need to develop a feasible operation and management model based on the specific needs and potential of the village. This document summarizes the project team's findings during public engagement and capacity building stages, and make corresponding recommendations for sustainable operation the hub.

## 2 Objective and vision

Project Plum Grove aims to conserve heritage houses in Mui Tsz Lam as the catalyst for sustainable revitalization of the village. The main function of Mui Tsz Lam Commons is a grounded base that directly supports the community with physical spaces, facilities and other resources. As the village's only sheltered venue freely accessible by the community, it provides the gathering space for day-to-day communications as well as discussion and implementation of revitalisation plans.

The architecture restored from the century-old Hakka house can also demonstrate and promote Hakka history, culture and rural lifestyle to the public. Visitors can experience the spaces in person, and join the activities organized by the community hub, such as Hakka dining and other traditional experiences.

## 3 Methodology

The basic framework for this operation and management plan is referenced from the Community Hub Management Manual published by the project *Strengthening the Role of Local Communities* funded by United Nations Development Programme. It layouts a step-by-step approach to develop a community hub that is grounded in the community, accessible, inclusive, supportive, sustainable and collective. These steps include:

- understanding the community's need through research, statistics, mapping and direct engagement
- establishing a clear vision for the community hub by different methods such as public meetings, day-to-day communications and surveys
- developing partnerships and building relations to identify and establish a stakeholders' network
- developing strategic goals including setting up plans of community activities, number and capacity of managers and individual engagement level
- establishing a management structure to allow for community hub managers with clear duties and responsibilities
- promotion of the existence and possibilities of the community hub first by preparation of basic materials (posters, flyers and schedule of activities) then social media, community network
- measuring results (excluded in this document as the setup of Mui Tsz Lam Commons is in progress)

Since its launch in 2020, Project Plum Grove has worked closely with Mui Tsz Lam villagers throughout the restoration process, collaboratively shaping the vision for the Old House as a community hub. Following the building's restoration, we conducted capacity-building workshops and planning sessions that brought together stakeholders to jointly determine MTL Commons' operational model, equip participants with practical skills and knowledge and cultivate a strong sense of collective ownership.

## **4 Understanding Local Needs and Demands**

### **4.1 Overview of Mui Tsz Lam Community**

#### **4.1.1 Individuals**

##### **4.1.1.1 Village Representative**

Mr Tsang Yuk-on takes a leading role in the revitalisation of Mui Tsz Lam, coordinating with various stakeholder parties including non-profit organisations, villagers, volunteers and the government with his own vision to re-activate the village for tourist activities. He volunteers to return to the village on a regular basis to organize village activities and serve as the guided tour for visitors. As the owner of Old House, he is also the key collaborator with the Project Plum Grove team in the restoration and operation of the Village Community Hub.

##### **4.1.1.2 Villagers**

Mui Tsz Lam is a historic single-clan village founded by the Tsang family. Due to its remote location and the lack of restored houses and basic infrastructure, the village was gradually abandoned in the 1990s, leaving no permanent residents. Today, a small number of retired villagers occasionally return on weekends and holidays to gather and participate in revitalization efforts. Larger reunions typically take place during traditional festivals such as Chinese New Year and Ching Ming Festival. However, younger generations—many of whom live overseas or have moved away—rarely engage in village affairs.

##### **4.1.1.3 Volunteers**

Since the revitalization of Mui Tsz Lam began in 2017, hundreds of volunteers have contributed to restoring houses and village infrastructure, participating in co-creation workshops, community engagement activities, and tour guide training. These volunteers were recruited at different stages by Project Plum Grove (CUHK), Forest Village (HKU), and core villagers. However, due to volunteer turnover and varying levels of involvement, the current active volunteer base is estimated at 30 to 50 individuals.

With the limited capacity of retired villagers and low engagement from younger generations, volunteers remain essential to sustaining Mui Tsz Lam Commons in the long term. Their continued participation will be crucial for the village's ongoing revitalization efforts.

### **4.2 Community Development**

Once a thriving village with over 200 villagers, Mui Tsz Lam was abandoned since 1990s when the last villager moved out of the village. Historically, Mui Tsz Lam is closely associated to neighbouring villages in the Hing Chun Alliance and Sha Tau Kok District.

Since 2017, revitalization in Mui Tsz Lam began with self-initiated villager actions as well as organisations under private and government funding. Its rural revitalization model was influenced by Lai Chi Wo in 2010s including restoration of houses and facilities for public use, re-cultivation and related public engagement activities.

In 2024, the government opened up the Sha Tau Kok Town and planned new ferry routes from Sha Tatu Kok to Lai Chi Wo, bringing a new wave of visitors to the villages. Further studies on further opening up are in progress, with an ultimate aim of abolishing the policy of Closed Area Permit and allow more convenient access to the area. Currently, government support is mainly on infrastructure improvement such as renovation works of the village playground and provision of public toilets. In government's Northern Metropolis plan, Mui Tsz Lam and other villagers will accommodate the new town and economic development in the region, and be further developed for sustainable eco-recreation/tourism.

### **4.3 Revitalisation Groups**

#### **4.3.1 Project Plum Grove**

Organised by the School of Architecture at CUHK, the team established a village-university partnership aimed for sustainable revitalisation, using architectural restoration to re-activate the village spaces as well as the community, formed by students, volunteers, villagers and NGOs. A series of research and co-creation activities with stakeholders formulated an experimental restoration approach. From 2020 to 2024, 2 houses namely Mural House and Old House have been successfully restored and used by the community in organising public activities.

#### **4.3.2 Forest Village**

Organised by Centre for Civil Society and Governance at HKU, the team's objectives included cultural and natural conservation, public education and community engagement. Currently in Mui Tsz Lam, the team operates and manages the Mui Tsz Lam Story Museum, a restored Hakka house serving as a visitor centre, and a campsite at a southern slope of the village.

#### **4.3.3 Wu Zhi Qiao Charitable Foundation (WZQ)**

WZQ is a charity with the mission to mobilize university students and volunteers to contribute to bridge building and other infrastructure improvement projects. In Mui Tsz Lam, they have rebuilt a ruined house as community kitchen with students' volunteers in 2021 and re-paved stone paving on walking trail. Now Mui Tsz Lam is one of the bases of the NGO for volunteer activities.

#### **4.3.4 Other NGOs**

A CCO-funded project titled "Participatory Action Research (PAR) on Countryside Conservation and Revitalisation at Mui Tsz Lam, Hing Chun Yeuk" was organised by Hakka Home at LCW (暖窩) and supported by Stories North and South (河童野地) and SEE Network (思網絡) to carry out action research on Mui Tsz Lam's history, culture and community. Notably, the project collaborated with the CUHK team in the archaeological survey of the excavated Old House and Mural House site for found historical objects.

Moreover, the group organised cultural experience activities with locals, youths and visitors. The process, challenges and learning outcomes were summarised and published in the book "梅子林故事—鄉郊文化保育考見記" in 2022.

## **4.4 Local Resources and Potential**

### **4.4.1 Small-scale Farming Practices**

Currently, a group of volunteers is operating communal farms in dispersed locations throughout the village, growing crops such as cabbages, peas, white turnips, coriander, ginger, potatoes, sweet potatoes, spring onions, chayote, tomatoes, choy sum, bok choy, and spinach. The crops are consumed locally or used as ingredients for traditional festive foods, such as turnip cake, during Chinese New Year.

### **4.4.2 Traditional Local Crops**

Mui Tsz Lam's agricultural tradition centered on rice and vegetable cultivation across its terraced valley fields, with plums - reflected in the village's Chinese name literally meaning "Plum Grove" - and post-WWII mandarins serving as signature crops. Since revitalization efforts began in 2017, mandarin trees have been reintroduced as both a cultural symbol and agricultural product, replanted in the prominent terraced fields facing the village to inhibit weeds from overgrowing.

The Village Representative now organizes an annual December harvest festival where volunteers participate in picking and sharing the tangerines. With expanding orchards, plans are underway to develop value-added preserved products from surplus harvests, creating both economic opportunities and continued celebration of this traditional crop.

### **4.4.3 Restored Houses**

Most of the houses deteriorated and became half-buried since they were abandoned in the last century. Currently, about 9 houses were in good condition for use, including 5 private houses by villagers, 2 restored houses by CUHK, 1 restored house by Forest Village and a warehouse.

As the most recently restored house, Mui Tsz Lam Commons provides a multipurpose space, traditional kitchen stove as well as utilities including a toilet, shower room and storage. Forest Village's restored house serves as Mui Tsz Lam Story Museum and the base of the group. Some of the private houses were lent to volunteers and visitors who stay over for village activities. The warehouse was built on the original pigsty for storage of tools and equipment for village maintenance.

### **4.4.4 Community Kitchen**

Rebuilt by WZQ on the site of a ruined house, the community kitchen serves as a space for food preparation and communal dining. It supports daily volunteer activities and hosts gatherings during traditional festivals, such as Mid-Autumn Festival and Chinese New Year.

### **4.4.5 Campsite**

Managed by the Forest Village team, the campsite serves as the primary overnight accommodation for visitors to Mui Tsz Lam, given that the capacity of restored houses is insufficient for group size larger than 20. Advanced booking is required.

### **4.4.6 Playground**

Originally an unused vacant site in the village, this space was first upgraded in the 1960s with playground climbers by the government. As part of Mui Tsz Lam's ongoing revitalization, a new renovation plan is now underway, featuring spectator

seating, canopies, and landscaping improvements. According to the Village Representative, the site's unobstructed sky views and minimal light pollution make it an ideal location for community stargazing events, enhancing the unique identity of the village for visitor experiences.

## 5 Establish a Clear Vision and Mission with the Community

### 5.1 Individuals

#### **Tsang Yuk-on, Village Representative / Trial Operator**

As the village representative of Mui Tsz Lam, he has a strong vision about Mui Tsz Lam's future development. In 2020, he dedicated Old House to the CUHK team for restoration and public visits. He returned to the village every weekend

At the planning stage of Project Plum Grove 2, he envisioned Old House to serve as Hakka Cultural Experience Centre. In the trial operation, he coordinates different resources available in the village. He suggests that Mui Tsz Lam Commons can provide indoor activity space and ancillary facilities for the campers.

#### **Ah Po, Volunteer and Resident at Lai Chi Wo / Trial Operator**

Ah Po participated in Project Plum Grove I as a volunteer to assist in restoration of Old House and Mural House. He also collaborated with the CUHK team in hosting a poetry workshop during Project Plum Grove Festival in Phase 1.

As a new resident in the Sha Tau Kok community, He appreciates the natural scenery in Mui Tsz Lam with continuous greenery and unobstructed sky view, offering a totally different environment from the urban area.

With an interest in poetry, he emphasizes the need to experience and appreciate the artistic meaning in poetry by real and present experience, and he thought Mui Tsz Lam's environment is inspirational for artistic creation. With regards to Old House, the high ceiling height of the main hall makes it suitable for **artist in residence programme**.

Ah Po is a committed volunteer and very engaged in village activities organized by different organisations. Personally, he is interested in developing and organising **in-depth tour groups** in that promotes cultural, ecological and communal values in Sha Tau Kok District.

#### **Roger, Volunteer / Trial Operator**

Roger first joined Mui Tsz Lam as a volunteer for leisure in 2019, and was influenced by villagers' effort to conserve and revitalise the village. As a Hakka himself, he was unfamiliar with Hakka culture and is passionate about learning ancestral culture. He is committed to small-scale farming and village improvement works. Now he often resides in the village to take care of his crops and maintain the village environment.

In his opinion, the essence of Mui Tsz Lam lays in its prestigious natural environment of comprised of valley, natural steam and terraced fields is. He suggested that Mui Tsz Lam Commons can work with the outdoor environment and serve as a **base for experiential education** for students to learn from Mui Tsz Lam's agricultural and ecological assets. Moreover, with the restored Hakka stove, Mui Tsz Lam Commons can serve as a community kitchen to **Hakka food culture**.

### **Berry Yeung, Volunteer**

Berry is a dedicated senior volunteer who has actively participated in Mui Tsz Lam's revitalization efforts. With a passion for community development, he focuses on creating educational and promotional materials to enhance the village experience. His innovative proposals include:

- Visitor Accessibility & Promotion: updating Google Map listings for better navigation and installing clear signages and transport guides
- Use of advanced technology such as AR to enhance the experience in the village. For example, AR technology can work with the murals for more interactive experiences
- Placing a guest book at MTL Commons to gather visitor feedback
- Establishing book-sharing stations to promote cultural exchange between villagers and public visitors
- Exploring funding opportunities for long-term projects
- Creating thematic decorations during festive seasons (e.g., Christmas) to attract visitors

### **Alec Lai, Project Plum Grove Phase 2 Volunteer / Trial Operator**

Alec Lai first visited Mui Tsz Lam in 2019 when the village was still abandoned, and became a volunteer in Project Plum Grove II in 2024. He suggested that Mui Tsz Lam's remoteness makes it difficult for in-depth experience in a single-day event, and Old House can provide accommodation for visitors staying overnight.

### **Ah Wai, Project Plum Grove Phase 2 Volunteer / Trial Operator**

Ah Wai joined the volunteer activities organised by the CUHK team during Phase 2. She is impressed by the community in Mui Tsz Lam where villagers are very friendly to visitors, as well as the traditional Hakka food culture and lifestyle. Mui Tsz Lam Commons can be a gathering platform for villagers and public visitors to share Hakka culture and preserve traditional customs such as Chinese New Year activities. The restored courtyard can be used for dyeing, pickles and traditional cakes.

## **5.2 Brainstorming Workshop**

On the opening day, different stakeholders were invited to the Old House for a knowledge sharing session and co-creation workshop. The invited parties included local and neighbouring villagers, volunteers, representatives from the Countryside Conservation Office, Forest Village (HKU), Wu Zhi Qiao Charitable Foundation, Rural Commons (Make a Difference Institute) and countryside conservation experts from mainland China. Participants were divided into 4 groups, assigned with different discussion topics namely (i) cultural tourism, (ii) art and culture, (iii) education and (iv) community hub respectively. Each group was asked to identify the potential of Mui Tsz Lam and the restored house, and propose thematic suitable activities, as well as the roles of each group member with respect to their capacities.



### 5.2.1 Art and Culture

*Attendees:*

*Sam Chan – Moderator*

*Tsang Yat-fu – MTL Villager*

*Lam Chiu-ying - Chairman of The Hong Kong Countryside Foundation*

*Teresa Leung – Countryside Foundation*

*Human Ip – Artist and Writer, Resident of Lai Chi Wo*

#### **Potential 1: Natural Environment**

The natural environment and habitat in Mui Tsz Lam, especially the natural stream, creates a mindful experience. It also has rich diversity of medical plants.

#### **Proposal 1: Thematic Retreat Experiences**

Retreat camps can be organized in Mui Tsz Lam twice a year themed on mindfulness and meditation. with Old House. The experience can last for, including herbal and Hakka cuisine

#### **Potential 2: Artwork Creation**

Old House's main space with high ceiling clearance is ideal for exhibition and large-scale artwork creation. As a villager in Lai Chi Wo, artist Human Ip often draws inspiration from the natural environment and habitat surrounding the village for her artworks.

#### **Proposal 2: Artist-in-residence**

A short-term residence is preferable, with a period from 1 to 4 weeks for more flexible planning while allowing enough time for the artist to develop in-depth creations

#### **Remarks:**

The operation of Mui Tsz Lam Commons and the village in general is done with limited resources, therefore, small-scale activities with trending themes can more effectively attract visitors.

With the completion of hardware infrastructure, it is crucial and the right timing to consider and construct both mid-term and long-term development/operation strategies related to project planning, resource and financial management.

### 5.2.2 Cultural Tourism and Living Experiences

*Attendees:*

*Joshua Lam - Moderator*

*Kevin Li – Countryside Conservation Office (CCO)*

*Ryan Leung – Forest Village, HKU*

*May – Rural Commons*

#### **Potential 1: Geographic Advantage**

Lai Chi Wo serves as the central point of Hing Chun Alliance and a junction connecting outer islands and the mainland. Mui Tsz Lam can leverage the

geographical advantages of Lai Chi Wo to strengthen connections with other villages and islands.

### **Potential 2: Indoor Spaces and Facilities of Old House**

Given that most houses in Mui Tsz Lam are in a state of disrepair and lack basic indoor facilities, the restored Old House equipped with a toilet and shower room can serve as the primary venue and operational base for community activities.

### **Proposal 1: Evening Activities**

Currently, many activities are held during daytime, while it's worth exploring evening activities, so that participants can experience the serene atmosphere of the village the change of the environment during the day. For example, Forest Village has previously organised light shows and environmental theatres.

### **Proposal 2: Camper Base**

The restored Old House in Mui Tsz Lam can enhance the camping experience of the Forest Village campsite. Functioning as a support hub, it would provide essential amenities such as storage space, a shower room, and a toilet for campers and serve as shelter during adverse weather. This cross-organisational partnership is a good example of connecting the different resources to provide a comprehensive visitor experience.

### **Proposal 3: Natural Education and Farm-to-table Experience**

The Old House will serve as a living classroom by leveraging its natural and agricultural setting and restored architecture for immersive natural education. Participants will engage in the complete farm-to-table cycle - harvesting local crops from village fields and preparing meals in the historic kitchen. This hands-on experience transforms everyday activities into educational moments, where visitors learn about natural resources in the surrounding in connection to village culture.

### **Collaborator 1: Villagers and Volunteers**

Stakeholders including villagers and volunteers can be invited as collaborators in the activities. Their personal narratives of village life and memories can add authenticity to the factual information about the village and provide a warm experience to visitors.

### **Collaborator 2: Individuals with Special Skills**

Individuals with special skills and background can be invited to host niche activities in the village. For example, a professional can be invited to share his life experience and interest (e.g. photography) with other participants, while leading a co-living experience as a small community in the village. These customized activities offer a unique experience and personal touch that is unrepeatable in other places.

### **Remarks:**

Small-scale activities with a small group of participants are preferred for in-depth experience.

### 5.2.3 Education

*Attendees:*

*Professor Wong Kam-shing – Chairman of Wu Zhi Qiao Charitable Foundation*

*Wan wah-yung – Villager of Yung Shue Au*

*Alec Lai – Volunteer*

#### **Potential: Countryside Environment and Hakka Culture**

The countryside environment and Hakka culture is a valuable education resource for school education ranging from kindergarten to university as well as public education. There is also potential to engage corporates with ESG targets for volunteer activities and other supports. With Old House restoration and other hardware upgrade, various educational activities about Hakka food culture, dialect and customs combined with a special theme such as photography can be held to enhance attractiveness.

#### **Proposal : Educational Camps**

Mui Tsz Lam Commons can be the bridge with external organisations to arrange visits or 3-day events. While these activities can be an income source, it is important to establish a systematic structure to coordinate the manpower and resources in the village for creating and an in-depth experience, and to manage the appointments from organisations to maintain an optimal participant flow in the village.

#### **Remarks:**

Remoteness, procedures of close area permit application and competitions from mainland travel are all challenges of attracting visitors to Mui Tsz Lam. Different types of activities should be organised on a trial basis to test out the most attractive activities.

### 5.2.4 Village Community Hub

*Attendees:*

*Tsang Yuk-on – Village representative*

*Professor Selia Jinhua Tan – China Expert in Countryside Conservation*

*Majorie – Volunteer*

*River – Volunteer*

#### **Insight:**

Professor Tan shared her principles for rural revitalization in Jiangmen: culture-driven, public participation, social enterprise management, government support. While the government provided support for infrastructure, a business model should be set up to ensure self-financed, sustainable operation.

#### **Proposal 1: Herbal Garden**

Courses about Chinese herbal medicine can be organized in the Old House.

#### **Proposal 2: Hakka Culture Experience Centre**

Mui Tsz Lam Commons can be a multi-functional space that features various

Hakka culture experiences. With the traditional stove, workshops about making of pickled vegetables, cooking rice cakes, rice crackers can be organised.

### **Proposal 3: Local Farm Products**

Mui Tsz Lam can develop its distinctive farm products from surplus crops such as carambola and mandarins (jam or salted preserves)- to preserve agricultural heritage while creating economic value. By transforming native crops into premium artisanal goods with authentic village branding, we aim to establish a unique local identity. Workshops can be organized of food processing, packaging design and production.

### **Proposal 4: Partnership with Mainland Villages**

Supported by national policies, mainland China's rural revitalization operates at a larger scale than Hong Kong's community-driven model. A partnership between Mui Tsz Lam and mainland villages can foster valuable exchange, providing learning opportunities about the mainland's transformation strategies and business models.

<b>Themes</b>	<b>Potential</b>	<b>Proposal</b>	<b>Remarks</b>
<b>5.2.1 Art and Culture</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Natural environment</li> <li>- Artwork creation</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Thematic retreat experiences</li> <li>- Artist-in-residence</li> </ul>	
<b>5.2.2 Cultural Tourism and Living Experiences</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Geographic advantage</li> <li>- Indoor spaces and facilities of Old House</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Camper Base</li> <li>- Evening activities</li> <li>- Natural education and farm-to-table experience</li> </ul>	Collaborator 1: villagers and volunteers Collaborator 2: individuals with special skills
<b>5.2.3 Education</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Countryside environment</li> <li>- Hakka culture</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Educational camp</li> </ul>	Trials to be carried out
<b>5.2.4 Village Community Hub</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Traditional stove and courtyard</li> <li>- Natural environment</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Herbal Garden</li> <li>- Hakka culture experience centre</li> <li>- Local farm products</li> <li>- Partnership with mainland villages</li> </ul>	

### **5.3 Learning Outcomes of Capacity Building Workshops**

#### **5.3.1 Rural Commons (MaD)**

Make a Difference Institute (MaD), a local NGO that promotes social innovations through socially engaged programmes, set up the government-funded Rural Common, a digital platform to collect village stories and news in Hing Chun Alliance and its neighbourhood. It also engages and local public participants through social experiments, co-creating prototypes including a Lai Chi Wo community map and board game that promotes cultural tourism in the area.

MaD was invited to the Old House to lead a workshop and share their experience in social innovation in the context of Hong Kong countryside. A toolkit was introduced to volunteers, formulating questions about site observation and stakeholders' needs. The workshop was important to facilitate and empower volunteers to realize their innovative ideas in Mui Tsz Lam. Moreover, MaD collaborated with the project team to curate an exhibition in the Old House themed on village stories and prototypes.

#### **5.3.2 Wu Zhi Qiao Charitable Foundation (WZQ)**

Soon after Old House Phase 2 opened to the public in September 2024, WZQ organized an exchange camp to Mui Tsz Lam and other rural areas in Hong Kong, joined by 30 students from 21 universities and 3 rural revitalization experts from mainland China. In the restored Old House, they shared their practical experiences in (a) Qiaoshan Village, Shaanxi Province, (b) Chengchong Village, Anhui Province and (c) Yushan Island, Fujian Province. The representative of Tsinghua University shared the experience in the setup and operation of Rural Revitalization Workstation as an important

reference case for Old House. The activity demonstrated Old House as a local exchange platform to gather volunteers from whole China. As a close partner with CUHK, WZQ's network of experts and volunteers in both Hong Kong and mainland China can utilize Old House for further

exchange opportunities in the future.

#### **5.3.3 The Partnership for Nature Education and Conservation**

The PNEC, an established ecological community based in Nam Chung, brought their expertise in community engagement and public education to Mui Tsz Lam. Two of their core members facilitated a one-day retreat workshop designed to foster meaningful dialogue among stakeholders. The session emphasized reciprocal exchange - encouraging participants not only to share perspectives but to actively listen to personal connections with the village.

The workshop utilized the Old House's authentic domestic setting to create a co-living experience, with participants preparing meals together at the historically restored kitchen stove. This immersive approach strengthened interpersonal connections while demonstrating the space's potential for community building.

### **5.4 Operation Meeting**

#### **5.4.1 Opening Arrangement**

Tentatively, Old House can open to the public twice a month. In one of the opening sessions, communal dining is to be organized to as a regular gathering for villagers and volunteers. To draw newcomers to Mui Tsz Lam, the activity can be

open for registration to public participants who are interested in experiencing village lifestyle. Participants are free to pay for the meal, and the fund raised will cover the operational expenses.

In the meeting, it was suggested to invite villagers in Mui Tsz Lam and nearby villages to serve as the “guest chefs” and cook traditional Hakka dishes using their own recipes.

#### **5.4.2 Daily Operation**

House owner Mr. Tsang Yuk On suggested a work exchange policy that allows volunteers to stay overnight in the Old House in exchange of their assistance. Staff on duty is responsible for introducing Project Plum Grove and Mui Tsz Lam to guests. A set of house rules are to be established for both public visitors and tenants. Notably, specific activities are not allowed in the Old House, including commercial sales and religious ceremonies.

A volunteer volunteered to be the tour guide in Mui Tsz Lam and Old House on a regular basis.

#### **5.4.3 Long-term Campaign**

The Old House has the potential to be rented out as a venue, specifically targeting organizations for team-building events. It was recommended to explore the option of providing a service package that includes a variety of experiences in the village. The exact rental fee was to be further determined.

The remote location of Mui Tsz Lam provides a peaceful environment, making the Old House an ideal setting for artistic creation. An artist-in-residence program could be organized to invite artists to stay at the Old House for up to 2 months, allowing them to use Mui Tsz Lam’s cultural and ecological features as inspiration for their art projects.

#### **5.4.4 Promotion and Marketing**

Promotional materials about the Old House and its rental arrangements will be shared on social media platforms to reach the wider audience.

A calendar showing regular opening times and special events will be available on social media to allow visitors to plan their trip to Mui Tsz Lam in advance. Posters will be placed in Lai Chi Wo and other nearby locations so that passersby are informed about the house and the activities.

## **6 Developing Partnerships and Building Relations**

Through various events, the project team reached out to partner organisations in Mui Tsz Lam as well as external organisations for potential collaboration.

### **6.1 Forest Village**

As a key partner in Mui Tsz Lam, the CUHK team has established multiple collaborations with the community, including joint festive celebrations for Mid-Autumn Festival and Chinese New Year. A significant partnership involves utilizing MTL Commons' amenity facilities as backup space for Forest Village's campsite during inclement weather.

In December 2024, the group hosted an indigo dyeing workshop at MTL Commons. Future plans include developing an artist-in-residence program in partnership with local artists.

## **6.2 Wu Zhi Qiao Charitable Foundation (WZQ)**

In the opening of Old House, students from WZQ's Leadership Programme conducted an educational workshop for a local primary school in the area. WZQ also arranged visits and exchange activities to Mui Tsz Lam and Old House for scholars and students from Tsinghua University and other mainland Chinese universities. As WZQ sets foot in neighbouring villages including Lai Chi Wo and Yung Shue Au and establishes rural revitalisation workstations, MTL Commons could serve as a potential base for the group's volunteer initiatives.

## **6.3 Professional Organisations**

The community-based, in-situ restoration approach implemented in Old House and Mural House represents an unprecedented model in Hong Kong, serving as valuable case studies for the industry while creating opportunities for professional collaboration and knowledge exchange. This innovative approach has already attracted visits from industry organizations including the Hong Kong Institute of Architects (HKIA) and the Hong Kong Government Landscape Architect Association (HKGLAA) to MTL Commons. Other relevant professional bodies that could engage with this initiative include the Hong Kong Institute of Landscape Architects (HKILA), Hong Kong Institute of Urban Design (HKIUD), and Hong Kong Institute of Architectural Conservationists (HKICON), contributing to the professional planning and implementation of Mui Tsz Lam's future development.

## **6.4 Schools**

Mui Tsz Lam's ecological and cultural assets serve as valuable resources for experiential learning in schools, as highlighted in recent brainstorming workshops, with particular relevance to university disciplines such as tourism, cultural management, and architecture.

Since the opening of Mui Tsz Lam Commons, educational visits have been organized for HKU Space's MA Arts and Cultural Enterprise programme, along with two camping experiences for students from HKICC Lee Shau Kee School of Creativity and CUHK's School of Architecture, delivered in collaboration with village partners to provide accommodation, meals, guided tours, and cultural exchange activities. Looking ahead, there is significant potential to expand partnerships with more educational institutions and establish long-term collaborations with selected schools to further enhance these experiential learning opportunities.

# **7 Development of Strategic Goals**

As the government funding for Old House revitalisation ended in December 2024, it is expected that the operation of Mui Tsz Lam Commons will change from project-driven to community-driven approach. Correspondingly, the role of the CUHK project team should gradually change from a leading role to supporting role. Such change should be facilitated by an empowerment process in which volunteers or villagers are supported and encouraged to propose their interested activities and tasks.

## **7.1 1-2 Self-Initiated Activities Per Month**

To sustain the active operation of MTL Commons, it is recommended to organise regular public activities to engage the community. While stakeholders have expressed numerous creative ideas during discussions and workshops, many lack the experience or strong motivation to execute them. In empowering

spontaneous stakeholder actions, project teams should take a proactive role in encouraging and supporting villagers and volunteers to propose and lead one-off activities based on their interests. Potential support tasks, including social media promotion, participant coordination, venue and material preparation, guest liaison, transportation arrangements and event hosting assistance, can be discussed and shared among project teams and stakeholders. The revenue from registration fees, after deducting the reserve for daily operation costs and material expenses, can be the reimbursement for the PIC.

We encourage new and innovative activities to test public response and space feasibility at the Old House, such as:

- Art & cultural workshops
- Film screenings
- Food tastings
- Special guest talks or skill-sharing sessions

## **7.2 Formulating 1 Pilot Project**

### **Educational Programme**

Stakeholder workshops and meetings have identified MTL Commons as an ideal venue for delivering immersive short-course educational programs that combine volunteer activities with cultural and natural experiences. These programs will leverage existing community assets including guided cultural/ecological tours, local logistical support networks, and physical spaces such as restored heritage houses and campsite facilities. In Q3 2025, Jockey Club Scholarship scholars will self-initiate such a program featuring camping, volunteer services, and cultural/art workshops.

### **Design Research Project**

Moreover, the success of Project Plum Grove has demonstrated a viable collaborative restoration model for the village. This approach can be adapted to smaller, more manageable scales, enabling students and volunteers to co-create modest physical interventions and test their impact on the village.

## **7.3 Regular Gathering**

To strengthen community cohesiveness, we recommend organizing regular stakeholder gatherings at MTL Commons to provide updates, review operations, and facilitate open discussions. These gatherings can adopt a casual and inclusive format, such as community dining events, to create a welcoming atmosphere. This approach encourages broader participation, fosters engagement among existing members, and helps newcomers integrate more easily into the community.

# **8 Operation Model**

## **8.1 Regular Opening Arrangement**

### **8.1.1 Opening Dates and Hours**

Regular opening hours: 11am – 2pm

The opening dates in each month are to be announced on social media upon discussed and sign up of duty by volunteers. As a good practice, it is suggested that Mui Tsz Lam Commons opens at least open twice a month to ensure continuous public access.



### 8.1.2 Community Hub Manager

A crucial principle for sustainable operations of MTL Commons is the distribution of daily operational duties among project groups, volunteers, and villagers without over-reliance on any single individual. For volunteers and villagers taking on managerial responsibilities, we recommend providing transportation reimbursement and meal allowances where financially feasible, as these practical supports help facilitate participation. Building on the work exchange policy outlined in Section 5.4.2, we suggest piloting this incentive system first with core volunteers and villagers before broader implementation. Looking ahead, we propose publicly recruiting short-term managers to bring fresh energy and perspectives to the community hub. These managers would receive mandatory basic training covering Mui Tsz Lam's cultural heritage and the Old House revitalization project's objectives, ensuring they can represent and operate the space effectively. To standardize this training process, we recommend developing a comprehensive training kit containing operational guidelines and cultural background materials.







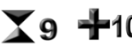





### 8.1.3 Duties

<b>Routine Tasks</b>	Turn on the lights at main hall, courtyard and mezzanine
	General cleaning
	Mark down the visitor number indicated on the people counter
	Empty the rubbish bin (1 at toilet and 1 at courtyard) and dispose the bin bag at the garbage collection point at Lai Chi Wo
<b>Visitor Reception</b>	Answer visitors' enquiry
	Provide a house tour as required
	Encourage visitors to leave their feedbacks

### 8.1.4 Visitor Rules

- i. For safety reasons, access to mezzanine via the steep staircase is not allowed, unless permitted by the manager on-duty or during guided tours
- ii. Do not touch or deface any exhibit, artefacts, walls or other parts of the premise
- iii. Do not leave any rubbish at the premise
- iv. The toilet and shower room is not open to visitors. For urgent use, please notify the manager on-duty
- v. Do not run or play at the premise
- vi. No smoking within the premise
- vii. The facility is a conserved historical Hakka heritage. Please beware of uneven headroom and floor levels (such as steps, doorway, thresholds) and of the slippery granite or tile-paved flooring
- viii. Please take care of your personal belongings and observe safety precautions. Mui Tsz Lam Commons will not be responsible for any loss or damage to personal property within its premises.
- ix. Mui Tsz Lam Commons has the right to demand the departure of any person who cause disturbance to other visitors.

### 8.1.5 Weather Policy

	Warnings and Signals	In force at 7am on an opening day	In force during opening
Thunderstorm Warning		Proceed	Proceed
Rainstorm Warnings		Proceed	Proceed
		Cancel	Stand down and evacuate <u>OR</u> stay indoors or take shelter in a safe place until the heavy rain has passed.
		Closed	Stand down and evacuate
Tropical Cyclone Warning Signals	<b>T1</b>	Proceed	Proceed
	<b>13</b>	Proceed	Proceed with cautious on necessary measures
	  	Closed	Stand down and evacuate <u>OR</u> stay indoors or take shelter in a safe place until the heavy rain has passed. Stand down and evacuate
Fire Danger Warnings	 	Proceed	Proceed
Cold Weather Warning		Proceed	Proceed with cautious on necessary Hypothermia Prevention measures
Very Hot Weather Warning		Proceed	Proceed with cautious on necessary Heat Stroke Prevention measures
Frost Warning		Cancel	Stand down and evacuate <u>OR</u> stay indoors or take shelter in a safe place until the heavy rain has passed. Stand down and evacuate

## **8.2 Community Hub**

Apart from serving as a day-to-day gathering space, MTL Commons space is freely accessible to villagers, volunteers, project groups and stakeholders for non-profit activities supporting community revitalization. Users of interest are responsible to update the shared online calendar to reserve available time slots. For revenue-generating activities, we encourage users to donate a portion of proceeds to help sustain hub operations.

## **8.3 Renting of Space**

As a direct income source, it is recommended to offer renting services of the entire MTL Commons venue. With Mui Tsz Lam's natural and cultural landscape, the place is most suitable as a day camping base, accommodating team-building and retreat activities for NGOs and private organisations. Other suggested activities include wellbeing activities. The Booking can be associated to other activities and experiences currently available in Mui Tsz Lam as a bundle to enhance attractiveness.

Initially, tenants can be by invitation of the operation committee, such as schools and NGOs natural education for trial runs. In the future, an open call can be launched on social media.

### **Guidelines and Terms for Booking:**

- i. Complete the online booking form at least two weeks prior to your rental date, providing details including number of attendees, event purpose, meal requirements, and representative contact information.
- ii. Upon confirmation from MTL Commons, a 50% deposit of the total rental fee is required via bank transfer or FPS to secure your booking. This deposit is non-refundable in case of cancellation. The remaining balance must be settled on or before your departure date.
- iii. Booking is available in two sessions: 9am-12pm and 1pm-4pm. Renters should at least rent one whole session per each application. Each booking must cover at least one full session. Whole-day or overnight rentals require special arrangement.
- iv. Meal services can be arranged upon request during the application process. The traditional stove is available for use (with or without instructional support) at an additional charge.
- v. For special activities including guided tours, cultural programs, or workshops, please contact MTL Commons directly for arrangements.
- vi. The venue is secured with a combination lock. Access codes will be provided prior to your event. Before leaving, ensure the space is restored to its original condition, all waste is properly disposed of outside the village, and all entry points are securely locked.
- vii. The restroom and shower facility are available for use. Renter groups must maintain cleanliness after use.
- viii. MTL Commons is not liable for any loss or damage to personal property. We strongly advise against bringing valuables.
- ix. The renting party assumes full responsibility for any accidents involving their participants.

- x. Visitor rules are to be strictly complied
- xi. If typhoon signal No.1 or higher or the Red Rainstorm signal is hoisted at 7am on the renting date, all pre-registered bookings shall be cancelled and refunded. If such weather signals should be hoisted during the renting period, the renting party should base on safety concerns, decide to stay inside the venue or evacuate. Under such circumstances the camp fees and meal charges unconsumed will be refunded on pro rata basis.
- xii. Any activity in contravention to the laws of Hong Kong or in breach of public order such as alcoholism, gambling, fighting and drug taking are strictly forbidden. Offenders will be asked to leave the venue and will be held responsible for all consequences, and all fees paid will not be refunded.
- xiii. Renters are forbidden to sell to other groups or persons or conduct commercial activities in the venue.
- xiv. Religious ceremonies or rituals require prior written approval.
- xv. Filming, recording or interviews in the venue is permitted only for promotional and documentary purposes. Commercial filming requires advance authorization.
- xvi. The person-in-charge will be liable for the cost of repair to any facilities damaged during his/her camping period.

#### **8.4 Activities (recap from part 4 and 5 of this manual)**

##### **8.4.1 Hakka And Village Culture**

- Dialect workshop
- Food experience (wine, pickles)
- Traditional craft (dyeing, carpentry etc)
- Human library

##### **8.4.2 Natural Education**

- Farming
- Plant and Chinese herb identification
- Taxidermy workshop
- Farm-to-table experience

##### **8.4.3 Cultural Activities**

- Poetry workshop
- Tea-tasting
- Artist workshop

##### **8.4.4 Long-term Campaigns**

- Artist-in-residence

#### **8.5 Financial Model, Funding and Grants**

Currently MTL Commons is operating on a voluntary basis with minimum expenses and incomes. For revenue generation, the committee will establish a reasonable fee schedule for activities and services proposed in this section, maintaining transparent accounting of all income. These funds will be allocated to essential operational needs including premises maintenance, basic reimbursements for managers, and strategic research and development initiatives to enhance our programs.

Looking ahead, the committee will actively monitor and pursue new funding opportunities, with particular focus on heritage conservation, community development and educational programs that align with our mission.

## 9 Management Structure

### 9.1 Suggested Community Charter (for further discussion purposes)

#### 9.1.1 Core Values

**Collaborative/ Supportive:** We unite villagers, volunteers and the public to collectively revitalise Mui Tsz Lam through shared actions and knowledge exchange.

**Equality:** All voices - from elders to urban volunteers - have equal weight in deciding our village's future, ensuring no one is left behind in our revitalization.

**Proactive:** We empower members to identify needs and lead solutions, providing platforms for initiative-taking and skill-sharing to drive community progress.

**Transparency & Openness:** Transparent operations and accessible spaces ensure inclusive participation. Knowledge, decisions and resources are shared openly to build trust and adaptability.

#### 9.1.2 Decision-Making

MTL Commons functions as an open platform for nurturing and supporting revitalization initiatives by individuals or collectives. Therefore, it should allow for maximum flexibility of use while maintaining straightforward and minimal management. In principle, the system should consist of an effective communication channel and a transparent decision-making mechanism to ensure inclusivity and efficiency.

Online platforms, such as WhatsApp groups, have been widely used for day-to-day communications within the village community due to the low accessibility of Mui Tsz Lam's physical site. These groups will remain the primary means of keeping stakeholders informed about updates, facilitating idea exchanges, and discussing operational matters. Individuals should be free to propose actions and implement them with the support of others. To maintain an engaged and relevant participant base, an annual membership review process will be implemented, allowing for the voluntary and non-contentious departure of inactive members.

Monthly gatherings (as proposed in Section 7.2) will serve as the formal space for decision-making on budget use, operational policy changes (such as adjustments to committee formation) and disputes. During these meetings, attendees will also review past activities, assess operational progress, and collectively agree on future priorities, visions, and goals. The committee is responsible for consolidating key discussion points and decision agendas beforehand to ensure productive discussions. These gatherings will be open to the public, and all participants may vote on proposals. Stakeholders are encouraged to raise concerns or suggest improvements for MTL Commons' operations. A designated secretary will take notes during the meeting, and a summary will be shared afterward on the WhatsApp groups for those unable to attend, ensuring transparency and continued engagement.

### 9.2 Operation Committee

#### 9.2.1 Formation

The Operation Committee shall consist of at least 7 members: 3 ex-officio members (1 village representative and 2 representatives from CUHK and HKU project groups) and 4 general members (villagers, experienced volunteers, and

professionals). All members will serve one-year terms, with the entire committee composition subject to majority approval at community gatherings. The open nomination process welcomes committed stakeholders through community nominations or self-nominations. This structure encourages broader leadership participation while ensuring governance continuity, with annual recomposition of the committee maintaining accountability and providing regular opportunities for new members.

## **9.2.2 Roles and Responsibilities**

### **9.2.2.1 Facility and Administrative Management**

- Oversee maintenance and upkeep of premises
- Manage finances and bookkeeping
- Manage internal space booking system on online calendar
- Manage public rental bookings and coordinate with renting parties
- Administer online platforms and social media pages for information update in MTL Commons

### **9.2.2.2 Support, Coordinate and Monitor Activities of Community Hub**

- Promote the activities of community hub to stakeholders and the public
- Provide logistical support for activities
- Coordinate between stakeholders and working groups

### **9.2.2.3 Host Regular Gatherings and Facilitate Discussion and Collective Making of Decisions**

- Consolidate day-to-day communications in online groups and prepare agendas for discussion and decision making
- Mediate between diverse stakeholder opinions to build consensus
- Document meeting outcomes and action items for community records and follow-up

### **9.2.2.4 Community Development and Outreach**

- Identify new funding sources for sustainable operation
- Reach out for opportunities for creating a local partnership, public-private partnership, networking, etc.
- 

## **9.3 Work Groups**

MTL Commons encourages forming independent working groups for long-term initiatives. Interested stakeholders can self-organise to design, implement, and promote sustained activities. These groups will receive hub support while maintaining autonomy in operations. Regular reporting to the core committee ensures alignment with community goals.

### **9.3.1 Farming**

With the aim to expand the current small-scale farm production, the work group will organize workshops to recruit and train public volunteers. Working closely

with experienced farmers, the group will first identify the most suitable crops for the village's unique terrain and soil conditions, while developing a systematic roster system to maintain farm operations and ensure stable yield.

Beyond fresh produce, the initiative will explore processing crops into value-added products like salted mandarins to extend shelf life and create unique branding opportunities for the village. These premium goods could be sold through local markets or incorporated into immersive farm-to-table experiences for visitors.

### **9.3.2 Public Education and Promotion**

This work group will mobilize volunteers passionate about innovative education to develop engaging learning materials that promotes Mui Tsz Lam's uniqueness, such as:

- Digital AR Experiences – Interactive content allows users to visualize heritage sites, soundscape artistic interpretations beyond their original context through smartphone applications.
- Thematic Learning Kits – Hands-on educational packages for schools featuring curated activities, maps, and storytelling materials about Mui Tsz Lam's cultural and ecological assets.
- Outdoor Learning Programs – Designed field experiences incorporating nature observation, heritage interpretation, and community interaction to foster deeper connections with the rural landscape.

### **9.3.3 Village Improvement**

To complement funded restoration projects in the village, the work group will coordinate community-led initiatives to repair and enhance village infrastructure such as balustrades, retaining walls, walkways, landscaping and public furniture. These hands-on improvement works will double as valuable experiential learning opportunities for secondary school and university students, while engaging community volunteers in meaningful place-making activities. The work group will be responsible for planning and prioritizing projects, organizing volunteer teams, and facilitating safe, educational worksites that foster both skill development and community ownership of public spaces.



## 10 Activities Images







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