

## Lamma Island Concern Group

### **Our Views on the Development of the Ex-Lamma Quarry Site**

1. The second stage of the public consultation on the “Planning and Engineering Study on Future Land Use at Ex-Lamma Quarry Area at Sok Kwu Wan, Lamma Island-Feasibility Study” is now underway. In our opinion the consultation process is beset with problems of maladministration and ill planning. Here below is a summary of our views on these problems.

#### **First Stage of Public Consultation Process was Exclusive**

2. The Planning Department put forth three concrete options already in the first stage of the public consultation, all proposing to use the Ex-Lamma Quarry Site mainly for housing with an anticipated population between 2,000 and 7,000. In the consultation process, the public was not given any chance to discuss planning principles or other options apart from the three proposed options. In spite of this, in the first stage of the consultation many people were of the opinion that the site should mainly be used for tourism and recreational purposes and that all housing plans should be scraped.

#### **Outcome of First Stage of Consultation was Concealed from Public**

3. The report of the Planning Department on the first stage of the consultation only mentions that 500 comments have been received and there is no mention on their content. The Planning Department has also refused to disclose the percentage of support for each option or the total number of comments that oppose any housing plan and demand for conservation and the building of a botanical garden. On the public forum hold on May 3, officials of the Planning Department said that they had no intention to “quantify views”. In our opinion the Planning Department is trying to conceal the fact that the majority of the comments are opposed to any plan for housing.

#### **In Contrast to Outcome of Stage 1 Consultation, New Proposal Raises Buildings and Population Density Significantly**

4. In the second stage of the consultation, officials of the Planning Department claimed that they had summed up the views expressed in the first stage of the consultation and decided to integrate the options of “housing” (1a and 1b) and “tourism and housing” (2). This is obviously a kind of “language disguise”. The plan proposed now by the Planning Department is in fact the option that had a housing plan for a population the size of which was opposed by many local residents in the first stage of the consultation. They thought that both the figure of 5,000 and 7,000 was too high. In a letter dated April 15, 2014 in reply to Legislative Councillor Leung Kwok Hung, the Planning Department admitted that most participants in the consultation supported the “tourism and housing” (2) option. In spite of this, in the new plan proposed in the second stage of the consultation, the plot ratio and building height have been increased from 2 times and 13 storeys to 2.7 times and 13 storeys, and a target population of 5,000 is proposed. Even though the

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newly proposed plan retains most of the tourist facilities, the Planning Department has completely ignored the outcome of the first stage of the consultation in which most participants supported Option (2) that had a plan only for a population of 2,000.

## No Public Consultation Event Takes Place on Lamma Island

5. Unlike the first stage of the consultation, no public forum or workshop is hold at Yung Shu Wan or Sok Kwu Wan in the second stage. This inevitably excludes large number of local residents from taking part in the process. The only forum for public consultation that took place at City Gallery at Central District was hold on the morning of May 3, a Saturday. Again this made it difficult for many wage earners to take part in the forum. The host of the forum acted improperly when, as the forum began, she threatened that protestors would be liable to any damage caused by their protest, etc. Her long statement in this regard inevitably dampened participants' motivation to speak. Two "experts" were invited to speak at the end of the forum, thus their views were made to appear as though they were summaries of views and opinions expressed at the forum. In addition, instead of making use of the opportunity to solicit more opinions from the participants, the forum ended half an hour earlier than scheduled.

## Same People Being Consulted Repeatedly

6. The Planning Department has repeatedly consulted same groups of people, which is unfair for residents of Lamma Island as a whole. For example, members of the rural committees of Lamma Island have been consulted for at least four times as representatives of local groups, members of rural committees, district councillors and participants of public forums. The three district councillors of Lamma Island, who definitely have already expressed their views fully in other occasions, were all given a chance to speak again on the public forum on May 3.

## Misleading Figures

7. To raise the percentage of "green area" in land use in the proposed plan, 9 hectares of land, which is on a slope that cannot be built on, is presented as "green belt" in *Stage 2 Community Engagement Digest*. The total area of land that can be used for building and construction is only 24 hectares and not 34 hectares as stated in the paper. In fact, the "Planning and Development Study on Hong Kong Island South and Lamma" commissioned by the Planning Department and completed in 2004 also uses 24 hectares as the base figure. In other words, the Planning Department is trying to deceive the public by playing with figures. The figures below are the percentages of various land uses when 24 hectares is used as the base figure. It could be seen that open space accounts for only 16% of the land use and there is no green area at all on flat land.

Land Use	Area of Land (hectares)	Percentage of Total Land (%)

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Residential	6	25%
Hotels	2.5	10%
Recreational	7	29%
Open Space	4	16%
Government and Institutional or Community Facilities	2	8%
Road, Ferry Pier and Landing Steps	2.5	10%

## **Planning Study Proposing that the Site be Used only for Tourist and Recreational Purposes Concealed from Public**

8. In both stages of the public consultation, the Planning Department has not mentioned at all the planning history of the Ex-Lamma Quarry Site. In fact, the Planning Department conducted the “Planning and Development Study on Hong Kong Island South and Lamma” (CE65/96) a decade ago and proposed that the quarry be developed only for tourism and recreational use, such as providing land for outdoor recreational centres, extreme sports centres and water sport centres. It was also proposed that the site be used as the entrance to the proposed Lamma South Country Park. This study has never been mentioned in both stages of the consultation and the public is led to think that the Ex-Lamma Quarry Site must be used for housing.

9. On the forum on May 3, our representative asked the officials of the Planning Department directly why the public had never been informed of the above study. We were astonished when the official replied that the study was only an “internal study” for the department’s own reference and that its proposals concerned only short-term uses of the site. The official further stated that the site had been planned for the use of the Strategic Sewage Disposal Scheme. This claim was totally misleading. According to the report of the above-mentioned study, long before the study was launched, a government report entitled “Final Report of the Rehabilitation of Lamma Quarry Planning and Engineering Study” published in 1995 had already proposed that the site be used for recreational purposes. The government had consulted and gained the support of local groups and environmental organisations in this regard. Apart from this, in the “Planning and Development Study on Hong Kong Island South and Lamma”, it was stated that the objectives of the study was to study all “short-term, mid-term and long-term” uses of the site. The study proposed to reserve 9 hectares of land for the construction of a sewage facility. Later, due to changes in the Strategic Sewage Disposal Scheme, it was no longer required to build the sewage facility at this site. However, it does not mean that the study should be ignored completely.

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## **No Social, Economic and Environmental Impact Study has been Conducted on Lamma Island as a Whole**

10. According to the proposed plan, there will be a new population of 5,000 which means that the population of Lamma Island would increase by nearly 100%. The site is located in the southern part of Lamma Island, which has only a population of about 500. In other words, the population in southern part of Lamma Island would increase tenfold. There has never been any kind of development of this scale on Lamma Island which is comparable to the development of a new town. In spite of this, the Planning Department had not undertaken any island-wide social and economic study on the possible impact on the life of local residents and on the business of local shops and restaurants.

11. According to the Eco-Education and Resources Centre, Lamma Island was put on the list of “Proposed Country Park” as early as 1967. In the “Southeast New Territories Development Strategy Review” published in 2001, the southern part of Lamma Island was again on the list of “Proposed Country Park and Marine Park”. The south of Lamma Island is rich in ecology. For example, it is the habitat and breeding ground of two precious species of wildlife, Romer’s tree frogs and green turtles. However the study on the use of the Ex-Lamma Quarry Site has not looked at the impact of the development of the site on the environment of Lamma Island as a whole.

## **Negative Impact on Tourist Industry on Lamma Island**

12. Lamma Island is one of the outlying islands of Hong Kong renowned for their unique landscapes and attractions that draw large numbers of visitors on holidays. Tourists and visitors enjoy the small-town charm and the natural and ecological environment of Lamma Island. However the new development plan proposes a new population of 5,000 and the construction of 13-storey buildings the scale of which is close to a medium size new town. The implementation of such a development plan would not only severely undermine the unique attractions of Lamma Island, it would also destroy the environment of the island. The proposed plan for hotels is also incompatible with the current “hostel” style of accommodation for visitors on the island. Obviously no study has been undertaken on the preferences of tourists and visitors of Lamma Island. The signature campaign of the Eco-Education and Resources Centre against the housing plan collected over 5,000 signatures on the trail from Yung Shue Wan to Sok Kwu Wan in only a few days during the holiday. This shows clearly that tourists and visitors are very opposed to the construction of high-rise buildings on Lamma Island.

## **New Buildings May Remain Unoccupied**

13. The Planning Department proposes a housing development plan for 1,900 flats of which 1,200 flats are to be built by private developers while 700 flats are to be built under the Home Ownership Scheme. It

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is anticipated that many of these flats would remain unoccupied because owners find it difficult to adapt to living on the island.

14. According to the data published by the Rating and Valuation Department in 2012, the vacancy rate for large flats (i.e. 700 sq. ft. to 1,000 sq. ft.) was 6.12%. The 1,200 private flat that the Planning Department proposes are all large flats of 700 sq. ft. to 1,000 sq. ft. As Lamma Island cannot be reached by motor road, it has little attraction for buyers of luxurious flats. Problems of speculation and high vacancy rate are expected.

## **Living On Outlying Islands Does Not Mean Retirement**

15. It is claimed that the 700 flats provided under the Home Ownership Scheme will attract retired people and young people. If this is what our planners think, a social resources mismatch can be expected. According to the 2011 Population Census, the percentage of retired persons among the residents of Lamma Island is only 11.5%, which is lower than the overall percentage of 14.8% for the whole of Hong Kong. It is not difficult to understand why. To move to the outlying islands, one would have to leave behind one's community and support network. Most retired people would be reluctant to do so.

16. The price of the flats provided under the Home Ownership Scheme might be lower than flats in the city and young people may find it easier to own their flats under the scheme. However, due to the problems of long traveling time and high transportation fee, one doubts that young people would be attracted to live on the island. According to the 2011 Population Census, 13.7% of the current residents of Lamma Island are "free lance workers". The percentage is two times that for the whole of Hong Kong.

## **Public Facilities are Unable to Sustain a Population of 5,000**

17. While the proposed new population is 5,000, only a few public facilities have been planned. The Planning Department has reserved only a small plot for government and institutional or community (G/IC) facilities. The South Lamma Public Library (approx. 250 sq. m.) will reopen in the Ex-Lamma Quarry Site. A community health centre (approx. 700 sq. m.), an integrated service centre (approx. 290 sq. m.) and a SWD integrated family centre (approx. 40 sq. m.) will be built. It can be seen that the scope of service offered are very limited. The public library and the police station will be relocated from Sok Kwu Wan to the Ex-Lamma Quarry Site on the opposite shore and the residents now living in Sok Kwu Wan would be marginalised. In the meantime, no land has been allocated for "schools" which means that the children of the new community will have to travel to schools on Hong Kong Island everyday. There will not be any facility for town gas and residents will have to resort to electricity for cooking. The new plan has also not responded to the demand of residents of Lamma Island for a 24-hour clinic.

18. According to the new proposal, some new buildings will be 13-storeys high. A large number of fire engines and ambulances will have to be placed on the island which is completely cost ineffective. The fire engines and ambulances will have to be ferried to Hong Kong Island for maintenance or replacement but there is no plan for a vehicular ferry pier. In addition, the fire engines and ambulances will not be able to

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serve other parts of Lamma Island because of road design. The planned fire station will be located up on the hill and no fireboat has been planned. In other words, if any fire should break out on the southern part of Lamma Island in the future, fireboats will have to be sent from Aberdeen, something that is really ridiculous.

## **Subsidy of Transportation Expenses of Lamma Residents Would Be a Long Term Burden on Public Fund**

19. The government is currently spending over \$100 million to subsidise the ferry service of outlying islands. A planned population of 5,000 at the Ex-Lamma Quarry Site would mean a substantial increase of spending of public fund in this regard. For example, the “Yung Shue Wan-Central” route serves about a population of 5,500, but up till today, the route is still operating with loss. Under the proposed plan, the future “Sok Kwu Wan to Central via Ex-Quarry” route will be serving a population size close to the “Yung Shue Wan-Central” route. It can be anticipated that the ferry service would also operate with loss.

## **Destruction of the No-Car Environment of Lamma Island**

20. Currently there are only village roads on Lamma Island and there are no public roads for cars. In the plan for the Ex-Lamma Quarry Site, it is proposed that a single two-lane carriageway be built. In the proposal, it is also suggested that an “environmentally-friendly transport mode” be adopted as an “ancillary service”. In its reply to Legislative Councillor Leung Kwok Hung on April 15<sup>th</sup>, the Planning Department admitted that it was planning to permit hotels or other users to use golf cars or other environment-friendly vehicles on Lamma Island. In other words, cars would be introduced for the first time to Lamma Island, which would mean changing completely the no-car environment of Lamma Island.

## **Our Demands**

- To launch again a consultation that does not have any presupposition;
- To expand the scope of study to the whole of Lamma Island;
- To immediately list Lamma Island South as a country and marine park.

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