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世界自然(香港)基金會

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BY FAX, E-MAIL AND BY HAND

22 November 2005

Chairman and Members
Legislative Council
Planning, Lands and Works Panel and
Environmental Affairs Panel
Legislative Council Building
Jackson Road
Hong Kong

Attn: The Hon. Lau Wong-fat, GMB, GBS, JP

Honourable Chair and Members,

Central OZP and Tamar

We write to express our grave concerns about the Administration's plans and intentions for the Central OZP, comprising both the Central Reclamation and the Tamar Site.

Central District is the historical heart of Hong Kong and this stretch of waterfront is perhaps the most important part of our harbour. Now that the Administration has committed to no further reclamation in the harbour, we as a community have only one chance to get the Central waterfront right: we have a very grave responsibility to future generations of Hong Kong citizens to create a waterfront of which we can be proud, the "world-class" waterfront which was promised to us by the Administration.

The current proposals give us little confidence that a world-class waterfront is what we will end up with! The Outline Zoning Plan for Central, which encompasses the Central Reclamation, contains planned additional GFA of 8.2 million square feet. This includes the 3.7 million square feet of government offices and 1.6 million square feet for the new Legco building. What is more, the whole zoning scheme displays a lamentable planning insensitivity, involving huge "blocks" of buildings surrounded by major roads. Large blocks of buildings, "islands" surrounded by multi-lane roads, will mean an almost total absence of street-level life (think North Wanchai, as compared to Old Wanchai south of Gloucester Road...). One senior government minister counters this by painting a vision of a "City in the Sky", with podiums and overpasses over the roads. We are extremely sceptical of this vision: we are concerned that the new government and Legco complex will be examples of the kind of architectural mistakes that European cities have spent the last 30 years trying to undo: brutal, monolithic and inhuman complexes, surrounded by public spaces where no-one will wish to go. Compare this to the current Legco building and the remarkable street-level environment which surrounds it. Or the current Central Government Offices, surrounded by greenery and heritage buildings. Can members

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think of a single example of a podium-level complex that even remotely matches the charm and humanity of these areas?

At the same time, the large number of roads in the new complexes – including a multi-lane highway which will bisect the length of the OZP – will mean significant additional traffic load and smog. Air quality is the single greatest environmental concern among the citizens of Hong Kong and yet the Administration persistently pursues a policy of road and highway building which goes contrary to its oft-stated determination to tackle the air quality issue. The large number of new roads in this area, and the very high additional traffic load, will do nothing to improve the environment in this landmark area of Hong Kong.

Members should clearly request the Administration to justify why extra space is needed, why the move to Tamar is considered the best option and why the option of modernising the existing buildings is not considered possible, when many cities around the world have very successfully modernised much older buildings. The experience of many world-class cities shows that urban regeneration is most successful and most accepted by the community when heritage buildings and neighbourhoods are restored and modernised. In almost any city that one can think of where this has been done, these areas are best-loved in the community, and give the community a sense of its history and belonging. Furthermore, from Westminster to Washington, hundred-year-old buildings are still used for legislatures and government institutions; members of these institutions put up with a certain degree of inconvenience because these buildings have become the living embodiments of the institutions they contain.

Members should also consider that the corollary of the move of government to new buildings in Tamar will mean the high-density redevelopment of the government buildings on Lower Albert Road, an area filled with greenery and surrounded by low-rise and heritage buildings.

We urge Members to examine this issue with the most serious concern and attention, and to consider calling a special meeting to enable the views of the public and concerned groups to be heard. Citizens have placed their public trust in you – please use it to ensure that the true interests of present and future generations are protected.

Yours sincerely,

Markus Shaw
Chairman

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