

HKILA

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## **Comments on Urban Renewal Plan for Kowloon City – Stage 1 Public Engagement Digest**

### **General comments from HKILA**

- HKILA do not see any vision in the proposed re-development. The 4 "visions" mentioned in the Public Engagement (PE) document are nothing more than empty words and definitely too generic and basically can apply to any area in Hong Kong. The vision we expect is how the district can be seen, how the urban environment can be shaped and what people are expected to use the space.
- The image of the district is not mentioned in the renewal plan. Despite the fact that the district is generally deteriorating, the image of Kowloon City is very distinctive. Although the image is somehow built and evolved by itself, whether the building height should be restricted (the "toothpick buildings" after the closure of Kai Tak Airport are heavily criticized by many people) or the current layout should be preserved so that the relationship of shops and streets are kept instead of simply building conventional mega shopping malls and blocks of bulky buildings all around, making the district as disgusting as the remaining part of Hong Kong are things that need to be further explored.
- In old district re-development of this kind, HKILA see the opportunity to free up the open space and revert back to the public. While we say to free up the open space, we do not mean having a big park segregated from the remaining parts of the city. We refer to the way of renewal like in Barcelona, which allows open spaces, urban elements and historical icons mingling seamlessly and harmoniously to each other.
- Greening strategy should be incorporated in this stage. The involvement of landscape architects in decision making before the layout is fixed and barred from any amendments is essential.
- The wording "street beautification" in P.11 of the Digest is the wording we feel are highly unprofessional. It deems the public realm and urban greenery is a superficial beautification of the city. We opt not to simply say "beautification" and give no consideration to imageability. Terms like "streetscape enhancement" should be adopted instead.
- The preliminary urban renewal proposal is about to renew the district in a piecemeal manner, a typical and conventional strategy. Despite the fact that there are a lot of practical reasons in the real world, a holistic approach should be proposed in this stage so that people see the overall vision and see how the district looks like in long term.

- A reasonable study on Kai Tak Development together with this urban renewal plan is essential to evaluate the impact to this re-development plan.
- It is a good intention to review the existing composition of the district. If one has ever been to Kowloon City, one will know the image of the place is built by the activities of the people.
- The Social Impact Assessment (SIA) can be crucial but we don't think we should heavily rely on it. The feedbacks will be diverse and reflecting the concerns of different vested interest groups and stakeholders only. In foreign experience, it is the vision that convinces and satisfies the public but not to trying to fulfill "ALL" requests from the vested interest groups and stakeholders.
- We have a very strong feeling that the Revitalizing Business Area, the revitalizing waterfront and piers and the dining hub idea will simply turn the areas into theme park for tourist mostly from mainland China, but not an enjoyable urban space for the public.
- The heritage trail can be a good idea but it should be done subtly, such as the Sun Yat Sin Historical Trail in HK Island. The history of many renowned cities like Beijing cities blended in everyone's daily life. A small plate in front of a small shop elegantly tells people this was the home of a poet; an abrupt turn and comes to a dead-end *hu tong* that writes here was the place for a famous writer. While it's a bit too fancy for Hong Kong but we at least do not need a monumental "icon" to tell the others saying "hello, here is our remaining history".
- The incorporation of any buildings or sites to a heritage trail should take into account the capacity of their facilities. This is a lesson-learnt from some failed example taken from Stanley. In addition, property owners' consent for incorporation as part of the sight-seeing elements of the heritage trail should also be obtained, as this may cause nuisance to the property owners.
- Connectivity of the heritage trial is very important. E.g. the existing Olympic Garden is a very important garden celebrating the first Olympic torch arriving HK in 1964, yet it is segregated by highways and is not easily accessible.
- Any planning and future development should fully take into account the unique historic character of the Kowloon City neighborhood.
- For redevelopment projects, setbacks should be required to allow for generous utility-free soil provision for street trees.

- Streetscape design needs to be free from conventional vehicular-prioritized designs. Thorough traffic study should consider the possibility of introducing a series of streets that are pedestrian-prioritized, which shall provide street-side parking but minimal provisions for through traffic. In this way, table-topped roads, pedestrianized paving materials, and increased number of street trees would be possible to create much more pedestrian-friendly streetscape, and conducive to upgrade of commercial storefronts.
- To the largest possible extent, the existing scale of buildings should be protected to retain the character of the place.
- The Kowloon Walled City Park, and its proximity, should recapture much more of the area's uniquely valuable history.
- The consultants should consider the feasibility of reclaiming the roofing of the Kai Tak Tunnel for pedestrian/recreational use.
- The government shall conduct a high-level study on the practicality and fairness of the laws relating to the acquisitions of old buildings. The current system holds a much simplified view of the complex market mechanisms at work.
- The waterfront should be linked up with a comprehensive greenway/walkway system that is integral to the whole neighborhood, which connects the waterfront as a whole, plus bikeways and vibrant commercial storefronts.
- Given the importance of public space, and the many aspects of public space and the conservation of neighborhood character, landscape architects should be involved in the discussion of urban renewal as earlier as possible in the consultation process. Neighborhood conservation should not be restricted to individual buildings, but should involve the larger urban fabric including overall character and public spaces; including all the streetscapes and commercial frontages. The early involvement of landscape architects will largely contribute to the overall environmental and cultural sustainability of urban renewal projects in general.

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