

Comments to Panel on Development

For special meeting on 16 April 2016: Proposed Development Strategy for Lantau

Dr Martin Williams, Founder, Hong Kong Outdoors

I'm a birdwatcher and conservationist, living on Cheung Chau - and often visit Lantau, for birdwatching, hiking and more.

Previously, I have opposed much of the *Concept Plan for Lantau*; to me, more akin to a Concrete Plan for Lantau.

Now, we again have planning for Lantau "development".

Seems this is politically motivated, and perhaps with some pushing from engineers keen to Carry On Concreting, along with various businesses seeking to exploit Lantau for profits. Part of motivation seems to be justifying the HKZM Bridge; along with aiming to profit from the anticipated hordes who will arrive on buses.

Would be interesting to learn: to what extent is Lantau Development Advisory Committee really driving the strategy; or more a talking shop and rubber stamp?
7 meetings in two years!

Also, what of the supposed "balance" between development and conservation?
Does this mean as much money to be spent, as many resources used, on protecting and enhancing natural environment as on concreting? If not, what is the meaning, or just fine sounding wording?

To me, it seems the "strategy" is something of a mishmash, with three main sections:

Mad Metropolis Island - which seems bad in many ways.

Expensive; who would live there or set up headquarters (in a third Central Business District!; when HK should be happy with one plus satellite CBD)? Destructive to environment, including east Lantau and highly scenic western harbour.

Plus, would be threatened by storm surges, especially as changing climate drives rising sea levels and more intense peak typhoons.

Hopefully, just a fanciful notion.

Northeast Lantau - particularly "Splurge and Indulge" area east of airport island. Surely the pivotal part of the Strategy in near term, including for major Lantau businesses including the world's smallest Disneyland.

Yes, there is room for enhancing Tung Chung, but surely with far better, more sensitive planning than somehow created Yat Tung Estate - with its sparse amenities, distance from MTR etc etc as if the residents' quality of life was a mere afterthought.

Re tourism: it is surely possibilities for keeping great majority of any crowds coming to Lantau here in the northeast of Lantau. Put in some facilities to cope with mass tourism in less sensitive areas, and keep various parties happy - malls etc, along with people who can take short coastal walks and so forth as well as shop and eat.

But also, safeguard sensitive sites, notably Tai Ho Stream; and the lowland river valley plus temple and neighbouring mangroves at west Tung Chung. No need for mass tourism access here; sensitivity required!

West and South Lantau - not such a focus of the strategy, and maybe many areas are poorly known or unknown to various Lantau planners and LanDAC members.

But HUGE CARE IS NEEDED; there is potential for severe “accidental” damage. (Important to note the Strategy does not include extra roads to south Lantau; that’s a good thing, but hope this can be for long term too.)

Or - let’s dream! - there could be some beneficial projects.

There are some silly ideas in the Strategy, as if just tossed into it by someone glancing at a map. Like star gazing facilities atop Sunset Peak, for goodness sake!

Yet there are places that could benefit from a properly thought out strategy, in place of the haphazard developments etc that characterise too much of lowland Lantau.

For instance, at Pui O: should be a lovely place, yet get a messy storage dump here, rubble dumping there, the bizarre Villa Victoria project (far uglier in reality than artist’s impression on a website); here and now at nearby Shap Long and elsewhere got some “ding uk” housing that looks to be housing built for profiting, not as homes for indigenous villagers.

And Pui O has shameful examples of how a “Coastal Protection Area” is farcically ineffective.

Surely Hong Kong can do better than this!

Aim for protection of natural and near natural environment, while also making places great to live in and visit; and with some income generated from “ecotourism” NOT mass tourism: with main tourists being Hong Kong people, many of whom love Lantau.

Years ago, with help from some others, I drafted a Sustainable Development Plan for Lantau, in response to earlier Concept Plan for Lantau. Has various ideas that may be of interest. Attaching with my email to the Panel; I hope members will have time to have a look through.

Also online: <http://www.hkoutdoors.com/lantau-news/lantau-sustainable-development-plan.html>

Chinese translation here: <http://www.hkoutdoors.com/places-with-problems/a-sustainable-development-plan-for-lantau.html>

A SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT PLAN FOR LANTAU AND NEIGHBOURING ISLANDS (DRAFT: NOVEMBER 2005)

Introduction



Lantau is the largest of Hong Kong's islands, and for the most part is relatively undeveloped (the main exceptions being Tung Chung and the airport on the north coast, and Discovery Bay and Hong Kong Disneyland on the east coast). However, following the publication of a *Concept Plan for Lantau* by the Lantau Development Taskforce established by the Hong Kong Government, this situation could greatly change.

The Concept Plan, which should be read in conjunction with this document, outlines a raft of potential developments that would significantly transform Lantau: ranging from the Zhuhai-Macau-Hong Kong Bridge landing on the north coast, through a Logistics Park and indoor, man-made beach, to spa resorts and boardwalks. Some other potential projects were omitted from the Concept Plan, notably a container terminal off northwest Lantau, and a liquefied petroleum gas storage facility on the Soko Islands.

The Concept Plan has received criticism from several quarters, including as several projects threaten to radically transform Lantau, especially along the north shore; also as the plan does not present a clear vision for Lantau.

This Alternative Concept Plan therefore includes suggestions for development projects on Lantau. These projects are within the framework of views of Keep Lantau Beautiful, an alliance of groups concerned about the future of Lantau. Further, much as the Concept Plan espouses sustainable development, the projects outlined here are aimed at achieving sustainable development. "Sustainable development" was not defined in the Concept Plan, and some critics have charged that the Concept Plan took it to mean ongoing development. For the purposes of the current document, sustainable development is defined as:

"Sustainable Development in Hong Kong balances social, economic and environmental needs, both for present and future generations, simultaneously achieving a vibrant economy, social progress and better

environmental quality, locally, nationally and internationally, through the efforts of the community and the Government.”

HKSAR Study on Sustainable Development for the 21st Century (SUSDEV 21)

In this alternative plan, following the views of the Keep Lantau Beautiful alliance, there is strong emphasis on environmental needs (views include: “The basic premise must therefore be conservation”). If these needs are met, together with social and economic needs, then the developments will indeed benefit both present and future generations.

Here, sustainable tourism is proposed as an important means of enabling sustainable development. The World Travel Organisation defines sustainable tourism as:

“Sustainable tourism development meets the needs of the present tourists and host regions while protecting and enhancing the opportunity for the future. It is envisaged as leading to management of all resources in such a way that economic, social and aesthetic needs can be fulfilled, while maintaining cultural integrity, essential ecological processes, biological diversity and life support systems.

UNEP Tourism Programme, <http://www.uneptie.org/pc/tourism/sust-tourism/home.htm>

This document does not give exhaustive coverage of potential projects; it makes brief mention of a potential project for the nearby Soko Islands, but other neighbouring islands should also be included in any considerations for Lantau. Nor are projects fixed; the intention is to encourage discussion, as part of a process aimed at discovering how the community and Government can work together to both protect and sustainably develop Lantau and neighbouring islands for present and future generations.

Lantau: beautiful and unique



Lantau is among the loveliest islands in China, and is, “Hong Kong’s biggest and most beautiful island” (Henry Tang, Financial Secretary). It was once known as the Island of Prayer, with 135 monasteries in the 1970s. There are many working monasteries today, many of them still tranquil.

Lantau retains small rural communities, offering insight into South China village life – with both farming and fishing communities.

With its convoluted coastline and soaring mountains cut by fast-flowing streams, Lantau has tremendous scenery. The wetlands, woodlands and montane scrubland are home to rich flora and fauna, with several species that are rare worldwide.

Planning Considerations

The Concept Plan proposes a wide array of projects, some of which are apparently strongly conflicting – such as intense urbanisation including new town expansion and logistics development near tourism projects (on a stretch of coast once earmarked to become a “tourist paradise”; Northshore Lantau Development Feasibility Study).

Doubts expressed in *A Conservation Strategy for Lantau* regarding threats from [urban] development on Lantau remain valid; such development is more suited to other parts of Hong Kong, especially the Kowloon Peninsula. As yet, no case has been made to show that such development on Lantau would indeed be sustainable.

Therefore, this Alternative Concept Plan covers projects that are complementary and coherent, with a goal of achieving sustainable development whilst ensuring we keep Lantau beautiful. There is strong emphasis on tourism:

1. Tourism – involving both overseas visitors, and Hong Kong people – is already important on Lantau, and set to become far more significant with the opening of Ngong Ping 360 and Hong Kong Disneyland.
2. As tourism need not require major urbanization developments – indeed, these can deter many tourists – it could be key to achieving sustainable development on the island. Providing, that is, the environment is not harmed, and there is real benefit for local communities – ie there is sustainable tourism in a broad sense, with real benefits for local communities.
3. Lantau offers a slew of possibilities for sustainable tourism, including cultural, hiking and outdoor sports, nature tourism, and even beach recreation. All are offered to some extent; all could be greatly developed, with strong, well-considered planning and management to safeguard the environment.
4. Tourism elsewhere in Hong Kong will benefit from sustainable development of Lantau. This is partly as Lantau is a gateway to Hong Kong – and a green, beautiful Lantau will boost visitors’ impressions; further, the promotion of additional attractions on Lantau will make Hong Kong a more enticing place to visit.
5. Effective sustainable tourism will benefit local communities on Lantau, helping reverse economic declines in places such as Mui Wo.
6. A well-protected Lantau, with strong sustainable tourism, will also benefit Hong Kong people, offering a ready retreat from city life. Especially in the wake of

- SARS, outdoor recreation has become more popular for Hong Kong people, with several key destinations on Lantau.
7. Lantau could likewise offer a retreat for people from elsewhere in the Pearl River Delta, which in several places is suffering from rushed, ill-considered, highly unsustainable development.
 8. In tandem with tourism, other sustainable developments will be possible, including organic farming, producing and exhibiting arts and crafts, cultural performances, and sports development.
 9. Other benefits will include greatly improved facilities for educating Hong Kong people – especially schoolchildren – about their cultural heritage and local natural history.

Potential Projects

The following gives examples of projects that could help ensure sustainable development on Lantau. It includes suggestions from sources such as the Concept Plan for Lantau, ark~eden, a submission from legislator Albert Chan, and other groups and individuals.

The overall aim is to show that Lantau can be protected, and indeed enhanced, whilst becoming a multi-faceted destination for Hong Kong and overseas visitors. A destination with something to offer whether visitors want the excitement of outdoor sports or the tranquillity of hillside temples, or want to explore natural and cultural history, or simply enjoy a casual stroll, a day at the beach, a meal at a rural restaurant. The aim, too, is to ensure Lantau remains a great place to live, and a place Hong Kong can be proud of.

Conservation area at Tai Ho Wan

The Tai Ho Stream boasts high diversity of freshwater fish, and the stream and vicinity hold a good variety of wildlife. In environmental terms, it is the second-highest rated privately owned land in Hong Kong, and one of the 12 Crown Jewel sites. This would make an excellent reserve, with effective management for conservation and education purposes.

Plans for reclamation work off the mouth of the stream should be curtailed or abandoned, to safeguard biodiversity in the stream and inshore waters.

Tourism Node at Sunny Bay

Sunny Bay will be an important node for tourists travelling to and from Hong Kong Disneyland. Here, the node can be a transport hub (not indoor complex), where visitors wanting to enjoy indoor entertainment, dining, fashionable stores, theme attractions and indoor leisure and sports facilities can readily take transport to urban areas such as nearby Kowloon, which has excellent facilities; perhaps also to Tung Chung.

Further, information in this tourism node can also highlight the potential to enjoy outdoor pursuits in Hong Kong, especially on Lantau.

Nearby Yam O and headland are very attractive, making good places to for visitors to stroll, especially if they have no time to visit other Lantau destinations (besides Disneyland). There may be potential for building one or two small, rural style restaurants overlooking the bay.

Tung Chung

Tung Chung can be enhanced, to have facilities and attractions for tourists – including those using Skyrail, as well as for local residents, whilst also expanding employment opportunities. In the main, urban area, this can include restaurants, bars, and shops. New housing developments should be kept to a minimum, with ample green spaces to somewhat guard against concentrations of air pollutants.

Historic attractions in the Tung Chung area include Tung Chung Fort and Tung Chung Battery. These lead to the possibility of a museum – even coupled with historical re-enactments, such as between imperial forces and pirate ships.

As the fleet of infamous pirate Cheung Po-tsai was defeated off Chek Lap Kok, there is great potential for a museum – ideally, a “living museum”, with real people dressed and acting as sometimes wicked characters – at Tung Chung. (Chow Yun-fat will play Cheung Po-tsai in the next *Pirates of the Caribbean*, and though far from any historical accuracy [publicity bills him as 15th century, not 19th], this will help make Cheung better known.)

Also of historic interest is the Hau Wong temple, which marks a time when the Song imperial court fled Mongol forces to the Hong Kong area, including Lantau. Here, too, there is opportunity for re-enactments, for bringing to life some of the great drama in the history of Hong Kong and Lantau.

Close to the temple is San Tau, which is an SSSI and one of few local breeding sites for horseshoe crabs. Together with Hau Wong, the Tung Chung stream and old rice fields, this creates potential for making the area west of Tung Chung – including Tung Chung Bay, which should not be reclaimed – into an attractive area for visitors and locals. This will also be make for good initial views for people riding the Skyrail from Tung Chung. Proper management will be required to safeguard San Tau’s value for biodiversity.

Tourist Accommodation on South Lantau

There is already a range of accommodation available in village housing scattered across Lantau, including at coastal areas such as Cheung Sha. Such accommodation can be improved, and more perhaps added, without need for environmentally harmful developments.

Importantly, although their total potential may be substantial, each of the village apartment complexes is small, so perhaps finds promotion difficult. They can be assisted with promoting their accommodation to visitors from Hong Kong and overseas (see later, suggestion for Lantau Tourism Promotion Association).

(See later, re Infrastructure.)

Lantau Museum and Garden

A Lantau Museum and Garden could become a very popular destination for visitors to Lantau. Exhibits can cover Lantau's cultural and natural history – from the island's formation, to the arrival of humans who left artefacts discovered by archaeologists, to the present day, coupled with an overview of changes in the flora and fauna. [Though this outline has similarities to the Museum of History in Tsim Sha Tsui, the Lantau Museum can differ, with more focus on natural and cultural history, and on activities for visitors.]

Here, too, there is potential for highlighting the range of potential activities on Lantau, so this centre acts as a springboard for exploring the island.

Possible locations include Tung Chung (away from the Fort, which is an attraction in its own right); or Mui Wo; or Ngong Ping (assuming the Skyrail is successful).

The centre could include landscaped gardens, with plants and trees that are native to Lantau. These will in turn attract birds, butterflies and other wildlife.

Potentially, this could be expanded to showcase biodiversity from elsewhere in the region, such as from south China and southeast Asia.

Lantau Tour Centres

Visitor information centres can be established at major entry points for Lantau, such as Mui Wo and Tung Chung. These need not be grandiose; at Mui Wo, for instance, there is potential for – initially at least – simply enhancing the AFCD information kiosk.

Mui Wo

Facelift Mui Wo is in slow decline; but this could be reversed if it becomes attractive for tourists. Already, Mui Wo has much to offer – it's in a splendid setting, with rural character and an attractive beach.

In places, however, Mui Wo appears rundown, with excessive grey concrete: this is especially true near the ferry pier, presenting an unlovely impression to people arriving by ferry. There is great scope for improvements, which could include replacing expanses of concrete with trees and flowerbeds. Plus signage highlighting things to see and do.



Heritage and Scenery There are almost ruined, old watchtowers at Mui Wo, which could be renovated. There are already trails through the area, but with better signage these can guide visitors past these buildings, as well as past orchards, through fields and hamlets, and to the Silvermine Waterfall – which is impressive and easily reached, yet not promoted. Historic trails, suitable for people on foot and on cycles, can be created.

It may be possible to open the silver mine for (guided) visits; if so, an exhibit could cover the history of mining here and elsewhere in Hong Kong.

Other possibilities include a water sports centre, perhaps including accommodation. These sports could include dragon boat racing – giving visitors a chance to try paddling in and drumming for a dragon boat.

Mui Wo Wetland Reserve The marsh and fishponds at Mui Wo are sadly neglected, impacted by drainage works and by slow reclamation. Yet they still attract wildlife, with birds including egrets. This area could readily be transformed into a small wetland reserve, with visitor facilities such as hides (blinds) and a short trail system. Here, people can easily see large waterbirds such as the egrets, as well as herons. Rarer species would also occur. This, too, would add to the visitor attractions on Lantau.

Ngong Ping: native woodland and tea plantation

With the advent of the Ngong Ping 360 tourist attraction, Ngong Ping is set to become an even more important area for visitors.

Ngong Ping is in a magnificent setting, and already features a tea plantation, woodland and a tree walk. More native trees could be planted here, creating sub-tropical woodland similar to the forests that once clothed Lantau and much of Hong Kong. With better woodland and wildlife, there will be opportunities for highlighting the reverence for nature that permeates Buddhism; also the aim for balance with nature in Taoism.

The tea plantation has become somewhat neglected in recent years. Some assistance can be given to help restore parts of the plantation – as well as selling locally made tea. Mountain Begonia, once a famous product of this area, can be cultivated.

Tai O

Fishing village Tai O is already a tourist attraction. With more promotion, and benefiting partly through the visitors drawn to Ngong Ping, overall visitor numbers could be significantly increased – but ensuring a balance, so that at no time do visitors overwhelm

the village (peak numbers during weekends and public holidays may already be at or close to capacity; whilst there is perhaps scope for more visitors on weekdays). There may be ways of reducing congestion, such as extended routes for visitors, with signage etc so most visitors walk in one direction, such as making a clockwise circuit.

While infrastructure may need improving, assistance should also be given to locals wishing to open or enhance restaurants, cafes, shops, and small heritage museum – so the community benefits from tourism, yet Tai O retains the ambience that draws visitors.

Wetlands Beside Tai O are mangroves and small marshes, and former salt fields. These receive some protection, and additional mangrove planting work is underway; ongoing active management could further improve these wetlands.

Especially if wetland reserve is established at Mui Wo and proves successful, the Tai O wetland can be enhanced, also with some visitor facilities such as hides.

Folk Museum There is potential for a folk museum focusing on traditional Tai O lifestyles, including fishing and salt extraction methods. This could be at least partly a living museum – for instance, with people selling dried fish as locals have done for generations. [This could be developed from an existing, small museum; perhaps simply by giving financial assistance to the current museum owner.]

Ng Yuen



Ng Yuen is unique in Hong Kong – and probably, worldwide. It's arguably Hong Kong's only folly: a Chinese landscaped garden, with carp pond, built away from roads (but beside a major hiking trail), and is a superb place to visit with majestic surroundings.

The buildings are somewhat dilapidated, but with assistance, these can be renovated. There is considerable opportunity for making this more attractive for visitors, with possibilities including a café – maybe in the style of a Chinese tea house, perhaps accommodation, and improved gardens that could focus on the flora of Lantau and south China. Such developments should be small scale; with safeguards to ensure the environment is not damaged (including by ensuring there is no pollution of the stream).

Fan Lau; nearby Tai Long Wan

The Fan Lau hamlet is almost deserted. Yet it is in a wonderful part of Hong Kong, with an old fort and mysterious stone circle close by, accessed by walking or by boat. Here, there are possibilities for enhanced attractions for visitors, perhaps including comfortable

accommodation for small numbers of people who wish to spend the night in a tranquil place, seemingly far from the city.

Cycle tracks

Lantau offers scope for creating an excellent cycling network; indeed, there are already mountain bike trails. New trails could be established – but with minimal environmental damage. Existing routes can be promoted, particularly the South Lantau Water Catchment, which offers easy riding, and can be a fine family cycling trail. It may, however, be difficult to create new mountain biking trails without introducing conflicts with hikers (hiking should have priority over biking).

Action Sports

As well as having excellent potential for cycle trails, Lantau could become Hong Kong's main centre for action sports. Mountain biking trails, adventure racing courses, climbing routes, and destinations for watersports such as kayaking are all possible. These can suit people with abilities ranging from beginner to expert, affording training facilities for athletes who can represent Hong Kong at an international level.

A Lantau Action Sports Centre would be the focus for these activities. This may offer accommodation for local and overseas contestants, static work out areas, a gym, rock walls, training pool, workshops to repair gear, parasailing stores, canteen, sports shop and so on. Possible locations include the South Lantau Hospital site at Cheung Sha, and Shap Long.

Cheung Sha

Cheung Sha is one of Hong Kong's most beautiful beaches – which is all the more remarkable given that it is right beside a main road. However, it is relatively under-utilised, perhaps because it is almost a secret.

Cheung Sha can be promoted, with roadside signage helping visitors who arrive by buses.

The western stretch of Cheung Sha should be kept as is, allowing people to stroll along the sand, with natural vegetation above the tideline.



The eastern stretch of Cheung Sha already has visitor facilities including restaurants in village houses, and a watersports centre with visitor accommodation. With greater promotion of the area, these could attract more people on weekdays (when they are currently relatively quiet); perhaps more visitor houses could be converted to non-intrusive visitor facilities – focused on enjoying the beach and South China Sea views, and on watersports.

Pui O Buffalo Fields

The marshy, abandoned fields at Pui O are home to feral water buffalo. Coupled with the scenery, beach, and rural character, these could help make Pui O a significant tourist attraction.

The buffalo and “their” fields should be protected; with an improved method for controlling buffalo numbers if needed. With community help, the area can be improved, with some rather despoiled areas enhanced by greenery.



As with much of Lantau, promotion is needed: it's currently easy to pass through Pui O village by bus, without realising there is anything of interest. There is scope for a Buffalo Trail, including a loop from the main road, through fields to the beach, and back to the road. With more visitors, there will be opportunities for more small shops and cafes, plus accommodation (avoiding new buildings in the coastal protection zone).

Proposed Lantau North (Extension) Country Park

This country park extension should not really appear in this plan; the extension has been long planned – it was gazetted in 2001, and should by now be a reality.

There seems no excuse for further delaying the country park extension. Once established, the new area of country park can be a focus for creating new hiking (and mountain biking) trails, as well as for conservation activities.

Protection for Other Important Natural Areas

Formal zoning protection should be afforded to other valuable areas such as coastlines, mountain streams, wetlands and *fung shui* woods.

Soko Islands

A marine park has been proposed for the Soko Islands; this can make a significant contribution to coastal protection around Lantau.

The Sokos have potential as an ecotourism destination, with coral communities, as well as regenerating woodland and old farmland, and small beaches. Visitors may arrive on day trips; accommodation could be built allowing small numbers of people to stay overnight.

Infrastructure

Ensuring Lantau developments are indeed sustainable will be challenging. A host of problems may well arise; however, some problems can be anticipated, and alleviated or solved in advance:

1. Carrying capacities for individual sites. Assessing carrying capacities is difficult, and somewhat subjective. However, care should be taken to ensure visitor numbers do not overwhelm sites, destroying the natural beauty that attracts visitors in the first place. This is especially important for sensitive sites, such as proposed nature reserves, and Ng Yuen; for such places, ticket systems may be required.
2. Sewage treatment and sewerage facilities must be adequate.
3. Transportation needs considering. The emphasis should be on using the minimum transport required to meet the needs of visitors and locals. Ferries could play useful roles. They offer a convenient, and highly scenic alternative to vehicles; small piers at coastal villages would bring visitors to revitalize these communities. Better and more buses (perhaps of the tourist minibus style) are preferable to more taxis.
4. Accommodation in rural areas should be small, in keeping with the environment, and ensuring people staying can truly enjoy a rural atmosphere – cf small island resorts in places such as Thailand, though on Lantau buildings can have a local character. It may be possible to use some local materials such as bamboo to help build accommodation.

Promotion Crucial for Success



As this – by no means exhaustive – document makes clear, Lantau already has many existing and potential visitor attractions, with great possibilities for improving these and creating new attractions.

However, most of these attractions receive little or no promotion – many are little known even to Hong Kong people. There is, therefore, considerable scope for enhanced promotion of Lantau's many and varied attractions. It may be advisable to establish a Lantau Tourism Promotion Association – or Islands Tourism Promotion Association; this could also help businesses with improving services for visitors (such as even small restaurants having menus with English as well as Chinese, ensuring minimum standards for hostels), as well as promoting attractions, including through the Internet.

Acknowledgements

Sources used in preparing this plan included:

Concept Plan for Lantau: Consultation Digest Lantau Development Task Force
ark~eden – a vision for sustainable development on Lantau

A Conservation Strategy for Lantau Green Lantau Association, The Conservancy Association, Friends of the Earth, Green Power, Hong Kong Marine Conservation Society, World Wide Fund for Nature Hong Kong
Keep Lantau Beautiful Groups including Green Lantau Association, Clear the Air, Save Our Shorelines

Several individuals – including from some non-governmental organisations – commented on the first draft of this plan. However, names are not published here, as at least two were concerned that some people would take “commented on” to mean “fully support/endorse”. Despite this, their contributions helped strengthen this plan; their contributions are greatly appreciated.

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Letter from James Lazell, Director of the Conservation Agency, to the *South China Morning Post*:

I have recently been able to review the plan for conservation and ecotourism development drawn up by Dr. Martin Williams for Lantau. It is a superb alternative to the current government plan, which I believe calls for unsustainable, ecologically destructive development.

As a conservation biologist, I have been visiting Lantau and surrounding islands annually since 1979. I typically bring groups of other professional biologists, graduate and undergraduate students, and amateur naturalists to these islands. We have discovered new species of reptiles and insects and documented new localities and habitats for many rare species of wildlife. We work with colleagues at local universities, AFCD, WWF, Kadoorie Farm and Botanic Garden, and other Hong Kong institutions. We know Lantau and the surrounding islands, like Peng Chau, Hei Ling Chau, Chau Kung To, Shek Kwu Chau, and the Sokos, are treasure troves of natural biodiversity. But over the years we have lost a lot.

The consumptive destruction of most of Chek Lap Kok, the urbanization of the Tung Chung region, the Disneyfication of Chok Ko Wan (Penny's Bay), and continued housing development along Lantau's south coast have all destroyed significant natural areas and habitat. The demise of agriculture, too, has resulted in paddies reverting to shrubland. This has decreased habitat for many species specialized for marsh and paddy life. Buffalos and cattle are our

allies in helping maintain these open ecosystems, but active agriculture is needed too.

All of these factors are considered in the alternative plan. I urge Lantau residents and all concerned citizens to study it and, I hope, assist us in bringing it to reality.

Sincerely,

Dr. James Lazell

Shui Hau, Lantau

www.theconservationagency.org