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The Hon. LAU Wong-fat, GBM, GBS, JP
Chairman
Subcommittee to Review the Planning for the
Central Waterfront (including the Tamar site)
Panel on Planning, Lands and Works
Legislative Council
Jackson Road
Central
Hong Kong

8 May 2006

Dear Mr. Lau,

Value for Money
Achieving a World-Class Solution

Attached is a short paper on how your Committee could help achieve World-Class premises for the Legislature and Government.

As an RIBA Client Design Advisor, the recommendations that I make are a précis of the basic processes that need to take place in order for the right solution to emerge.

I trust that it may be of value in your deliberations.

Yours sincerely

Santa Raymond

VALUE for MONEY

Achieving a World-Class Solution

Next month Government asks the Legislature to grant funds for the new Headquarters at Tamar. The size of the budget is apparently seen as 'reasonable', but nobody seems to know what this money is intended to buy. Before any responsible person – whether as an individual, or as part of an organisation - can agree a budget, they must know exactly what they are paying for. Indeed, unless they know what is included, they cannot be sure that the budget is correct.

Government has gone out to tender, received prices, and even designs we are told, but apparently nobody is clear what the parameters are. This is the Seat of Government, and the most important development to take place in this City for over a century. It is surely essential that the people – whom Government represents – know exactly what their money is being spent on.

Therefore, before agreeing a budget, members must demand full details of the project. There should exist a comprehensive brief, which sets out exactly what is needed and why. There should also be a process in place for ensuring that the development is carried out in the most effective way.

Quality buildings - those that look good, work well over time for all stakeholders, and cost the right amount to construct, service and maintain – are the result of hugely sophisticated processes. Design and Build can deliver excellence, but the process has to be devised as a partnership with all sides accepting their share of risk. Those with power require to engage and be fully responsible as part of the team, and not delegate to subordinates without the authority to make critical decisions.

From the limited information in the public domain, it would seem that Government has gone ahead with the project without doing either sufficient research into existing situations, nor devising a properly rigorous approach to appointing a contractor to design and construct the project.

However, this can be corrected by allowing time to proceed in a normal and business like manner. There is no doubt that like this a solution that pleases all parties can be achieved. Whether functions move to Tamar, or stay where they are, robust processes are still required.

The recommendation of this short paper is that Government should employ independent professionals to advise on the most effective way to achieve a successful result. The actions that require to take place include the following:

1 Steering Group

A small group of independent people of standing are chosen who are responsible for the project, and act as client on behalf of the Legislature, Government and the Community.

2 Strategy

The Steering Group develops a vision and overall purpose for the project, with input from critical parties.

3 Consultants

Independent consultants are appointed to be responsible for overseeing the project on behalf of the Steering Group.

4 People

An investigation is carried out into how the different departments and functions operate in relationship to each other, considering latest management methods, so that clear adjacencies can be developed.

5 Property

Existing premises are studied to ascertain the state of the fabric, and its suitability for refurbishment, or redevelopment.

6 Context

The effects of the different possible solutions are checked related to environmental issues such as traffic, noise and pollution, amenity issues such as open space, public access and facilities, and other urban planning issues.

7 Technology

Technological needs - present and future – are established, and how these can best be met, bearing in mind modern systems.

8 Ecology

Ecological elements that can reasonably be built into the design and construction processes, and into the life-in-use of the building, are considered.

9 Community

The community and other interested parties are consulted, and the finding assimilated into the development process.

10 Design

The critical elements of the design are agreed, so that a World-Class solution may be achieved.

11 Brief

A strategic brief is developed, encapsulating all the findings, to act as a 'road map' for implementation.

12 Tendering

A transparent and equitable tendering system is devised, which enables the right contractor to deliver a quality solution on budget and programme.

13 Monitoring

An ongoing process for monitoring the works, and the completed project, is developed.

14 Communicating

A clear system for communicating information on the project to staff, the community, and other interested parties, is created.

15 Moving in

A system for relocating staff, which reduces unnecessary disruption, is devised.

16 Confirmation

The fact that the vision for the project has been well met is confirmed, and these findings made public.