

Costly and wasteful and incapable of addressing our urgent housing problems

The Lantau Tomorrow Vision/East Lantau Metropolis plan is a costly, environmentally destructive and wasteful way of solving Hong Kong's housing problems.

Briefly I make the following points:

It is clear from the outset the government was intent on proceeding with this project, regardless of the benefit to the city. Originally, the project was to cope with Hong Kong's claimed forecast population of more than 9 million. Only after it was pointed out this exceeded the government's own forecast of a population peak at 8.2 million in 2043 did the boosters of this project start to argue that the additional land is need for additional space and lifestyle.

Second, the Land Supply Task Force offered citizens no reclamation option other than the 1000ha ELM. We have not heard any reason why we cannot carry a modest level of reclamation of, say, 300ha or 400ha. It is 1000ha or nothing.

Third, the Chief Executive notoriously increased the scale of the project overnight from 1000ha to 1700ha. The 1700ha plan has been subject to no discussion or public engagement - it cannot be said to have any meaningful public support. This random and unilateral expansion merely underlines the nature of the plan, that it is primarily for the benefit of government officials in Hong Kong and Beijing officials, the developer community and their financiers.

Fourth, the government appears to have overlooked a large swathe of brownfield land - more than 1500ha, according to research group Liber Research. Again, this benefits the developer community, who prefer spanking new sites with taxpayer-funded infrastructure rather having to carry out the hard graft of reconditioning existing sites.

Fifth, the urgent issue facing Hong Kong citizens is not a shortage of accommodation but affordability. No part of the process to date has addressed the question of cost for the homebuyer. Indeed, early estimates of the LTV suggest it will be as out of reach of future homebuyers as the current housing stock is today. And it goes without saying that the urgent problem of affordability is hardly going to be addressed by a 20-year reclamation and development project.

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