

Government Hill: Not for Sale

A Joint Statement

Government Hill, where the current Central Government Offices are, has been the seat of the government since the foundation of Hong Kong as a city. It is an important heritage site where the historic landscape reflects the original planning of the area over 160 years ago. The Development Bureau has proposed, after the CGO offices are to be moved to Tamar by end 2011, to sell half of Government Hill to a developer, demolish the West Wing, hollow out the hill to build a five-storey shopping mall and carpark, and build a 32-storey commercial tower on top.

We believe:

1. The Government Hill is an important public asset of Hong Kong people. The site has high historic and cultural significance and should be conserved in its entirety. To sell any part of it to a private developer is unacceptable.
2. There is no overriding need to sell part of Government Hill. Currently the government has fiscal and foreign exchange reserves of over HK\$2000 billion - there is no financial pressure to sell this site nor any urgent need to add to the supply of Grade A office accommodation as the future Central and Wan Chai reclamation area and West Kowloon will provide more office space.
3. The proposed scheme is a large-scale property development with poor and unsustainable planning which will have a long-term negative impact on the environment of Central District - that is already over-developed with consistent traffic congestion and high level of pollution. Large-scale demolition, excavation and construction will endanger existing trees, heritage buildings, archaeological relics and the historic integrity of this site as well as create excessive construction waste.
4. The present public consultation is another example of government undertaking a false-consultation – having already announced advanced plans and models and presented its preferred use of the site to the Town Planning Board, the government is merely offering a *fait accompli* to the public. Since the announcement of CGO buildings were to be transferred to Tamar in 2006, community groups have demanded that the CGO site be conserved for public use, but it appears now that the government has given preferential treatment to property developers - which is highly inappropriate and against the principles of fair and open governance.

We strongly request that:

1. The government acknowledges the public ownership of the site and retain its current land use (that is, Government, Institution and Community)
2. Based on the “no land-sale” principle, the government should seek public opinions through a 12-month consultation as to how the CGO Complex should be used by the public after the relocation of the offices to Tamar.
3. Meanwhile, open days should be organized for the public to visit the CGO complex and an independent preliminary archaeological investigation should be conducted.

Joint signatories:

Central & Western Concern Group
Conservancy Association
Designing Hong Kong
Green Sense

Greeners Action
Professional Commons
Community Alliance for Urban Planning
Community Development Initiative
Heritage Watch
Action Group for the Preservation of Heritage in Central and Western
United Social Service Centre
Lung Fu Shan Environmental Concern Group
Save Our Shorelines
Dr Stephen Chan Ching Kiu
Cheng Lai King, C&W District Councillor
Wong King Shing, C&W District Councillor

23 November 2010