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Designing Hong Kong's concern over the proposed Kau Yi Chau Artificial Islands

Designing Hong Kong is writing to raise our concern over the proposed Kau Yi Chau Artificial Islands.

Adverse Environmental Impact

- The reclamation of the artificial island will bring permanent damage to the marine habitats in the area and disturb the balance of the ecosystem.
- The construction activities will generate water and noise pollution which can pollute the surrounding waters and affect the health and life of the marine creature in the water space.
- The construction of the island, even with the Y-shape channel, will alter the natural flow of currents and tides, which interrupt the natural geological process and affect the natural shoreline of Kau Yi Chau.
- We are greatly concerned about the adequacy and effectiveness of the so-called “mitigation measures”. We believe the reclamation of the Kau Yi Chau Artificial Island will bring significant and long-lasting damage to the environment and ecology.

Potential Safety Risks

- The artificial island could be vulnerable to natural disasters such as typhoons and storm surges, putting the safety of residents and workers on the island at risk.
- According to the *Study of Coastal Hazards under Climate Change and Extreme Weather and Formulation of Improvement Measures – Feasibility Study* from the Civil Engineering and Development Department in 2022, there are uncertainties in future climate development. However, there is a lack of information showing the construction of the artificial island is based on which assumption allows the island to be resistant and resilient to future potential storm surges.
- Under the same study, a Progressive Adaptive Approach is adopted to enhance the coastal structures near existing residential regions in Hong Kong to cope with medium and long-term climate change. We are concerned about whether the artificial island will adopt the same measures, and the costs of these measures on the island as there are kilometres of shoreline on the proposed islands and the

majority of them are near human development.

Costs

- The latest estimation of the construction cost is about \$580 billion, however, based on the previous infrastructure work in Hong Kong, it is often to see the construction over budget at last. With the large scale of the project and all the challenges may face, we are concerned the budget is underestimated.
- It is also alarming for the potential land revenue from the project. As shown on the project website, the estimated land sales revenue has decreased from about \$974 billion to \$1143 billion in 2019, to about \$750 billion in 2022. However, the land sale programme has not been very recently and the land price keeps decreasing, we are concerned the land sales cost will continue to drop in the future. From recent land sale records, the construction of the artificial island is a high-risk investment with no guarantee of payback.
- The artificial island is proposed to enhance Hong Kong's competitiveness as a financial, commercial and trade centre, while also providing land for housing development to alleviate the housing problem in Hong Kong. However, there is also a lack of information on the development schedule of the island, which may affect the revenue and costs of the island.
- If the land is sold in the same period, the high supply will lower the land price which may hinder the revenue of the investment. Meanwhile, limiting the amount of land to sell may increase the revenue, but residents have to bear the high housing price and have to wait for a longer time for the completion of housing, which cannot respond to the immediate housing needs of the public.
- The resources invested into the artificial island could have more benefit to the general public if it is spent on other fields such as medicine, and education, or even to fund urban renewal projects and enhance the living quality of the people in a much shorter time.

Needs for Land Reserve

- We are concerned over the need for a large amount of land for land reserve. It is mentioned that the artificial island is nearly 10% of the supply sources of the 3280 ha of developable land in the entire territory in the coming ten years.
- However, the latest population statistics show that the latest population in Hong Kong is only 7.33 million, which is already lower than the previous population prediction. From the decrease in population, it can be assumed that housing demand will also decrease in the future.
- On the other hand, the latest research also shows there is an increase in office vacancies, especially in Kowloon East, the CBD2 that was proposed by the government decade ago. The increasing vacancy shows a lower demand for office space in Hong Kong than before, and the need for land for office space is also decreased.

- Also, after the pandemic, there is a shift in working mode. Work-from-home and online meetings are more common than before, which also contributed to the decreased demand for office space. It is foreseeable that a hybrid working mode becomes a trend in many industries in the future that the demand for office space will continue to drop.
- The latest population and office vacancy statistics also show a decrease in demand for housing and office building. It is sceptical whether Hong Kong needs an artificial island to fulfil the land reserve based on previous and outdated predictions.

Lack of Transparency

- The consultation for the Kau Yi Chau Artificial Island is lack transparency, much data and information that can facilitate the public's understanding of the project are missing.
- There is a lack of information on the costs and expected revenue for constructing the island, the public does not have sufficient information to understand whether the project is economically feasible.
- The proposal claimed the Y-shaped channel will effectively cope with the impact of reclamation on water quality, and ecology and reduce the urban heat island effect, and the water channel will be used as an ecological refinement measure to promote biodiversity. However, there is no further explanation of how the design can compensate for or alleviate the environmental and ecological concerns raised by the public.

Diminishing Popular Public Promenade

- Road construction from Hong Kong Island to the artificial island is required, and it is confirmed by the Development Bureau that Belcher Bay Promenade will be closed for five years for the construction of the tunnel.
- Even though the promenade is newly built and only open to the public for a short time, it has become an iconic and popular public space in Central and Western District and attracts residents and visitors, especially after the closure of nearby Western District Public Cargo Working Area (Instagram Pier) for the public in 2021
- The existing Belcher Bay Promenade is a popular public space and community node for the resident of Kennedy Town and Shek Tong Tsui. The wide and plain promenade allows a variety of activities to take place which is seldom permitted in the rest of the promenade. The closure and replacement of the promenade with a footpath will degrade the quality of the promenade and hinder the vibrancy of public activities in the area.
- The proposed ventilation building along the promenade limits the area of the promenade, and it will also block the view and interrupt the connectivity of open space between the promenade and Belcher Bay Park nearby.

There is Alternative

- The Kau Yi Chau Artificial Island is not the only land option available for future development in Hong Kong. We believe other options can provide land for housing and development in a shorter period and with less destruction to the environment.
- There is plenty of brownfield site in the New Territories that required less time, costs and resources to develop than the Kau Yi Chau Artificial Island. Together with the proposed Northern Metropolis, comprehensive planning over the North and the existing brownfield site can provide enough land for future development in Hong Kong and should be prioritised.

Here we submit our comments and concern for your consideration. Thank you for your kind attention.

Best regards,

Designing Hong Kong Limited

Cc:

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