Annex E

Gist of Focus Meetings

**Topic:** Development Patterns and Alternative Scenario(s)
**Date:** 10.1.2004

**Assumptions – Population**

**Population Level**
- The population level assumed in the HK2030 Study is too high. It is even higher than the projection prepared by the Census and Statistics Department which is already on the high side.

- New York and London both experienced a drop in population in the 1970's. International experience showed that the high property cost and living cost drove the blue-collar workers away but attracted the rich people. World cities are usually with lower population level but the residents are wealthier.

- The high tax and high living cost will push people away from Hong Kong. It is likely to have a zero-growth in our population.

**Demographic Structure**
- The population projection should be fine-tuned to provide the demographic structure and characteristics of the future population.

- The population assumptions do not seem right. A workforce of only 4 million will not be sufficient to support a 9.2 million population.

**Mobile Population**
- There is a need to know more about the mobile population so as to enable better understanding of the implications of this trend on the provision of housing and other facilities. The implication on service apartments should be revisited if the magnitude of the mobile population were to be increased. Relaxation of the Landlords and Tenants policy will also be useful to provide short-term rental accommodation for visitors.

**Assumptions – Employment**

- The employment projection only has provided the figures of the major industries/sectors. If the statistics of different sectors are disaggregated, there may be mismatch of job types and the skills of the workforce.
Role of Government and Private Sector

• There should be a balance of Government action and the market force. Market will give the drive and the planners can do what the market has failed/missed out. The Government should not intervene much, but let the private developers respond to the market. The role of the Government is to facilitate the private sector.

• Government and private sector should go hand in hand, and work together to achieve the desirable outcome which is most acceptable to the community as a whole.

• 200 hectares of ‘Other Specified Uses (Business)’ will be adequate to provide a wide range of economic activities. If sufficient infrastructures are provided, the private sector will respond to the market through lease modification.

Patterns and Forms of Development

Location of Future Quality Office Space

• It is suggested that quality office space can well be co-located with the proposed cultural hub in the West Kowloon. The West Kowloon should accommodate quality office space as a new commercial centre instead of cultural development as proposed in the Cultural District Development.

Integrated Transport and Land Use Planning

• There is a need for a comprehensive approach to integrate transport and land use, while better design will provide more spacious environment.

• The capacity of rail and Mass Transit Railway can support both Decentralisation and Consolidation Patterns. The question is how to fit in the development in the transport nodes. There should be an integrated planning for transport infrastructure and development. The Regional Express Line station should be a potential node for future development in the New Territories. The programme of development and provision of infrastructure should also be well paced.
Decentralisation or Consolidation

- Decentralisation Pattern is preferred. It will bring greater convenience to the people living in the New Territories. Development and conservation can go well together under Decentralisation.

- The choice of either pattern reflects personal taste/preference. Since different people will have different preference, some may prefer larger space with a green setting, others prefer urban convenience. It is important to provide adequate choices to our larger community.

- The location of public housing development will have a critical bearing on the centre of gravity of the development; Sha Tin is an example which is a Housing Authority led development. The location of public housing has a significant implication on which development pattern will emerge.

- The housing choices and affordability need to be well balanced.

The Environment

- The green area in Hong Kong is very precious in the Pearl River Delta Region. However, the focus of the proposed patterns is more on economic and development, but not so much on the environment.

- There is a need to put more emphasis in the environment and ecology. There is also a need to preserve our natural resources. Green space should not be sacrificed for development.

Density and Form

- There is a need to develop vertically (‘to reclaim the air’) so as to free out green sites undisturbed and other space. Proposed mega tall building complex to form habitat clusters.
General Comments

- Non-development of the Lok Ma Chau (LMC) Loop is the mainstream of views expressed at the meeting. There is reservation on the development of the LMC Loop in view of a host of issues (e.g. environmental and ecological impacts, lack of infrastructure, flooding) pertaining to the site.

- Before jumping to a conclusion of development, the Government is urged to carry out more assessments to ascertain the engineering, environment and financial viability of developing the LMC Loop. Besides, alternative uses including eco-tourism or maintenance of its status quo are suggested as better uses for the site.

Environmental and Ecological Impacts

- Many are of the view that the LMC Loop formed an integral part of the ecological corridor spanning from Ma Tso Lung to Deep Bay, constituting the most important green corridor in Hong Kong. Any development there will cause disturbance to the ecological balance of the area. Therefore, development of the LMC Loop needs to be carefully weighed against the pros of non-development or conservation which will instead render more benefits to Hong Kong.

- One respondent points out that despite the flood prevention work done by the Shenzhen River Training, the LMC Loop is prone to flooding and any development there will increase the risk of flooding in the New Territories.

More Studies

- One respondent mentions that as pointed out in the Planning Department (PlanD) Working Paper, the LMC Loop is fraught with a number of constraints (including impact on Deep Bay Water Quality, lack of infrastructure and handling of 4.5 million m³ mud deposited in the Loop).

- The case for development as a trade expo or other uses needs to be supported by more studies (including a 12-month ecological survey) to ascertain its feasibility. Also, detailed cost and benefit analysis is required to establish its commercial viability.
**Project Viability**

- A number of convention and exhibition facilities have been planned or developed in the Pearl River Delta (PRD) Region (including those facilities in Hong Kong) and the viability of developing more convention and exhibition facilities is doubtful.

- One respondent considers that the low-density conceptual scheme as presented in PlanD Working Paper on the website is unrealistic because in view of the hefty costs involved in site formation and servicing, a high-density development is the logical scheme to optimise the potential of the LMC Loop.

**Alternative Sites for Development**

- One respondent considers that in view of the lack of infrastructure facilities and ambiguous land title of the LMC Loop, the Government should consider relaxing restrictions in other areas within the Frontier Closed Area (FCA) e.g. Sam Po Shue and San Tin in the vicinity of the terminus of the planned LMC Spur Line to facilitate private development as a more cost-effective option to developing the FCA.

- Some express the view that knowing that there is a welter of problems related to the LMC Loop, the Government which still insist on preparing a development scheme for the site is criticised to have harboured a plan to give favour to some private developers.

**Alternative Uses for the LMC Loop**

- With due regard to the ecological and environmental sensitivity of the Loop and its adjoining areas, some suggest that a nature park for eco-tourism purpose (for low volume visitors) should be worth to be considered. This will be beneficial to the whole PRD Region, within which green area has been replaced by built-up area at an alarming pace.

- One respondent considers that the green edge of Hong Kong boundary serves to demonstrate the uniqueness of Hong Kong in the context of ‘One Country, Two Systems’.
Other issues

• One respondent maintains that to articulate the local interests, the Government should closely involve the local residents in the future planning of their own villages and the rural areas.

• According to the findings of a preliminary wildlife survey in FCA and Northeast New Territories by Kadoorie Farm, there are rich flora and fauna resources and development of a new crossing at Lin Ma Hang for the proposed Eastern Corridor is not supported on environmental and ecological grounds.
Annex E

Topic: Density Reduction
Date: 31.1.2004

General Comments

- Most of the respondents suggested that the density problem cannot be resolved simply by reducing plot ratios of individual sites. Comprehensive review of related issues, including planning, land, building, financial issues, is required.

- A three-dimensional spatial form should be considered in designing the new settlement.

- Blanket reduction of plot ratios is not supported by a couple of respondents.

- Protection of existing private development rights is fundamental.

- It is important to provide people with different choices.

High-density Development

- High-density environment can provide more convenience and reduce our ecological footprint.

- One respondent points out that Hong Kong’s compact and high-density development form has made rail projects viable, resulting in a relatively low car-ownership level (15%-17%) much admired by many other cities in the world. Reducing densities will affect rail projects, creating many transport and environmental problems.

- Hong Kong has been successful in producing a compact and sustainable form of development due to its topography and this should be continued to avoid urban sprawl.

- Few have expressed the view that high-density development can produce a comfortable living environment if good urban design is applied. More studies are required to produce high-density development of a better quality.

Plot Ratio Reduction

- One respondent suggests that whatever development pattern to be adopted, urban renewal should be a common objective.
Incentives are needed to encourage urban renewal, whilst transfer of plot ratio or site swapping can be considered.

For redevelopment projects, financial viability is a key factor determining whether they could proceed or not. Viability of the projects can be affected by plot ratio limits, inclusion of Government sites in the scheme area, etc.

Plot ratio limits have affected urban renewal in Hong Kong; Government should review the premium calculation method in order for urban renewal to work.

**Redevelopment of Government, Institution or Community (GIC) Sites**

Government’s past practice of arbitrarily maximising plot ratios of sites for Government facilities is totally undesirable and this has resulted in co-location of incompatible uses.

Many suggest that GIC sites do not only have land use function, but could also help to balance development intensity and building heights. It is therefore wrong for the Government to build GIC facilities to their maximum plot ratio purely based on financial considerations. GIC sites can provide spatial relief or act as breezeway for high-density environment.

A few respondents do not support change of use at GIC sites. Their locations in the city are supported by their original functions. If a change of use is proposed, the suitability of the location should be reviewed; if necessary, the sites should be returned to the Government for replanning.

**Large Development Plots and ‘Podium’ Building Form**

Plot ratio limits in Hong Kong have not changed since the 60’s; however development sites have becoming larger and larger which have produced massive building bulk.

One respondent points out that podiums of private developments are so large that they look like a big wall built along the street and often create undesirable townscape.
• Car parking requirements in Hong Kong Planning Standards and Guidelines resulted in large podiums. Centralised car park is suggested.

• Comprehensive re-planning can help to relieve the undesirable ‘podium effect’, e.g. Government can resume a piece of land in the middle of a densely developed area and turn it into an open space or low-rise public facility.

• Large sites often produce massive built volume; in order that the spirit of the Building (Planning) Regulations can be adhered to, a ‘large site reduction factor’ should be applied in calculating the desirable development levels.

Better Urban Design

• Many express that good urban design is conducive to a good living environment and there is a need to control building heights and site coverage.

• Hong Kong needs a fairer system and more flexibility in its planning guidelines. For example, many European cities have various design guidelines not only related to plot ratio, but also other issues such as sunlight penetration, street widths, etc.

• In terms of urban design, one respondent points out an example found at Barcelona of Spain where buildings at street corners are set back from the kerb. It gives a lot more space to the street corner and creates a feeling of a public square. Hong Kong needs more guidance on urban design like this.

• The Buildings Ordinance is not conducive to innovative building design which should be reviewed.

• A couple of respondents suggest that Government, rather than the private sector, should be responsible for conducting studies into better urban design and healthier living environment.

• There is no use talking about plot ratio reduction when at the same time bonus GFA and non-accountable GFA are granted. There is a need to review the related policies.
Annex E

Institutional Mechanism

• Some express the view that there should be a change of prevailing mindset within the Government that all sites should be ‘maximised’ for development. Institutional mechanism such as a ‘task force’ should be established to consider the implications of density reduction and review the existing policies and relevant legislations.

• The limitations of the HK2030 study on physical planning alone are noted but hope to see that new ideas not necessarily related to physical planning can be reflected to higher levels of Government and considered.

• A vision is needed to guide Hong Kong’s future development which is currently lacking. HK2030 needs to set out the tasks required to achieve this vision, including possible changes to policies and legislations.
Annex E

Topic: Environmental and Ecological Considerations
Date: 28.2.2004

General Environmental Issues

- One attendee suggests that a more pro-active approach is needed to set out our desired environmental qualities. The Strategic Environmental Assessment, which seems to have adopted a passive mitigatory approach, is unsatisfactory.

- Another attendee urges that the Government needs to set out an Action Plan to protect the ecological environment, and should have better co-ordination between bureaux and departments to consider ecological impacts and to ensure that our habitats will not be fragmented / lost due to development projects.

- A few speakers express the need for an independent authority to be responsible for conservation and related matters, including cultural heritage, archaeological, ecological and environmental issues.

- One attendee point out that the Government has adopted a rather passive approach in addressing rural planning and land management issues. It should do more in terms of reviewing relevant policies and encouraging more public-private partnership as a means to improve the rural environment.

- Some point out that the construction of infrastructure, rather than building developments, has been the true cause for environmental damage. Planners, engineers and urban designers should properly address the environmental impacts of infrastructure developments.

- The Government should strike a balance between the financial and environmental implications of development projects, rather than just focusing on the costs. One attendee points out that the value of land in Hong Kong has always been dependent on ‘what can be built’ on it rather than giving due regard to the ‘existence value’ of the land itself, i.e. the value of an entity is recognised because it exists, as in the case of Siberian tiger. Another attendee holds also the view that land can have ‘eco-tourism value’, which has often been neglected because the focus always rests in the economic value of the land upon its development. We should aim at integrating the natural environment as part of our heritage and history.
Infrastructure and Environment

- Regarding the port development, one attendee opines that, with the increasing integration between Hong Kong and Pearl River Delta (PRD), it is possible to consider rationalising future port development within the whole PRD instead of building additional container terminals in Hong Kong.

- Another attendee suggests that a new container terminal could be built in Shenzhen to serve both Hong Kong and PRD. Nonetheless, some point out that the possible loss in jobs and businesses in Hong Kong will have great economic implications.

- Concerning the location for future port development, one attendee opines that using those already developed areas will cause less damage to the environment as compared to using greenfield sites. As such, the Tsing Yi site will have less environmental damage as compared to the Northwest Lantau site. The Government should seriously consider whether Northwest Lantau is an appropriate location on environmental grounds.

- There are concerns about the lack of any public consultation on the development of Hong Kong-Zhuhai-Macao (HZM) Bridge and the CE’s announcement of building Container Terminal 10 in Northwest Lantau even before the completion of the “Study on Hong Kong Port - Master Plan 2020”.

- The environmental implications of increasing cross-boundary traffic will be one of the most important issues in future planning.

- The mass transit system is an effective and environmentally friendly mode of transport. More studies should be carried out to investigate its further expansion in Hong Kong.

- An attendee introduces a new concept for freight movement called the ‘Underground Cargo Capsule System’. It is a rail-based automatic transport system which is efficient, cost-effective, and helps to reduce traffic congestion and pollution. This highly sustainable transport system can be installed underground or underneath the proposed HZM Bridge.
Environmental Issues on Lantau

- A number of speakers point out that Lantau has long been identified as our recreational and leisure garden, not only because it has a lot of natural heritage resources and places of archaeological interest, but there are also many species of plants and insects which are unique to Hong Kong. Lantau’s natural beauty and rich biodiversity should be protected and conserved for our future generations.

- The previous Territorial Development Strategy Review has suggested that major residential and economic developments on Lantau will be limited to the northern shores of the island, thus there should be no development elsewhere which may destroy the remaining natural coastline. Reserving Lantau as a land bank for the development of new container terminal, logistics park and tourism node etc. is inconsistent with the planning intention to maintain Lantau as a conservation area.

- One attendee points out that the Government has not honoured its previous promises, e.g. designation of the proposed Lantau North (Extension) Country Park.

- There are concerns that the formation of the ‘Lantau Development Task Force’ only emphasises on the economic and infrastructure developments on Lantau. Several attendees point out that the establishment of the Task Force to fast-track development projects on Lantau could invite many problems since the need for a timely programme may override other considerations, such as environmental interests. An example is the subsequent need to deal with the contaminated mud issue which only comes to light after commencement of the fast-tracked Disneyland project. There should be a multi-dimensional appraisal of the development projects and an integrated approach (not a piecemeal approach) to assess the compatibility of the developments with the overall environment. They urge for a transparent operation of the Task Force.

- One attendee introduces her work on setting up educational centres on Lantau and other islands, making use of disused village school buildings to help bringing children closer to the nature. It is hoped that their effort to protect and conserve the natural environment can be recognised and appreciated by the Government.
The Proposed ‘Super Prison’ Development at Hei Ling Chau

- There are queries about the need to construct a super prison as well as the site selection. The proposed site at Hei Ling Chau is against the recommendation of the South West New Territories Development Strategy to keep the island for conservation purpose. A few attendees raise grave concerns on the proposal as it will cause damage to the beautiful natural environment on the island.

- There have been insufficient studies on the environmental conditions of the island, nor have there been adequate public consultations on the super prison proposal. It is recommended to conduct a proper sustainability development study based on the whole region that will be affected by the project.

- One attendee points out that the Frontier Closed Area is a more preferable location for the prison development. It is also suggested that other sites (e.g. military sites) can be considered as well.

Planning Themes / Development Options

- Hong Kong has been gradually developing into a high-tech city with a focus on leisure and tourism. However, we still need to distinguish ourselves through conserving our natural environmental assets in order to stay ahead of other cities in the Mainland.

- Apart from the Victoria Harbour, attention should also be given to other water bodies, such as the Tolo Harbour.

- More should be done to improve on urban design, urban renewal and revitalisation. Massive development in urban areas should also be avoided in order to reduce further pollution and environmental damage.

- Hong Kong should be the pioneer in creating a three-dimensional habitat design in which buildings can become part of the infrastructure, rather than just isolated structures.

- One attendee expresses that the ‘Decentralisation Pattern’ will exploit undeveloped natural landscape. It should only be considered when urban land is fully developed.
Another opines that future planning in Hong Kong should give priority to environmental protection and prefers the ‘Decentralisation Pattern’ which will allow more scope for lower density development.

**Public Consultation Process**

- One attendee suggests that the Government should use more sophisticated information technology tools and software programmes in public consultations, such as ‘urban simulation model’ and ‘visual preference survey’ which are being used in other countries, to illustrate possible future scenarios / planning outcomes to allow people to view and appreciate alternative futures.

- Public consultations should be all inclusive, but many rural committees (RC) do not represent non-native residents in the communities concerned. Hence the RC should not be the only target consultee on rural planning issues.