

KAI TAK PLANNING REVIEWWRITTEN SUBMISSION FROM HONG KONG CIVIC DESIGN ASSOCIATION

1. The outcome of this process in both planning and urban design terms is very disappointing. The site in itself and its location adjacent to one of the world's great harbours represents an enormous opportunity for an inspirational urban design approach. This opportunity has resulted in an extensive 'planning review' that, for a variety of reasons, has failed to produce a plan of substance, coherence or stimulation. To state that this represents the "Community's Vision" is, to say the least, misleading. The public consultation feedback that lies at the centre of an extremely long and somewhat tortuous planning process, in several stages, has generated little of major significance, nor has it generated any real vision. This process does not in any way represent proper planning participation and there are no apparent mechanisms that can realistically review suggestions, evaluate them properly and accept or reject these in a proper context. Countless bodies who have proposed ideas or made suggestions might therefore begin to wonder what 'consultation' actually means.
2. The concept plan as it stands is virtually predetermined by government-imposed constraints as to straight and uninteresting waterfront profiles, fixed road corridors, etc. and reflects an obvious lack of enthusiasm to resolve some of the more obvious planning dichotomies. This of course, as in other cases, represents a fundamental weakness of the prevailing planning system, where urban design potential is compromised from the outset by having to juggle conflicting criteria, and where the planning outcome inevitably boils down to an overly simplistic 'zoning' plan.
3. There has been no attempt to call into question the judicial review of the badly drafted and massively restrictive Protection of the Harbour Ordinance, even though:
 - This means that the plan sacrifices the obvious potential to animate the water edge in a responsive way as happens in every other major 'world city' waterfront, and therefore fails to instigate a dynamic interface with the harbour;
 - The polluted Kai Tak Nullah is retained, even though this cannot be used for recreation, and therefore compromises the opportunities inherent in the area. In the process this flies in the face of both common sense and substantial local opposition to its retention; and
 - There are clear opportunities to use existing water bodies for marina type uses with an interesting interface with the waterfront e.g. the Kwun Tong Typhoon Shelter, and the inner part of To Kwa Wan shelter, which have been ignored.
4. The cruise terminal is planned parallel to the 'runway' thereby creating a long and sterile stretch of waterfront. This runs alien to the most effective design of cruise terminals elsewhere in the world that utilize both sides of a terminal 'pier', thereby creating not merely functional solutions but interesting and dynamic ones in a design sense, so that such a facility can become both a landmark and a new public place.
5. The stadium design and the interface between different component uses is rather compromised, as these are bisected by a major road corridor. The major stadium should be set against the waterfront, to establish a powerful multi-use 'landmark', well

integrated with other active water-edge uses and spaces (ref Melbourne and San Francisco).

6. The illustrative plans, in terms of individual layout areas, are very crude and would be very unlikely to be implemented in the form shown. As set out they are simply ‘artists impressions’ with absolutely no conceptual relationship between the actual planning outcome – a draft Outline Development Plan, and any government commitment as to how this might or could be interpreted in practice to produce really good waterfront environment. The sketches themselves are so poor, and so totally lacking in any ability to convey information as to form or character, that they defy any rational comment.

THE WAY FORWARD

We would propose a complete re-think of the urban design criteria for this area. It is in our view likely that common sense on the reclamation of Kai Tak Nullah might, in the end, prevail. This is itself should entail a new planning re-think. This needs to be based not on a range of poor compromises, but on a stimulating urban design redolent of Hong Kong’s ‘world city’ aspirations. We would propose ten initiatives as a starting point that might help to achieve this :

1. The definition of compelling and over-riding public need in relation to new harbour reclamation must be extended to include the creation of a world-class waterfront for the benefit of the public and the city as a whole. A policy of ‘no net water loss’ should be applied – i.e. a principal that while some water area might be lost through reclamation in one area, it is compensated for in another. However ‘pier’ structures, marina uses, and boardwalks that extend over the water should not be classified as harbour infill.
2. Preliminary technical assessments indicate that even after the adoption of mitigation measures, the Kai Tak Approach Channel would still suffer contamination and fail to meet water quality standards for recreation. In its existing form, the channel therefore forms both an environmental and planning constraint and it is proposed that it be reclaimed in order to improve urban design, connectivity and open space provision. A drainage culvert should instead link the existing nullah to the west of Prince Edward Road on a curvilinear alignment to Kowloon Bay, which will allow a landscaped walkway system above. Various components associated with this have already been designed as part of a separate study, including tidal gates, desilting operation working areas, opening access, entrance ramps and food relief paths.
3. Both the spatial context and key development components indicate the need for a linked series of urban ‘quarters’, each with a distinct sense of place, attraction and landmark quality. Making this work in both a functional and dynamic way requires a strong but diverse and environmentally-friendly connective structure for pedestrian movement.
4. The proposed Central Kowloon Route and Trunk Road T2 should be in immersed tunnel sections as far as possible, although this will require some restrictions on development in order to avoid engineering conflict.
5. The To Kwa Wan Typhoon Shelter area in Kowloon Bay should be replaced and the inner Ho Sham area should house a purpose-designed marina for a new Kowloon Yacht Club and recreational focal point, with the public pier repositioned.
6. The Kwun Tong Typhoon Shelter should primarily take the form of a marine leisure basin in relation to adjoining facilities and water edge uses, but could be used in typhoon conditions as an emergency shelter.

7. The Cruise Terminal should form the main component of a coherent tourism node associated with a 'critical mass' of compatible visitor uses. This landmark structure should extend into the harbour as a 'pier' structure, providing berths on either side, freeing up the waterfront edge and establishing an axial 'finger' of pedestrian connection, cultural and leisure uses that complement the terminal design itself.
8. The new Hong Kong Stadium should represent a constant multi-event urban 'place' and an identifiable and symbolic city destination associated with the new waterfront, both functionally and spatially. Its multi-modal capacity must generate a strong image associated with integral entertainment and recreational functions which will contribute to waterfront vitality.
9. Broad massing of development should embody a gradation in height across the area, establishing relatively low-rise building groups along the waterfront, respecting the critical encapsulation of the area within the ridgeline backcloth, and facilitating visual and open space corridors in relation to neighbouring areas.
10. Neighbourhood quarters should, as far as possible, represent areas of mixed uses, redolent of the diversity, contrast and street incident found in Hong Kong's older urban environment. In this regard there should be scope for different scales of development and opportunities for different types of built fabric, to help produce an environment of contrast, variety and diversity. Reclamation of the nullah would allow for greater freedom of layout and a potential reduction in development scale, so that new urban streets and spaces could realistically be designed to showcase a new Hong Kong urbanity rather than a sequence of 'tower and podium' estates.