



Brief regarding item *IV. 355DS

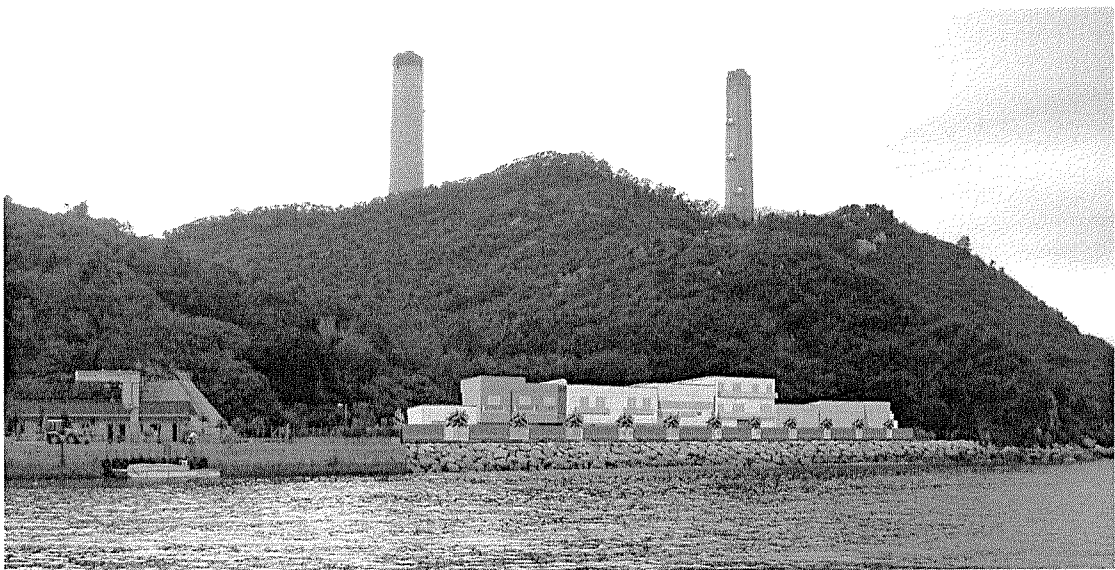
**Outlying Islands sewerage, stage 2 – Lamma village sewerage phase 2
presented to the Legco Panel on Environmental Affairs
for the Meeting on Monday, 22 April 2013, at 2:30 pm**

1. Living Lamma is a registered society concerned with improving the environment on Lamma through cleaning up rubbish and dumping and improving the design of public facilities.
2. In February 2010, we produced a report containing 250 photos of messy areas in our community. These were grouped and analysed and themes emerged.
3. One of the problems was with the temporary works areas used by contractors for the outlying islands sewerage project. These were dumping grounds for all manner of rubbish, as pictured here.



Our group contacted the contractors and DSD, and we are pleased to say that the situation has been very much improved. Works sites have been left in a tidy state and notices have been put up to ask passersby not to deposit rubbish there.

4. Also noticeable was the lack of safety standards. Arc welding was carried out without any protection measures for the public, though the worker would have safety glasses. This even happened when the kindergarten students were gathering to put on their nativity play. Again, we brought this to the attention of the contractors and the problem was addressed, though we did see it creeping back over time. More reminders and oversight are advisable.
5. A major problem has also been in the visual aspect of the project. The statutory outline zoning plan for Lamma states that *“The general planning intention is to **conserve the natural landscape, the rural character and car-free environment of Lamma Island.**”* In fact, works carried out by all government departments have not heeded the conservation intention of Lamma’s zoning plan and the natural landscape and rural character have been undermined, and in some cases destroyed, because of government’s adherence to standard designs and procedures that are not appropriate for a rural island setting.
6. In November 2010, we contacted DSD to enquire about the finished appearance of the sewage treatment plant, the construction of which was well underway. The first rendering, provided in July 2011, was as follows:



After several discussions, a further version was provided in November 2011. At this stage, the building was almost built.



The design, in terms of outward appearance, use of materials and landscaping, seemed to be added on rather than integral. Though the plant occupies a prominent position on the harbour front, and will be overlooked by many residents who used to look out on natural shoreline, there has been no communication with the wider community about what it will look like when finished. We were contacted for our opinion about tile choice, but at that time the order had been made and could not be changed. Low price and low/no maintenance appear to be the main criteria for choice and decisions are made without any professional design input based on consideration of rural aesthetics. This is common across government works and is one of the major contributing factors in Lamma's environmental decline (and is also reported to be blighting other rural areas in Hong Kong.)¹

7. We note that in general Environmental Impact Assessments carried out by consultants claim that the impact on the environment can be "mitigated." In practice, this rarely happens because designs of projects do not involve the required sensitivity (as they follow low cost, no maintenance objectives). Equally, environmental protection measures are weak and work practices shoddy, with contractors often tossing rubbish into the undergrowth.

On South Lamma, there is now a large scar on the hillside where rock has been taken for the sewerage project. Though this site will be tidied up eventually, the scar will remain.

¹ See for example, *Government must stop improving our countryside*, Markus Shaw, SCMP Opinion, 30th October 2012.



The contractor has responded well to our requests for them to clean up their site and minimize the impact of their works on people who come to enjoy Lamma's supposedly natural environment. They have put recycling bins on site and have put up camouflage netting to improve the appearance of the work's site. They are also carrying out monthly beach clean ups at Sok Kwu Wan, which we are very impressed with.

Hong Kong faces immense challenges with regard to changing people's habits so that we can all enjoy a litter-free environment. Living Lamma has been cleaning up for years and has yet to see any significant improvement. We hope our new initiative, Brand on the Beach, will have some impact on connecting people with the consequences of their actions. For more information, please see this 90 second video:
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ICUSZyZdZxY>

Thus, there is a significant challenge for management whose workers might have spent a lifetime littering. It is very encouraging to see Kaden and Scott Wilson making an attempt to educate their workers in this way. Equally, government departments need to have much better oversight over their contractors with meaningful incentives and/or penalties to encourage good behaviour.

8. Equally impressive was the response from the Drainage Services Department (DSD) following our concerns on the design of the treatment plant, when it came to Phase II works. As part of this, pumping stations are planned. For the design of these DSD engaged an architect who first explained the design philosophy, which intends to be sensitive to the natural environment in its layout and use of materials. This is a first for government projects on Lamma and we hope that the promise of good design will serve as a good example for other projects in future. The communication of the intention was clear and provided more meaningful photomontages, two of which are included here:





We were also provided with other examples from photographs of real projects carried out elsewhere. We hope that other departments can follow DSD's example with regard to the design of public works and the communication of their intentions with residents.

9. One issue that DSD has been unable to resolve, however, is that of the markers to be used on Lamma's pathways to indicate a bend in the pipe under the ground. Lamma's pathways are twisty and there will be a need for many of these bends. The first suggestion was to have the word **SEWER** at each turn of the pipe. Living Lamma objected to this. Lamma's pathways are beautiful countryside walks. We have numerous eco-tour walks and family trails and neither residents nor tourists want to see the word **SEWER** written on them.

Living Lamma suggested a marker could be used that would be in keeping with our natural environment and actually enhance the pathways by providing something of interest. Lamma is home to Romer's tree frogs and green turtles, both protected species and part of the eco-tour attraction. Surely a frog or turtle marker that incorporates the DSD logo would be a good idea?

Unfortunately, thus far, DSD is unable to move beyond the standard design on this one. Instead of the word **SEWER**, they have said that they can use the word **FOUL** instead. We hope that something can be done about this. It seems a shame to deface our island in this way, especially when other places in the world use such markers to good effect to promote environmental awareness and enhance the appearance of places. A Google search of "beautiful manhole covers" will produce many examples and the involvement of schools, design institutes and the public in developing designs is a great opportunity to inspire and educate, as well as give Hong Kong designers the ability to showcase their talents.

Here are some examples:



10. Phase II works are about to start and Land Department notices have been posted with regard to the project intention. Living Lamma still has concerns with regard to works practices and waste management. The team working for DSD is aware of the problems and they have made assurances that the problems of the Phase I works will not be repeated.
11. An remaining concern is how connection will be managed. We wrote to DSD about this in June 2010 and received a response, which explained the responsibility of homeowners with regard to connection, but gave no specifics of how this would work in practice or how much it would cost. This is the same approach given by the EPD website with regard to the maintenance of septic tanks, and as a result few are regularly maintained as they should be.



We foresee major problems with connection charges, joint responsibility for properties with absentee landlords, the decommissioning of old septic tanks and the proper management of that waste (we have even had reports of septic tank waste being dumped down hillsides, which we have reported to EPD). It is not enough for government to tell people what they should do. They must ensure that residents have the means to do what is necessary in a fair and reasonably easy manner.

Report ends
April 2013