

Lantau Development Public Engagement

Executive Summary

1. An advisory body called the Lantau Development Advisory Committee (LanDAC) was formed by Government about two years ago and they hoped to develop Lantau and its surrounding waters to create a modern services and logistics hub, and, to form an artificial island through reclamation although the planning vision for the developments on Lantau is to balance and enhance development and conservation. Earlier this year, the LanDAC submitted a report¹ and initiated a public engagement exercise.

2. Unfortunately, we do not see any concrete ‘conservation proposals’ being newly proposed by the LanDAC in the report. Instead, many reclamation projects are proposed (most of these have been proposed before under different scenarios and at least one (i.e., Tung Chung East reclamation) has already been approved and is on-going. There are also numerous proposals for building even more infrastructure facilities on Lantau and locating them within many places of high conservation importance.

3. Although the report mentions ‘sustainable development’, ‘low-carbon’ and ‘conservation’, we do not consider that the LanDAC really understands the real meanings of these terms. Firstly, reclamation by no means can be considered to be sustainable development – it will cause permanent and irreversible impacts to our marine environment. It is also proposed to build more roads connecting Hong Kong Island and New Territories with Lantau, and to also relax the existing road restrictions on access to South Lantau – these imply there would be more vehicles on Lantau and, thus, these are not proposals that reduce carbon emissions. Although many conservation areas such as Marine Parks, Country Parks and ‘River Park’ are mentioned in the report, these parks have either already been in existence for decades (i.e., the Country Parks) or already planned in current development projects – none of these parks are new proposals or original concepts proposed by the LanDAC.

4. The LanDAC is also very keen to promote ‘green-tourism’. However, what is being proposed are recreational facilities such as adventure park, sport centre, marina, etc. There is even a proposal to build a SPA resort on South Lantau. The LanDAC consider that these are facilities which can promote what they call ‘green tourism’.

¹https://www.devb.gov.hk/filemanager/en/content_872/LanDAC_First_term_Work_Report_%28English%29.pdf

5. The LanDAC is primarily comprised of members from the commercial or business sector, some with vested interests or conflicts of interests^{2, 3}. For instance, some of them own land or are senior staff of development companies which own land on Lantau^{2, 3}. According to the LanDAC's own documents, members of the LanDAC have only carried out one or two familiarisation visits to Lantau, and even visited several sites of conservation interest all on the same single day although the report mentions that such site visits have helped the members to thoroughly understand the conditions of Lantau Island.

6. Lantau Island is currently facing a lot of problems. One of the most serious is the haphazard dumping/ development on South Lantau. As the entire coast of South Lantau has not been covered with a Development Permission Area plan, the Planning Department cannot carry out any enforcement action against haphazard land filling or excavation even though some of the affected areas are already zoned as Coastal Protection Area or Green Belt. Dumping of inert construction materials on private land lots is also not considered to be unauthorised once consent from the land owner has been obtained. All these legal loopholes have contributed to the endless dumping and haphazard development that is currently happening on South Lantau. Unfortunately, some of the affected areas such as Pui O are ecological hotspots – the irony of the situation is that the conservation importance of these places are also well-recognised by the Agriculture, Fisheries and Conservation Department.

7. The numerous development proposals supported or being promulgated by the LanDAC would have the inevitable consequence of clearly raising the local land owners' expectations for development. Taken together with the existing malfunctions in the land use and environmental protection systems, we are highly concerned that the remaining habitats and active farmlands now on Lantau would eventually disappear due to development pressure for much higher-return commercial activities.

8. If the Government does not have any solid solutions or real answers to deter or resolve the environmental problems caused by haphazard dumping and uncontrollable development on the important habitats that are already happening on Lantau right now, then we simply urge that there should be no more roads, no more further relaxation of the road restrictions and no further development on Lantau.

² <http://hk.apple.nextmedia.com/news/art/20140421/18695811>

³ <https://www.facebook.com/hk.nextmedia/photos/a.170516952447.149676.105259197447/10152439281137448/?type=1&theater>

9. We also urge that the Government take pro-active and practical measures to re-vitalise and support local food production as a fundamental pillar of the local economy of Lantau, and not to only focus on those 'traditional' ways to promote socio-economic development, i.e., only to be driven by commercial activities.

10. We also recommended that careful consideration be given to a re-structuring of the composition of the membership of the LanDAC to include more representatives from the environmental sectors and civil society to help the Government formulate a meaningful and visionary plan that would be truly seamless with the globally accepted concepts of sustainable development, low-carbon communities and conservation.

11. Lantau Island is a haven – a remnant of the wide open refreshing green spaces left in this corner of China. This idyllic island is still, mostly, in a pristine natural state, crisscrossed by a verdant mosaic of natural habitats and a lush cloak of natural vegetation that does not need any kind of further development. Hong Kong is already highly congested, so what is the purpose of developing Lantau and turning it into a concrete jungle and making it even more overcrowded, just like Kowloon or Hong Kong Island? What would be people's reason to come if they are just going to be offered what they are trying to escape?