

Tel No : 2848 2119

Fax No: 2845 3489

HPLB(PL) P 50/01/190

13 April 2005

By Fax 2810 0302 and By Post

Mr Ruy Barretto S C
Temple Chambers
16/F, One Pacific Place
88 Queensway
Hong Kong

Dear Mr Barretto,

Concept Plan for Lantau

Thank you for your letter of 28 February 2005 commenting on the Concept Plan for Lantau. Before responding to your comments made in the specific areas, let me first reiterate the purpose and background of the Concept Plan. The Concept Plan for Lantau aims to provide a coherent planning framework to meet a diversity of land use needs. In drawing up the Plan, the Government has adopted a sustainable planning approach balancing both development and conservation needs. While some of the proposals aim to sustain the economic development of Hong Kong, we have not lost sight of the importance of conserving the natural environment of Lantau and have included conservation as one of the major themes in the Plan.

The purpose of the public consultation undertaken from end November 2004 to end February 2005 is to engage the public at the early conceptual stage in planning for Lantau. Therefore, the proposals set out in the Concept Plan are conceptual in nature to invite community discussion. They would be reviewed and revised, as appropriate, to take into account the community's feedback. Proposals to be taken forward will be subject to detailed studies, including environmental impact assessment, to establish their feasibility.

As part of the community-wide consultation exercise, a briefing was held for the Planning, Lands and Works Panel of the Legislative Council on 26 October 2004. With general support from the Panel members, the Plan was put out for public consultation. During the public consultation, we actively engaged different stakeholders in the discussion of the Concept Plan. Over 30 discussion meetings were held with the relevant statutory and advisory bodies, the Islands and Tsuen Wan District Councils, the Rural Committees, local organizations, professional institutes, environmental groups and other relevant stakeholder groups. In addition, two public forums were held. The community has enthusiastically responded to the proposals and given a lot of valuable comments and suggestions. We are carefully analysing the public feedback.

Responses to comments made in specific areas

Planning Policy and Intentions for Lantau

There is no change in Government policy and our planning intentions for Lantau. The Concept Plan for Lantau has followed the overarching principle of achieving sustainable development by balancing social, environmental and economic needs of Hong Kong under the Hong Kong 2030: Planning Vision and Strategy Study (the HK2030 Study). The proposals are in line with the three planning directions promulgated in the HK2030 Study, i.e. providing a quality living environment, enhancing economic competitiveness and strengthening links with the Mainland. Apart from conserving the beautiful countryside, the contribution that Lantau may make in logistics and tourism developments in Hong Kong and improving the cross boundary transport connection is also reckoned in the HK2030 Study.

The South West New Territories Recommended Development Strategy (SWNT RDS) endorsed by Government in 2001 has been taken as a basis in drawing up the Concept Plan. The vision of the RDS is to balance development and conservation needs, with particular emphasis on turning the sub-region, including Lantau and the outlying islands, into a tourist, recreation and leisure centre. This overall direction is adopted for the Concept Plan. The planning themes for Lantau set out in the RDS include a tourism and recreation hub in Northeast Lantau, an urban development area along the north shore, and conservation and sustainable recreational uses in South and Northwest Lantau. The Concept Plan has also taken into account latest planning circumstances, aspirations of the local community, development constraints in Lantau and other relevant

factors.

In gist, your comments that the Lantau Development Task Force is attempting to unilaterally change the planning intention for Lantau to property-led conventional development is groundless.

Balance of Development and Conservation Needs

In balancing the development and conservation needs, the Concept Plan proposes major economic infrastructure and tourism uses in North Lantau to optimise the use of the transport links and infrastructure. The other parts of Lantau are protected primarily for nature conservation and sustainable recreational and tourist uses, and the existing nature and rural character therein will be maintained. It cannot be said that no genuine balance is intended in the Concept Plan.

Recreation

In line with the SWNT RDS, the Concept Plan has set out proposals for recreation which are compatible with the characteristics of different parts of Lantau. As you have pointed out, Chapter 4 of the Hong Kong Planning Standards and Guidelines (HKPSG) sets out a set of definition and standards each for open space and recreation. For the “Green Open Space” mentioned in your letter, the conservation of the natural environment and the promotion of compatible countryside recreation such as cycling, hiking and eco-tourism in rural Lantau are in line with the intention for this type of green space. The provision of non-core recreation facilities is also encouraged. The proposals for more specialist types of recreation at North Lantau could not be said to be at variance with the planning standards. These recreational facilities, if taken forward, will be subject to detailed studies to ascertain their feasibility, and relevant requirements under the Environmental Impact Assessment Ordinance will also have to be complied with.

Regarding the Motor Racing Circuit mentioned in your letter, it is a proposal from the Hong Kong Automobile Association. This together with other proposals received in the public consultation will require detailed consideration.

In sum, a majority part of Lantau has been dedicated for nature protection and countryside recreation in the existing Lantau North and Lantau South Country Parks. With the improvement in the facilities and

accessibility, as proposed in the Concept Plan, there will be a real gain in public recreation opportunities in Lantau. For the proposed heritage and eco-trail from Tung Chung to Tai O, there is not yet any detailed design. If the proposal is to be taken forward, they would be carefully designed to tie in with the natural character of the area.

Conservation

The need to conserve high quality natural landscape, ecological habitats and cultural heritage sites has been a priority planning consideration in formulating the Concept Plan. Conservation is one of the major themes and the Concept Plan has set out proposals to meet such needs in Lantau.

The recommendations contained in the Conservation Strategy for Lantau issued by six environmental groups in 1998 have been submitted to the Lantau Development Task Force and given careful consideration during the preparation of the Concept Plan. Most of those areas identified as having high ecological values such as those in Tai Ho, Ngong Ping and South Lantau have been designated as Sites of Special Scientific Interest or protected under conservation related zonings on relevant statutory town plans. Tai Ho Stream and the adjacent valley have been designated as a priority site for enhanced conservation under the new nature conservation policy. The implementation of the Lantau North (Extension) Country Park and South Lantau Marine Park, which is one of the recommendations of the Conservation Strategy for Lantau, is also among the conservation proposals in the Concept Plan. We are considering the implementation timetable for designating the Lantau North (Extension) Country Park and the South West Lantau Marine Park. Government will continue to strengthen the protection of sites of conservation value in Lantau, as proposed in the Concept Plan.

We would like to clarify that the proposed Lantau North (Extension) Country Park is not a compensation measure for the Hong Kong International Airport. The proposed country park was identified as one of the 14 potential sites in the previous Territorial Development Strategy Review in 1993. The boundary of the proposed Lantau North (Extension) Country Park has taken into account views of the Islands District Council, Lantau Rural Committees, the relevant village representatives, various environmental concern groups and the Advisory Council on Environment through various consultation meetings. A portion of the coastal area at Hau Hok Wan was excised from the proposed

boundary in response to the suggestion of the Lantau Rural Committees. The Country and Marine Park Board was consulted and agreed to the draft map gazetted in 2001.

Sustainability Assessment

A preliminary sustainability assessment has been conducted for the Concept Plan. Planning Department will separately let you have a copy of the preliminary sustainability assessment. Further sustainability assessments will be conducted in the feasibility studies to be undertaken for projects selected to be taken forward. The overall cumulative environmental impacts of relevant projects will be assessed in the feasibility studies in accordance with relevant statutory requirements.

Rezoning for Development

The land use pattern included in the Concept Plan is conceptual in nature and there are no development details or rezoning proposals. The 'Green Belt/Countryside Area' shown on the Concept Plan are not development zonings. They signify vegetated and countryside areas at the suburban fringe to limit the sprawl of urban development. They are consistent with the planning intention for retaining the existing character of rural Lantau on the relevant statutory town plans. No major development is envisaged in the 'Green Belt/Countryside Area'. There is simply no basis to assume that such zoning will lead to loss of agricultural land or countryside in favour of property developments or "barrier of private property" along the South Lantau Coast and along Tai O Road and valley as alleged in your letter.

Resort Proposals

As for the resort proposals for South Lantau, the overall planning concept for the area is to preserve the high quality and ecologically sensitive natural environment. The proposed resort facilities aim at enhancing the leisure potential of the area without compromising its landscape and conservation values. It is intended that they would be low-rise and low-density and would be sensitively designed to harmonize with the surrounding natural setting. The implementation will be subject to market demand and detailed studies to confirm the feasibility and environmental acceptability. For the potential site at Tai Long Wan, marine access would be the main mode of transport, if the resort proposal is to be implemented.

New Town area at Tung Chung Valley

The Concept Plan proposes that Tung Chung would be a comprehensively planned new town for a population of around 220 000. Continuing development of the new town is necessary to provide for the population threshold to support the various community, commercial and transport facilities and services required by the residents. Adequate buffers will be maintained between the development areas and the adjacent Country Park and other ecologically sensitive areas in designing the new town.

Status of Certain Projects

The alignment of the Hong Kong section of the Hong Kong – Zhuhai – Macao Bridge (HZMB) and the infrastructure connecting it to the local network is being studied in an Investigation and Preliminary Design Study conducted by Highways Department. The Bridge is planned to land on Northwest Lantau near the San Shek Wan/Shalo Wan headland. This landing point has been most carefully chosen to minimize the ecological and other environmental impacts on Lantau Island. The alignments shown on the Concept Plan only indicate some of the possible alignments at this stage. The exact alignment will be further studied and will be subject to an Environmental Impact Assessment. The public will have the opportunity to offer their comments in due course.

For Container Terminal (CT) 10, no decision has been made on its location at this stage. The Study on Hong Kong Port Master Plan 2020 (HKP2020 Study) has identified two possible locations, namely, Northwest Lantau and Southwest Tsing Yi. Both sites have their pros and cons. As recommended in the HKP2020 Study, Government will conduct an ecological study on the Northwest Lantau site option to further assess its environmental suitability for constructing CT10. In parallel, we will update the Port Cargo Forecast to work out the optimal timing for constructing CT10. When a decision is made on the preferred site, a detailed Environmental Impact Assessment and feasibility study will have to be conducted to fulfill the various planning requirements. The public will be fully consulted on the proposed plan then. As there is no decision on the location of CT10, it is not appropriate to include the Northwest Lantau option in the Concept Plan.

The construction of an LNG Terminal in Hong Kong is a proposal of Castle Peak Power Company Limited/CLP Power. Soko

Islands is one of the sites currently under consideration by the company. It is therefore not appropriate to include the proposal in the Concept Plan.

Public Engagement

During the public consultation, we have actively engaged different stakeholders individually and collectively in the discussion of the Concept Plan. As mentioned at the beginning of my reply, we will carefully analyse and consolidate the public feedback for submission to the Task Force for considering the way forward. We will continue to listen to the views of the public with a view to mapping out the future development of Lantau jointly with the community.

Hope the above will answer your enquiries. If you have further questions, please do not hesitate to call me.

Yours sincerely,

(Miss Christine Chow)
Secretary, Lantau Development Task Force

c.c. Clerk to the Legislative Council Panel on Planning, Lands & Works
Advisory Council on the Environment
Secretary for Environment, Transport and Works
Secretary for Economic Development and Labour
Secretary for Home Affairs
Director of Planning
Director of Agriculture, Fisheries and Conservation
Director of Environmental Protection