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Position Paper on Lantau Planning and Development

Background

1. The Lantau Development Advisory Committee (LanDAC) on 31 January 2016 launched a public engagement exercise for Lantau development to gauge public views on Lantau development proposals (the proposed Lantau Development) for formulating a blueprint with a view to developing Lantau into a smart and low-carbon community for living, work, business, leisure and study while balancing and enhancing development and conservation. Details and a digest of the proposals are available at LanDAC's website (www.LanDAC.hk).
2. LanDAC Secretariat gave a briefing to the members of the Hong Kong Institute of Planners (the Institute) on 7 March 2016. Taking account of members' views raised at the meeting, the Institute puts forth its comments on the Lantau Development in this position paper.

Comments

3. According to the vision of the proposed Lantau Development, balancing development and conservation as well as developing a smart and low-carbon community are supposed to be two important foci for deriving the planning principles and major proposals. However, the proposed planning principles and proposals only reiterate some general statements or existing measures/initiatives, seldom touching upon any innovative planning concept or substantive direction to address these two foci. For example, the proposals do not introduce any new ideas on how to strengthen the existing means of ecological conservation, how to handle the potential risk of declining local character/culture due to the influx of huge amount of tourists, and how to achieve a smart and low-carbon community through substantial innovative initiatives. Further

thoughts should therefore be given to the following:

Formulating a conservation management and development plan for natural area of Lantau based on a comprehensive study on ecological assets and habitats to balance tourism development and natural conservation

- a. The current proposals put emphasis on how to make use of the natural resources to promote tourism, such as through providing more facilities in Country Parks, connecting marine parks and introducing more water activities to the areas, but do not mention how to strengthen conservation. In this regard, it is suggested that that a comprehensive study on assessing the ecological value and habitat networks of Lantau should be carried out as a basis to formulate conservation management and development plan for Lantau area. Overseas example of natural tourism attractions like Mountain Kinabalu in Malaysia ¹ and Alishan in Taiwan could be some of the references. In these examples, to conserve the valuable natural resources and the integrity of ecological habitats while maintaining a good visiting experience, buffer zones are designated and developments or human activities are regulated outside the protected areas. In addition, effective management measures could be introduced by the authorities to control the amount of visitors in designated areas. Some areas with significant ecological value may even have restriction on human activities. Furthermore, the conservation management and development plans should be coupled with scientific research and education programme. Regular research and study could help monitor the performance of the conservation management work.

Introducing community planning to strike a balance between tourism development and conservation of local character

- b. According to the PE digest, providing employment opportunities through boosting the four major pillar industries in Hong Kong (financial services, tourism, trade and logistics, and support services for professional, industrial and commercial sectors) is considered as a major way to build a thriving community for Lantau. However, measure to deal with the potential risk of declining local character/culture due to the influx of huge amount of tourists has not been mentioned. As the local character is an essential quality that makes the place an attractive tourism destination, and in view of some recent conflicts between tourists and residents in some attractions in Hong Kong, we should ensure the proposed Lantau development would not compromise the local character and lead to conflict with tourists. Therefore, when introducing new and large-scale tourism facilities and bringing in considerable

amount of tourists to the local community from a top-down planning approach, community planning should be in place to allow the local community to participate in shaping their community by implementing neighbourhood plan initiated by them from a bottom-up approach. This new planning concept will also enable the local community to be empowered and engaged in the process of Lantau's strategic development in a more organic, interactive and pragmatic manner that strikes a balance of tourism development and the needs of the local community with respect to their daily life.

Introducing carbon audit system and more aggressive carbon-emission target to develop a smart and low-carbon community

- c. There is no specific and determining proposal in response to the proposed development of a smart and low-carbon community indeed. Lantau should be a good starting point for introducing more aggressive measures to reduce carbon footprint in the strategic and tourism development process as well as the local daily life. For example, carbon audit report should be included as a requirement for assessing new development or planning application on Lantau. The government can be more proactive by setting a carbon emission target for the whole island. Technology may be able to help reducing the use of fossil energy, introduce renewable energy resources as well as monitor the energy-saving or carbon footprint that facilitates better planning, development control and land management by the authority holistically.

Need for assessing carrying capacities

- d. It is appreciated that in the current plan the proposed developments are clustering on the northern corridor of Lantau Island to harness its strategic position and proximity to the strategic transport infrastructures, while recognizing its natural and cultural assets in the predominant part of the Island for conservation, leisure, cultural and green tourism. Nonetheless, in the light of the physical proximity between the northern proposed development areas and the predominantly passive areas particularly in the south, as well as the arrays of tourism initiatives and conservation facilities proposed, there are concerns on whether the carrying capacities of various parts of Lantau, especially the culturally and environmentally sensitive areas, and even possibly the entire Island, have been appropriately assessed, and how to ensure such thresholds are not exceeded due to the substantial influx of visitors. The proposed Lantau Development seems not to have given detailed thoughts to these issues at the moment.

¹ <http://whc.unesco.org/en/list/1012>

- e. The concept of sustainable development has been highlighted in the proposed Lantau development which has also covered, amongst others, how to suitably utilize the rich natural and heritage resources for recreation and tourism purposes. We are of the view that as far as sustainable tourism is concerned, the principles should encompass comprehensive considerations related to economic, environmental, ecological and social and cultural aspects with respect to the local context and a wider scale as appropriate. Corresponding assessments on carrying capacities should form part of the guiding framework.

Need for thorough baseline study

- f. While the major proposals of LanDAC on Lantau development are believed to have generally followed similar approaches and framework of the Government studies carried out previously, a comprehensive baseline study has not been included and published for public information in the current consultation exercise.
- g. According to the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations ² : “*a baseline study is a descriptive cross-sectional survey that mostly provides quantitative information on the current status of a particular situation – on whatever study topic – in a given population.*”
- h. In the context of the proposals for Lantau development, it is crucial to carry out a relevant baseline study first in order to capture the current condition of Lantau in relation to sustainable tourism. Indeed while some of the data on environmental and economic aspects are quantifiable and can be observed over time for benchmarking purpose, community aspirations and concerns should also be included in the baseline study since they are integral to sustainable tourism of Lantau. In this way, we can better understand the carrying capacity of Lantau, and identify the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats due to the proposed developments on Lantau.
- i. In taking forward the specific development proposals in Lantau, thorough site-specific baseline studies should be conducted in advance to identify the existing assets and needs, on the historical, cultural, ecological and socio-economical aspects, of the subject areas and communities. The baseline studies should serve as the basis upon which sets of appropriate indicators and carrying capacity thresholds can be developed to safeguard the environment and the communities from irreversible impacts especially from tourism. Site-specific proposals taking into account the local characters can be formulated on such basis to avoid any kind

of out of context approach in allocating tourism initiatives. Major proposals can be reviewed and refined for more sustainable outcomes. It would as well open up valuable opportunities for engaging local communities in addressing their needs and strengthening their assets as part of the plan.

East Lantau Metropolis (ELM)

Housing and Economic Need

- j. ELM is identified in the digest as a long-term strategic growth area beyond 2030 with potential to develop as Hong Kong's third Central Business District (CBD3) as well as to accommodate a population of about 400,000 to 700,000. There is, however, no information to justify the need/suitability to establish CBD3 Hong Kong and why it is positioned in ELM as part of Lantau. Before jumping to such a foregone conclusion, the Government should first be obliged to demonstrate how our future demographic profile (e.g. population projection, change in household size) and direction of economic development (e.g. economic structure, floorspace demand for offices and other commercial uses) would warrant the need of such massive land supply requirement, taking into account a number of on-going developments initiatives such as Kwu Tung North and Fanling North NDAs (KTN/FLN NDAs), Hung Shui Kiu NDA (HSK NDA), Yuen Long South Potential Development Area and Tung Chung New Town Extension, have already been in the pipeline of housing land supply in the next two decades. Queries would arise as latest population projection ³ suggests that our population will reach its peak in 2043 (about 8.22 million), whereas the recommendation in the then HK2030 Study suggested that the NDAs would suffice to cope with a projected population of 8.4 million by 2030.
- k. In addition, while the Planning Department is still undergoing the Hong Kong 2030+ which will shed light on the strategic planning direction and possible spatial development beyond 2030, the release of ELM prior to the result of Hong Kong 2030+ seems to pre-empt the public discussion on the overall spatial development in the context of HK2030+.

Locational Considerations

- l. The locational considerations to justify the geographical advantage and necessity to have our future population/development node in ELM require elaboration. Based on the illustration in the Strategic Traffic and Transport Infrastructure Concept, it

² FAO web site: www.fao.org/docrep/008/y5793e/y5793e07.htm

³ <http://www.statistics.gov.hk/pub/B1120015062015XXXXB0100.pdf>

seems that ELM would serve as an anchorage of the strategic traffic and transport infrastructure which helps close the gap between Hong Kong Island and Lantau, and further to Northwest NT to complete the territorial transportation network. However, is such connection necessary and proven with traffic and other relevant assessments?

- m. The First-term Work Report ⁴ suggests that having ELM as the CBD3 will lead to a more balanced development pattern in Hong Kong yet no detail is given to define how a more balanced development pattern should be like to respond the current unbalanced distribution of homes and jobs and why we need massive reclamation in the central waters to achieve that. Reclamation in the central waters not only would involve huge investment cost, substantial impact to marine ecology is anticipated. Without spelling out the strategic importance of ELM, it would be difficult to convince the public to support the ELM.

Components of the ELM

- n. ELM consists of reclamation in the central waters, Mui Wo and Hei Ling Chau. There is little, if not none, information to illustrate the relation amongst these three components and why ELM has to include them to form an entity. Will they complement each other functionally and geographically so that a critical mass will be created and thus synergy will be achieved?

Concluding Remarks

- 4. Lantau is renowned for its expanse country park as well as high conservation and ecological value. Though the coming completion of strategic infrastructures may bring about new development opportunities to the Island, LanDAC should be mindful of a balanced approach (to be backed up by solid studies and research) in planning for the future of Lantau. Through the public engagement exercise, LanDAC should study in detail various views of the community, though maybe diverse and conflicting. The views of the Institute should also be properly responded. LanDAC should aim at securing a wider support, if not a consensus, of the community before proceeding to the next stage of work.



Public Affairs Committee, HKIP

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⁴ [https://www.devb.gov.hk/filemanager/en/content_872/LanDAC_First_term_Work_Report_\(English\).pdf](https://www.devb.gov.hk/filemanager/en/content_872/LanDAC_First_term_Work_Report_(English).pdf)