

Enhancing Land Supply Strategy: Reclamation outside Victoria Harbour and Rock Cavern Development

Introduction

Our understanding of the objective of the strategy is to meet the demand for public and private housing sites. Reclamation and rock caverns would be a way to increase the supply of land as part of a long term strategy to cope with future needs. Additional benefits would arise from the potential for disposal of surplus public fill and of contaminated mud and also the ability to locate certain facilities to less sensitive locations. Government has also stated there is the need to provide land for suitable industries for the future economy.

The British Chamber of Commerce Construction Industry Group is generally in support of initiatives that enable Hong Kong to better use its limited land resource.

Our specific comments on the currently proposed methods of enhancing land supply are given below.

General

A key aspect of the strategy will be in forecasting realistically the growth in population in Hong Kong over the planning horizon for the current studies on this strategy. This will be a complicated exercise given the changing demographics of Hong Kong's population and the greater integration currently taking place with the Mainland.

There is a clear and present need to optimise the use of the land we currently have available through redevelopment and rezoning. The ultimate aim must be the regeneration of some of Hong Kong's older urban areas with a particular emphasis on lowering building density and creating more open space. There are significant challenges in achieving these goals but it is important that they are not put to one side in favour of the new initiatives that may be perceived as being easier to implement.

There will also be a need to demonstrate that the forecast population cannot be accommodated in vacant land already available in the urban area or in parts of the New Territories that remain to be developed. It will also be important that any new developments are carried out in a sustainable manner, both during construction and also in the longer term. In particular, they should be fully integrated with our public transport systems and be easily provided with other necessary services. This may be a challenge for development of more remote sites.

Rock Cavern Development

The benefits of locating certain Government facilities into caverns in order to free up valuable land for other uses are fully supported. There are already a number of examples in Hong Kong where this approach has been successfully implemented.

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The challenges will be in identifying those facilities that can be readily located in cavern. Sites freed up should be integrated into the planning for the whole surrounding area to determine the best use of the sites even if this may result in a use that does not generate the greatest financial return to offset the cost of constructing a new facility underground.

The Hong Kong construction industry is well placed to face the challenges of design and building these new underground facilities. For example, two new stations are currently under construction on the MTRCL's West Island Line.

New Reclamations

New reclamation areas have already been identified for major projects under planning in Hong Kong including the Third runway at Chek Lap Kok (if the EIA is approved) and the Integrated Waste Management Facility. It is expected that such uses will continue to be identified and progressed as normal. These will allow a certain amount of projected surplus public or contaminated fill to be accommodated.

It will be necessary to demonstrate that any new reclamation is justified for public or private housing uses by:

- Showing that there is a clear need for these additional areas as available resources on land are insufficient.
- Demonstrating the need for, and benefits of, accommodating public fill or contaminated fill in these new reclamations.
- Assessing the environmental impacts of reclamation. It is recognized that any development on land will also likely have environmental impacts.

The Hong Kong construction industry also has all the necessary skills to construct these reclamations and associated structures and a desire to continue to develop innovative solutions to mitigate the impacts of their construction.

We would expect that more meaningful feedback could be provided to you once your strategy has been further developed and specific options have been developed for comment.