



ON-GOING ACTIVITIES

■ KABUL OLD CITY PLANNING

Building on several years of facilitating participatory planning with communities in District 1, members of the Old City Commission attended a half-day workshop on 1st March 2007 at the AKTC office in Kabul. Present were Commission Chair, Qadria Yazdanparast, director of the Historic Cities department of the MoUD, Engineer Adeli, and several of his staff, Engineers Mahmood and Dastagir from Kabul Municipality Planning department, the district 1 head and old city community representatives.

The workshop provided an opportunity for the Commission members to review the scope of information gathered as part of AKTC's participatory planning work with several old city communities. This led to a discussion on options for widening roads in the historic quarters, building height controls and the relocation of *Gudams (depots)* outside the city centre.

The importance of drawing on the resources and knowledge of communities in planning and upgrading work was discussed at length. Some participants felt that the current top-down approach towards planning has stifled local initiative.



Participants were shown examples of upgrading and conservation initiatives that are under way in Asheqan wa Arefan and adjacent areas.

At a time when the inhabitants of the old city eagerly await the outcome of MoUD's planning initiative for the old city, the workshop heard arguments for a more hands-on approach to the complex problems of the area which, it was argued, can best be solved in consultation with the residents. Hopes were expressed that collaboration MoUD and Kabul Municipality staff would improve, and enable a common approach to be developed for the area, taking into account its social and historic significance.

Deputy President H.E. Ahmad Zia Masood subsequently convened a meeting of Old City Commission members, with AKTC staff present as observers.



■ BAGHE BABUR VISIT

Minister for Information and Culture H.E. Abdul Karim Khuram visited Baghe Babur on 30th November in order to familiarize himself with the ongoing rehabilitation programme. Before paying their respects at Babur's grave, the Minister and his entourage toured the new caravanserai complex and inspected ongoing works in the Queen's Palace.

The Minister went on to hold discussions with AKTC staff on a wider range of conservation issues, including measures to improve coordination of cultural activities in the country.



Consultation with residents is vital to addressing the problems facing the old city



Masons finishing the brick arches and vaults in the main prayerspace



■ HAJI SHARIF MOSQUE

In response to a request from neighbourhood leaders in November 2006, support has been provided for the reconstruction of the Haji Sharif mosque in Bar Durrani quarter of the old city. As part of efforts to demonstrate and train craftsmen, a traditional system of vaults and arches has been used to span the main prayer space, which now serves as an important focus for residents. Improvements were also made to facilities, including public water-supply, in the courtyard.

■ HERAT DRAINAGE

Poor drainage is one of the most acute problems facing residents of the densely-populated historic quarters in the old city of Herat. Apart from the consequences of poor drainage on public health, water-logging in some areas continues to damage the foundations of traditional homes. The historic system of vaulted underground drains has largely fallen into disrepair, or been disrupted by new development. As densities in the historic quarters rise, environmental conditions are worsening.

In response to this situation, a series of pilot drainage improvements was initiated by AKTC. More than half of the 60,000 residents of the old city have benefited from the pumping of liquid waste from some 35 open cesspools or *khandaq* in all quarters. In addition, support has been provided for repairs of surface and underground channels in key 'pressure points', benefiting in all 4,000 residents. One example is the repair of the existing 207 metre long drain, serving 23 homes in Nawab gozar, whose residents contributed unskilled labour for the works.

Until investments in network infrastructure are made in the old city, ad hoc improvements offer the only immediate solution to the immediate environmental problems facing vulnerable families. In anticipation of a scaling-up of investments, preliminary topographic surveys have been initiated by AKTC.



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

COMMERCIALISATION?

In February 2007, the custodians of the famous *Khirqa Sharif* mosque situated south of Herat's citadel, started to convert part of the premises into shops. Walls of several rooms that were part of the endowment of Governor Khalikyar were removed, and seven modern steel shutters installed facing the street.

Despite the fact that the Afghan conservation law specifically precludes any changes to historic buildings, staff of the department of Historic Monuments in Herat were unable to halt the illegal conversion work. Apart from violating the precinct of this historic mosque complex, this action sets a precedent for the commercialization of other religious sites in the city—where a significant proportion of shops remain empty and unlet. Efforts will continue to monitor this form of illegal 'development' and to lobby for enforcement of building controls.



New shops in the precinct of Khirqa Mosque

EVENTS



■ MINISTERIAL DELEGATION

A delegation of the Ministry of Urban Development, headed by the Director of the Historic Cities department, Mr. Adeli, participated in a meeting of the Old City Commission in February 2007. The groups also visited AKTC's ongoing conservation and rehabilitation work in the old city, as well as the shrine complex of Khwaja Abdullah Ansar in Gazargah (funded by the Federal Foreign Office of the German government.)