

**For discussion on
26 April 2021**

Legislative Council Panel on Economic Development

Upgrading of Facilities of the Hong Kong Wetland Park

PURPOSE

This paper aims to consult Members on the proposal for upgrading the facilities of the Hong Kong Wetland Park (HKWP) with a view to enhancing its appeal as an eco-tourism attraction and seek Members' support to seek funding approval from the Finance Committee (FC).

BACKGROUND

2. HKWP is located at the northern part of Tin Shui Wai. It comprises a 10 000m² Visitor Centre and a 60-hectare Wetland Reserve. The Visitor Centre has themed exhibition galleries, a theatre, a souvenir shop, a cafeteria and an indoor play area. The themed exhibition galleries showcase the importance of wetland on biodiversity, civilisation and conservation. HKWP has attracted over 7.2 million visitors as at March 2021 since its opening in 2006. It is a world-class eco-tourism attraction and has obtained various architectural and landscaping awards from local and overseas professional groups. HKWP is also an important wetland ecological education and green tourism facility in the territory. A total of 8 000 educational and promotional activities were held in 2019.

3. Located next to the Mai Po Inner Deep Bay Ramsar Site and being a member of the Wetland Links International (Asia), HKWP presents a beautiful wetland landscape, which is home to more than 270 species of birds, 58 species of dragonflies, 10 species of amphibians, 33

species of reptiles, 18 species of crabs, 27 species of fishes and 181 species of butterflies. HKWP is special in the way that the wetland is surrounded by urban areas. Its proximity to the downtown areas in the northwest of the New Territories and Shenzhen makes it easily accessible by railway or other public transportation, making it an ideal eco and green tourism destination for local visitors, tour groups and overseas tourists.

JUSTIFICATIONS

4. The mission of HKWP is to foster visitors' understanding of wetlands and seek their support and engagement in wetland conservation. Notwithstanding, the permanent exhibition and visitor facilities, including the interpretation panels of exhibits, orientation maps and signages, etc., of HKWP have been used for over 14 years. Quite a number of them are either ageing and cannot be restored due to non-availability of spare parts in the market, or unable to meet the prevailing technological standards. Moreover, the lack of linkage between the themed exhibition galleries and the outdoor Wetland Reserve has failed to integrate immersive environment with simulated visual features for interactions among visitors, thus limited visitors' better visiting experience. As such, the upgrading of exhibition and visitor facilities to keep abreast of the modern technology is required so as to bring fresh and better experience for visitors.

5. In view of the above, the Chief Executive proposed in the "2018 Policy Agenda" to enhance the appeal of HKWP as an eco-tourism attraction by upgrading its facilities to offer better visitors' experience of the wetland wildlife and habitats. In 2019, the Agriculture, Fisheries and Conservation Department (AFCD) conducted a study to review the exhibition and visitor facilities of HKWP.

6. AFCD gauged public views on HKWP in general and their visiting experience by means of focus group workshops, questionnaires, interviews, etc. The respondents covered major stakeholders including local visitors, overseas tourists, green groups, the education sector, the tourism trade, etc.. Most of the respondents considered that HKWP should update the interpretation materials, exhibit content and visitor

facilities. In terms of interpretation materials, they considered that conservation information should be strengthened to meet local school curriculum development, and seasonal topics or temporary exhibition should be added to attract repeated visitations. On the exhibit content, they recommended adding amusing and storytelling elements to enhance edutainment atmosphere, wild animals- and plants-watching experience, integrations among the exhibition galleries and the Wetland Reserve, as well as online sharing experience, etc. On visitor facilities, they proposed providing family-friendly facilities, improving visitor flow control to avoid too many or too few visitors at particular venues, and accommodating the needs of persons with disabilities in venue and exhibit design. Based on the views collected, AFCD devised a proposal of upgrading the exhibition and visitor facilities, leveraging HKWP's distinctive market position to strengthen its role as an important gateway to nature education and Hong Kong's major eco and green tourism attraction with a view to meeting the expectations of stakeholders and encouraging repeated visitation.

7. In addition, given the development of the COVID-19 epidemic, we anticipate that healthy travelling experience will become more popular among local and overseas visitors. Eco and green tourism attractions, especially those with visitor-friendly facilities, good accessibility and hygienic conditions will be more competitive. As such, we have to timely upgrade the exhibition and visitor facilities of HKWP so as to prepare for the tourism recovery in Hong Kong and provide local and overseas visitors with more fruitful eco and green tourism experience.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR IMPROVEMENT AND DETAILS OF THE PROPOSAL

8. Having regard to the recommendations of AFCD, we plan to launch a three-year programme to renew the exhibitions and upgrade the visitor facilities of HKWP in phases by making reference to standards and modes of international museums with the following proposed scope:-

- (a) *Updating and designing the facilities and permanent exhibition contents of the themed exhibition galleries*, which

include enhancing the quality of screen display of exhibits by using the latest technology; dismantling aged exhibits or those beyond repair; providing an immersive environment with simulated visual features; and strengthening the uniqueness of exhibits by connecting the nature and local culture, so as to bring visitors a more interesting and interactive visiting experience; and

- (b) ***Improving visitor facilities***, which includes re-designing the installations at the Entry Plaza; re-designing and renewing exhibit interpretation panels; providing new interactive visit-planning kiosks with the function of searching routes and designing visits of different lengths; renewal of orientation signages and location of exhibits to guide visitors touring around the themed exhibition galleries and the Wetland Reserve so as to improve the visitor circulation and the connection between the Visitor Centre and the Wetland Reserve; improving accessibility of exhibition venues and exhibits by adopting barrier-free design with assistance of audio system and induction loop system so as to accommodate the needs of various visitor groups, including different age groups and persons with disabilities, with a view to enriching their visiting experience.

9. The themes of design and details of renewal of respective exhibition area of HKWP recommended by AFCD are as follows-

- (a) **Entry Plaza**: Unlike previous design with physical sculptures, the park entrance will feature freshwater wetland organisms' and their underwater habitat, and will provide visitor-oriented facilities such as shade structure. Visitors can experience the environment at the bottom of freshwater wetlands through augmented reality (AR) technology. Signages will be installed to enhance visitor usage;
- (b) **Atrium**: In addition to the traditional orientation points, interactive visit-planning kiosks, commemorative stamps and seating area will be added;

- (c) “What are Wetlands?” and “Living Wetlands” Galleries: The two galleries will be combined and renamed as “Living Wetlands” Gallery. Different from the previous exhibition set up with models, taxidermies or physical components, the new gallery will demonstrate a complete local wetland environment¹. Exhibition facilities will include interactive games, models, and wetland animals and plants, with highlights including a large-scale eco pond for dragonflies, and an interactive game demonstrating rainfall and water cycles;
- (d) “Wetland Challenge” Gallery: Different from the traditional one-way presentation of images, video shows and human interpretation, the gallery will be divided into the “Wetland Explorer” Gallery (Ground floor) and “Amazing Journeys” Gallery (First floor). The two themed exhibition galleries at the two floors will be connected. Exhibition facilities will combine games and artwork presentation elements on natural science and digital art museum, to educate visitors about wetlands animals and plants;
- (e) “Human Culture” Gallery: Different from the traditional one-way presentation video shows on worldwide wetlands, the gallery will be converted into “Wetlands and Us” Gallery. Through interactive presentation, the gallery will showcase cultural heritage of Hong Kong wetland from past to present, wetland ecosystem services on food provision and water supplies. Visitors can enjoy an immersive art experience by exploring with other visitors to operate a fishpond, and rethink how to cherish our wetland and water resources;
- (f) Viewing Gallery: In addition to providing telescopes, the gallery will provide a creative space for games and workshops, as well as a temporary exhibition space for use by green groups or other communities; and

¹ A complete local wetland environment stretches from the mudflats, mangroves and brackish water habitat of Deep Bay, to the lowland freshwater ecosystems, and upstream into the woodland streams in forested hill.

- (g) Indoor Play Area: The area will be redeveloped into a themed play area for children and toddlers, namely the “Mangrove Adventure”. Game facilities will include mezzanine high-tide play netting area and elevated slides to mudflat, and a diversity of themed game areas for children to explore a mudflat mangrove environment.

10. The map, list of existing exhibition areas and preliminary conceptual design of the upgrading plan of HKWP are at Annex I, Annex II and Annex III respectively.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

11. The total funding required for the project is estimated at a one-off non-recurrent cost of \$135 million, which covers detailed design of the exhibits and visitor facilities, sourcing, prototyping, as well as testing, fabrication and installation of new exhibits and visitor facilities. The estimated cash flow requirement is at Annex IV.

PROJECT IMPLEMENTATION AND WAY FORWARD

12. Subject to FC’s funding approval, we plan to start the upgrading work in the fourth quarter of 2021 for completion by phases from the third quarter of 2022 to the fourth quarter of 2024. During the upgrading of facilities, HKWP will remain open with partial closure of the exhibition galleries for replacing exhibits and visitor facilities to minimize impacts to visitors.

13. Meanwhile, we will start developing and designing new educational activities and teaching resources to tie in with the new exhibition themes and visitor facilities. We will consult stakeholders so as to organise diversified educational activities for quality eco and green tourism. We will also provide training for schools, the tourism sector, etc., to foster deeper visitors’ understanding of the wetlands and cultural heritage effectively through the hardware and software of HKWP. The

interactive elements as well as immersive environment with simulated visual effects of the new exhibits will further strengthen educational effect and visitors' experience on wetland and biodiversity conservation, thereby enhancing HKWP's attractiveness as an important gateway to nature education, and positioning as an eco and green tourism facility. Besides, the new exhibits are updatable. Upon completion of the upgrading, with available resources, we will continue to update or renew the exhibits by incorporating seasonal elements so as to maintain visitors' interest and competitiveness of HKWP.

14. We are going to implement online ticketing which provides convenient ticketing services. Visitors, schools, organisations or the tourism sector can purchase admission tickets in advance. Apart from the interactive visit-planning kiosks in the proposal, we will explore the introduction of a visitor flow control system for the exhibition galleries for visitors to grasp the best time to visit the galleries with better itinerary arrangement.

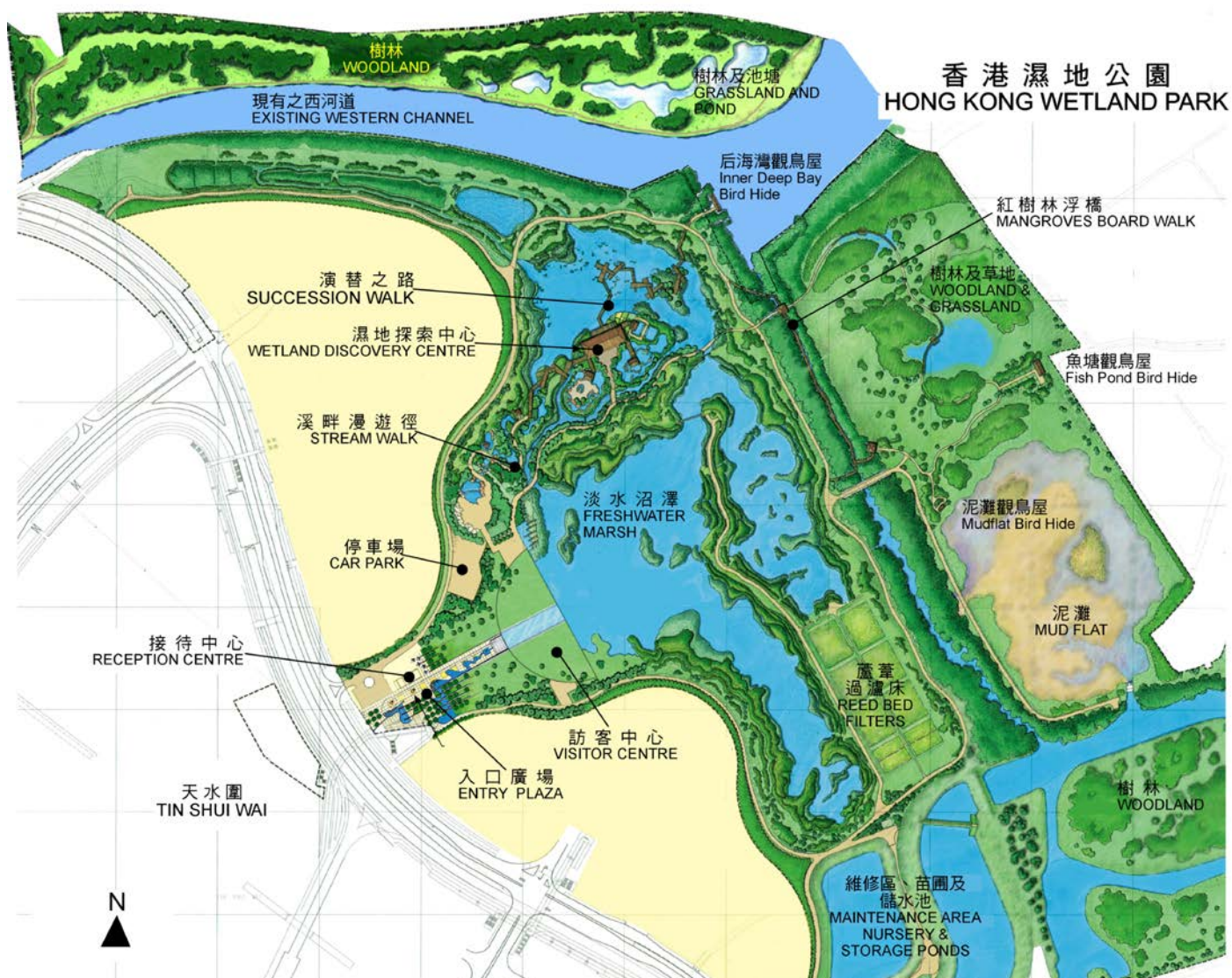
ADVICE SOUGHT

15. Members are invited to note and comment on the contents of this paper. Subject to Members' support, we will seek funding approval for upgrading the facilities of HKWP from FC.

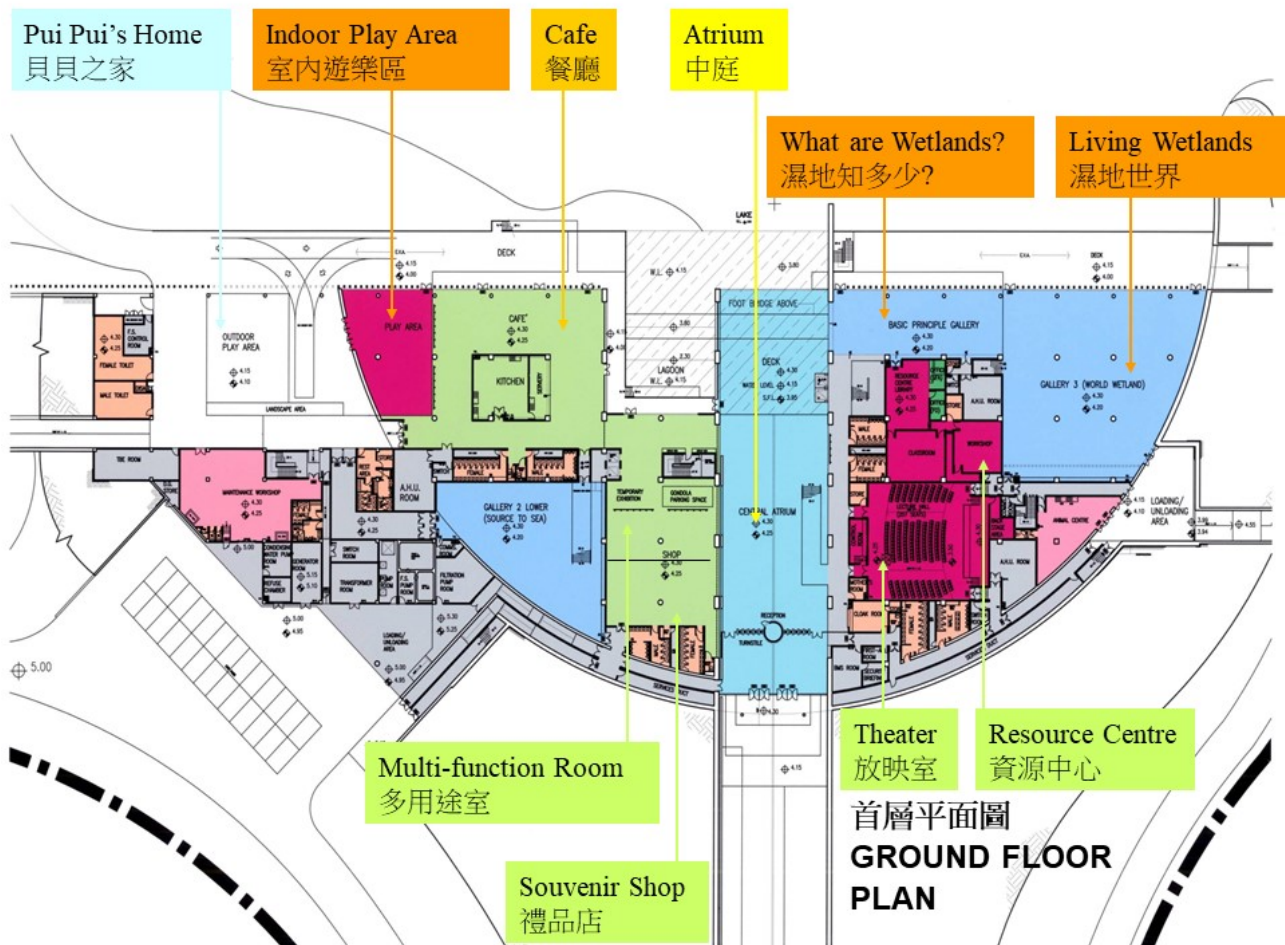
**Commerce and Economic Development Bureau
Tourism Commission
Agriculture, Fisheries and Conservation Department
April 2021**

Map of the Hong Kong Wetland Park (HKWP)

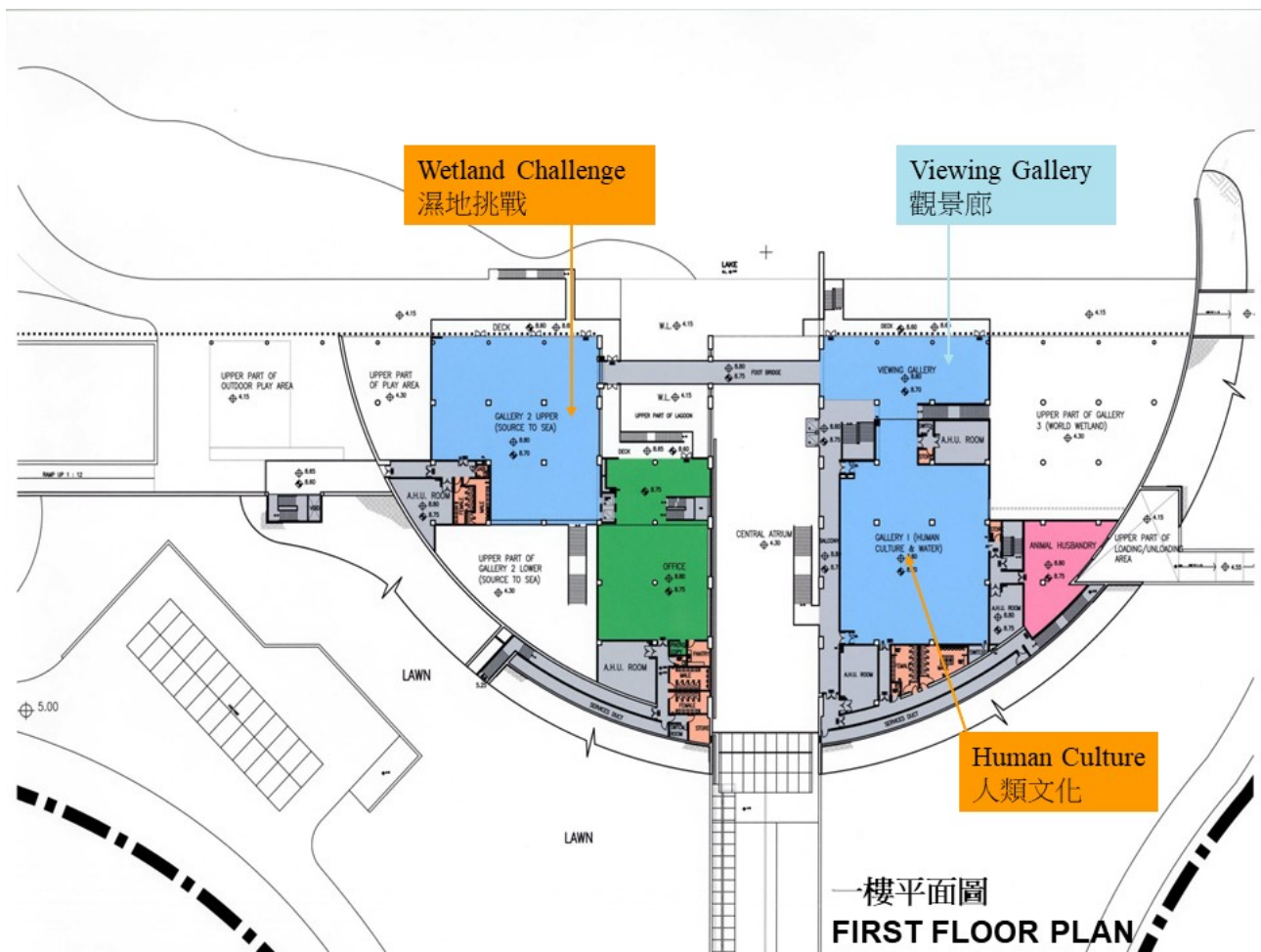
1. HKWP Wetland Reserve



2. HKWP Visitor Centre (Ground floor) floorplan



3. HKWP Visitor Centre (First floor) floorplan



**List of Existing Exhibition Areas
in the Hong Kong Wetland Park**

| Exhibition Area | Year of Usage | No. of Exhibits |
|------------------------------|----------------------|------------------------|
| Entry Plaza | 14 | 97 |
| Atrium | | 2 |
| “What are Wetlands?” Gallery | | 100 |
| “Living Wetlands” Gallery | | 163 |
| “Wetland Challenge” Gallery | | 297 |
| “Human Culture” Gallery | | 65 |
| Viewing Gallery | | 23 |
| Indoor Play Area | | 45 |
| | Total | 792 |

Conceptual Design of the Upgrading Plan of the Hong Kong Wetland Park

1. Entry Plaza (入口廣場)

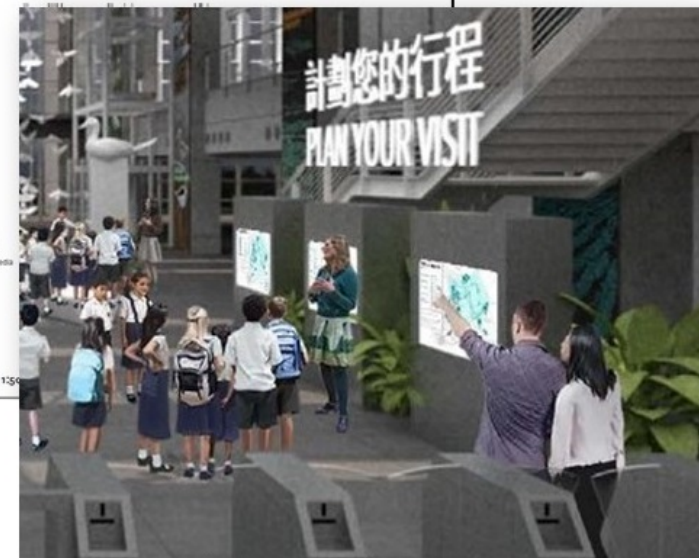
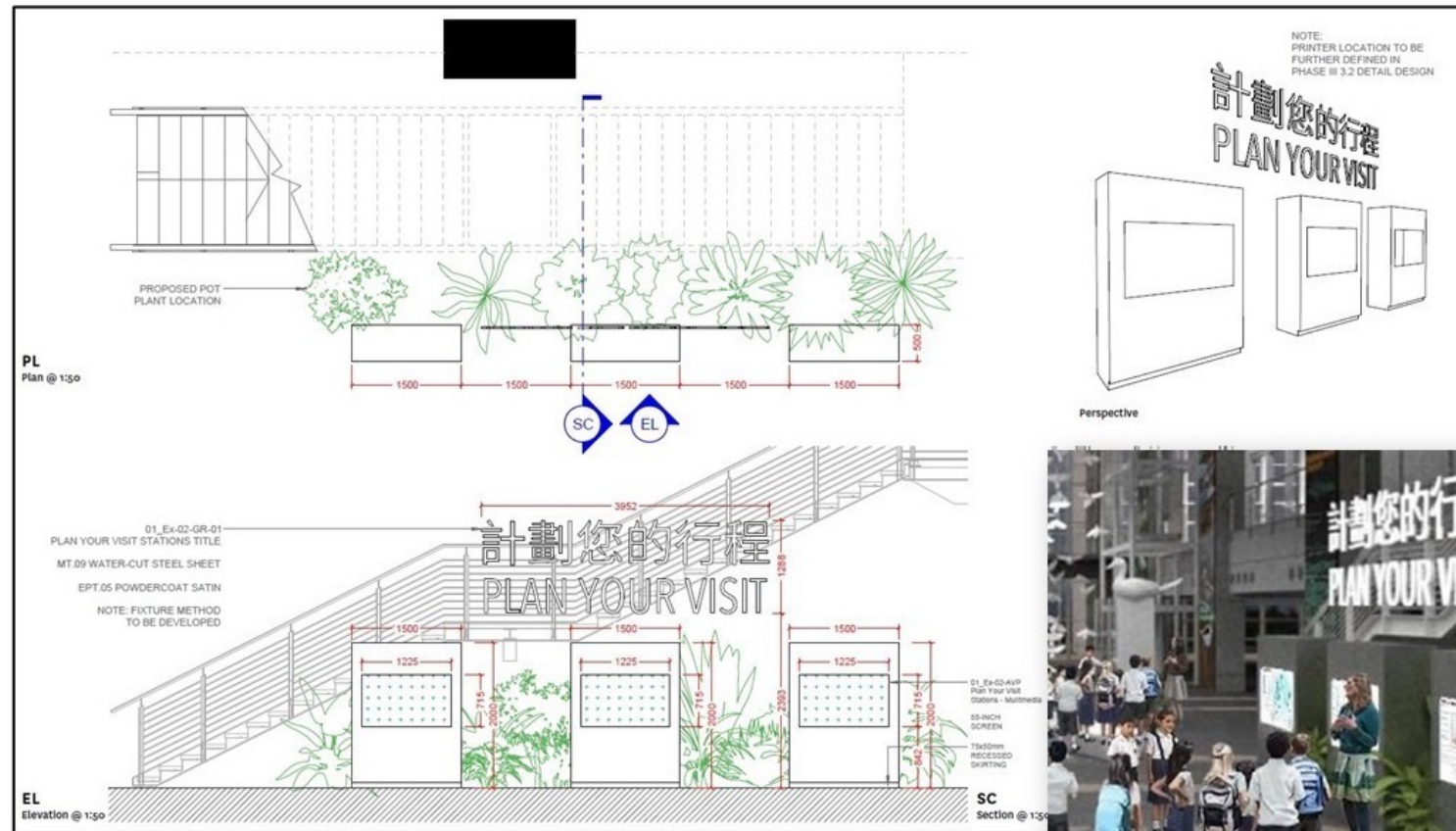
It is proposed to renew the visitor facilities at “Entry Plaza” by featuring freshwater wetland organisms and their underwater habitat, and will provide visitor-oriented facilities such as shade structure. Visitors can experience the environment at the bottom of freshwater wetlands through augmented reality (AR) technology. Signages will be installed to enhance visitor usage.





2. Atrium (中庭)

It is proposed to add interactive visit-planning kiosks, commemorative stamps and seating area.



3. “What are Wetlands?” and “Living Wetlands” Galleries (「濕地知多少?」及「濕地世界」展覽廊)

The two galleries will be combined and renamed as “Living Wetlands” Gallery. The new gallery will demonstrate a complete local wetland environment¹. Exhibition facilities will include interactive games, models, and wetland animals and plants, with highlights including a large-scale eco pond for dragonflies, and an interactive game demonstrating rainfall and water cycles.



¹ A complete local wetland environment stretches from the mudflats, mangroves and brackish water habitat of Deep Bay area, to the lowland freshwater ecosystems, and upstream into the woodland streams in forested hill.

4. “Wetland Challenge” Gallery (「濕地挑戰」展覽廊)

It is proposed to divide the gallery into the “Wetland Explorer (探索濕地)” Gallery (Ground floor) and “Amazing Journeys (奇妙旅程)” Gallery (First floor). The two themed exhibition galleries at the two floors will be connected. Exhibition facilities will combine games and artwork presentation elements on natural science and digital art museum, to educate visitors about wetlands animals and plants.





5. “Human Culture” Gallery (「人類文化」展覽廊)

It is proposed to convert the Gallery into “Wetlands and Us (濕地與我)” Gallery. Through interactive presentation, the gallery will showcase cultural heritage (e.g. *Gei wai*, fishpond, oyster and rice farming) of Hong Kong wetland from past to present, wetland ecosystem services on food provision and water supplies. Visitors can enjoy an immersive art experience by exploring with other visitors to operate a fishpond, and rethink how to cherish our wetland and water resources.



6. Viewing Gallery (觀景廊)

In addition to providing telescopes, the gallery will provide a creative space for games and workshops, as well as a temporary exhibition space for use by green groups or other communities.

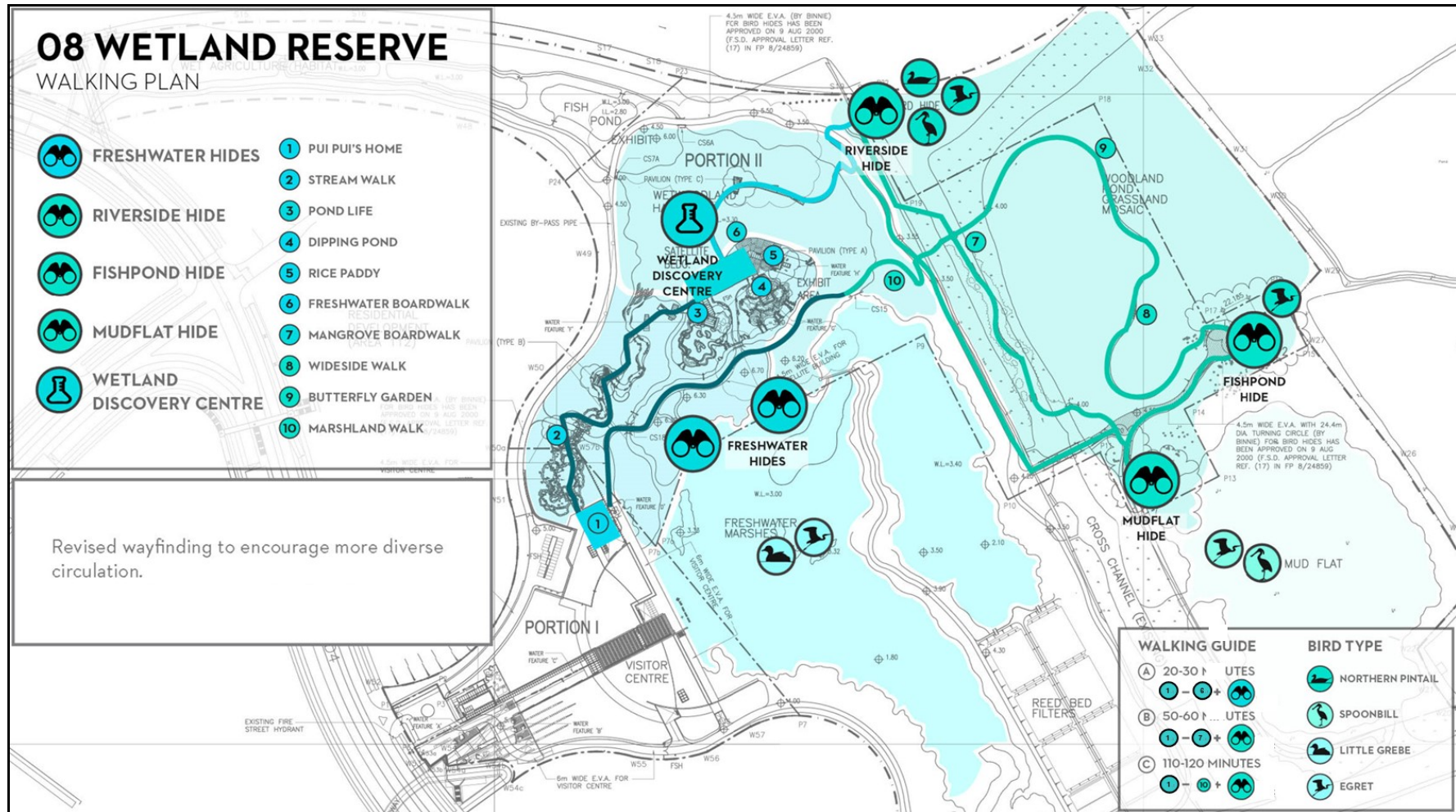


7. Indoor Play Area (室內遊樂區)

It is proposed to redevelop the area into a themed play area for children and toddlers, namely the “Mangrove Adventure (紅樹林歷奇)”. Game facilities will include mezzanine high-tide play netting area and elevated slides to the mudflat, and a diversity of themed game areas for children to explore a mudflat mangrove environment.



It is proposed to renovate the signage and way finding systems, including orientation map and directional totem, to guide visitors through the Wetland Reserve.



**Estimated Cash Flow Requirement for Upgrading the Facilities
of the Hong Kong Wetland Park**

| Financial Year | Cost (\$ million) |
|-----------------------|--------------------------|
| 2021-22 | 10.5 |
| 2022-23 | 26.7 |
| 2023-24 | 85.7 |
| 2024-25 | 12.1 |
| Total | 135 |