

The Urban Renewal Strategy Review
"Urban Regeneration – District Aspirations Study Forum" for District Councils

Date: 9 January 2010 (Saturday)
Time: 9.00 a.m. to 12.45 p.m.
Place: Noah's Hall, Noah's Ark, Ma Wan, New Territories.

1. Speech by Mrs Carrie Lam, Secretary for Development

The Development Bureau (DevB) was very supportive of inter-district discussions as they would facilitate positive collective thinking. In 2006, the Government began to strengthen the functions of the District Councils. The "Summit on District Administration" held in early 2008 demonstrated that the Government attached great importance to the District Councils' views and experience, which facilitated the Government's formulation of policies.

All principal officials of the Government would pay regular visits to local districts and schools to listen to resident's aspirations and expectations, and in particular on urban regeneration. The Urban Renewal Strategy (URS) Review would last for two years to allow sufficient time for public consultation and discussion. The Secretary stated that there were three major directions emerging from the opinions collected in the first two stages of the URS Review:

Firstly, urban regeneration should be "district-based" taking into account the development and planning of the whole district.
Secondly, a "bottom-up" approach should be adopted to listen to the views and opinion of the community through public engagement.
Thirdly, the new and the old should be blended by striking a suitable balance among redevelopment, rehabilitation and preservation.

The DevB would maintain an open mind about urban regeneration. The current URS might deviate slightly from the above directions and might therefore require some fine-tuning. Attempts would be made to strive for consensus in the community and the Legislative Council. The Secretary thought that urban regeneration needed catalysts, for instance, by constructing a waterfront promenade to regenerate areas near Victoria Harbour, revitalising industrial buildings in the old areas to proceed with urban regeneration, or implementing preservation projects for unique heritage sites and buildings in Sham Shui Po. More importantly, urban regeneration must be lively and must ensure sustainable growth in order to respond to public expectations.

2. Speech by Mr Barry Cheung, JP, Chairman of Urban Renewal Authority.

The Chairman of Urban Renewal Authority (URA) pointed out that the "Urban Regeneration District Aspirations Study", led by the District Councils with resources provided by the URA, was a proactive response to the public expectation of district-based urban regeneration.

Many views collected in the first two stages of the URS Review focused on the "implementation" front. The prime objective of the District Aspirations Study was to

understand the characteristics of each district and the residents' expectations of the implementation of 4Rs strategies of urban regeneration. The study would raise more comprehensive and substantial district aspirations and widen the scope of the URS Review. The findings from the study would be of great importance to help guide future urban regeneration, and would serve as a reference for the Government and other stakeholders, as well as the URA for its medium-and-long-term planning.

The URA attached great importance to public opinions. For example, URA had conducted a public opinion survey together with the District Council on the "Mong Kok Revitalisation Project". The public opinions had set the foundation and directions for the revitalisation project, which would be fine-tuned by professionals. He said public opinions would form the basis for urban regeneration, and it was also important to capture the opinions of the silent majority. This study served as a good demonstration of how this could be done.

Summary of the Preliminary Results of the District Aspirations Study

1. District Council: Yau Tsim Mong District
Topic: Urban Regeneration in Yau Tsim Mong – District Aspirations Study – Progress Report and Preliminary Analysis
Consultant: Architecture Design and Research Group Limited

The consultant pointed out that Yau Tsim Mong District was currently facing various challenges in urban regeneration. For instance, Tai Kok Tsui was experiencing interface problems between the old light industrial area and new developments such as the West Kowloon Cultural District Development and land reclamation. In addition, the commercial and tourism industries in Yau Tsim Mong were mature, but it would be necessary to study how to tie in with the redevelopment of the old areas.

For heritage preservation, there was not only physical heritage in the district, but also intangible local culture worthy of preservation, e.g. the Temple Street Market and traditional shops and businesses (including Chinese herbal tea shops and Chinese opera, etc). The consultant had studied the priorities of preservation in the district, and came up with preservation and revitalisation proposals. In respect of redevelopment, the consultant had compiled a list of places and buildings which might need redevelopment in the coming five or ten years. The selection criteria included degree of building dilapidation, poor living environment, impacts on the district and financial feasibility. Many residents of the district thought redevelopment and rehabilitation were inter-related and that the latter was often able to replace the former.

The consultant had sought advice from owners' incorporations in the district to find out the age and conditions of the buildings. A list of buildings aged over 30 years which needed rehabilitation in the coming five to ten years was prepared. The consultant had also conducted studies on how to assist owners in buildings with no owners' incorporation to carry out rehabilitation. For revitalisation, the consultant identified a list of land lots and industrial buildings in non-industrial areas suitable for revitalisation.

The consultant summarised the preliminary views from Yau Tsim Mong District Area Committee as follows:

- Develop Tai Kok Tsui with an “Olympics” theme, display the evolution of the old factory area and remove incompatible land uses.
- Preserve tenement buildings on Flower Market Road, Prince Edward Road West, Fa Yuen Street and Arran Street.
- Improve the business environment within the five themed streets in Mong Kok (including Flower Market Road, Fa Yuen Street, Tung Choi Street, Nelson Street and Sai Yee Street), boosting tourism and local economy.
- Develop Yau Ma Tei Wholesale Fruit Market and Wet Market, Reclamation Street, Shanghai Street and Temple Street as a preservation area for Chinese opera, temple fair and Cantonese opera, to tie in with the development of the West Kowloon Cultural District.
- Redevelop the old buildings within the district around Ferry Street.
- Raise awareness of problems arising from redevelopment or rehabilitation, e.g. private development rights, damage to existing social networks and issues about re-housing.
- Preserve some unique characteristics and features of the district in the course of redevelopment.
- Environmental protection and traffic problems.
- Connection between the old and new areas.
- Establish district management organisations to tackle issues like building maintenance.

2. District Council: Central and Western District
Topic: Start with the Basics to Revitalise Central and Western District
Consultant: Planarch Consultants Limited

The consultant had held a community workshop to identify the aspirations of the stakeholders for urban regeneration in the district. Many Central district residents opined that organic regeneration should be adopted, historic buildings should be revitalised flexibly, and the background and the needs of the district should be reflected. Residents in Sheung Wan and Sai Ying Pun suggested that the characteristics and resources of the district be preserved, that the environment, hygiene, law and order and connection with the waterfront should be improved; and building density, height, sunlight, ventilation and impact on the environment, etc. be taken into account in designing the redevelopment areas. Stakeholders in Western District and Kennedy Town were supportive of a variety of land uses to match up a continuous waterfront promenade, construction of public housing estates, introduction of more tourist destinations and leisure and cultural venues, etc. The facilities provided after urban regeneration must be affordable for citizens at large to enjoy.

Conservation and Consolidation

Summing up the preliminary recommendations from the Central and Western District, the consultant opined that it was necessary to carry out “Conservation”, i.e.

preservation and revitalisation of heritage, culture and buildings, and improvement of the environment in the district:

- Preserve and revitalise old urban areas, tenement buildings, markets, distinctive architecture and buildings, lanes and alleys.
- Introduce economic activities which would reflect the local character of the district, and encourage one-stop service for creative industries to revitalise Central Market.
- Erect signs showcasing the early history of Sam Kok Ma Tau (Wing Lok Pier).
- Set up a moving tram museum and introduce two heritage trails highlighting local history and culture.
- Improve the environment, including rear alleys and parks nearby, pavements and provide pedestrian precincts during holidays.

To achieve “Consolidation”, which would include waterfront enhancement, optimisation of land use, strengthening existing resources and fulfilling the needs of residents:

- Carry out proper town planning, enhance New Central Harbourfront, strengthen the connection to and optimise the use of the Western Wholesale Food Market e.g. by promoting local high-quality specialized foods, setting up an exhibition on history, converting the Western District Public Cargo Working Area into a public promenade and a public open space in the long term and introducing more leisure and cultural venues; boosting the local economy e.g. by converting China Merchant Wharf into a tourist area and building more hotels, etc.;
- Satisfy the needs of the elderly in the district, e.g. converting the vacant Western R&F Married Police Quarters into housing for the elderly, and
- Satisfy the housing needs within the district.

3. District Council: Tsuen Wan District

Topic: Tsuen Wan Urban Regeneration – District Aspirations Study

Consultant: Community Project Workshop, Faculty of Architecture, the University of Hong Kong

The consultant had conducted interviews in Tsuen Wan. Interviewees were most satisfied with transport and least satisfied with the environment (mainly caused by traffic). They thought Tsuen Wan was now a diversified, convenient and “kaifong” district with unique local character. They wanted to preserve local specialised shops so that the old and the new could have a better interface. The finding of this study showed that the average monthly household income in the district was higher than the median household income in Hong Kong, indicating that apart from existing residents, it could attract people to move house to and spend in the district.

Tsuen Wan Town Centre had “green urban lungs” i.e., recreational open spaces and squares where citizens could gather. The old centre had a number of Pei Squares, and the buildings nearby were mostly aged 30 to 50 years old. Interviewees thought that the environment and law and order needed to be improved.

The history and culture of Tsuen Wan were mainly reflected in its old town centre. Its most prominent feature was the Tai Pei Fong, Yi Pei Fong, Sam Pei Fong, Sze Pei Fong and Hau Tei Market which were unique in Hong Kong. The Pei Fongs (or squares) dated back to the Chang'an City, a walled city in the Tang Dynasty. It could be seen from the layout or street name of the Pei Squares that Tsuen Wan was an ancient city. The consultant was of the view that Pei Squares could become Tsuen Wan's unique branding and character, and suggested that trails could be provided to interconnect the Pei Fongs and in so doing, revitalise the district.

Tsuen Wan was a typical old district surrounded by industrial areas. A possible development approach was to extend the town centre to its surrounding industrial areas. The retained industrial areas could be developed into a Research & Development Centre and a high value-added industrial base. The branding and characteristics of Tsuen Wan could be extended to the waterfront. Revitalisation and different activities could be carried out to enhance vibrancy and the connection between the waterfront and the old town area. In addition, Tsuen Wan had many tourist spots and hence tourism should be promoted in the district.

4. District Council: Wan Chai District
Topic: Urban Regeneration – District Aspirations Study – Interim Report
Consultants: Culture Development Limited and Centre for Culture and Development, the Chinese University of Hong Kong

The consultants had studied the statistical information and data for the Wan Chai District:

- There were 94 declared monuments in Hong Kong, 3 of which were in Wan Chai District. Out of the 452 graded historical buildings in Hong Kong, 38 were situated in Wan Chai District, accounting for 9% of the total. There were a total of 2,458 private buildings (including commercial buildings) in the district, about 70% of which aged over 30 years. 46% of the private buildings were without an owners' corporation.
- Around 50 buildings had taken part in the "Operation Building Bright" and over 100 buildings had undergone subsidised rehabilitation.

Public opinions collected by the consultants from workshops included:

- More consultation with residents;
- Focus on preservation and promote local characteristics within the district;
- Focus on retaining the social network and local economic activities;
- Avoid too many high-valued commercial activities in preservation projects;
- Improve the environment by providing more greening and reducing air pollution;
- Formulate policies for preservation of privately owned heritage buildings;
- Enhance connections within and outside the district, and

- Try to decrease the density. Revitalisation is preferred to redevelopment.

In addition, the consultants had also conducted an interview survey to collate views from residents of the district. Preliminary results showed that the majority views of the interviews were:

- Wan Chai was a district with both tradition and modernity, and the ratio of residential to commercial developments was balanced in the district;
- The problems in Wan Chai included traffic congestion, inadequate pavements, and air and noise pollution;
- Preservation should be given top priority, followed by rehabilitation, revitalisation and, lastly, redevelopment. However, rehabilitation was the most current pressing issue; and
- Environmental improvement was the most important factor for consideration in urban regeneration, followed by development density, sustainable development and enhancement of the local economy, community and social network.

A summary of the Consultants' recommendations:

- Rehabilitation would be the top priority for Wan Chai District among the strategies of urban renewal.
- Preservation projects should be affordable for the local residents and more local characteristics should be conserved.
- Re-housing in the same district, and "flat-for-flat" and "shop-for-shop" compensation arrangement should be adopted as far as possible.
- The environment and connection within and outside the district should be improved in urban regeneration.
- More public open spaces should be provided in the harbourfront promenade so as to enhance its accessibility.

5. District Council: Kowloon City District
 Topic: District-based Urban Regeneration – District Aspirations Study
 Consultant: Centre for Architectural Heritage Research, The Chinese University of Hong Kong

Kowloon City had some of the highest potential for future development among all the districts within Hong Kong, as it included the Kai Tak Development Area and would benefit from an improved transport network (Shatin to Central Link and Kwun Tong Line Extension) as well as the Kowloon City Underground Street, etc. In the first joint focus group meeting of the four areas of Kowloon City, the consultant listened to and collected views concerning the 4Rs, waterfront revitalisation and industrial buildings revitalisation, as well as aspirations and demands for implementation, etc.

The preliminary study results showed that the stakeholders hoped urban regeneration would improve the traffic conditions in the district, enhance residents' living conditions as well as strengthen the cultural characteristics of the district. To ensure that development in the district was desirable and energetic, the feasibility of the

district aspirations should be enhanced and coordination with the surrounding areas was required. Specific views included:

- a. Heritage conservation and historical buildings preservation, with appropriate design and planning in the surrounding areas:
 - Historical buildings could be linked up with tourism, catering and commercial activities.
 - The Government could cooperate with the owners of old buildings and shophouses to carry out rehabilitation, and preserve some buildings with special features to serve as exhibition venues.
 - Let the public participate in the discussions about optimising the use of the Cattle Depot.

- a. Redevelopment
 - 13 Streets – Consider whether they should be preserved or rehabilitated. If redevelopment was to be undertaken, green areas should be reserved to tie in with the development of Kai Tak Area.
 - Funeral Parlours – if they could not be relocated, the outlook should be improved by utilizing the surrounding buildings and developments as visual screens.
 - Hung Hom Old District – Develop into a Comprehensive Development Area.
 - The redeveloped buildings should not be over 30 stories in height and low-density development should be adopted to avoid creating a wall effect.

- b. Rehabilitation
 - The buildings in Ho Man Tin district were generally well maintained. Owner's initiatives to undertake rehabilitation had been strong; and
 - Most buildings around Nga Tsin Wai Road should undergo rehabilitation to tie in with the development of tourism and revitalisation in the district.

- d. Revitalisation
 - Hoi Sam Park was a well used major open space with high pedestrian flow in the district.
 - Pak Tai Street and Tam Kung Road could be pedestrianised, but the shop tenants might not consent.
 - Cattle Depot Artist Village – it could be converted into an outdoor café or an art shopping centre.
 - Ho Man Tin East Service Reservoir – providing more recreational facilities and beautifying the environment, and connecting Ho Man Tin Sports Centre with Ho Man Tin West Service Reservoir.
 - The Kowloon City District areas surrounding Nga Tsin Wai Road should tie in with the development of the food and beverage and tourism industry.

e. Waterfront Revitalisation

- Connect the waterfront from Laguna Verde, Hung Hom to To Kwa Wan with the waterfront in Tsim Sha Tsui, or as far as the waterfront in Kwun Tong.
- The land resources were not fully utilized now and only used for warehouses and carparks. It was recommended that the waterfront be revitalised for tourism by connecting the private waterfront sites by footbridges or subways, setting up refreshment kiosks and cycle tracks, and widening the waterfront promenade.

f. Industrial Buildings Revitalisation

- It was hoped that the Government would implement policies to facilitate more value-added uses for industrial buildings.
- It was recommended that a survey be conducted on the vacancy rate before making plans for revitalisation and changes of use. Beautification works and enhancement of transport network was also recommended.

6. District Council: Kwun Tong District
Topic: Urban Regeneration – District Aspirations Study
Consultant: Community Project Workshop, Faculty of Architecture, The University of Hong Kong

Since the 1960's, many public housing estates had been built and redeveloped in the Kwun Tong district in order to cope with the demand arising from the growing population for additional community facilities. More than half of the population in the district was living in public housing. The monthly median household income was between ten and twenty thousand Hong Kong dollars, which was lower than the median household income for Hong Kong. The consultant had conducted a survey in the district and found that more than 30% of the interviewees were satisfied with the transport network in the district, but 37% of them were dissatisfied with the environmental problems brought about by traffic. Some interviewees felt that Kwun Tong was an old district with local traditions and characteristics, and was a place where the new meets the old. Some were concerned that redevelopment might damage the local characteristics. It was also felt that the district was suitable for the elderly to live in.

Due to its relatively delayed development, Kwun Tong was not like some districts in Hong Kong, which had a rich history and culture. However, it had many street markets and small shops etc. which were valuable intangible cultural heritage worthy of retention. The most significant meaning of conserving culture and heritage was to bring benefits to and facilitate sustainable development of the community. According to the current zoning plan, the Kwun Tong Town Centre redevelopment would include medium to high-end shopping areas. This would reduce choices for shoppers. Diversity was a prerequisite of sustainable development, and the "grass root" shopping areas around the Kwun Tong town centre could offer diversified choices for the residents. It would contribute to Kwun Tong's becoming a sustainable commercial/residential area in the future.

At present, Kwun Tong's industrial area separated the waterfront and the residential area. Many residents said that they hoped the waterfront promenade could be used more often. The consultancy study had found that many 30-50 years old buildings within Kwun Tong industrial area had gradually been converted into commercial uses, resulting in increased commercial activities in the originally less busy areas. For example, since 1999, the Kwun Tong South area had had 12 approved applications for rezoning to hotel uses.

The Kwun Tong and Ngau Tau Kwok MTR Stations currently connected the Kwun Tong town centre and the waterfront via two main streets. However, the development of elevated highways had created physical barriers, e.g. many trucks loaded and unloaded goods on Hoi Yuen Road, causing pedestrian-vehicle conflicts and endangering road users. Improvement schemes should include streetscape improvement works, pedestrian precincts, widening pavements and greening. The consultant had also recommended that the overall planning strategy should link-up Kwun Tong Town Centre (including Yue Man Square) with the waterfront and the residential area on the hillside.

At present, the waterfront from Kowloon Bay to Cha Kwo Ling and Yau Tong were mainly divided into waterfront industrial/commercial areas, heavy industrial area and squatter areas. The aspiration was to establish new city hubs in the Western area (i.e. Cha Kwo Ling) and the Eastern area (i.e. Kowloon Bay), thereby developing the waterfront areas and extending it to the Kwun Tong industrial area and Yue Man Square. The Western and Eastern hubs and the Kwun Tong town centre should be linked together for a "networking" effect. It was recommended that "green lungs of the city" (i.e. parks and recreational land) and green corridors should be provided. The latter would establish linkages along the Eastern and Western areas as well as Yue Man Square and the residential area on the hillside.

7. District Council: Sham Shui Po District
Topic: Sham Shui Po 'People-based' Urban Regeneration Aspirations
Consultants: Centre for Environmental Policy and Resource Management of the Chinese University of Hong Kong and SEE Network Company Ltd.

The consultant had studied the history, local features, residents' daily lives, aspirations, etc. of Sham Shui Po by adopting a bottom-up and people-orientated approach. The consultant has gathered information by a baseline study, compiling statistics on the year of completion and height of buildings, buildings with owners' corporations, urban renewal projects completed or in progress, as well as the distribution of public open space within the district. The above information together with findings from past studies would form the basis of formulating recommendations for future policies.

The consultant would also conduct in-depth interviews with about 100 stakeholders within the district. The targets of analysis included (a) : Living space (including household composition and type), targeting at reaching all types of residences; (b) Use of public open space by regular users (i.e. owners, operators, shoppers, tourists,

etc.). The consultant extracted some interviews recorded on video to show the following:

- Sham Shui Po was a ‘convenient living area’ with readily available daily necessities and cheap goods. The community was diversified.
- It was necessary to provide more community services and create more job opportunities for those who were less capable, so that they could earn a living. Some interviewees agreed with the redevelopment plan, hoping that it would reduce the waiting time for public housing. Nevertheless, redevelopment often forced the tenants to move out without any rehousing arrangement. This had adverse impacts on those in a difficult financial situation.
- Redevelopment often led to a rise in property prices in the same district. The compensation amount might not be sufficient for purchasing flats of 7 years old in the same district. This would reallocate the monthly expenditure of affected people (e.g. due to increase in building management fees).
- Redevelopment would sometimes stifle the local economy. The current mode of real estate development in Hong Kong had brought fortune to some, but at the same time, it had made some people live below the subsistence level.

The consultant concluded that although Sham Shui Po was an old district, it was full of vibrancy and energy. It brought convenience to people who lived in the district and satisfied their needs. Although people living in the Sham Shui Po district were relatively poor, they could “sustain themselves in poverty”.

Public Discussion and Overall Summary

This part was hosted by Dr. TANG Bo-sin, Deputy Head of the Department of Building and Real Estate of the Hong Kong Polytechnic University. The main points were summarized as follows:

- The ‘Urban Regeneration -- District Aspirations Study’ led by seven District Councils was not a typical-technical study. It not only focused on the design and planning of hardware, but more importantly on the integration of opinions and recommendations derived from people’s needs and aspirations for the Government to consider.
- Each district should set its own aspirations, with its own position and theme. A unique culture and theme should be established so as to produce ‘community branding’, thereby developing local economy and community activities.
- The opinions and recommendations must be implementable and practical. Also, detailed programmes and action plans were required to facilitate and assist the Government to formulate and implement relevant policies.

Participants’ opinions were summarised as follows:

- A participant felt that most of the time surveys and interviews could not reach the real stakeholders effectively, leading to a superficial and one-sided study.
- A participant raised the question concerning how each consultant team could improve methodology of its study, and whether there was sufficient time and funds to carry out the improvements, as well as the future direction for district

planning. A consultant responded that there was no “best” methodology of study, because the needs of each district should be taken into account in adopting the study methodology. Most importantly, the methodology should be in line with the three major principles raised by the Secretary for Development in her speech, and public views should be gathered in a more extensive way.

- A Central and Western District Councillor indicated that he hoped the Authority would approve the development or improvement of the waterfront area, and also raised concerns regarding environmental improvement and building density, as well as sustainable development (especially on the issues of wall effect buildings and so on).
- A Kowloon City District Councillor questioned whether funeral parlours and related industries were still appropriate to be located within urban areas, and enquired whether the Authority would consider relocating them.
- A representative of Kwun Tong Central Area Committee pointed out that many industrial buildings were old and dilapidated, and even becoming dangerous buildings. He hoped that the revitalisation project of industrial areas could be implemented as soon as possible. Furthermore, the planning of some districts was not well-organised. The Government was urged to be forward-looking.
- A representative of the Task Group on Urban Regeneration of Sham Shui Po District Council indicated that the residents did not understand how the URA decided on the timing to commence the 225 redevelopment projects, and enquired whether the previous planning proposals would be amended after the ‘Urban Regeneration – District Aspirations Study’ had been completed, and what the subsequent actions would be. He was also concerned that after the non-technical meeting held today, the Government or the URA would claim that consent and support had been obtained from the District Councils for implementing the recommendations according to the findings of the study.
- In respect of Kwun Tong and Tsuen Wan districts, a participant raised questions as to how the traffic conditions could be improved, emissions of carbon dioxide reduced, and residents’ daily lives improved. A consultant responded that by increasing pedestrian flow, business opportunities and commercial activities would increase, and residents’ daily lives could be improved.
- A Kowloon City District Councillor believed the redevelopment of the 13 Streets was very important for the development of Kai Tak City. She hoped that the Government could resume private streets and improve their environment. Besides, there were many jewellery companies in Hung Hom and the economy of the district should be stimulated by revitalisation and development of industrial buildings. She also believed that it was necessary to promote cultural development, activities and heritage conservation.

A-World Consulting Ltd.
January, 2010

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