

URS Review

Report for the Consensus Building 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, the Secretary for Development announced on 17 July 2008 the commencement of a comprehensive review of the URS. 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 Consensus Building Stage (“CBS”), and the public views collected.

After the extensive consultation activities in the Envisioning Stage and Public Engagement Stage, the Steering Committee (SC) held brainstorming meetings to conclude the findings and drew up ten preliminary proposals in response to the public views and suggestions. At the final CBS the public, stakeholders, professional bodies/institutes and other social sectors were engaged for their further views and suggestions to focus on and reach a broad consensus on the preliminary proposals.

2 Consensus Building Stage Events and Programmes

A number of core public engagement activities were held in the CBS to gather views from the community. These included:-

- eight radio programmes on RTHK and Commercial Radio;
- advertisements of public events in Chinese and English newspapers;
- publication and distribution of the ‘Public Views and Future Direction – Paper for the Consensus Building Stage of the Urban Renewal Strategy Review’ at various outlets for public access and at the public engagement activities;
- a structured telephone survey with 1,005 successful interviews;
- Consensus Building Workshop with around 140 participants;
- concluding meeting with around 170 participants;
- two consultation forums with professional groups; and
- e-forum and e-blog of the URS Review website recorded 86 messages during the CBS.

3 Summary of Public Views Expressed in the Consensus Building Stage

The Hong Kong Institute of Asia Pacific Studies of Chinese University of Hong Kong (“CUHK”) was commissioned to collect, collate and analyse all public views received. As at the end of the CBS, after filtering out duplicated submissions and irrelevant documents¹, 264 copies of submissions were accepted for analysis.

The views collected were categorised into three main topics:

- 1) District-based, Bottom-up Approach (District Urban Renewal Forum - DURF), Social Impact Assessment/Social Service Team (SIA/SST);
- 2) Compensation and Rehousing; and
- 3) Scope of Regeneration, Roles of the URA and the URA's self-financing model.

Topic 1: District-based, Bottom-up Approach (DURF), SIA/SST (preliminary proposals (1) & (9))

(a) Setting up of “District Urban Renewal Forum” (DURF)

The people-centered and bottom-up approach in urban regeneration was generally supported both from direct feedback and via the telephone survey. Although the basic approach was generally accepted, there were major concerns on the composition and appointment of the DURF members, which was tied to its effectiveness and representativeness.

(b) SIAs on both district and project basis and segregation of the advocacy role and case handling work of the SSTs

The SC's proposal was in line with public views. Views expressed were mainly on who should conduct the SIA to maintain its independence and credibility. Mixed views were received on the segregation of advocacy work and individual case work of the SSTs. Those who opposed the segregation proposal believed that the roles stated did not correspond to the categories of social workers.

Topic 2: Compensation and Rehousing (preliminary proposals (6), (7) & (8))

(c) Maintaining the Home Purchase Allowance (HPA) and the differentiation between owner-occupiers (OOs) and owner-investors (OIs) of domestic unit when compensating domestic owner-occupiers

¹ ‘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.).

Some opposed this proposal, both regarding the inadequacy of the compensation offered by the notional value of 7-year old replacement flat and the inequity of treatment to differentiate between OOs and OIs. Despite the criticism noted in direct feedbacks, the result of the telephone survey showed that 62.7% of the respondents supported the continuation of the existing policy.

(d) Special assistance to elderly non-owner-occupiers of domestic units

The public generally supported to assist those elderly with special circumstances (e.g. their livelihood depends on the rental income of their flats) and this was confirmed by the telephone survey.

(e) New “Flat for flat” option for domestic owner-occupiers

There were mixed responses on this new “flat-for-flat” compensation option. The use of the current 7-year old notional flat value as a basis for determining any balance of payment required was questioned by many. The telephone survey, showed that the majority of respondents were in support of the URA to provide the ‘flat for flat’ option for affected owners. However, they might have different ideas on how it could be implemented.

(f) Assisting the affected shop operators to re-start their business but not feasible to offer a “shop for shop” option

Many agreed that the URA should assist the shop operators as far as possible to re-start their businesses and this was also supported by the telephone survey findings.

(g) URA to come up with measures to positively assist tenants who lose their eligibility for rehousing / compensation due to the non-renewal of tenancy after the freezing survey

Many agreed that the URA should assist as much as possible the tenants who lose their eligibility for rehousing/compensation due to the termination of their tenancies after the freezing survey but before the URA acquired the property from their landlords. This was also generally supported by the telephone survey findings.

Topic 3: Scope of Regeneration, Roles of the URA and the URA’s self-financing model (preliminary proposals (2), (3), (4), (5) & (10))

(a) The URS is a Government strategy - its implementation agents should not be confined to the URA

Since the URS is a government strategy, the URA should not be the sole implementation agent. Other stakeholders/participants should also be included.

This view was generally supported from direct feedback and from the telephone survey.

(b) The future two Rs focus of the URA in urban regeneration

The proposal for URA to focus more on two of the four Rs, namely, “Redevelopment” and “Rehabilitation” was generally supported. However, there are different views regarding the priority and balance of the planning and implementation of the Rs. Similarly, in the telephone survey, the majority of the respondents agreed that URA should balance its foci on redevelopment and rehabilitation in the future.

(c) URA’s revised role in heritage preservation

The proposal to confine the URA’s work in heritage preservation within its redevelopment project areas received mixed responses. The telephone survey indicated that just over half of the respondents disagreed that the URA should only deal with heritage preservation within its development project areas.

(d) URA to play the role of “implementer” as well as “facilitator” in urban redevelopment

The proposal for the URA to take on a “facilitator” role in addition to the traditional “implementer” role in redevelopment also received mixed views. Those who opposed the idea believed that the service provided by the URA should be different from those by private companies, as the URA has a social mission.

(e) Review of the self-financing principle of the URA with the consideration of other economic benefits

This was generally supported. Some suggested that in calculating the effective achievement of the social missions and benefits of past projects, the spillover/knock-on benefits to the surrounding area should also be taken into account. Similar general support was noted in the telephone survey.

4 Conclusion and Remarks

Despite different views being voiced during this stage, there has been some broad consensus on key issues such as the bottom-up approach to be achieved through the establishment of a DURF, a new flat-for-flat compensation option, more independent and credible social services for affected stakeholders, and a better-rounded outlook at urban renewal involving significant inter-bureau coordination instead of just the responsibility of the URA or DEVB.

The CBS has provided an overview of the public responses to the 10 preliminary

proposals. The further opinions collected in the CBS will be duly scrutinized by the SC and taken into account in framing the revised URS by the Government.

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