



The building housing Wellcome (main picture) was built in 1859 but many interior features are masked by shelves of goods (top); antiquities consultant Chow Wing-leung shows one of the original fireplaces. Photos: Edward Wong

Wellcome keen to keep heritage store

Supermarket hopes to renew lease on the former Stanley police station despite high maintenance costs

Fox Yi Hu and Chloe Lai

The Wellcome supermarket chain said yesterday it would seek to renew its lease for the former Stanley police station when its contract with the Government Property Agency for the 19th century monument expires on July 31.

A Wellcome spokesman told a news conference it had spent HK\$1 million on maintaining the monument during its tenancy and hoped it could continue occupying the premises.

Conservationists said, however, the lease expiry should give the government an opportunity to review its policy for the use of historic monuments without sacrificing their historical and architectural significance, and allowing the public a chance to appreciate them.

In 2002, Wellcome won a controversial bid to open a branch in the building, the city's oldest surviving police station.

Built in 1859, the site used to house the army and the police because of its strategic position as the

southernmost outpost of Hong Kong Island. Its antique features included British-style fireplaces, chimneys, prison cells, a gunroom, stone walls and wooden stairs, windows and floors.

In the 1990s, the building was occupied by a restaurant called Tables 88.

A Government Property Agency spokesman said: "We are consulting the concerned government departments on the premises' future use and letting arrangement." He said "a conclusion will be reached

TALKBACK
How should the old Stanley police station be used?
 Send your comments to
talkback@scmp.com
 Please include name, address and phone number

in March or April this year," and any lease tenders would be announced.

The agency's decision to award the tenancy to Wellcome was criticised by conservationists and Stanley residents who believed the su-

permarket's tenancy would diminish the building's historic and architectural significance. Diane Chiu, Wellcome's marketing director, said yesterday that although the building's maintenance cost was 50 per cent higher than a conventional Wellcome supermarket's, renewing its lease would help to enhance the company's image.

Betty Ho Siu-fong, chairwoman of the Conservancy Association, said the Antiquities and Monuments Office should be involved in drawing up the new tender, and

that the Antiquities Advisory Board should endorse the choice of any new tenant.

"The old police station used to be an expensive restaurant. It had plenty of space to showcase the historic and architectural significance of the building. But not many people could use the restaurant. Everyone has access to a supermarket. Unfortunately, the place is filled with goods. The way the supermarket decorates the place makes appreciation impossible," Ms Ho said.

Stanley resident Raymond Lo, a regular shopper at the outlet, said it was a pity a supermarket occupied the monument.