

**For discussion on
23 March 2020**

**LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL
PANEL ON ENVIRONMENTAL AFFAIRS**

Enhancing the Recreation and Education Potential of Country Parks

Purpose

This paper aims to brief members of the results of the consultancy study on enhancement of the recreation and education potential of country parks (CP) and special areas (SA), and the plan to take forward the related enhancement proposals.

Background

2. The Agriculture, Fisheries and Conservation Department (AFCD) commissioned a consultancy study in January 2017 to explore opportunities for enhancing the recreation and education potential of CP and SA, so as to enrich visitors' experience and meet the growing demand for countryside recreation from the public. With reference to opinions collected in a series of public engagement activities, and having considered factors of the environment, planning, design and operation, the consultants formulated four enhancement proposals as follows:

- (a) **Enhancement of Existing Facilities** (e.g. one-stop services visitor hub , advance booking system for campsites, new viewing platforms, improvement of hiking trails with natural materials, etc.);
- (b) **Open Museums for Historical Relics Appreciation;**
- (c) **Tree Top Adventure** (e.g. canopy walk, tree climbing and ziplining);
and
- (d) **Glamping Sites and Eco-lodges** (e.g. to offer convenient, comfortable and diversified overnight facilities or experience).

3. During February to May 2019, AFCD collected public opinions through various channels and media, including consultation document and pamphlet, dedicated website, social media, advertisement, organising public engagement activities and questionnaire surveys. The public could also learn about the proposals and express their views at the five interactive exhibitions at shopping malls, four roving exhibitions and two public forums. During the public consultation period, AFCD received over 1 100 completed questionnaires as well as other written responses. Having evaluated the views and opinions gathered, AFCD formulated an implementation plan to take forward the enhancement proposals. Major opinions collected in the public consultation are summarised below.

Summary of Major Views Collected from the Public Consultation

Enhancement of Existing Facilities

4. With respect to enhancement of existing facilities, majority of the respondents supported AFCD's proposals to address the needs of visitors in accordance with their ages, experiences and abilities. The proposal aims to enhance the accessibility of CP, improve existing facilities or provide new facilities in support of environmentally friendly and plastic-free measures, as well as facilitate visits by physically handicapped persons. Furthermore, respondents also made suggestions in respect of enhancing the experience of camping activities.

Open Museums for Historical Relics Appreciation

5. There are many cultural heritage sites such as war relics found within CP and SA, which provide opportunities to set up open museums with a view to enhancing conservation and educational functions. Respondents generally supported the proposals of setting up open museums at the proposed historical relics sites (e.g. the Pinewood Battery and Shing Mun Redoubt). That said, they considered that measures should be taken to minimise impact on the environment and provide relevant historical information to enrich visitors' knowledge.

Tree Top Adventure

6. According to survey results, the proposal of tree top adventure activities in CP and SA was very well-received. A wide variety of associated activities,

such as canopy walk, tree climbing and ziplining, could offer unique adventurous experiences for visitors of different age groups to enjoy in person and have better understanding of nature conservation and related knowledge. Nevertheless, some respondents were concerned about the possible impact on ecology in CP caused by installation of facilities for tree top adventure.

Glamping Sites and Eco-lodges

7. The provision of diversified overnight facilities in CP and SA, such as “glamping sites” and “eco-lodges”, was another widely supported proposal. These facilities would cater for visitors’ needs for different countryside experience. While about 85% of respondents supported this proposal, they also opined that the services provided should avoid over-commercialisation and measures should be taken to ensure that the facilities and campers would not cause pollution to the environment or impact on ecology.

Other Comments

8. Apart from the above, the public also expressed concerns about the carrying capacity and management of CP and SA, possible over-commercialisation of certain facilities, and the potential environmental impact brought by the enhancement proposals or more new facilities. There were also suggestions that the Government should collaborate with villages near CP, and encourage local villagers to provide ancillary facilities for respective CP.

Taking Forward the Enhancement Proposals

9. Based on the views collected, the public had three major areas of concerns, including the potential environmental and ecological impact of the proposed new facilities, the carrying capacity of CP, as well as the possible over-commercialisation and overcharging by the private operators of these facilities and activities. When formulating individual projects for the implementation of the four enhancement proposals, AFCD will identify suitable locations with prudence and carry out detailed feasibility studies where necessary to ensure that the operation of the concerned facilities will not exceed the carrying capacity of the relevant CP. Natural or environmental-friendly materials will be used as far as possible to renovate and construct the facilities.

10. To avoid over-commercialisation of recreational facilities and activities, AFCD will also consider non-governmental organisations, social enterprises or

charitable organisations in addition to the commercial sector in the selection of operators. Suitable terms will be included in the agreements to ensure that fees are set at reasonable levels and affordable by the public. Fee concession for educational and social welfare institutes will also be considered.

11. AFCD will also maintain and improve existing facilities and supporting arrangements regularly. In addition, various educational elements will be incorporated to promote conservation of the natural environment, preservation of heritage and culture, knowledge of biodiversity, adoption of green living and sustainable use of CP and SA.

12. Having considered the complexity of individual enhancement proposals and the lead time required, AFCD will implement the enhancement proposals in stages.

Short-term and On-going Projects

13. AFCD is implementing the following short-term and on-going projects, and will roll out these projects gradually for public enjoyment:

- (a) **Set up more campsites** – AFCD is identifying suitable recreation sites in CP for conversion into campsites.
- (b) **Improve hiking trails using natural materials** – as an on-going work, AFCD will collaborate with suitable organisations and invite public participation in the improvement of hiking trails.
- (c) **Provide more viewing platforms** – the new viewing platforms at Tai Lam Reservoir Islands, Sai Kung Biu Tsim Kok and High West on Hong Kong Island were opened in March, June and September 2019 respectively for public use. AFCD will continue to set up new viewing platforms at suitable locations in CP.
- (d) **Review and develop a new orienteering program in CP** – AFCD is carrying out preparation work for a new orienteering facility in the Lions Nature Education Centre in Sai Kung. The facility is expected to be launched in 2020. AFCD will also review other orienteering facilities at a later stage.

- (e) **Organise more thematic guided tours** – AFCD has been organising guided tours in the CP and SA with themes on biodiversity and cultural heritage. AFCD will continue to collaborate with relevant organisations to roll out more diversified guided tours to enhance promotion of biodiversity conservation and appreciation of cultural heritage.
- (f) **Install water filling stations** – AFCD has recently installed 15 new water filling stations in CP to encourage the public to bring their own bottles and reduce the use of single-use plastic bottles. AFCD will continue to install water filling stations at suitable recreation sites in CP.
- (g) **Improve the Ngong Ping Nature Centre** – AFCD is currently preparing for the enhancement of facilities in Ngong Ping Nature Centre to provide more information of peripheral hiking trails and green attractions. The guided tour services of the Centre will also be strengthened.

Medium-term Projects

14. AFCD has taken steps to prepare for the implementation of the medium-term projects as follows:

- (a) **Introduce an advance booking system for popular campsites and enhance services at campsites** – AFCD is formulating a pilot scheme of advance booking system at the Twisk Campsite. A computer booking system will be introduced to facilitate advance booking of camping spaces and facilities, with a quota set for overseas visitors. The pilot scheme is expected to be launched in 2020. AFCD will collect the public's views on the advance booking system, review the implementation of the system, and include more CP campsites in the booking system. The camping services will be enhanced as appropriate to provide an alternative of glamping experience to the public at suitable campsites.
- (b) **Enhance physically handicapped and able-bodied (P.H.A.B.) sites and supporting facilities** – AFCD is in collaboration with relevant organisations to explore the improvement of certain trails and the supporting facilities to facilitate wheelchair users to visit selected CP. AFCD will also continue to renew and improve existing P.H.A.B. sites and the supporting facilities.

- (c) **Review, formulate and implement countryside education programmes** – In collaboration with the Education Bureau, AFCD has recently launched a kindergarten education programme to nurture the interest of children to explore and learn in the natural environment. AFCD will review and formulate nature education programmes targeted at secondary and primary students at the next stage.

Long-term Projects

15. AFCD will take a prudent approach to take forward enhancement proposals of larger-scale, such as open museums for war relics in CP, tree top adventure facilities and eco-lodges. AFCD will carry out feasibility studies to investigate in detail the site selection, design, mode of operation, fee level and operation requirements, etc. of the concerned facilities. After acquiring the necessary resources, AFCD will kick-start the preparatory work for the feasibility studies, and take further steps to implement these proposals according to the outcome of the studies.

16. In addition, as announced in the 2019 Policy Address by the Chief Executive, the Government plans to develop Pak Tam Chung into a green tourism hub with a view to further promoting green tourism. AFCD will conduct a preliminary planning study to investigate the service need of countryside visitors at Pak Tam Chung, such as visitor information, guided tour services, sale and rental of hiking and camping equipment, eateries and café, transportation to green attractions, as well as gathering points for outdoor events, etc.. The aim is to re-design the supporting facilities in the Pak Tam Chung area for green tourism, and turn the site into an important gateway to visiting the Sai Kung Country Parks and Hong Kong UNESCO Global Geopark.

Advice Sought

17. Members are invited to note the implementation plan to take forward the enhancement proposals of CP and SA and provide comments.

Environment Bureau

Agriculture, Fisheries and Conservation Department

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