

12 July 2017

Mr. Michael WONG, JP
Secretary for Development
Development Bureau
18/F., West Wing, Central Government Offices,
2 Tim Mei Avenue, Tamar
Hong Kong

Dear Mr. WONG, JP,

First, on behalf of the Hong Kong Institute of Landscape Architects (HKILA / the Institute) I extend our warmest congratulation to you for assuming the post of the Secretary for Development on 1 July 2017.

In response to the Sustainable Lantau Blueprint (the “Blueprint”) released by the Government on June 3, 2017 and establishment of Sustainable Lantau Office (SLO / the Office), HKILA would like to express our concern on the Government’s approach to implement the Blueprint in the natural-resource-rich Lantau Island.

The Institute appreciates the fact that the Blueprint has flagged many sustainable development principles. Sustainable development, which is defined in the Brundtland Report as “development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs”, is one of the core value that the Institute shares with the public in Hong Kong. The Blueprint has also highlighted the strategy of “Development in the North” and “Conservation for the South”. It emphasizes a balanced approach to develop Lantau into “a smart and low-carbon community for living, work, business, leisure and study” and “providing new opportunities associated with land and housing supply, economic development, commerce and trade, leisure, recreation and tourism, and at the same time enhancing the conservation of our natural, cultural and heritage resources”. Whilst conservation has been discussed in considerable coverage, the HKILA urges the government to materialize these initiatives through concrete actions. This is particularly important as Hong Kong has acceded to the Paris Agreement and committed to combat climate change.

Sustainable Development Goals and Carrying Capacity

The Blueprint outlines a massive development demand based on the anticipated agglomeration of economies and acceleration in overall economic growth, in which massive commercial, residential,

and GIC land uses are planned. The population of Lantau is projected to increase from 110,000 to about 300,000 by 2030 and 0.7 to 1 million when East Lantau Metropolis (ELM) project is completed. Such demand may pose significant pressure to the environment and may deviate from the goal to satisfy the needs of the future by consuming the desire of the present. In our opinion, sustainable development goals should be identified with respect to natural, social, human and built capitals and their abilities to replenish – in other words, the carrying capacity of the environment and the society.

Holistic Resources Planning and Management of Cumulative Impacts

The Blueprint is shaping Lantau Island with 30 years of mega-infrastructure development, including the CLK Airport and associated transportation and new town developments, the Disneyland, HKBCF, TMCLK and with more infrastructural plans underway. Many of them are designated projects in accordance with the Environment Impact Assessment Ordinance (Cap. 499). We would like to express our concern that the cumulative impact of these developments may be under-represented. Our worry is built upon the fact that there is a marked decline in the encounter rate and estimate of abundance of Chinese White Dolphins in the North Lantau region as suggested in the annual Marine Mammals Monitoring Reports. The HKILA urges the government to place paramount priority on the avoidance of developing sensitive areas and abandon the mentality that “mitigation measures could always resolve all the environment impact”, which is simply flawed.

Urban and Landscape Design

The Institute appreciates the government’s commitment to introduce both green and blue infrastructure in the development plan. Whilst the Blueprint acknowledges ecological and cultural values of Lantau, these investments shall go beyond the provision of hardware such as river parks and should embrace ecological thinking from design and planning stages to proper management and continuous enhancement of biodiversity.

With 70% of land designated as country parks, 86% of land designated as conservation related zonings for statutory protection and 8 nos. of SSSIs, Lantau is truly an environmentally sensitive area. We note that there are key settlements proposed at the northern landward side of Tung Chung East and West New Town Extensions and Siu Ho Wan Development. Land reclamation and the introduction of dense high-rise building clusters would inevitably alter the existing landscape characters. Treating the interfaces of the environmentally sensitive areas will be a major challenge in endeavouring a sustainable development in Lantau.

Establishment of Sustainable Lantau Office

To achieve a sustainable Lantau, the Institute agrees that a centralized authority is necessary to oversee the overall development in relation to the environmental impact. This could greatly reduce the number of unnecessary disturbance to the environment and perhaps may get closer to a balanced development of Lantau.

Despite the fact that Landscape Architect is the expert in landscape and visual impact assessment, landscape resource management and preservation, and standing at the forefront of contributing to a more sustainable Hong Kong, the function and role of Landscape Architect in the SLO are overlooked. HKILA is completely disappointed that the government has not proposed any Landscape Architect position in DEVB, CEDD or PlanD, but has only proposed one Forestry Officer, in the non-directorate posts to be created in CEDD for Lantau Development and Conservation Initiatives. Not to mention the 4 directorate posts proposed for the consideration of Establishment Subcommittee of Finance Committee, LEGCO on 6 June 2017. We are in grave concern that the manpower allocation in the SLO has pre-determined the fate of Lantau and deviated from the Office's goals and objectives.

As envisage in the Biodiversity Strategy and Action Plan (BSAP), "a sustainable future for Hong Kong would require a change of our mindset to achieve economic and social development with conservation of the environment". We believe the Blueprint and setting up of SLO should look beyond development opportunities but towards establishing a harmonic coexistence with the nature, catering for both the present and future economic, social and ecological needs. Thus, the Institute would like to advise the following for your deliberation:

- i) The balanced approach as mentioned in the Blueprint should be duly adopted to avoid the current recommendations tipping to development consideration only without adequate counterbalance of sustainability advertence; and
- ii) A Landscape Architect should be established in the SLO to safeguard the balanced development of Lantau.

Thank you for your attention.

Yours sincerely,



Tak Y. WONG

President, HKILA