

**A Concept Plan for Lantau**

**Submission by the Green Lantau Association on 22 November 2005 to the Legislative Councils Panels for Planning Lands and Works and the Environment**

Chairman and members of the Panels, the Green Lantau Association (GLA) is a voluntary association formed in 1989. As our name suggests, we are conservation minded about Lantau. In July 1998 we co-authored *A Conservation Strategy for Lantau*, copies of which have been provided to government.

We are grateful for the chance to present before the combined Panel today, and hope that our views can in some way influence the future of Lantau for the benefit of all Hong Kong people.

The process of planning is both a positive one and a necessary one, if we are to achieve the best possible outcome for our future. It is particularly so with Lantau, a magnificent and unique island, which is held in affection throughout the community. There are few who have never heard of Lantau, and generations of Hong Kong people have visited the monasteries, beaches, rural communities, watched the sunrise from Lantau Peak, traversed the superb hiking trails, and enjoyed the immense bio-diversity, of this our 'western green lung'.

Lantau has been long protected from 'development' by its relative isolation. However the advent of the airport at Chep Lap Kok and the accompanying highway and rail links have substantially altered that situation, and it is indeed timely that we look very carefully at the long term future of Lantau.

The planning process started in earnest in 2001 with the South West New Territories Development Strategy Review (SWNT DSR). Issued in July of that year after extensive public consultation, it placed Lantau, its islands and environs, fairly squarely on a conservation path. This was consistent with government intentions going back over 30 years, and was further confirmed in the 2030 planning studies.

In 2004 however, the planning process unfortunately started to go off the rails, when in an exceptional step, the then Chief Executive announced the formation of a Lantau Development Task Force (LDTF) whose remit was to fast track infrastructural developments on Lantau. This announcement was greeted with understandable shock by many in the community, which was aggravated by the subsequent closed door deliberations, and by its composition solely of civil servants.

There remains a deep-seated distrust of the LDTF, and dismay that the public driven planning process has been usurped.

In November of 2004, the LDTF issued a consultation document, the 'Lantau Concept Plan' (LCP). We in GLA were initially pleasantly surprised to see the LCP. We had expected simply development proposals, (and there were many), but accompanying these was an apparent recognition of conservation needs. Unfortunately, on closer study we found that the conservation aspects to be hollow words. Even the Lantau North Extension Country Park promised in the 1999 Chief Executive's Address, was conditional. There was a dearth of identified conservation goals, and the absence of any timetable on achieving these.

We expected, and our view is we believe, widely shared, that there must be first, a properly drawn up ‘Conservation Plan’ for Lantau, without which there can be no sustainable development.

The SWNT DSR is a strategic document, the LCP is not. The former includes the offshore islands and waters, the latter does not. The former allows a wider view to be taken, while the latter restricts our view to the land mass of Lantau only. Why is this an issue?

Firstly, it seems apparent that government is looking only to Lantau to provide the land for a whole slew of currently favoured development projects. Why only Lantau, we would ask, is it simply seen as an easy option? Is this consistent with the strategic view espoused by the Chief Executive in his 2005 Policy Address, which included elevating the importance of the Commission on Strategic Development? Why exclude the islands and adjacent waters - is this to avoid public discussion on the proposals to build CT 10 off Tai O, and a gas plant on the Soko Islands?

Secondly, when government talks of ‘striking a balance’ (a subjective phrase capable of wide interpretation), we would ask why the environment/development balance must be confined simply to Lantau? Surely we must have regard first to what we are carving up. Would we do this with the Mona Lisa, or on a local level, Mai Po?

The narrow focus on Lantau is detrimental to a balanced strategic vision for Hong Kong’s future, and particularly prejudicial to a proper consideration of the conservation value of Lantau in the proper and wider HK context.

Hong Kong is a mature society, endowed with a responsible, knowledgeable and rational populace. Increasingly, the top-down paternalistic approach to decision making does not sit well with us. We want to be part of the planning and envisioning of the Hong Kong of tomorrow. The 2030 Planning study was an example of facilitating discussion and achieving community feedback. However the ‘star achiever’ as it were, is the Council for Sustainable Development, which in 2004 conducted studies into 3 areas, Solid Waste Management, Renewable Energy, and Urban Living Space. Instead of presenting solutions, the Council presented issues, and formed stakeholder groups to discuss and envision. Over 2000 people participated and the results exceeded all expectations. The government is now about to issue a strategic document on solid waste management with the confident expectation that the best ideas have been collected and distilled.

How different it is with the LCP. Here we have a top-down paternalistic approach, a series of ‘Town Hall’ meetings where government played the defendant, and a consultation period spanning 3 public festivals, and two other major consultations (West Kowloon and Port 2020). Instead of an orderly and unhurried public envisioning of the future of Lantau in the form of concepts, we have been presented with the governments hurried collection of various site-specific short term development proposals. We believe the governments approach is fatally flawed.

We believe that the LDTF-driven top-down approach, must be replaced by a bottom-up community envisioning process, if we are serious about deciding the long term future for this magnificent island of Lantau, its waters and islands.

Chairman and members of the panels, we have not had the opportunity of studying the government response to the consultations. However the matters we have traversed today are unlikely to be altered. In brief summary we would suggest that :-

- (i) The future of Lantau be placed under the purview of the Council for Sustainable Development, to take forward the future of Lantau in a public envisioning process
- (ii) A 'Conservation Plan' for Lantau be drawn up to facilitate discussion
- (iii) All development plans for Lantau be stayed, until a community consensus is reached.

Thank you for hearing us

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