

Steering Committee on Review of the Urban Renewal Strategy

Key Issues Identified During the Envisioning Stage

Purpose

This paper outlines the key issues that have been identified so far during the public engagement process of the Envisioning Stage of the Urban Renewal Strategy (URS) Review.

Background

2. Since the launch of the URS Review, we have been soliciting public views on urban regeneration in Hong Kong through various means, including focus group sessions, written submissions, entries in the e-Forum of the URS Review website and public seminars. In Steering Committee paper No. 2/2008, we inform members that the views collected from these initial discussions will be distilled into a list of issues and challenges identified, which will form the agenda for our public consultation in the subsequent stages of the Review.

3. Meanwhile, the Policy Study Consultant will also produce a report summarising the findings of their studies on urban renewal policies and practices in comparable Asian cities, including their approaches, achievements and lessons learned. A summary of their initial observations is provided in the progress report of the policy study consultant (Annex to SC Paper No. 1/2009). The agenda developed during the Envisioning Stage coupled with the study report on the practices and experiences of other Asian cities will form the basis for our consultation in Stage 2 – Public Engagement. We hope these will contribute to facilitating more informed discussions and identification of creative solutions for our challenges in urban renewal.

Public Views Received So Far

4. The major issues and challenges in urban renewal that we have identified during the Envisioning Stage are:

(a) Vision & Considerations

- Many suggested that the vision of urban renewal depended on the long-term positioning of Hong Kong and should be part of the town planning and economic development strategies.
- Some expressed more specific concerns about development density, urban design (e.g. building height, local characteristics and public spaces), environmental protection and public transport considerations during the urban regeneration process. Some suggested to conduct more studies on related areas and policies (e.g. local culture, poverty, heritage preservation and the Landlord and Tenant Ordinance) and improve their co-ordination.
- There have been a lot of discussions on the meaning of “people-centred approach”, the relation between development and quality of life, and the importance of preserving and revitalising social network, local culture and heritage as well as local economy. Some suggested that improvement of the living conditions of owners and tenants in dilapidated buildings was a welfare issue that should be achieved through social welfare programmes rather than urban redevelopment.
- There were also suggestions to extend urban renewal to cover industrial areas and areas outside the target areas included in the current URS.

(b) Balance & Coordination among 4Rs¹

- Some called for more emphasis on rehabilitation, preservation and revitalization to better preserve local character and social network, whilst some supported early redevelopment for buildings with poor safety and environmental hygiene conditions due to poor building management and maintenance.
- Many recommended better co-ordination among the 4Rs (e.g. guidelines on how to decide between redevelopment and rehabilitation).

¹ 4Rs refer to Redevelopment, Rehabilitation, Revitalisation and pReservation.

(c) Role of Stakeholders

- Many emphasized that different stakeholders should play their role in urban renewal. Some suggested that URA should take forward projects independently without cooperating with developers whilst some said that URA was not adequately equipped to implement the other 3Rs besides redevelopment.
- Some suggested a strengthened role of the Hong Kong Housing Society (HKHS) in rehabilitation of buildings, better co-ordination and re-alignment of the urban renewal efforts of URA, HKHS and Buildings Department, and improved collaboration with Hong Kong Housing Authority in rehousing.
- There were also requests for facilitating the role of the private sector in urban redevelopment (e.g. simplifying the requirements for compulsory sale, speeding up the relevant approval procedures, providing concessions in taxation or land premium, or transfer of development rights).
- There were suggestions to encourage residents to undertake redevelopment by themselves, with assistance from non-government organizations, developers and URA in the form of financial and technical support. Also, there were calls to strengthen the role of owners, such as through owners' participation in redevelopment projects, compulsory maintenance, management and insurance, and compulsory preservation with Government assistance.
- The Government was also urged to increase investment in public infrastructure (e.g. escalators in Mid-Levels) to encourage organic urban regeneration by the private sector.

(d) Compensation, Rehousing and Resumption

- There were suggestions to offer owners and tenants more options of compensation and rehousing, like “shop for shop” and “flat for flat”, rehousing in the same district and relaxing the criteria for rehousing into public housing. Some suggested providing compensation and re-housing before approval of the statutory plans or development projects.

- As regards the prevailing compensation policy, there were conflicting views on whether the compensation was too generous or insufficient. Some also queried the justification for allowing URA to apply for resumption of land required for urban renewal.

(e) Public Engagement

- There were requests for engaging the affected owners and tenants and the general public in identifying target areas for the implementation of the 4Rs under a district based approach.
- Whilst there were calls for public engagement throughout the policy-making, planning, design and implementation processes, community education on urban renewal, and the establishment of community alliance to monitor urban renewal projects, there were also concerns that the public engagement process might slow down the pace of urban renewal.

(f) Social Impact

- Some suggested expanding the scope of social impact assessments to look at both social benefits and social costs; cover areas outside the project boundaries; integrate the assessments with the public engagement process; and conduct assessments both before and after the redevelopment.
- There were concerns about the current arrangement whereby URA commissioned non-government organizations to set up social service teams for individual projects, as the teams would be accountable to the affected owners and tenants, as well as to the URA. Some suggested establishing an independent mechanism to appoint social service teams.

(g) Financial Arrangement

- There have been mixed views on the current self-financing model of the URA. Some considered that this would mean that URA has to raise the development density of its redevelopment projects and will be reluctant to improve its compensation and re-housing arrangements. Some considered that URA should be listed in the stock exchange to raise fund and that other organizations should be invited to share the burden of implementing those non-profitable urban regeneration initiatives.

- There were different views on URA's role: some suggested the Government to invest more on urban renewal (e.g. link redevelopment sites with new sites, increase resource allocated to URA); others suggested to reduce URA's role in redevelopment and strengthen the role of the private sector.

(h) Urban Renewal Programme

- There were calls to speed up the pace of urban renewal in view of the deteriorating conditions of old urban areas and the limitation of building rehabilitation. They requested early publication of planned urban renewal programmes so that affected residents might plan early (e.g. whether to rehabilitate their buildings).

(i) Others

- There was a suggestion to turn the URS into a statutory regulation.
- Some suggested URA's urban renewal projects should pursue excellence in architectural design.

5. The public engagement consultant is preparing a detailed report of the Envisioning Stage, which will be submitted to Steering Committee in due course.

Advice Sought

6. Members are invited to comment on the major views and issues summarised in paragraph 4 (a) to (i) above.

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