



康樂及文化事務署
Leisure and Cultural Services Department

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本署檔號 OUR REF: LCS 21/17/HQ 846/03 (20)
來函檔號 YOUR REF: CB4/PAC/R72

27 May 2019

Mr Anthony CHU
Legislative Council Secretariat
Legislative Council Complex
1 Legislative Council Road
Central, Hong Kong

Dear Mr CHU,

**Public Accounts Committee
Consideration of Chapter 2 of the Director of Audit's Report No. 72
Management of Greening Master Plans**

Thank you for your letter of 15 May 2019, referring the views of the Public Accounts Committee for "Chapter 2 of the Director of Audit's Report No. 72 – Management of Greening Master Plans". We would like to provide our response to the matters set out in the Appendix (both Chinese and English versions).

Should you have any enquiries, please contact me or Mr CHUNG Wah-hing, Senior Leisure Manager (Landscape) at 2601 8915.

Yours sincerely

(Ms Wendy OR)

for Director of Leisure and Cultural Services

Encl.

c.c. Secretary for Development (fax no. 2147 3691)
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Director of Audit (fax no. 2583 9063)

**Report No.72 of the Director of Audit
Chapter 2 – Management of Greening Master Plans**

**Response from the Leisure and Cultural Services Department
to Public Accounts Committee**

Part 1: Introduction

- 20) Regarding paragraph 1.13, why is there no breakdown of the cost solely for maintenance of greening works under Greening Master Plans (GMPs)?

Leisure and Cultural Services Department (LCSD)'s Response

LCSD is dedicated to the promotion of greening, enhancement of landscape planting and beautification of the environment. In addition to planting and maintenance of vegetation in venues, parks, gardens and roadside amenity areas under its purview, LCSD also collaborates with the Civil Engineering and Development Department (CEDD) by taking over the maintenance of greening works implemented by CEDD under GMPs. As the majority of greening works under GMPs are located at roadside areas (some in newly established planting areas, some adjacent to roadside planting currently maintained by LCSD, some even in existing planting beds), LCSD would, after taking over the greening works under GMPs, put these plants together with the adjacent vegetation under daily maintenance by its front-line staff or horticultural maintenance contractors. As no separate maintenance is provided for greening works under GMPs, no breakdown of the cost for such work is available.

Part 3: Handover and Maintenance of Greening Works under GMPs

- 21) Regarding paragraph 3.7, please inform this Committee of the following:
- (a) While CEDD and LCSD have different definitions of trees and different measurement bases for shrubs, posing a serious hindrance to the handover, how will the problem be solved?
 - (b) How will the Department ensure proper keeping of handover records by its staff?

LCSD's Response

- (a) CEDD and LCSD have different definitions of trees. CEDD adopted classification by plant species as set out in the "Check List of Hong Kong Plants" published by the Agriculture, Fisheries and Conservation Department. In addition to the classification mentioned above, LCSD also makes reference to the Technical Circular of the Development Bureau (DEVB) on tree preservation requirements (DEVB TC(W) No. 7/2015) for the definition of trees, by which a plant is classified as a tree only if its diameter at breast height (DBH) (measured at a height of 1.3m) is 95mm or more. For such trees, a tree risk assessment has to be conducted at least once a year. However, since most of the trees planted by CEDD under GMPs were young trees with DBH less than 95mm, the number of trees handed over by CEDD and the number of trees taken over by LCSD were different.

As for shrubs, CEDD adopted the number of shrubs as the unit of quantity for handover, whereas LCSD adopted the size of planting area as the unit of quantity for takeover. CEDD used the number of shrubs for the sake of cost calculation for purchasing and monitoring of contractors' planting work. At the time of the handover, the shrubs had grown up after one year's establishment period. It was likely that each shrub had developed new plantlets that could hardly be identified separately. Moreover, shrubs are planted in large numbers, usually in tens of thousands, making it impractical and not cost effective to count them one by one during the handover. Besides, it is also a common practice in the field of horticulture that plant maintenance contractors use planting area as a unit in calculating the tender cost for shrub maintenance. In view of the above, LCSD, as a department responsible for plant maintenance, adopts shrub planting area as a unit for takeover.

Although CEDD and LCSD adopted different units for counting the number of trees and measuring shrubs with regard to their actual operational needs, it did not affect LCSD's taking over and maintenance of greening works under GMPs. During the handover, CEDD would issue memoranda/letters with record drawings to LCSD. LCSD would base on these documents to confirm the species of plants and the quantity and location of the trees before taking over all the plants, and arrange its staff or contractors to carry out daily horticultural maintenance work such as watering, weeding, pruning and fertilising.

LCSD and CEDD will work out a common form of plant handover records for future use upon completion of the projects of Southwest and

Northeast New Territories, so as to cater for the different operational needs of the works department and maintenance department.

(b) In future, LCSD will keep the relevant handover records properly and input all information on the trees taken over into its Tree Data Bank System to record the number of such trees. As for shrubs, since it would be impractical and not cost-effective to count the shrubs one by one during the handover, LCSD will continue to use planting area as the unit in handover records.

22) It is stated in paragraph 3.17 that “there were no replanting plan for some of these locations due to the dense planting conditions”. Please tell this Committee how the Department determines if the planting conditions are dense.

LCSD’s Response

LCSD will make reference to DEVB’s tree maintenance guidelines for the proper planting practice and arrange replanting as appropriate according to the “right-species-at-the-right-place” principle, and take into account factors such as the height and size of the tree when mature and sufficiency of space for growth. For example, when the crown of a tree overlaps with that of an adjacent tree, the understorey plants will be overshadowed and their exposure to sunlight will be reduced, which is undesirable for the healthy growth of these plants. In such case, replanting between these two trees is not recommended.

23) In Case 4 in paragraph 3.19, CEDD planted 200 trees of *Juniperus chinensis* “Kaizuca” (龍柏) at the median strip of a road in Sham Shui Po in June 2011. However, all the 200 *Juniperus chinensis* “Kaizuca” planted at Location E under the works contract had been removed as at December 2018. Please inform this Committee of the time when LCSD staff normally carried out plant maintenance work and the difficulties encountered that resulted in the removal of all the 200 trees.

LCSD’s Response

Plants are living organisms and their health conditions are affected by various external factors which may even cause death. These external factors include the micro-climatic conditions, soil quality, traffic flow and even human damage in the planting area. The *Juniperus chinensis* “Kaizuca” planted in

the planters at the median strip of the road were subject to a number of environmental limitations and challenges: the planters were relatively narrow and unfavourable for plant growth; the location of the planters on a road with busy traffic had posed certain limitations on the daily plant maintenance work such as watering, pruning, fertilising and pest and disease control, thus exposing these plants under greater environmental pressure than ordinary roadside plants planted on the ground. After years of maintenance, the plants were eventually removed due to undesirable growth. At the present stage, it is difficult to ascertain the actual reasons for the undesirable growth of the plants at that time. Drawing from the experience, LCSD has grown plants which are more tolerant of harsh environment and stepped up plant maintenance work for that location. LCSD will share its experience and difficulties in carrying out daily maintenance for plants at that location with CEDD, so as to take forward the greening works under GMP for the New Territories more effectively.

- 24) In Case 5 in paragraph 3.19, CEDD planted 3 trees of *Michelia x alba* along a pavement in Kowloon City in June 2011. In January 2019, all these 3 trees had been removed. Please inform this Committee of the following:
- (a) LCSD remarked that after receiving the handover records from CEDD, the trees were damaged by a typhoon on 1 July 2013 before the data of these trees were recorded in its tree inventory (i.e. Tree Data Bank System). Did LCSD discover similar problems in the past? Has communication with relevant departments been enhanced to share its tree maintenance experiences?
 - (b) Location F was very windy and not suitable for replanting of replacement trees. Were the weather-related effects on trees taken into account during the development of GMPs?

LCSD's response

- (a) It was unfortunate that the trees were damaged by a typhoon right after the handover. There were no similar records in the past. LCSD considered that the location was not suitable for replanting of replacement trees as it was relatively windy. Other low-growing shrubs were therefore replanted to maintain the original greening area. LCSD will share its tree maintenance experiences with relevant works departments and provide its views according to the “right-species-at-the-right-place” principle.

- (b) Healthy growth of trees is subject to challenges of micro-climate of specific locations. In developing GMPs for Southwest and Northeast New Territories, LCSD will closely communicate with CEDD to share its experiences and problems encountered in daily plant maintenance at different planting locations, so as to select the suitable planting locations and plant species to facilitate effective and sustainable greening works.
- 25) It is stated in paragraph 3.19(c) that “LCSD had not issued any guidelines requiring its staff to make reference to the greening themes and the plant palettes of GMPs for replanting of trees and shrubs during maintenance.” Please inform this Committee of the following:
- (a) Will LCSD issue guidelines requiring its staff to make reference to the greening themes and the plant palettes of GMPs for replanting of trees and shrubs during maintenance in future? If not, what are the reasons?
 - (b) Further to the above question, if such guidelines are to be issued, will any of the staff responsible for the above work check staff’s compliance with the guidelines? If non-compliance is found, how will it be followed up?

LCSD’s response

- (a) LCSD agrees with the audit recommendations. It will enhance its existing working guidelines and remind its staff and contractors to make reference to the greening themes and the plant palettes of GMPs and select suitable species for replacement planting according to the “right-species-at-the-right-place” principle.
- (b) When LCSD replants trees and shrubs during maintenance, its staff will not only follow the working guidelines, and make reference to the greening themes, colour coordination and plant palettes of GMPs, but will also consider a host of factors, including plant maintenance experiences, growth conditions of a particular species, views of the local community, availability of relevant plant species in the market, and select suitable species for replanting according to the “right-species-at-the-right-place” principle. LCSD will remind its staff to follow the guidelines concerned and strengthen plant maintenance work, so as to take forward the greening works more effectively.