

Developments Creating the Wall Effect

**Questions raised by Members of the Legislative Council's
Panel on Planning, Lands & Works
at its meeting on 27 February 2007**

**The Administration's response to the specific points raised in (a) – (i)
of the letter from Clerk to Panel dated 1 March 2007**

(a) Addressing wall effect in railway development projects

All railway development schemes are required to meet the statutory requirements applicable to private developments including the development restrictions imposed by the relevant Outline Zoning Plans (OZPs) or planning approvals given by the Town Planning Board (TPB). In addition, all railway developments are required to comply with the lease conditions and provisions of the Buildings Ordinance.

For those railway developments for which tenders have been awarded to developers, they should be allowed to proceed in accordance with the contractual provisions entered with the developers. For those developments where tenders have not been awarded, the railway companies take into account the government guidelines on air ventilation in the planning and design of the projects. We note that the railway companies also get in touch with the District Councils and listen to their views on individual development projects.

(b) Government measures to deal with wall effect

The Government shares the community's aspiration for a better living environment and strives to balance it against the fact that Hong Kong is a compact city and we need to put our scarce land resources to optimal use to meet development needs of Hong Kong.

The TPB has taken the initiative of reviewing, and amending, OZPs to provide clear parameters to guide individual developments. The development restrictions under OZPs are enforced through the Buildings Ordinance and land sale/lease conditions.

In the absence of specific development restrictions under some OZPs and in cases where specific planning approval from TPB is not required, the control of development intensities and building heights could be exercised through specific provisions contained in the land sale/lease conditions and will in any event be subject to the First Schedule to the Buildings (Planning) Regulations of the Buildings Ordinance which specifies the maximum plot ratios and site coverage permitted for domestic and non-domestic buildings in relation to building heights, whichever is the lesser. This aims to control the bulk and space around buildings and streets.

To improve clarity and consistency in effecting development restrictions on individual developments, we have reviewed, and strengthened, the present arrangement applicable to the determination of site development intensities and building heights for incorporation into the land sale/lease conditions. As reported by the media, we have recently reduced the plot ratios and building heights of some land sale sites.

For proposed developments in environmentally sensitive areas or comprehensive development areas, the TPB may require the project proponents to submit relevant environmental and visual impact assessment to ensure the scale of developments would not result in adverse environmental and visual impact.

(c) Mitigating wall effect of existing developments

To mitigate the wall effect of existing developments, we would continue to improve the pedestrian environment through extensive greening under the Greening Master Plan. Greening can help improve microclimate, enhance pedestrian comfort by

providing solar shading, cooling and pollutant filtering, and soften large structures to improve the streetscape at pedestrian level.

As and where opportunities arise, we would ameliorate the wall effect of the existing developments through introducing streetscape improvements or building setbacks in the neighbourhood. We would also apply design improvement measures in the redevelopment of existing sites or development sites within Government's control in the area with particular regard to air ventilation and visual impacts.

(d) Developments approved but not yet commenced

As a general principle, if and when an approved development complies with all the statutory requirements and lease conditions, it could proceed lawfully.

(e)&(h) Air Ventilation Guidelines and Air Ventilation Assessment

Under the 'Feasibility Study for Establishment of Air Ventilation Assessment System' (the AVA Study) completed in 2005, qualitative guidelines have been recommended on how building mass, height, disposition and permeability can improve air ventilation in the pedestrian wind environment. The guidelines are qualitative in nature and not quantitative. In applying the guidelines, due consideration has to be given to the uniqueness of each individual site.

The guidelines have been incorporated into the Hong Kong Planning Standards and Guidelines. Air ventilation is formally recognised as one of the considerations in the planning of major development and redevelopment proposals. Proponent departments/bureaux or authorities responsible for government projects are required to undertake Air Ventilation Assessment (AVA). We will continue to encourage quasi-government organizations and the private sector to include AVA in planning and design of their projects on a voluntary basis.

We will also conduct AVA for government sale sites to assess the impact of development on pedestrian wind environment, as such AVA will indirectly help improve the design and spatial layout at pedestrian level.

(f) Prevention of wall effect by relevant authority or quasi-government organizations

The Urban Renewal Authority (URA) has strictly mandated that all of its projects must conform with prevailing environmental stipulations. For this reason, the URA has decided that for its projects still under planning, reference will be made to the guidelines on AVA in order to meet the community's environmental aspirations. As a matter of fact, the URA has carried out AVA for both the Peel Street/Graham Street and Lee Tung Street projects.

As to the measures taken by the railway companies in addressing wall effect in railway development projects, please refer to (a) above.

(g) Planning Department's effort against wall effect

Over the years, the Planning Department has put forward various planning measures to promote sustainable planning and building designs for better living environment. These include drawing up and promulgating standards and guidelines on urban design, air ventilation, open space, greening, etc, to guide both public and private developments.

Under the statutory plan making process, appropriate development restrictions have been and would continue to be imposed to control building bulk and height. In processing development proposals requiring planning permission, the Planning Department would, in consultation with other concerned government departments, continue to assess

development proposals having regard to all relevant considerations including environmental and visual impacts. The TPB may impose approval conditions to mitigate the adverse visual and environmental effect, where appropriate.

(i) Technical Guides for Air Ventilation Assessment

The Planning Department has commissioned a study on the ‘Urban Climatic Map and Standards for Wind Environment’ (UCM Study) to identify climatically sensitive areas with a view to establishing air ventilation standards appropriate for the local climatic conditions for future assessment purpose. The feasibility of establishing more quantitative criteria/ standards in wind environment will be covered in the UCM Study.

Conclusion

As an on-going initiative and effort of planning with the community, we will continue to work with all stakeholders, professional bodies and the community at large through an open, transparent and consultative engagement process to further promote sustainable developments and foster a quality environment.

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