

Agreement No. CE 61/2007
North East New Territories New Development Areas
Planning and Engineering Study - Investigation

Gist of the Public Forum held on 22 September 2012

Date : 22 September 2012 (Sat)
Time : 2:30pm
Venue : Lawn at Po Wan Road, Sheung Shui

Overall Development Strategies

- Some participants supported the development of the New Development Areas (NDAs) and opined that the social and economic development of Hong Kong needed to progress with time. Given the fact that many existing new towns such as Sha Tin and Tai Po had been developed successfully over the years, the development of the North East New Territories (NENT) NDAs should be supported;
- Some believed that the development of NENT NDAs were in the interests of the public at large as it could resolve the housing shortage in Hong Kong. Hence, all Hong Kong people should support the proposals;
- Some requested to shelve NDA proposals;
- Some doubted the accuracy of the population projection figures and questioned if the NDAs were developed for Mainlanders;
- Some pointed out that the first page of the public engagement digest had implied that the NDAs proposal were intended for the “Unification between Hong Kong and Shenzhen”. They were skeptical that the NDAs were tailor-made for the rich Mainlanders and stated that the Government could not deny the intention of NDAs proposals were related to “Shenzhen-Hong Kong Integration”;
- Some questioned the urgency of implementing the NDAs proposals, as the population growth had been slowed down. Moreover, some said that according to the paper submitted to the Legislative Council, about 2,000 hectares of vacant government land were zoned for residential use, of which about 1,100 hectares were within the urban areas and south New Territories. It was considered that the Government should first develop these vacant residential sites, rather than developing the NENT NDAs which would affect over 10,000 people and 170 hectares of farmland;
- Some challenged the Government’s justifications to develop the NENT NDAs to displace local residents whereas the Government sold more than 10 private residential sites in Tseung Kwan O to private developers for the development of luxurious housing. It was believed that if the planning of the urban areas were carried out properly, there was no need for implementing the NDAs;
- Some suggested to develop “Home Ownership Scheme (HOS)” flats in the urban areas and doubted the effectiveness of the policy of “Hong Kong property for Hong Kong residents” as many Mainlanders could become Hong Kong permanent residents through various means. Some hoped that the public at large would urged the Government to shelve the NDAs proposals together;
- Some residents in Kwu Tung Village were of the view that the Government was intended to divide the local residents of NENT, in particular between the indigenous and non-indigenous villagers. They also considered that the villagers in Sheung Shui Heung should also object to the NDAs development, so as to allow Sheung Shui Heung to further expand their village while the affected non-indigenous villagers could continue to have their rural lifestyle, thus achieving a win-win situation;

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- Many farmers, squatter and elderly residents currently lived in NDAs development areas and many of them lived a simple life and practiced farming for a living. They were already residing in a green and low-density living environment. The Government's decision to displace these residents and re-introduce low-density residential areas in the NDAs was queried. The displaced residents would be rehoused to public housing; The Government was urged to explain the benefits of the NDAs proposals to the local residents, in particular to those who wished to continue with the current lifestyle; and
- Some queried why the proposed developments in NENT were composed of three NDAs and would like to know why they could not be developed as a whole.

Land Use

- In a newspaper interview in June 2012, the Chief Executive had mentioned that there was an aspiration to develop the NENT NDAs into another "Canton Road" with the provision of shopping malls, cinemas and residential developments, etc.. The government should clarify whether this proposal was still valid;
- Some questioned whether the planning of the NDAs had taken the existing rural environment into consideration;
- Some villagers of Sheung Shui Heung were dissatisfied that the NDAs development would affect Sheung Shui Heung but the Government disregarded the villager's demand for expanding their "Village Type development" ("V") zone. They also expressed that the villagers actually supported the NDAs proposals but the Government did not address their requests;
- A participant considered that the activities in the police training facility would produce noise and exhaust gas, and he was of the view that the proposed police facilities in Fu Tei Au was not in line with the planning of proposed "Conservation Area" nearby. He recommended retaining the land proposed for police facilities for agricultural purpose and to be a buffer for the "Conservation Area" in order to save the ecological value of the area; and
- Some pointed out that the proposed riverside residential sites in the Fanling North NDA including the existing farmland in Ma Shi Po were all for private housing developments while the public housing sites were proposed further away from the river, and only a small piece of land along the river near Lung Yeuk Tau was allocated for public housing development; questioned whether the Government had the intention to reserve the land along the river for developers to develop private housing. Some pointed out that some developers exhausted all means to acquire land in the area, affecting the farmers' livelihood. And urged the Government to call off the NDAs development and reconsider the entire proposal.

Implementation Mechanism

- Some requested for apologies from the Government for conniving with the developers in building up land bank in the NENT and forcing out farmers and non-indigenous villagers over the years. Some urged the Government to stop developers' further land acquisition in NENT;
- Some were dissatisfied that the Government had suggested to adopt Public-Private-Partnership Approach (PPPA) as an implementation mechanism for the NDAs proposals. Many local residents were put into difficult situation as a result of land acquisition by the private developers. It was considered that the whole development proposals were full of collusion between the Government and the developers. Thus, there were requests not to

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develop the NDAs which were for “China-Hong Kong Integration” and to retain the existing rural landscapes.

- Some villagers of Tin Ping Shan Village requested the Government to include Tin Ping Shan Village into the NDAs development area and stated that if the Government adopted PPPA as an implementation mechanism, the existing squatters would be forced out by the developers through different means before commencement of the project. Thus, they did not support the adoption of PPPA and they hoped that the Government would decide on the implementation mechanism for the NDAs proposals as soon as possible; and
- A villager of Ma Shi Po queried that the development of the NDAs was for the benefits of the developers while locals were forced out by the developers. He originally thought that the developers would stop acquiring land in NENT after the Government had announced to adopt “Conventional New Town Approach”, however, it was observed that the developers had accelerated with their land acquisition. He objected to adopt PPPA as an implementation mechanism and against real-estate hegemony.

Transportation

- Some pointed out that the proposed roads in PC/TKL NDAs were only connected to Liantang/Heung Yuen Wai Boundary Control Point Link Road and there was no direct road connecting to the urban areas, leading to the suspicion of “China-Hong Kong Integration” and allowing the entrance of mainland vehicles.

Land Resumption and Compensation/Rehousing of Affected Residents

- The Government must have appropriate arrangements for compensation and rehousing in order to benefit the residents, Government and the wider society of Hong Kong.

Agricultural Activities

- Some demanded the Government to formulate long-term policies for the rural and agricultural development, to protect farmland, to support local agriculture development as well as to return the land to farmers/farming;
- Some were dissatisfied with the current farmland rehabilitation measures which might not be helpful to assist the affected farmers as most of the farmland had been bought by the developers or used as open storage and not suitable for farming. It was not true as the Government claimed that there was lots of land in other areas suitable for affected farmers to continue their farming practices. It was considered that the proposal of relocating the affected farmers to Long Valley was unrealistic in view of the existing active farming activities in Long Valley; and
- The NENT had the potential to develop into a low density “agricultural town”. As Hong Kong had the endowments to produce high quality farming products, which could be sold not only in Hong Kong but also be exported to the mainland. This development direction of “agricultural town” would be beneficial to the ecology, environment and economy in Hong Kong. It was criticized that the Government stifled the local agriculture development but built luxurious housing on farmland to serve the rich Mainlanders.

Public Engagement

- Some discontented with the public engagement conducted by the Government and considered the public engagement was a closed-door arrangement and misled the public. It

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was believed that if the Government could engage the public from bottom-up and adequately consult all the stakeholders, the NDAs proposals would be accepted by the public;

- The whole planning process of the NDAs proposals neglected the affected residents' right to know and participate. The planning process was a closed-door arrangement and it was against the "procedural justice". Thus, the proposals were illegitimate. It was requested to immediate withdraw the NDAs proposals. Extension of the consultation period and any "minor adjustments" in the proposals would not be accepted;
- Planning of the community must be from bottom-up and in a democratic way;
- Pointed out that the planning proposals for this area had already been delayed for more than a decade, questioned whether it is possible to postpone the development plan for at least 10 years to allow the residents in North District to participate in the entire planning process as well as to seek the residents' opinions in a bottom-up manner;
- Dissatisfied that the current stage of public engagement had "presumption" and "position" that the NDAs proposals would not be withdrawn; Some were skeptical that there was no participation from the public of Hong Kong in the planning process but only the Government and officials in Beijing to set up the proposals for "Shenzhen-Hong Kong Integration"; it was considered to be against the "procedure of justice";
- Some pointed out that many residents of Kwu Tung North and Fanling North had previously expressed their objections to the NDAs proposals in the Stage 2 Public Engagement; and some residents in Ping Che/Ta Kwu Ling did not learn about the proposals until the Stage Three Public Engagement. Some requested withdrawal of the proposals as there were a large amount of public opinion against the proposals;
- Many attendees of the forum were holding banners showing wordings like "withdraw", "fake consultation but eradication of villages" etc.. Some questioned whether the Government officials had noticed the opposing views from the public;
- Some were dissatisfied that the Government had indicated not to withdraw the development before the end of the consultation. Many attendees requested the Government to withdraw the proposals and queried whether the Government would withdraw the proposals;
- A villager of Wa Shan Village stated that the villagers only learned about the NDAs proposals through notification by the Lutheran Church in end of July 2012. The villagers were shocked that the Government had not notified them earlier. It was known that many affected villagers were notified about the NDAs proposals by other non-governmental organizations and hence questioned whether the Government had exhausted all means to consult the affected villagers genuinely;
- Some complained the arrangement of public forum that there were more talking opportunities on the stage than on the floor. It was pointed out that many affected residents were still unaware of the proposals even though the Government claimed that over 30 consultation meetings had been organized and hence some requested to withdraw the proposals; and
- Some were discontented with the location of the public forum which was not convenient and they considered that the Government had no sincerity in consulting the public.

[Note: The above gist of views collated by the Consultants is for reference only and has not been confirmed by the participants.]