



Let Development and Nature be in Harmony

Public Consultation before introduction of New Policies detrimental to Green Belts

In the recent Policy Address, the housing problem of Hong Kong is again attributed to the lack of land. The Government stresses time and time again the importance of increasing land supply. It seems that once there is exploitation of land, housing problems will be solved. Apart from its “brilliant” plans of reclamation and development of new towns, the Government also came up with an idea of changing the land use of our green belts.

According to the Policy Address, the Government is taking steps to rezone sites in Green Belt areas for residential use. It is stressed that these areas are “devegetated, deserted or formed”. However, some of those designated areas are in fact covered with vegetation and with a significant number of trees. It is worrying that such policy would make the environment of the urban fringe worse and promote further encroachment of the natural environment by urban development.

As we all know, trees plays a vital role in improving our air quality and in alleviating Heat Island Effect. Green Belt zones also serve as a buffer between urban areas and country parks. According to the Town Planning Board Guidelines, the planning intention of Green Belt zones is “to conserve the existing natural environment amid the built-up areas/at the urban fringe” and “to

define the limits of urban and sub-urban development areas by natural features, so as to safeguard the natural environment from the encroachment by urban type development”. Also, they prevent urban sprawl and provide recreational outlets. Most importantly, the Town Planning Board has imposed a general presumption against development on Green Belt zones.

To our astonishment, in its zealous search of land, the Government picks the Green Belt zones. It clearly contravenes the long established planning principles. There should be a public consultation before such drastic change of policy, in order to set out defined regulations to minimize any adverse environmental impact brought about by developing deserted Green Belt zones. Since Green Belt zones are of so much importance to our city, the Government should review the reasons why some of the Green Belts has become deserted and to restore, but not building on them. Vegetation on private lands zoned as Green Belt may in fact be deliberately destroyed in order to become deserted and devegetated for easier approval of development.

Let’s imagine that the Government has now fulfilled the 470,000 housing target. Maybe we finally could secure a place to live. But we have lost a beautiful living environment, public open spaces and green areas. When there are holidays, we are stuck with similar shopping malls. Chief Executive C.Y. Leung has long stressed(s) that Hong Kong people should “live better” in the future. It is true that we need flats to live in. But what we want is a lively and green living environment, not a concrete forest.

Whenever there are housing targets and development needs have to be met, the natural and ecological environment is often the victim. However, it is only because the Government depicts a confrontational picture between development and (the) nature. Facing the housing needs of the general public, the Government simply adopts linear thinking to increase land supply. Publicly-suggested sites including parts of barracks, golf courses and the Brown Zones are never mentioned. It is also disappointing that the governmental discussion on housing problems never touches upon its policy on population. We urge the Government to review its suggested development on Green Belt zones and to give a constructive response towards the public’s suggestions on policy of land, housing and population.

(This is the translation of the Chinese version.)

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