



■ RECLAIMING BAGHE QAZI, KABUL OLD CITY

In collaboration with Kabul Municipality, rehabilitation work has resumed in Baghe Qazi, an historic garden in Kabul old city. Once the property of a judge, the 3.3 hectare site was designated a municipal park in the 1980s, after which it fell into disrepair. Surviving trees were cut down during the conflict in 1993, when the area was de-populated and many homes damaged. Part of the site has since been occupied by temporary buildings, with the remainder used as a parking lot and dump for waste.

Part of AKTC's ongoing conservation programme in the old city, the aim is to reclaim Baghe Qazi as a public green space. Among preparatory works now under way are the removal of waste, relocation of steel containers and erection of fencing around the site. This will be followed by the construction of drains and retaining walls, and re-planting, based on a design agreed with the Municipality. Partly funded by the German government, the project is expected to be completed in the spring of 2011.

■ ROAD WIDENING IN THE OLD CITY

In a move that may remind residents of the punitive destruction of property in the area after an uprising in the late 1970s, Kabul Municipality has begun to widen the road between Chindawol and Darwaza Lahori. This controversial project had earlier been discussed in the Kabul Old City Commission, when questions were asked about its purpose and concerns raised as to the impact on the historic fabric of increased flow of traffic. Despite an agreement that it would be reconsidered, municipal excavators began in October to dig new drains on both sides of a 30-metre wide reserve. This seemed to ignore the historic property, details of which had been shared with the Municipality, that stood in the line of the new drains (see below). As a result, the historic Ulya madrasa was damaged, while municipal engineers gave a days notice of their intention to demolish the timber minaret of the historic Sayyed Mehdi mosque, which stood in the path of a new drain. The structure was hurriedly dismantled by the department of Historic Monuments, with AKTC support, and several mature mulberry trees that were in the courtyard of the mosque were simply cut down. Aside from evidently contravening the Afghan Law on Cultural Heritage, the social and environmental damage of this road-widening initiative calls into question the commitment of Kabul Municipality to safeguarding the fragile historic fabric of the old city and its surviving historic monuments.



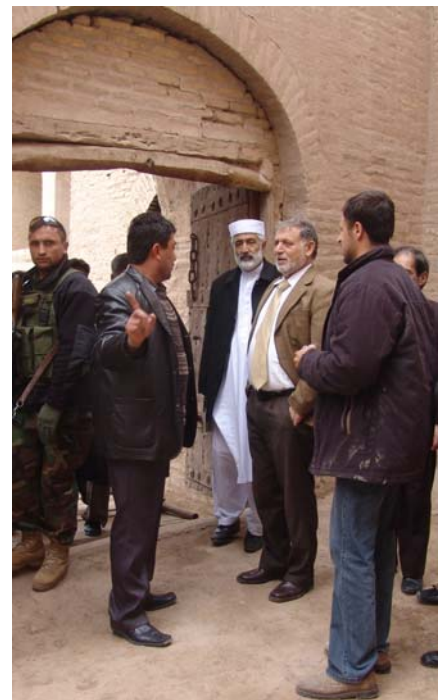
■ STOR PALACE, KABUL

A survey has been completed by AKTC of the Stor Palace in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Kabul. Originally built as a pavilion during the reign of Amir Abdur Rahman Khan, the Palace was subsequently altered and expanded. The Treaty of Rawalpindi, marking Afghanistan's independence, was signed here in 1919, and part of the building was later used by the intellectual and modernizer, Mahmoud Tarzi. The survey and ongoing condition assessment will pave the way for a programme of restoration, for which the Government of India has pledged support.



■ VISIT TO QALA IKHTYARUDDIN

The Governor of Herat, H.E. Yusuf Nooristani, chaired a special session of the Old City Commission on 28th February, before reviewing progress on the conservation of the historic citadel of Herat, Qala Ikhtyaruddin. During the course of his tour of the upper section of the citadel, the Governor was able to see at first hand the physical consequences of a failure to effectively enforce building controls in the historic fabric of the old city. While committing his office to supporting the safeguarding the surviving architectural heritage in and around Herat, the Governor stressed that responsibility for this lay primarily with Heratis themselves.



■ ARBABZADEH BAZAAR

As part of efforts to promote economic recovery in what was once the commercial heart of the city, AKTC has invested in conservation of traditional bazaars and serais that are under threat. In late 2008, work began on the reconstruction of the roof of the Arbabzadeh bazaar (above), which is thought to have been built in the 1950s. The building comprises 2 floors of shops and workshop ranged around a central courtyard, over which spans a lightweight timber structure in the form of a huge barrel-vault (see above). An ingenious reinterpretation of the traditional brick masonry vaults that spanned over the historic bazaars in the old city, the structure was found to be in a precarious state during surveys. Following thorough documentation, designs were prepared for a system of laminated timber beams that follow the curve of the original vault. After testing various techniques of fixing, a total of 26 of laminated beams were produced in the AKTC workshop and then erected along the length of the central space. Work continues on fixing timber boards across the beams, after which galvanised sheeting will be laid over the barrel-vault. Designs are also being prepared for the reconstruction of timber lanterns along the apex of the vault, and an ingenious system of openings at either end of the building that ensure ventilation through the courtyard space, which remains useable even during fierce heat of the summer months in Herat.

■ PAINTED DECORATION

An extraordinary mural painting has come to light during surveys in the Momandha quarter of the old city of Herat. Painted on the a plastered dome in the basement of the house of a furrier, and which is now in a very poor state of repair, it is remarkable that this mural has survived. While some traditional houses in Herat have floral or geometric painted decoration, a figurative painting on this scale is very unusual. Stylistically, this mural resembles the folk art of the 'qahveh khaneh' or coffee-house, popular in Iran in the late 19th century Qajar period. These paintings usually provided a backdrop for story-telling and religious rituals, particularly during Muharram, but it is not clear how this small domestic space might have been used. Work continues on documenting and stabilizing the mural.



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