

“Conserving Central” Distortion & Deception in a Government Proposal

Joint Petition on “Government Hill” for the People

Government Hill, where the current Central Government Offices are situated, has been the seat of government since the very earliest days of Hong Kong's existence. It is an important heritage site and its historic landscape reflects the original planning of the area from over 160 years ago. The Development Bureau proposes to sell a sizable portion of Government Hill to a developer who will demolish the West Wing and hollow out the hill to build a five-storey shopping mall cum car park with a 32-storey commercial tower on top.

Although the Government has labeled this plan as ‘Conserving Central’, it is in essence a real estate project. While the authorities are using misleadingly illustrated booklets and scale models to present their case, ostensibly for public consultation and to the Town Planning Board, it is evident that their intention is to present a fait accompli for selling off and redeveloping the site. We find that the government claims are out of context and involve distortion of the facts.

1. “Expert Recommendation” The technical justification for the government proposal is largely based on misinterpretation of the recommendations of the Architectural & Heritage Assessment Report commissioned by the Development Bureau and conducted by Purcell Miller Tritton. Rather than recommend redevelopment the report has, in fact, suggested “that there might be a case for making all the low rise and well planted area into a ‘Special Protected Area’ where the presumption would be against any significant redevelopment work”.

2. “Financial Pressure” For a government sitting on over \$ 2 trillion of fiscal and foreign exchange reserves, there is no overriding public need to sell off a historic site to developers in return for a revenue of a few billion dollars.

3. “Lack of Office Space” The government claims that the redevelopment of the West Wing would provide much-needed grade A office space of 280,000 sq ft. Yet it omits to mention that a total of 9.6 million sq ft of grade A office space has been held in reserve in the Central reclamation area, Wanchai and West Kowloon.

4. “More Greenery” The government claims that a green space of roughly the same size of Statue Square would be provided after redevelopment. Yet this space is at most a ‘podium garden’ situated on top of a shopping centre, in sharp contrast to the existing greenery on natural slopes which would be totally destroyed except for 11 trees.

5. “Better Pedestrian Connectivity” Even without redevelopment, this can be easily achieved by removing the barriers put in place in 1997 and opening up the government car park. The public can immediately enjoy passage from the commercial district to Government House and the Botanical Gardens once again.

6. “Compatible Building Design” An office tower 150 meters tall and a multi-storey shopping arcade occupying half of the CGO site can hardly be claimed to be compatible with the current low-rise architectural design. It also violates the height restriction proposed in the government's expert report. The proposed commercial use is clearly incompatible with the dignity of the historic site.

7. “Improve Traffic Flow” Although the government proposes to add another lane in Ice House Street, the impossibility of widening major road junctions in Central would only mean more traffic congestion and more pollution after the redevelopment. Government papers also make no mention of the fact that the historic masonry wall lining Ice House Street would be destroyed together with the mature trees on top.

8. “Low-carbon development” The excavation of nearly half of the CGO site and the removal of a building in good condition will produce unnecessary waste and increase carbon emissions. This clearly goes against the government policy of combating climate change through carbon reduction.

We strongly request that the government:

1. Declare the entire Government Hill a ‘Special Protected Area’ so as to arrest environmental degradation in Central.
2. Stop any plan to sell off the historic site and to preserve the site for public use.
3. Formulate development options on the basis of international conservation guidelines and the “not-for-sale” principle, and consult the public for another 12 months on the optimum use of the site.
4. Organise public open days and engage an independent archaeologist to conduct investigation of the Murray Battery relics and the underground tunnel network.

Co-signatories (Organization)

Central and Western District Concern Group
Community Alliance for Urban Planning
Community Development Initiative
Conservancy Association
Designing Hong Kong
Greenpeace
Greeners Action

Green Power

Green Sense

Heritage Watch

Lung Fu Shan Environmental Concern Group

The Professional Commons

Save Our Shorelines

Co-signatories (Individual)

Nicolas Arriaga Agrelo
John Batten
Ken Borthwick
John Bowden
Dorothy Brown
Chan Kai Yuen

Chan Kim Ching
Stephen C.K. Chan
Chan Theresa
Cheng Ka Kui
Cheung Neoton, Francis
Chapman Cheng
Chik Yuk Chun

Wan Chin
Chu Hoi Dick
Simon Fook Keung Chu
Winston K.S. Chu
Annelise Connell
Fung King Hang
Lee Yuet
Ringo Li

Kathleen Hau
Ho Loy
Ip Lam Chong
Simon Kwong
Albert Lai
Eric Lai Yan Ho
Lam Fai Fred
Li Siu Man Peter

Mary Melville
Ma Kwok Ming
Karen Mak
Melanie Moore
Michael Mo
Mee Kam Ng
Ng Mong Shan, Momoko

Ng Yin Keung
Jimmy Pang
Ip Lam Chong
Katty Law
Sharon Loh
Sham Wai Nam
Sit Tak O Kelvin
Angie So

Wincy So
Anna Tam
Tsang Chun Ying
Wong Hok Ming Alan
Grace Yee
Elliot Yu
Brandon K. Young
Rocky Yung Lok Kei

For more details, see www.tiny.cc/notforsale