



Save Our Shorelines

拯救海岸

Tuesday, 22 November 2005

**To: The Legislative Council Panel on Planning, Lands and Works,  
Re: Re-Launch of Tamar Development Project**

Dear Members of the Legislative Council,

Save Our Shorelines is an active community group with its attention focused on the use, development, management and protection of Hong Kong's valuable shorelines. Our society takes particular exception to the proposals to undertake major construction development on the Tamar site and adjoining sites as indicated by current OZPs. We believe that these do NOT enhance the quality of life in Hong Kong and do not provide long-term benefits to the community. We take particular issue with the justifications presented to Legco in support of these plans.

A statement has been presented to you that the development of the Tamar site for Legco and Government use is 'generally accepted by the community'; however there is no evidence for this except the lack of objections at the time of rezoning in 2003. Lack of objection at that time does not indicate unconditional acceptance now. Public opinion has been clearly voiced over the last three years that the shorelines of Victoria Harbour need to be considered as a public resource and not as an opportunity for development by Government or the private sector.

In 2003 the then Chief Executive in a speech on October 17<sup>th</sup> stated that the reclamation was "only for one purpose, the construction of a bypass" and that no commercial buildings would be constructed on the reclamation site. Presentations by the Government as recently as last week indicate that this statement was simply untrue and that major development is planned. The CE further stated that: "there will be a sort of a park or promenade there" which has been lavishly illustrated by the government in many versions over the last few months. The public perception is therefore that they will be getting a Park. The government plans, however, indicate a 'public open space' but not a park at all. Several large blocks, including massive towers for the central government and Legco buildings are proposed, surrounded by a network of support roads and service areas, reducing the public spaces to a bare minimum strip directly along the shore. The landscaping is almost all hard and low-maintenance, providing unfriendly, open, exposed space with only limited appeal to public use. Access is severely limited by major roadways and the atmosphere will be polluted, windy and noisy. If the public were made aware of exactly what the results will be they will certainly NOT be generally accepting.

This is an opportunity to do better and to live up to the implied promises of 2003.

That the development of Tamar for government civic buildings is "optimal use of land" is simply not true. The land should instead be dedicated to open public parkland in line with similar projects constructed in Kaohsiung, Ningbo, Tokyo, New York and other shore and riverside cities. But then what of the space needs of the government? It is stated that government offices are overcrowded but what studies have been undertaken to prove that the existing space in government offices is being properly used? Most government offices are laid out using planning and work-pattern principles dating back twenty years or more. Contemporary office planning tools are designed specifically to make space more efficient in use and total area. Storage is often reduced by up to 60% in similar facilities, alternative workplace strategies allow for the construction of a variety of collaborative workplaces with fewer assigned desks where these are not essential. Space savings in administrative facilities can be as much as 30% overall on traditional patterns. With such initiatives there may well be no need to relinquish existing offices at CGO and Murray House, and therefore no need to build an entirely new facility at Tamar at great expense to the public.

Your briefing notes state that these older existing buildings cannot be renovated or upgraded to meet modern standards. This is simply untrue. Contemporary offices are moving towards wireless connectivity with building management systems supported on integrated analogue or Internet Protocol platforms which can be retrofitted easily into older buildings. Retrofitting and upgrading of power and air conditioning systems is similarly possible and has been undertaken in many buildings in Central in the past. Whilst some disruption is unavoidable the overall cost savings are enormous compared to the plans to rebuild entirely. Using such excuses for relocation from CGO, Legco and Murray Buildings are misleading, simplistic and misinformative.

Current principles of office planning in most major cities favour decentralisation, not a single central grouping. Disaster recovery, community connectivity and other reasons favour a more disparate arrangement of government services. Current and developing communications technology makes this even more effective and makes the central office somewhat outdated and inefficient. Government planners should look to the future of the office, not its past history.

The Tamar project has been deferred once already for financial reasons and SOS urges Legco to now propose its cancellation as it makes no sense to relocate all government offices into a single building on such a prime community asset. The only justification given for it in your briefing notes is that it fulfills the planning intentions previously approved in 2003. and that it frees up existing government offices to sell for additional revenue. Is this justification for the permanent loss of a truly effective and iconic Central Shoreline Park? Your notes state that the construction industry needs a boost but is this not a poor excuse and only a very short term solution to a much bigger problem that needs to be solved in other ways than this? Once Tamar is built the labour will be unemployed again and the opportunity to build a true community asset will be gone. Use the labour to build the park instead.

It is stated that the building of Tamar Government offices "accords with the long term interests of the community" but no evidence is given to support this claim. What interests are served by constructing multistorey blocks and all the road infrastructure needed to support them when that development destroys the shorelines that the community has clearly stated that it wants to have unencumbered access to? A shoreline park occupying the full reclamation site above the Central and Wanchai By-Pass would do that far more effectively.

The facts and options presented in support of the Tamar Government Offices development are deeply suspect and representative of out of date thinking in terms of building and land use. Endorsement of such proposals at this stage would remove for ever the opportunity to give Hong Kong a truly valuable shoreline resource – a true Harbourside Park. SOS respectfully requests that Legco members reject any proposals to relaunch the Tamar Development project.

Should there be an opportunity for a Public Forum on this subject SOS would welcome the opportunity to present options to the Legislative Council Panel on shoreline planning and effective use of existing office space.

Yours sincerely,



John Bowden  
Chair  
Save Our Shorelines

Save Our Shorelines

701 Hoseinee House, 69 Wyndham Street, Central, Hong Kong Tel:28930213 Fax: 31059713  
e-mail : [hksos@aol.com](mailto:hksos@aol.com)

<http://www.sos.org.hk>