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HKIUD Position Paper on Stage 3 Public Engagement for North East New Territories New Development Areas

HKIUD has the following views with respect to the Stage 3 Public Engagement Digest (PE Digest) for the North East New Territories New Development Areas (NENT-NDAs) Planning and Engineering Study.

General

HKIUD welcome and support the proposed new development in NENT to enable the continuous long term social and economic developments in Hong Kong and to respond to the over-whelming community demands for new housing and employment opportunities. We urge the Government to carry out an overview of the long-term housing strategy including Hong Kong overall needs taking into account all factors in a holistic approach. On the other hand, Hong Kong must increase our land supply with long term strategy and programme. It will take decades for virgin land to be available for new housing (both public and private) and new urban area/buildings after going through the process of public engagement, planning, infrastructure work and utilities provision. Hong Kong must "act" now and shall not debate endlessly.

However, there are several issues that need to be addressed in order to ensure the NENT-NDAs to achieve the vision and missions established in stages 1 & 2 with all stakeholders.

1. Vision and Missions

It is important that the vision and missions established in the first two (1 and 2) stages of the public engagement shall be withheld and reinforced in the 3rd stage public engagement. It shall be clearly re-instated in the consultation document to enable the community and the general public to assess and determine whether or not they have been achieved, enhanced and reinforced in the formulation of the development plans

2. Urban Design

HKIUD found it encouraging that urban design principles are being applied in the proposed development plans although there are still rooms for improvement. These principles include stepped (variation in) building height and density design, establishment of local focal points and view corridors, green environment and ventilation corridors, breezeways, public open space with commercial activities, pedestrian connectivity and activities, walking and cycle-track networks, etc. The following are some aspects that we consider necessary for further and better improvement in the proposed outline development plans:



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2.1 Walkable urban area

The proposed outline development plans spent much attention on pedestrian & cycle-track networks. However, the proposed pedestrian circulation & activities are focusing only on vehicular circulation. The walkability of an urban area is an important aspect of urban design that will enhance the quality of living in the area. Walkability deserves equal, if not more, emphasis in the circulation planning of the outline development plans. The quality of the urban spaces with the required amenities along the route that people walk on foot will encourage more people to take a walk in certain paths within the distance that they are willing to walk (usually within 500m) say, between the Railway stations/bus stops/other transportation hubs and the individual buildings.

2.2 Variety and changes in building heights

We strongly believe that building heights should be varied. The proposal that building height gradually decrease from the town centre(s) to the peripheral countryside should not be so rigid as illustrated in the proposed outline development plans. It shall be varied without a "rigid" formula. Control of building heights without any "rooms for diversity, flexibility and variation" in the plot ratios and height restriction would only create a new type of "wall buildings" with same height in a row, as illustrated now in the various photomontages in the PE Digest. Apart from adjusting the maximum building heights with respect to the desired plot ratios, another important tool to facilitate the creation of variety and vibrant cityscape with building heights is to sub-divide the supersize land lots into smaller ones which will avoid the repeated hugh podium, shopping mall with residential towers type of development. Podium-free development as targeted in the Kai Tak Development should be a good reference base.

2.3 Focal points and landmark buildings versus "ordinary" buildings

Focal points and landmark buildings may help in defining the town centres and entrances to major public open spaces. However this is not the only means to establish the identity and orientation in the urban area. Quality urban spaces with unique character are more important. It is absolutely unnecessary that the other "ordinary" buildings should repeat over large extent of land, as shown in the various photomontages in the PE Digest.

2.4 Mixed-use developments

The "mixed-use developments" must include provisions and allowances for the small businesses to co-exist with the bigger ones. In particular, it would only beneficial for the nearby residents if commercial uses, with flexibility in the types of business, are allowed at pedestrian levels in all R2 areas, in addition to R 1c and R 2c ones. As for Kwu Tung North town centre, it is not clear how the 14 ha of "Commercial, Research

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and Development” zone would eventually be disposed of and developed. It is not possible with the information currently available to envisage how the ultimate built form would look like. Perhaps, some indication on the theme would help building up consensus on the character of the new development, such as high tech area or environmental demonstration or service industry, etc.

3. Sustainability

The proposed NENT-NDAs are, apart from Lok Ma Chau Loop, the only major and intensive development areas in the northern New Territories close to the border. The long term development strategy of the NENT should allow flexibility and possibility for future opening up of the rural hinterland (as increasing pressure by the general public recently) which are yet undeveloped areas in the NT. Any further new developments in this region should follow the territory-wide mass public-transport-based development strategy instead of by subsequent haphazard incremental developments. The proposed plot ratios in the NENT-NDAs should be suitably high to meet the long term demand of Hong Kong, without the need to repeat the same exercise for more NDAs in the short run.

4. Environmental issues

The carbon reduction strategies identified in the PE Digest are good principles and guidelines only. They need to be implemented in both the regional planning levels and the individual building design levels. One example is that provision for renewable energy supplies for high-density developments are usually more effectively in a regional level than a local district level. Energy efficient and sustainable building design (SBD), on the other hand, is much better implemented through the control at the building design level with the compliance to assessment standards and guidelines such as BEAM Plus by HKGBC and SBD Guidelines by Buildings Department. Policies, innovative mechanisms and incentives should be established to induce stakeholders to participate and contribute for implementation of the NENT-NDAs.

Innovative and district based infrastructure should be considered to harness use of recycling technologies, hence deriving at a lower carbon footprint embracing both the public and private developments. Within the development zone whereby supply of seawater is not yet available, provision of in-district grey water system should be considered to cover the demand from increased population, the cultivation and other related industries. Appropriate allocation of space at strategic locations should be identified now for waste collection and recycling.

It is not clear what is the relationship between the Kwu Tung North NDA and the “ Sustainable Development Corridor ” to its west (as shown on page 4 of the PE Digest), and how Kwu Tung North would contribute to it or vice versa.

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5. Land Use

It is noted that some of the proposed land uses shown in the proposed outline development plans do not seem rational vis-à-vis the objectives of the NDAs. These include:

5.1 Low-density developments

Proposed uses like low-density housing development (R4) and agriculture near the centres of the NDAs are not efficient uses of land resources. They do not efficiently utilize the infrastructure provided for the NDAs centre. The Government should relocate and provide low-density accommodation and the cultivated lands for the indigenous village residents affected by the NENT-NDAs in a more appropriate location "in situ".

5.2 Special industries and the employment opportunity

One of the strategic roles of the NENT-NDAs is to provide land resources for special industries and the industries that Hong Kong possess advantages. More land/area should be allocated for such purposes. The current proposed area percentages are 7.7% overall and 5.3%, 0%, and 21.1% respectively in Kwu Tung North, Fanling North, and Ping Che / Ta Kwu Ling. We considered that it is not adequate to fulfill its strategic role. More commercial and special industrial uses should be also provided which will create more employment opportunities in the areas, allowing in-district employment. This is an important aspect for the development of a socially equitable, environmentally sustainable and financial viable new urban community in the North East New Territory of Hong Kong.

5.3 Provision for cultivation land

There is currently demand from the affected stakeholders for resite and aids for re-establishment of cultivation. These cultivation land can serve as the urban fringe leisure facilitates cum hobby farming, or eco tourism or educational purpose in the fringe areas. It appears natural and rational to assign land for such use at the peripheral edge of the NDAs, both in terms of spatial distribution and compatibility of various uses, apart from the economic use of infrastructure as mentioned in 5.1 above.

6 Others

6.1 Partial / segmentation of NENT-NDA development plan

HKIUD strongly disagree with the recent suggestion that the NENT-NDA to be partially implemented or segmented into different phases / areas. This suggestion is obviously contravene to the comprehensive and holistic planning and design

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approach for the NENT. This partial / segmentation proposal will cause long-term damages to future NENT, losing the benefit of comprehensive planning and economy of scale.

6.2 Government's duty to ensure peace and rationality for public engagement of NENT

HKIUD regret to note the recent violence and threatening approach in the public forum held for the NENT -NDA. We believe that for a civilized community as Hong Kong, all participants and stakeholders in public forum and workshop shall voice out their views, agreement or disagreement, and / or the difficulties / adverse impact that may affect them due to the NENT-NDAs proposal in a peaceful and rational approach. The government has the duties to ensure that all participants and stakeholders are not attacked or threatened by others with different views and everyone shall respect others in the public forum and / or workshop.

6.3 Opportunity for stakeholders to select their "life-style"

It is the government's duty to ensure that all those residents and / or owners of the NENT development area are able to choose and / or continue the "life-style" that they select, through proper re-allocation of land at appropriate locations.

**Hong Kong Institute of Urban Design
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