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To <cshiu@legco.gov.hk>
cc
bcc
Subject Tamar



Dear Sirs

Please find attached a commentary on Tamar for submission to the Legco Panel meeting on 22 November. If time is available, we would also be interested to present our views on the Tamar site and on the planning of that part of the Central reclamation.

Yours sincerely

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TAMAR

Margaret and Nicholas Brooke
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(The following article appeared in The Standard)

Could someone please explain how the development of a large, all-in-one government complex, housing not only meeting rooms and office accommodation for Legco and Exco but also for the full complement of civil servants (and this is a very full complement indeed) currently occupying the offices on Lower Albert and Garden Roads is consistent with the development of the Central district and accords with the long term public interest? Who, among the public, has been pleading for this new imposition on our harbour front as being in their long term interest?

It is understood that Legco is short of office space and probably will no longer fit into its existing home once electoral reforms come into being and perhaps Exco does need an appropriate place to meet with some dedicated office accommodation. There is also an argument that these representatives of the people of Hong Kong (even if imperfectly selected) should occupy a landmark location and perhaps part of the Tamar site is as appropriate as any. Sir David Akers-Jones has suggested as much already and, so long as the building or buildings are designed in such a way as to be worthy of such a site and are surrounded and complemented by open space and community accessible and orientated facilities, then I suspect that most people in Hong Kong would be willing to go along with the idea. It is the commandeering by Government of this site, almost the last on the Central waterfront and so all the more precious, for large scale Government offices, (the real need for which has not, to my knowledge, been demonstrated) that is really upsetting many in the community not to mention some of our legislators, media commentators and the Harbourfront Enhancement Committee which has not even been consulted.

It is a fact that the site has previously been approved by the Town Planning Board for development of Government offices but that was some time ago and, just because an approval is there, does not mean it has to be acted on. Times have changed and the

community has woken up to the destruction of the harbour front which has come about just because of such inappropriate uses being thrust upon it. I am sure that the Town Planning Board would approve another, more suitable site if there is a real requirement or alternatively the existing Government headquarters buildings could be redeveloped in situ over a phased period – both would lead to the “thousands of jobs badly needed in the construction industry”, just not in Central.

There seems to be a fixation that because certain plans have received approval that they cannot be changed, even though they have not been implemented and even though people appointed by Government itself to advise on the enhancement of the waterfront have not had the opportunity to review and, hopefully, to improve on these past ideas. The improved economic environment permits Government to focus less on price and more on value. The harbour front is valuable not just in financial terms but in terms of contingent value to the public as whole and it should be an accessible, vibrant and dynamic asset for Hong Kong people and visitors to the city. Government buildings with high walls or railings and which close at 6 p.m. are not vibrant and will stand as yet another barrier between the water and the rest of Central and Wanchai – views from the office developments immediately behind the waterfront are as important as those from the waterside itself and are often forgotten in harbour discussions.

There are other arguments as to why the Tamar site is unsuitable for large scale office development (whether public or private) such as the linked worsening of traffic conditions and the resultant pressure that there will be for expensive below ground infrastructure development (if we are to open up the harbour front and not simply dedicate it to more roads), the loss of one of the few lungs left in this part of our CBD, the need for a holistic plan for the harbour to be drawn up prior to committing any one site to any one project – the list goes on.

It is appreciated that Mr. Tsang wishes to get on and that many people have previously criticized the Government for lack of decision – but there are many other, urgent but less contentious projects waiting to be implemented and which could be started without delay.

The risk of pushing ahead with certain key projects, all of them involving harbour front sites or districts, without further consultation and in the face of significant, informed opposition is not the best way to win over the community or to establish a harmonious Hong Kong.