

Views of the Town Planning Board on Harbour Reclamation

1. The Town Planning Board (the Board) is charged with the function of preparation of draft plans under the Town Planning Ordinance (TPO), including those for the new reclamation areas in the Victoria Harbour. Over several decades, the Board has dutifully discharged its role in promoting the health, safety, convenience and general welfare of the community through such preparation of plans. At present, the Board is comprised of seven Government representatives and 30 non-official members coming from all walks of life. Any allegation that the Board is “controlled” by the Government is not only irresponsible and unfair, but also a blow to the trust and confidence put on the Board by many stakeholders over the years in seeking the Board’s permission.

2. While this public hearing is focusing on the Central and Wan Chai Reclamation, let us first refute a misconception about harbour reclamation in general. There appears to be some misunderstanding that all the reclamation proposals previously floated for internal deliberation have been incorporated into Outline Zoning Plans (OZPs) prepared by the Board and as a result, an accusation that a large amount of the Harbour would be reclaimed. The misunderstanding apparently arose from reference to a decade-old paper presented to the Board. We wish to take this opportunity to clarify once and for all that such accusation is totally unfounded. The fact is no reclamation proposals at Kowloon Point, Tsim Sha Tsui East and Green Island have ever been agreed by the Board for incorporation into the OZPs. The reclamation proposals in the OZP for the Central District (Extension), covering the Central Reclamation Phase III (CRIII) now in progress, has been significantly scaled down in the process of the Board’s consideration from 38 ha to 23 ha. Similarly, the South East Kowloon Reclamation relating to the former Kai Tak Airport site has been reduced from 299 ha to 133 ha. In the light of the Court’s judgment, the Board is aware that the Administration is undertaking a comprehensive review of this plan. As regards Wan Chai North, which is a draft plan, the Board has at its meeting on 31 October 2003 requested the Administration for a comprehensive planning and engineering review before the reconsideration of the Plan. Noting the Government’s stated intention that the Central, Wan Chai North and South East Kowloon will be the last reclamations in the Victoria Harbour, the Board is taking action to amend the Tsuen Wan OZP to delete the Tsuen Wan Bay Further Reclamation.

3. The Board always recognises that the Harbour is a special public asset of Hong Kong. We share the community’s desire to protect and preserve the Harbour. Hence, pursuant to the enactment of the Protection of the Harbour Ordinance (PHO), the Board has on its own volition formulated its “Vision and Goals for Victoria Harbour” in 1999. This Vision Statement was put to the LegCo Panel on Planning, Lands and Works and relevant advisory committees for consultation and a public seminar (attended by LegCo Members, representatives from various professional institutes/interested bodies/concern groups and the general public) was held. There was general support of the Board’s initiative to protect the Harbour and the Vision Statement itself. In its Statement of Intent on Reclamation, the Board has stated clearly that reclamation in the

Harbour should only be carried out to meet essential community needs and public aspirations. It has to be environmentally acceptable and compatible with the principle of sustainable development and the principle of presumption against reclamation in the Harbour.

4. CR III is covered by the approved Central District (Extension) OZP. In the process of the Government's feasibility studies and the preparation of the OZPs, extensive public consultation exercises were carried out and a due process of statutory and funding procedures have been gone through. In particular, the consultees generally supported the minimum reclamation option prior to its incorporation in the amended Central District (Extension) OZP subsequently approved by the Chief Executive in Council. Anyone who has gone through the chronology of events in respect of CR III would appreciate that the Board has dutifully discharged its functions in balancing the essential transport needs with the aspiration to minimise harbour reclamation.

5. As regards the draft Wan Chai North OZP, the Board always acts in accordance with the law. Its decisions on the draft OZP were based on an interpretation of the PHO which is different from that laid down in the High Court judgment. We wish to take the opportunity to explain the rationale behind the Board's appeal against the judgment. Not that the Board wishes to save the Wan Chai North reclamation plan in total, it has already decided not to pursue the Harbour Park. It only wishes to seek a clarification of the legal principles behind the PHO in view of the Court's restrictive interpretation which could have far-reaching implications on future planning and development of the harbourfront areas. Notwithstanding its appeal, the Board on 31.10.2003 preliminarily reassessed the purpose and extent of each individual component of the proposed reclamation within the draft OZP based on the three tests laid down by the Court. It has requested the Government to conduct a comprehensive planning and engineering review on Wanchai Development Phase II and to draw up a minimum reclamation option that would comply with the law, before proceeding with the reconsideration of objections and the draft OZP. The Government has indicated that the comprehensive review will take time and the Board has already asked the Government to speed up the review process.

6. The Board is a staunch supporter of all initiatives to protect and preserve the Harbour. In addition to preventing damage to the Harbour, the Board takes a positive and proactive approach. We believe that the current state of the harbourfront is unsatisfactory, and the best way to protect the Harbour is to have a well-planned, vibrant and accessible harbourfront which people and tourists alike can enjoy. It is the Board's vision to make Victoria Harbour "a harbour for the people and a harbour of life". The Victoria Harbour belongs to the people of Hong Kong and we want to bring the Harbour back to the people.

7. The main purpose of the currently planned reclamation in Central and Wan Chai is to provide for essential transport infrastructure, in particular the Central-Wan Chai Bypass. In making plans to provide for the Bypass, the Board has to act on the basis of information provided by the Government's transport planners/engineers. The Board's role and functions, being governed by the TPO, are limited to the land-use planning aspect and the Board does not undertake transport planning by itself. We note that the Government has dutifully updated the transport forecast and provided an update to the community on the justifications for the Bypass vide the information papers provided by the Government to the Joint Panels today.

Town Planning Board
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