

PI/LEGCO

2007/05/28 PM 04:12

To %Panel - PLW

cc &LGA[1]7

Subject Fw: Revised Concept Plan for Lantau

Dear Honourable Members,

I refer an email from Professor Paul Harris of Lingnan University for your reference.

Best regards,
Brenda YEUNG
PIO2

----- Forwarded by PI/LEGCO on 2007/05/28 PM 04:10 -----



pharris

2007/05/28 AM 10:59

To pi@legco.gov.hk

cc

Subject Revised Concept Plan for Lantau

Note: Please kindly copy this letter to all members of the Panel on Planning, Lands and Works.

28 May 2007

Hon LAU Wong-fat, Chairman
Prof Hon Patrick LAU Sau-shing, Deputy Chairman Panel on Planning,
Lands and Works
HKSAR Legislative Council
Central, Hong Kong

Submitted via email to: pi@legco.gov.hk

Re: Revised Concept Plan for Lantau

Dear Chairman, Deputy Chairman and Members of the Panel on Planning,
Lands and Works:

I am writing to express my concerns about the Revised Concept Plan for Lantau. I am concerned about the plan itself, and I am very concerned that HKSAR Government departments are already allowing the aims of the plan to be undermined by ongoing and planned development and construction on southern Lantau Island. Indeed, the concepts underlying the plan are already being violated in countless ways. Let me provide just a few contemporaneous examples.

During in the last fortnight alone, the so-called 'Coastal Protection Area' for Pui O identified in the plan and specifically a designated grove of mangrove trees in a tidal zone adjacent to Ham Tin Village are being reclaimed at a rapid pace, mostly with building rubble and rubbish, some of it clearly toxic as indicated by container labels. (This reclamation has speeded up since a photo of the damage appeared in the South China Morning Post a few weeks ago.) What is more, this reclaimed land is being used to construct a large new multi-unit village house. Any casual observer visiting Ham Tin can see the destruction of wetland. Fishermen lay their nets directly beside this tidal zone being reclaimed with polluted rubble.

Furthermore, very recently a request to build a two-house multi-story building in the so-called 'Green Belt' of Shap Long was being considered by the government, despite the fact that the site in question was gouged from a slope and the tailings dumped in the green-belt area nearby. The site is immediately adjacent to the proposed cycle track/mountain bike track (and an existing heavily traveled hiking path) that is supposedly intended to improve the attractiveness of the area for visitors. The plan's objectives are being undermined even as it is being discussed.

Staying in the area of Pui O, one must be extremely concerned about plans to construct a 'High-Quality Family Camping Site' on one of the most unique locations on Lantau, namely the spit of land on the eastern end of Pui O Beach that now includes a tent campsite. This area is extremely vulnerable and fragile, and it would be destroyed by such development, not to mention the great detriment experienced by the local herd of water buffaloes, which often spend the night on the tip of that spit of land -- to the great enjoyment and delight of visitors and tourists. This very small area of land is utterly unique and irreplaceable. To develop it further would be an environmental crime.

Provisions for a cycle track/mountain bike trail, as well as various additional 'Recreational Facilities' adjacent, to Pui O beach are extremely worrying because they would destroy the bucolic seaside setting. They are clearly inconsistent with designating the area as a 'Coastal Protection Area'. One assumes that the plan is to convert what is now beach and mangrove to concrete -- a mistake made elsewhere that one would hope could be avoided in this lovely area.

Incredibly, despite so much public anguish over AFCD's recent killing and disruption of Lantau's -- and especially Pui O's -- buffaloes, they do not receive a mention in the plan. This is shocking and reveals major ignorance on the part of those devising the plan. The buffaloes are a major attraction for tourists, give Pui O its unique rural character, and are a living piece of Lantau and Hong Kong's cultural heritage. To ignore them, and thereby to allow their continued official harassment and destruction, is a travesty and puts the entire revised plan into doubt. The complete neglect of the buffalo herd in Pui O is also utterly inconsistent with the plan's designation of a 'Major View/View Corridor' between Lo Wai and Ham Tin villages because it is the buffaloes that make this view possible by keeping the plants trimmed as they graze. Without the buffaloes there will be no 'Major View'. What is more, the ostensible desire of the plan to protect species is also inconsistent with the neglect of the buffaloes. Many local species of plants and animals, especially birds, rely on the landscape created by the buffalo herd. For example, Hong Kong's population of cattle egrets, which in springtime can be seen spiraling over Pui O as they prepare to breed, is (according to Birds of Hong Kong, published by the HKSAR Government) in decline due to 'reduction of wetland habitat and abandonment of the use of buffaloes'. To ignore this fact is to show ignorance of the area that is the subject of the plan, and shows a continued disregard by planners for Hong Kong's

cultural heritage.

Overall, the aim of the revised plan to keep southern Lantau Island free of major development is promising, but the few examples given here suggest that it is not well thought out. The lack of awareness of local issues revealed by the plan suggests that those devising it have spent very little time actually visiting the areas in question. This is worrying, as is past government practice of ignoring plans for conservation and environmental sustainability when vested interests see profit in laying concrete and constructing housing developments. Can we be certain that this plan, if finalized, will be carried out in a way that actualizes conservation and sustainability? There is no way to be certain or even confident of this.

Given these few examples, one hopes that more diligence will be given to the formulating a plan that is truly able to protect the nature of Lantau for present and future generations, and that ensures that southern Lantau Island survives the overdevelopment and reduced quality of life experienced on northern Lantau and throughout much of the rest of Hong Kong. I hope your committee and all responsible officials will undertake this diligence and see to it that southern Lantau is protected as intended.

Finally, let me comment on the new Tung Chung Road. I do hope that you will ensure that the road remains open only to resident permit-holders. To open the road to all vehicles would be a disaster. The roads of southern Lantau are already narrow and winding, and the parking is inadequate for vehicles already on the island (as evidenced by cars parked in all available space in some areas). What is more, opening the road would destroy the livelihoods of many people on southern Lantau who make their livelihood by moving goods from the rest of Hong Kong. Instead, the road should be open at all times to residents of southern Lantau only. This would be more convenient than existing arrangements for those living in the area, allowing them to get to jobs in other parts of Hong Kong, while keeping the roads safe and the southern side of the island free of heavy traffic -- very much in keeping with the objectives of sustainability described in the Revised Concept Plan for Lantau.

If you think I can be of help, I would be happy to discuss these views further and to consult with you or other parties involved in the development of Lantau Island. Please feel free to contact me.

Yours sincerely,

Paul Harris, Ph.D.
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Lingnan University

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