

URS Review

Report for the Public Engagement Stage - EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

1 Background

The Urban Renewal Strategy (“URS”) was promulgated in 2001 under section 20 of the Urban Renewal Authority Ordinance (Chapter 563). It has been guiding the work of the Urban Renewal Authority (“URA”) since then. As stated in the URS, the purpose of urban renewal is to improve the quality of life of residents in the urban areas. A “People-Centred” approach should be used to carry out urban renewal.

To meet with societal progress and changing public aspirations in urban renewal, in particular the increasing demand for preservation and revitalisation, a review of the URS has commenced in July 2008. The review is scheduled over two years, involving 3 stages to engage the public i.e. Envisioning Stage, Public Engagement Stage and Consensus Building Stage. This report gives an account of the engagement activities at the Public Engagement Stage (“PES”), and the public views collected.

2 Public Engagement Stage Programmes

A variety of publicity initiatives were prepared and launched to provide background information and invite participation in the public engagement activities with a view to facilitating the exchange of public views, and receiving more balanced coverage.

	Initiatives	Contents and remarks
Standard programmes		
1	Public Engagement Stage Consultation Summary	A booklet was produced introducing the background of the URS Review, detailing the seven issues identified and providing basic information on the current policies, public views collected during the Envisioning Stage (“ES”), as well as overseas experience. Copies were distributed in various promotion activities and were also available at the Urban Renewal Idea Shop (“Idea Shop”) and District Offices.
2	Road Show Exhibitions	8 Road Shows were organised in which a total of 14,082 visitors/times were recorded. 400 comment cards, 23 video clips and 1,088 pieces of children’s drawings were received and uploaded to the dedicated website for URS Review (“Website”).
3	Face-to-face structured interviews	The Hong Kong Institute of Asia-Pacific Studies (“HKIAPS”) conducted face-to-face structured interviews at random with visitors of the Road Shows, 886 completed questionnaires were received.
4	Public Forums	Five Public Forums with 478 participants in total, including students, representatives of Partnering Organisations (“POs”) and

		the media, were organised. An average of seven presentations for each forum were made by members of the public (mostly concerned/affected parties), professionals, Legislative Councillors and District Councillors ¹ .
5	Topical Discussions	Eight Topical Discussion sessions, which included public presentations and group discussions, were held with an average of 60 stakeholders and members of the public participating ² in each session.
6	Briefings and Outreach Meetings with Professional Institutes and Other Organisations	Meetings were organised with Land and Development Advisory Committee, Central & Western District Council, Town Planning Board, and District Advisory Committees (“DACs”) to brief them on the engagement activities and seek their views. Professional organisations were invited for outreach meetings with representatives from the Development Bureau (“DEVB”) and the URA to procure their views and to explain in detail the relevant issues of the Review. Seven meetings were held, including that with the Hong Kong Institute of Land Administration, Hong Kong Institute of Landscape Architects, Hong Kong General Chamber of Commerce, Chartered Institute of Architectural Technologists & Hong Kong Institute of Architectural Technologists, Hong Kong Institute of Architects, Chartered Institute of Building, and the Royal Institution of Chartered Surveyors Hong Kong. Most of them submitted their views in writing subsequently.
7	Overseas study visits	A Policy Study of six Asian cities was conducted by the policy consultant (HKU). Study trips to Tokyo and Shanghai were organised to provide the opportunity for key stakeholder groups to gain up-to-date, first-hand information of the urban renewal experience in these cities.
8	Announcement of Public Interest (“API”)	The API produced in the ES was relaunched on television from May to July 2009.
9	Mass Media – Radio programmes	A series of eight episodes of 90-second info-segments and another 10 episodes of 30-minute sponsored programme were aired on Commercial Radio 1. Audio clips are available on the Website.
10	Mass Media – Newspaper articles	Based on the contents of the radio programmes, a number of articles were contributed by Steering Committee (“SC”) members, academics, professionals and other public figures. 8 articles were published and 16 news reports were clipped.
11	Mass Media – Newspaper advertisements	Two bursts of newspaper advertisements were placed – the first in early May 2009 in Ming Pao, South China Morning Post (“SCMP”) and Headline Daily, and the other in Metro, SCMP and Sing Tao in September 2009.

¹ Representatives from DEVB and URA, as well as SC members, were present at all forums to observe the discussions first-hand. Video recording, with the PowerPoint presentations embedded, the question guide (if used), bi-lingual discussion gists and photos were uploaded onto the Website.

² Representatives from DEVB and URA, as well as SC members, were present at all topical discussions to observe the discussions first-hand. Video recording, with the PowerPoint presentations embedded, the question guide (if used), bi-lingual discussion gists and photos were uploaded onto the Website.

12	Mass Media – other programmes	SC members and guests were invited to the RTHK programme「左右紅藍綠」in December 2009. The production crews of 「鏗鏘集」- ‘Hong Kong Connection’ (RTHK) and ‘The Pearl Report’ (TVB Pearl) visited selected public engagement activities for their stories on urban renewal.
13	URS Review Website	The e-forum and e-blog of the Website recorded 1,082 messages in the PE Stage, which were passed to the HKIAPS of the Chinese University of Hong Kong (“CUHK”) for collation and analysis.
Innovative programmes		
1	Partnering Organisation Programme (“POP”)	The POP was implemented in two phases. 9 and 14 POs were each given subsidies of up to \$10,000 in Phase I and Phase II respectively to undertake urban renewal-related activities that aimed to educate the public and the target audiences identified by the POs. Post-activity reports have been uploaded onto the Website and put on display in the Idea Shop.
2	Urban Renewal Idea Shop	The Idea Shop was officially opened to the public on 25 March 2009 to act as an information and resources centre. It was also a venue for some activities initiated by the POs. Computer terminals, exhibition panels, and publications such as study reports and information booklets were available for easy public access.

3 Public Views Collected in the Public Engagement Stage

Collation and analysis of views collected via both structured and non-structured surveys were carried out by the HKIAPS of the CUHK. As at the end of the PES, a total of 2,376 submissions were collected. After filtering out duplicate submissions and irrelevant documents³, 2,077 copies of submission from the public, including over 50 organisations (e.g. DACs, professional bodies, NGOs and POs, etc.), were considered valid by CUHK for analysis. As with the ES, views were categorised into seven major topical issues, and those that do not fall into any of the topical issues are listed under ‘Others’.

(a) Vision and Scope of Urban Regeneration

- The dominant belief was that urban renewal should bring improvement in the quality of life to the people and the city.
- There was almost unanimous support from all commenters for

³ ‘Duplicate submissions’ refer to the same submission submitted via different channels by the same party or individual. ‘Irrelevant documents’ refer to submissions that lack meaning, or responses that do not contain views or suggestions with regard to urban renewal (e.g., incomprehensible replies posted onto the website, and inquiries about whether submissions had been received, etc.).

district-based urban renewal and overall urban planning.

- 64.2% of the respondents in the questionnaire surveys at the Road Shows felt the most important factor to be considered is the provision of more public facilities.
- The questionnaire surveys at the Road Shows also revealed that 67.7% of the respondents agreed that the URS should give consideration to industrial buildings and waterfront areas.
- Many commenters, including several professional bodies, believed that urban renewal had given rise to economic benefits or brought about economic improvement but there were also contradicting views raised by members of the public and professionals.
- As regards the selection of future urban renewal projects, many individuals and professional groups gave high priority to the preferences of the people, and building age and condition.
- There were divergent views expressed on the pace of redevelopment, yet the majority found the current urban renewal programme too slow.
- The ‘People-Centred’ Approach adopted by the URS was good, but it should help not just those directly affected by urban renewal projects but residents in the vicinity as well.
- Some professional institutes pointed out that urban redevelopment should not be seen as a way to alleviate poverty nor is it a kind of social welfare.
- There were calls for the Government to properly co-ordinate the urban renewal policy with the other related policies on housing and city planning.
- Apart from increasing green and public spaces, a number of professional institutes believed that the “wall” effect, building density and height should be reduced, and the culture, history, and characteristics of the renewal project area preserved. Others mentioned that the local transportation network should be simplified.
- Some professional institutes gave more specific suggestions, such as designing an overall plan for the Victoria Harbour and the waterfront, and integrating current redevelopment projects with development plans of South East Kowloon, which would be beneficial to sustainable urban renewal in the long run.
- One professional institute suggested that quantity-led mode of urban planning/development should become quality-driven instead.

(b) 4Rs Strategy in Urban Regeneration

- Urban renewal should not be undertaken primarily by redevelopment, and more emphasis should be put on rehabilitation, revitalisation and preservation. The questionnaire surveys at the Road Shows confirmed that there was considerable support for preservation (43.1%) and

rehabilitation (41.5%).

- Commenters generally agreed that the weighting of each of the 4Rs should vary according to factors including the location of a project.
- There was consensus on the need for the Government to help in rehabilitation cases, but opinions on the provision of financial assistance varied. Some people, together with a professional institute, believed that the maintenance of buildings was the responsibility of owners, not the Government.
- With regard to preservation, many commenters believed that it was important to preserve the original façade, interior design and the use of old buildings as well as local characteristics.
- While some professional institutes opined that the current coordination among the 4Rs was good enough, others believed rehabilitation should always be considered first and redevelopment should be the last resort.
- With regard to the selection of urban renewal projects, some professional institutes recommended that unsafe buildings or those in poor hygienic conditions should be redeveloped first. The surveys in the Road Shows showed that the most important criterion for project selection was the degree of building dilapidation. This was shared by a couple of professional institutes.
- A number of professional institutes opined that an integral policy on the protection of historical architecture should be adopted, and it should be defined in urban planning which areas are to be preserved. One professional institute suggested consulting District Councils, community leaders, affected residents and professions before setting standards for preservation or revitalisation.

(c) Roles of Stakeholders

- Among all stakeholders of urban renewal, the role of the URA received the most attention. Criticisms centred around the perception that the URA neglected the voices of the people and that it was not being held accountable in the current arrangements.
- Some commenters proposed that the private sector should be facilitated to take part as well as the URA and there should be a division of labour over urban renewal between the URA and the private developers.
- Many commenters agreed that the URA should not play the role of a developer nor an agent, but a facilitator, including the provision of professional services. However, no consensus could be reached on this in the questionnaire surveys at the Road Shows (25.6% selected the role of an implementer, 31.6% facilitator, and 39.1% considered the URA should act as both an implementer and a facilitator).
- A large proportion of comments asked the URA to speed up urban renewal or the resumption of old and dilapidated buildings in older districts.

- A larger proportion of commenters and a few professional institutes proposed that the Government should lower the threshold for compulsory sale from 90% to 80% as it could accelerate the pace of renewal or redevelopment. But others worried that it would favour the developers or the URA.
- Concerning the role of the Government, many considered it should play a more active role in urban renewal including setting up a platform to collect public opinions on urban renewal. Some believed Government-led redevelopment would be more efficient. A couple of professional institutes also mentioned that Government intervention could help create a new redevelopment model and be pivotal to owners' participation. But there were many who advocated that Government should play a smaller role, leaving the market to take the lead.
- Many commenters agreed to the "Big Market, Small Government" principle because the private sector could be a better implementer in urban renewal. However, there was no consensus as to whether the Government should completely withdraw from urban regeneration.
- Some commenters, including professional institutes and community organisations, concurred that affected owners should have the right to participate in redevelopment projects, either by constructing their own buildings or via owners' participation. The questionnaire surveys at the Road Shows also reported 49.4% of the respondents supporting such a view.
- A professional institute recommended the URA to communicate further with the Hong Kong Housing Society (HKHS) and the Hong Kong Housing Authority (HKHA) so as to pool together resources for urban renewal. In particular, URA should coordinate with HKHS as it is more experienced in rehabilitation.

(d) Compensation and Re-housing

- The majority suggested that the affected owners and tenants should be offered more options of non-cash compensation, particularly on the principle of 'flat for flat' and 'shop for shop'. The questionnaire surveys at the Road Shows revealed similar results (85.8%). 74.9% of respondents agreed to this despite the fact that it would incur more public funding.
- It was a general view that the rights of tenants were neglected.
- 54% of respondents in the questionnaire surveys at the Road Shows believed compensation at the level of seven-year-old flats is a fair basis. However, some commenters found URA's compensation policy, which differentiates owner-occupiers from owner-investors, to be unfair, unreasonable and not transparent. They proposed 'fair or reasonable' compensation for all types of affected owners.
- The public and professional institutes' views from both the structured and non-structured surveys showed general support for re-housing in-situ,

especially for the elderly to be rehoused in the same district. Specifically, a professional institute suggested rehousing affected residents by HKHS through constructing and renting out units in the vicinity at a subsidy. Upon completion of redevelopment, owners should be given the priority to purchase or rent shops or flats according to the current market rate.

- A large number of people opined that the URA might have misused the power of resumption in acquiring private property in the name of public interest.
- A few professional institutes and people, however, believed that 'flat for flat' and 'shop for shop' are unfair and unfeasible compensation options. Another professional institute stressed that 'flat for flat' does not mean exchanging an old flat with a new one, otherwise the compensation would be higher than the value of a notional 7-year old replacement flat.

(e) Public Engagement

- There were strong demands for a "bottom-up" approach in public engagement and an expanded scope of consultation. For example, a professional institute opined that through extending the 'People-Centred' public participation strategy at the community level, expectations of relevant stakeholders can be catered for. Another professional institute called for the provision of various kinds of professional support and independent financial aid for the affected, along with setting up community participation planning centres.
- It was recommended by one professional institute that this "bottom-up" approach must be considered alongside with the economic value, social aspirations and the effects on the environment.
- It was also generally agreed to enhance openness and transparency in the consultation process.
- Some commenters and professional institutes suggested that the URA should adopt a "first consult, then redevelop" approach in redevelopment. Some believed the Government should seek the support of experts prior to public consultation.
- A professional institute proposed more community participation at the later stages of the redevelopment projects in order to build consensus on the final solution and to generate a sense of ownership within the community.
- Some organisations, however, cautioned that in facilitating public participation, special care should be taken so as not to encourage speculation.

(f) Social Impact Assessment (SIA) and Social Service Team (SST)

- A larger proportion of commenters and a few professional institutes/ community organisations recognised the need to conduct SIAs to identify the needs of affected residents and the impact of urban renewal projects on residents in the vicinity. Some believed it should take place before

the announcement of redevelopment projects. 60.2% of respondents in the questionnaire surveys at the Road Shows supported the conduct of tracking (or follow-up) studies. Some professional institutes believed the studies would help understand who benefited from and who was affected by redevelopment.

- Many commenters saw conflict of interests in the role of the SSTs, which were funded and supervised by the URA. It was suggested that the SSTs be detached from the URA. Yet, the role of the SSTs in providing assistance to affected residents was thought to be pivotal.
- A more transparent process of the SIAs and redefining and fine-tuning their scope and reporting are recommended particularly by a few professional institutes/ community groups.

(g) Financial Arrangement

- The majority of views, including those from some professional institutes, indicated that the existing financial arrangement of the URA had to be reviewed as it seemed to have caused the URA to seek profits in urban renewal projects. 57.6% of the respondents in the questionnaire surveys at the Road Shows felt that the Government should provide additional resources to the URA while some professional institutes voiced worries that the current heavily subsidised urban renewal model would burden the public coffers too much.
- A couple of professional institutes opined that redevelopment should be more of a social duty than an investment. Thus the self-financing model imposed on the URA should be changed.
- Some people and a few organisations mentioned that it is only in theory that the URA should continue to assume self-financing responsibility in the long run. One institute proposed to interpret the self-financing model to take into consideration the social and economic benefits brought to redevelopment areas, their vicinity and the society at large.
- Some professional institutes recommended carrying out a social cost-benefit analysis as public interests are more important than finances.

(h) Others

- Many commenters, including individual professional institutes, doubted the sincerity of the Government in the URS Review, and hence the effectiveness of the public engagement activities.
- Suggested by many people and professional institutes/ community groups, Hong Kong should learn from the urban renewal experiences of other places, such as Mainland China, the U.S.A. and Taiwan.
- One professional institute proposed to establish an “urban design panel” to ensure urban design and development in the district and community level are in harmony with economic and social development policies.

4 Conclusion & Remarks

The PES provided opportunities for the seven major issues namely vision and scope of urban regeneration, 4Rs strategy in urban regeneration, role of stakeholders, compensation and rehousing, public engagement, social impact assessment and social service team, and financial arrangement identified in the ES to be deliberated by the public in detail. The wide spectrum of public views and suggestions received can be grouped into broad policy areas for future policy directions to be articulated. These policy directions will form a solid basis for further discussion and engagement with stakeholders in the next and final stage of the review process.

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