

## Central Park City Users and Public Space

The HKSAR Government has a golden opportunity to create a unique and magnificent Central harbour-front for the people of Hong Kong and for future generations. This will require the Government to reconsider the Central District (Extension) OZP by significantly reducing GFA density permissible under the current plan. In fact, the Town Planning Board has already recommended on 5 August for the Government to do just this.

The Government currently plans for extensive new development of NINE sites in Central producing 9.25 million sq ft of GFA. In addition, an extension of 208,700 sq ft at the Hong Kong Convention and Exhibition Centre will also be developed. These will add a substantial amount of traffic to the Central waterfront. The Government's plans to build the Central Wanchai By-pass and "P2" will provide little help. By its own admission, traffic will be saturated by 2016. Moreover, the "P2" highway will sterilise the harbour-front, as it will no longer be possible to walk towards the harbour at ground level. The Government's current solution is to create what are effectively elevated walkways for people to reach the waterfront. The optimal solution is to reduce development density substantially so that "P2" can then be reduced to a shortened access road, sterilisation can be prevented and further congestion avoided. This will also have a positive impact on both air and noise quality for Central District. The current plans unfortunately annihilate and compress valuable space resulting in limited and 'unfriendly' public open spaces.

We propose that the Government ought to provide an experience in Central that better meets the needs and wants of the community. There is significant value in creating an experience where people can enjoy the real Hong Kong of sea, waterside, green mountains and sky, with the tall buildings throwing this into relief. We see the possibility for the creation of *Central Park*. This peaceful oasis will act as the heart, lung and soul of the City, with a sense of connection between heaven and earth, nature and people. *Central Park* will be designed to allow people from all backgrounds and ages to enjoy many activities there. It will be a place that combines Chinese culture with community needs of the 21st century. With Central Park Hong Kong will offer a special benchmark to the world.

Our proposals are in their infancy, and require input from many directions to reach maturity, but the essence is already in place. A fountain, rising 100 feet into the sky, and illuminated in many different ways, will become a major feature of the City. This represents Hong Kong's energy and aspirations.

Water will no longer just be in the Harbour, but will come right into the heart of the City through a series of canals joining City infrastructure to its historical roots. Forest-like planting will bring the mountains into the City. Performance space will be used - day and night - by professionals and amateurs. The landscaping will be multi-purpose, durable but informal with green lounging areas, as well as hard play surfaces, and will be a showcase of indigenous plants and trees that will also encourage native birds. The open space will allow citizens to enjoy themselves in a multitude of different ways of their own choosing.

This green lung along the harbour-front will connect with existing green lungs of the City via an enhanced network of pathways. Hong Kong Park, the Zoological and Botanical Gardens, the Government House gardens as well as other spaces, will be opened up to form a continuous promenade between sea and mountains that leads our eyes to the Peak.

It is proposed that the Government will adopt environmentally sustainable attitudes and remain in its current locations at Lower Albert Road and Garden Road but use spaces much more efficiently, employing contemporary space planning principles with only limited parts needing to be redeveloped. The Legislative Council (LegCo) Building will continue to function and be refurbished, with intelligence and sensitivity, to meet current and future needs. The Central Government Offices (CGO) buildings will likewise be refurbished, but first a thorough and transparent study will take place to discover what space is needed for CGO and for LegCo. Successful enterprises, whether public or private, need to ensure that their processes and procedures are as effective and efficient as possible. The Government must do the same. Improved ways of working are commonly practised in the commercial field that are more satisfactory in terms of cost, outcome and human resources than those currently in use. From this, space requirements are developed and checked against existing premises. It is not uncommon to realise major space and cost savings through such planning initiatives.

Current government plans are to centralise operations into one location at Tamar. The concept of bringing more personnel together into one place, however, goes against modern management and also environmental thinking and accepted wisdom. It also makes the organisation more susceptible to crisis of all kinds whether terrorist, technical or human. Modern technology allows people to work together even when they are far apart. Decentralised local centres provide a better quality of life for workers, as well as reducing the environmental impact of transport. Good communication is essential, but though meeting face-to-face is useful from time to time, it is rarely a daily necessity. Technology, especially wireless connectivity, will enable the CGO buildings to be updated without difficulty to meet the most stringent standards of a modern working environment.

The Government's proposal for the Tamar site to construct Exhibition Galleries for the display of development initiatives can be located instead in many different places in the City and do not require a prime harbour-front location, or to be alongside other government functions. Thorough consideration must be given to the precise purpose of these galleries, what will actually happen in them, and how they will be managed to avoid their becoming redundant facilities on valuable public land.

A long-term strategy must be developed for the CGO buildings, based on the detailed schedule of needs. Maintenance may be expensive, but 30-year-old buildings still have decades of life. Government should be leading by example in refitting existing buildings as needed to reduce current operational and maintenance costs and environmental impact

Car use to government offices will be reduced, with Civil Servants showing the way forward, with parking provided only for those with real need, such as those with disabilities, and staff of all seniority will be encouraged to benefit from the City's public transport. Existing parking space around government offices will be 'greened' and become part of the public realm, with trees and planting between the cars. Fences will be removed, and security handled instead with sophisticated electronics.

The Central harbour-front and Tamar proposals are located on some of the most important sites for this City, not so much in terms of content, but for the message that they provide for the community, the nation and even the world at large. Is this City, struggling to make quick money, or is Hong Kong concerned with the quality of its life? Allowing time to reflect and investigate, to consult and make informed decisions will provide space for the best solutions to emerge.