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Panel on Economic Development
Meeting on 14 December 2010

Updated background brief on the Aberdeen Tourism Project

Purpose

This paper provides background information on the Aberdeen Tourism Project (the Project) and summarizes Members' views and concerns expressed on related issues.

Background

Initial Concept Plan for the Project

2. Aberdeen Typhoon Shelter retains some features of a traditional fishing port and is a popular tourist attraction where visitors can take sampan rides for sightseeing and observe the lifestyle and marriage customs of fishing folks.
3. In May 2002, the interdepartmental "Task Force on Redevelopment of Ocean Park (OP) and Tourist Attractions in Aberdeen" chaired by the Financial Secretary was set up to oversee the future development of OP and the development of Aberdeen tourism node. On the basis of the redevelopment plan of OP submitted to the Government in March 2005, the Planning Department drew up an updated planning framework for the Aberdeen Harbour. To complement OP's redevelopment plan, the Tourism Commission (TC) formulated an initial concept plan for the Project.
4. The initial concept plan comprises three thematic clusters: the traditional fishing harbour along the Aberdeen and Ap Lei Chau Promenade, Fisherman's Wharf at Tai Shue Wan proposed for development by OP, and the existing leisure and dining node off the coast of Sham Wan as the linkage. The scope of the Project will include both hardware (e.g. enhancement works) and

software (e.g. development of more structured sampan tours and traditional cultural walks) with a view to bringing out the unique character of Aberdeen and enhancing its tourism appeal.

5. TC consulted the Southern District Council (SDC) in June 2005 and received their support on using "traditional fishing harbour" as the theme of tourism development in Aberdeen. At the end of 2005, TC conducted a consultation exercise on the initial concept plan to solicit the views of the stakeholders, including members of SDC and local organizations, representatives from fishermen groups, sampan and "kaido" operators, the travel and relevant trades.

Initial Conceptual Design for the Project

6. On the basis of the feedback received during the consultation exercise, TC appointed a consultant in late 2006 to develop a conceptual design for the Project. In mid 2007, the consultant completed the conceptual design which was a preliminary study outlining the broad directions for consideration during detailed planning. The key features included re-developing and revitalizing both sides of the Aberdeen harbour under the theme of "Fisherman's Wharf" and developing exhibition facilities based on the theme of "traditional fishing harbour".

7. In 2007 and early 2008, TC consulted the local community and held discussions with the catering and property development sectors and other stakeholders on the conceptual design and to explore the feasibility of a private sector participation in the Project¹. In view of the diversified views received, TC appointed a financial consultant to assess the commercial and financial viability of the conceptual plan in early 2008. The study was completed at the end of March 2009.

8. According to the findings and assessment of the financial consultant, the Project is only marginally viable even under favorable economic conditions and with a substantial increase in commercial elements. Otherwise, it is unlikely to attract private sector participation. However, substantial increase in commercial elements would displace existing recreation facilities and open space, and affect the view along the waterfront of Aberdeen which is appreciated by long-haul market visitors as an oriental fishermen's village rich in related heritage and culture. Based on these considerations, the consultant did not consider it appropriate to increase the commercial elements of the Project. The executive summary of the financial consultancy report is given in Annex I of CB(1)1344/08-09(05).

¹ Source: Website of Tourism Commission
(http://www.tourism.gov.hk/english/current/current_aberdeen.html)

Beautification works of the Aberdeen and Ap Lei Chau Promenade

9. To showcase the characteristics of a fisherman's village, TC considered it more pragmatic for the Government to fund the beautification works of the promenade on both sides of the Aberdeen Harbour and Ap Lei Chau Main Street. The scope of works proposed by the Administration in April 2009 (LC Paper No. CB(1)1344/08-09(05)) included the following: -

- (a) improving passenger boarding or disembarking facilities, redesigning/constructing hard and soft landscapes to highlight the theme of a fishermen's village and provide additional plantings, so that visitors can enjoy the unique ambience of a fishermen's village in Aberdeen;
- (b) erecting additional signage and set up kiosk(s) for selling snacks and souvenirs, and providing visitors with various travel information, particularly on the traditional culture of Aberdeen and the customs of fishing villages;
- (c) carrying out landscape improvement works along the waterfront area of Ap Lei Chau, and setting up display boards to promote the temples of traditional fishermen's villages (including Hung Shing Temple and Tin Hau Temple) to facilitate visits to these temples; and
- (d) enhancing the streetscapes of Ap Lei Chau Main Street and other adjacent streets by providing architectural lighting and additional signage, beautifying the road surface and increasing the number of landscape displays, so as to attract the private sector to develop or enhance the area into a shopping and dining district for visitors.

Long term development

10. In addition to the proposed beautification works, the Government has also undertaken to further explore different ways to enhance the attractiveness of Aberdeen waterfront in the long run, which include –

- (a) developing a dining cum entertainment zone featuring seafood cuisine at part of the waterfront of northeastern Ap Lei Chau;
- (b) developing the Aberdeen Wholesale Fish Market into a tourist attraction and providing seafood restaurants at the market; and

- (c) re-vitalizing "Category III" stationary vessels along the Aberdeen Promenade.

Views/suggestions of Legislative Council Members about the Project

Panel on Economic Development

11. At the meeting of the Panel on Economic Development on 27 April 2009, members expressed disappointment with the Administration's decision to abandon the development of the "Fisherman's Wharf" under the Aberdeen Tourism Project after having taken more than eight years' time to conduct relevant studies. Panel members considered that economic downturn was an unjustified excuse for dropping the original Project. While agreeing to the immediate beautification of the promenade, members considered that the provision of a "Fisherman's Wharf" in Aberdeen would enhance Hong Kong's tourist attractions, in particular among visitors from long-haul markets. On the financial viability of the Project, members considered that it should be assessed in terms of the positive impacts on tourism and the overall economic benefits it would bring. Some members also queried the methodology adopted in assessing the financial viability of the original Project, such as assuming it would involve large scale commercial activities, single ownership or simplified management structure, coherent style and theme of development, and distributing questionnaires to key developers and industry bodies only. They suggested that the Government should consider funding the Project wholly or partially to enhance its viability.

12. Given the high expectation of the local residents and members of the public for the implementation of the original Project and the need to revitalize the tourism industry, the Panel passed a motion urging the Government to re-consider its decision and implement the Project as soon as possible.

Council question

13. Hon Paul TSE raised a Legislative Council (LegCo) question at the Council meeting on 20 October 2010, enquiring about the Government's latest position in the development of the "Fisherman's Wharf". The Administration responded that they had never given up the plan of developing Aberdeen into a popular tourist attraction. To showcase the ambience of Aberdeen as a fishing village and enhance its tourism appeal, the Administration discussed with SDC the construction of a promenade on both sides of the Aberdeen Harbour and beautifying Ap Lei Chau Main Street and adjacent streets with the theme of a fishermen's village. The Administration planned to consult SDC on the design and the works schedule in November 2010.

LegCo Members' Meeting with SDC

14. At LegCo Members' Meeting with SDC on 8 July 2010, SDC members urged that upon the completion of the beautification works, the Administration should implement measures to maintain the continuous attraction of the Southern District to visitors. They supported the development of seafood restaurants at the works site under the Ap Lei Chau Bridge which would be vacated by 2015. To tie in with the development, SDC members considered it necessary to address issues relating to the associated transport facilities, including waterborne transport services. Hon Tanya CHAN, Hon Regina IP, Hon CHAN Kin-por and Hon WONG Yung-kan supported the proposal to transform the Aberdeen Wholesale Fish Market into a fishing harbour featuring a combination of restaurants, fish wholesale and tourism.

15. A case conference on the overall direction of tourism development in the Southern District was held on 21 October 2010. Members expressed concerns about developing the Aberdeen wholesale Fish Market into a tourist attraction featuring seafood dining and developing the land adjacent the waterfront of northeastern Ap Lei Chau as well as re-vitalizing "Category III" stationary vessels.

Latest developments

16. At the Panel meeting on 14 December 2010, the Administration will brief members on the design and works schedule of the beautification works of the Aberdeen and Ap Lei Chau Promenade. Subject to the funding approval of the Finance Committee in February 2011, the improvement works is estimated to be completed in phases from 2012-2013 onwards.

References

17. The relevant papers are available at the following links:-

Consultation on Initial Concept Plan for the Aberdeen Tourism Project
http://www.tourism.gov.hk/resources/english/paperreport_doc/consultancy/2005-10-26/InformationPaper_on_ATP_-_for_uploading_-_Eng_-_final.pdf

Administration's paper on "Aberdeen Tourism Project"
<http://www.legco.gov.hk/yr08-09/english/panels/edev/papers/edev0427cb1-1344-5-e.pdf>

Paper on the Aberdeen Tourism Project prepared by the Legislative Council Secretariat (Background brief)
<http://www.legco.gov.hk/yr08-09/english/panels/edev/papers/edev0427cb1-1344-6-e.pdf>

Minutes of the Panel meeting on 27 April 2009

<http://www.legco.gov.hk/yr08-09/english/panels/edev/minutes/edev20090427.pdf>

The Administration's reply to Hon Paul TSE dated 20 October 2010

http://www.tourism.gov.hk/resources/english/paperreport_doc/press/2010-10-22/eng_lcq2_20101021.pdf

Tourism Commission

http://www.tourism.gov.hk/english/current/current_aberdeen.html

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