

**Legislative Council
Panel on Planning, Lands and Works**

Addressing Wall Effect in Developments

Purpose

This paper informs Members of the measures which have been and/or being taken by the Government to achieve sustainable and balanced developments on the one hand and to meet community aspirations for a better environment on the other. The new measures that we have implemented to address the issue of wall effect in developments in particular are highlighted for Members' reference.

Background

2. Hong Kong is a highly compact city and there is naturally a strong desire to put the scarce land resources to optimal use. Given the hilly topography and the need to minimize encroachment into the countryside, we have, out of necessity, resorted to a compact form of development to cater for the housing and social needs of our population and economic growth in the past. With this mode of development, we have been able to maximize efficiency in terms of utilization of land as well as the provision of needed infrastructure, such as sewerage, power supply and mass transport.

3. In recent years, as our development matures and with our community becoming more aware of our cityscape, the effect of high-rise and high-density development is more keenly felt. At the same time, there is growing community aspiration for a better living and working environment. The community is particularly concerned about the design, layout, massing, permeability and connectivity of development as well as provision of open space which directly affect both the quality and character of the surrounding area. Our challenge is to balance the social, environmental and economic needs of the community in order to support our future growth and yet achieve a quality environment to meet the community aspiration. Due to the obsolete street layout and private property interests involved, it is not always possible to re-plan our old urban fabric to meet the current expectations. However, there is scope to apply new planning measures to address the concern.

Promoting Sustainable and Balanced Developments

4. Over the years, we have put forward various planning measures to promote sustainable planning and building designs to achieve our planning goal. Among these measures are the promulgation, and regular updating, of the Hong Kong Planning Standards and Guidelines (HKPSG) which set out the criteria for determining the scale, location and site requirements of various land uses and facilities, including the standards for residential densities, open space and greening provisions.

5. In 2003, after thorough public consultation, we introduced the Urban Design Guidelines setting out the major urban design considerations and the broad framework for urban design assessment. The considerations include general massing and disposition of buildings, stepped height profile for the protection of the ridgelines and the harbour view, provision of breezeways, view corridors, setback of buildings at street level, etc. In accordance with the Urban Design Guidelines, in the planning of new development areas, due regard needs to be given to the layout and disposition of buildings; the possible impact on the surrounding areas, particularly those in respect of visual quality and air ventilation will also need to be assessed.

6. In the Team Clean report published in August 2003, the Administration undertook to examine the practicality of stipulating air ventilation assessment (AVA) as one of the considerations for all major development or redevelopment proposals in future planning. In the “First Sustainable Development Strategy for Hong Kong” promulgated by the Office of the Chief Secretary for Administration in May 2005, a strategic objective to promote sustainable urban planning and design practices was set out amongst other objectives with special regard to issues such as buildings affecting view corridors or restricting air flow.

7. Accordingly, a ‘Feasibility Study for Establishment of AVA System’ (AVA Study) was commissioned by PlanD in 2003. This AVA Study was completed in late 2005 and recommended a technical guide to set out the performance-based AVA methodology and a set of qualitative guidelines to achieve better air ventilation objectives. The technical guide as recommended in the AVA Study was promulgated in July 2006. The HKPSG has also been revised to incorporate the guidelines on air ventilation,

and the revised Guidelines were promulgated in August 2006.

New Measures

8. In July 2006, the Housing, Planning and Lands Bureau and the Environment, Transport and Works Bureau jointly issued a Technical Circular specifically on air ventilation assessments. Under this Technical Circular, air ventilation is formally recognized as one of the considerations in the planning of major development and redevelopment proposals. Proponent departments/bureaux or authorities responsible for major government projects are required to undertake AVA and ensure that air ventilation impact is given due consideration in the planning and design of the projects.

9. The promulgation of this Technical Circular demonstrates the Administration's resolve to take the lead in undertaking AVA in the planning of major development projects and in future plan-making. In addition to the AVA undertaken for the Kai Tak Planning Review (as referred to in para. 13 below), AVA was also conducted for the proposed comprehensive development at the government sale site at Oil Street, North Point. AVA will also be undertaken for the Central Government Complex development at Tamar and the forthcoming Central Reclamation Urban Design Study.

10. The Technical Circular provides a timely internal guideline for including AVA in major government projects. We encourage quasi-government organizations and the private sector to include AVA in the planning and design of their projects on a voluntary basis. In the case of redevelopment projects, the Urban Renewal Authority has agreed and taken the supportive step of conducting AVA for major urban renewal projects, the Kwun Tong Town Centre redevelopment being one.

11. Apart from the promulgation of the guidelines on urban design and AVA, we have also taken other positive steps to respond to the community's aspiration. We have recently reviewed the development intensities and building heights of a number of government sale sites. The Town Planning Board has also taken the initiatives of reviewing and amending Outline Zoning Plans to provide for clear planning parameters that best serve our planning intention to guide future developments.

12. The Kai Tak development could be used as an example to demonstrate how the Administration has applied a coordinated effort to provide a sustainable and balanced development. We have not only undertaken AVA for the Kai Tak Planning Review. We have also adopted a relatively low development intensity and introduced measures to enhance the wind environment within the area, including the relocation of the proposed Shatin to Central Link railway depot, imposition of restrictions on building height and site coverage, and the alignment of building blocks to maximize prevailing wind. The latter two planning measures are particularly effective in reducing the wall effect of new developments. They also help to minimize the impact on air ventilation in the area and enhance the urban design with respect to the surrounding environment and the mountain backdrop.

Conclusion

13. The Government shares and supports the community's aspirations for a better living and working environment. We will continue to work closely with LegCo, District Councils, professionals in the related fields, and all stakeholders to further our efforts of planning with community through an open, transparent and consultative engagement process.

Housing, Planning and Lands Bureau
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