

Letterhead of South East Kowloon Development

HKILA'S RESPONSE TO CONSULTATION DIGEST (May 2000)

The Hong Kong Institute of Landscape Architects (HKILA) supports the Territory Development Department's revised concept plan for the development of the old Kai Tak airport site and surrounding areas set out in its Consultation Digest and detailed in the Public Forum on 30 May 2000.

The HKILA has a strong interest in all matters relating to the visual appearance of our future urban areas including the conservation of existing landscape and heritage features, the provision of adequate open space, waterfront and recreational facilities and creation and maintenance of the highest standards of quality in hard and soft landscape in both public and private areas. In particular we welcome the Department's decisions to depress into tunnel key infrastructure components, to adopt of a more cogent stepped building height profile, and to establish an integrated network of landscaped open spaces, waterfront promenades and pedestrian corridors.

insufficient detail

The HKILA is, however, very concerned that there is insufficient information provided with the plan to be able to determine whether the landscape provision shown can actually be achieved. Our experience of the current administrative process, which both strongly favours issues of cost and expediency over those of quality of finish and design, and frequently delivers only independent parts of a comprehensive whole development and without reference to an integrated landscape policy, would suggest the plan to be highly optimistic.

Although it is understood that the plan is only conceptual at this stage, the acceptance of the proposed development has to be based on a high degree of confidence that the system can really implement the of sort landscape treatments envisaged in the large areas of green shown in the various diagrams.

As a sales brochure the plan presents an exciting vision for the extension of the city. It can only be made reality if the Government is able to give a commitment now, at this conceptual stage, to giving landscape considerations priority over other land uses in all waterfront, open space road side areas etc.

technical constraints

Under the present administrative system for such development, conceptual landscape proposals are very frequently found to be impractical as they have not been designed in an integrated manner with underground infrastructure works.

Of particular concern are:

- Highway and Drainage Services Departments current restrict landscape works above submerged roads and drainage culverts to just grass. No trees, no planters, no structures, no ball courts etc. If such approach was adopted for SEKD most of the landscape shown on the plan would eventually have to be omitted.
- the numerous electricity / phone / cable TV / gas / water / foul and surface water drainage systems etc. spread out across roadside footpaths leave no room for the planting of trees or the construction of planters, or any landscape features, and the rash of separate manhole access covers for each system randomly located within footpath areas leave no opportunity for the creation of quality paving design.

- the maintenance authorities steadfastly refuse to maintain anything which is non-standard, and the landscape treatment of all public spaces have to be composed of low cost, high durability materials
- there is no established mechanism for supervision of landscape hard works on site by suitably qualified landscape professionals. Such works have frequently been supervised by personnel associated with large scale civil engineering works who have no training in aesthetic design or the use of high quality material finishes. The results speak for themselves.

administrative process

The fundamental problem is that landscape works are often viewed by project managers as add-on decoration, and are frequently deleted or modified on site when they are considered to be in conflict with infrastructure works, which are designed and built first, without respect to any landscape objectives.

In reality the two can easily be designed in an integrated manner to achieve both engineering and landscape objectives, and at little extra cost. However, the Government's current system of procuring design services does not encourage consultants to seek integrated design solutions, as any modification in standard engineering designs is seen as potentially increasing the capital cost, the maintenance commitment and delays in the project programme.

Without the specific policy direction and a co-ordinated administrative framework from senior Government officers (Bureau level) landscape objectives are routinely ignored. Government has in the past left such 'technical issues' to be resolved at a technical level, but with everyone round the table saying that their requirements are absolute, not satisfactory compromise is ever reached. The HKILA would be happy to demonstrate this in action.

summary

The HKILA is particularly concerned to promote international quality in the planning, design and finishes for Hong Kong's public spaces, and urge TDD to critically review its administrative process for procuring urban development to ensure that landscape interests take first priority in open space, waterfront and roadside amenity areas, so that the beautiful plan envisioned for the SEKD can be achieved.

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