

3. ASPIRATIONS FOR THE HONG KONG HARBOUR DISTRICT

- 3.1 Victoria Harbour has been a working harbour and reclamation has played an important role in accommodating marine-oriented facilities, warehousing, piers, and other supporting facilities, as well for providing for Hong Kong's growing business and government needs. With marine services moving out to the Outer Harbour, many of previous marine facilities have been converted into office, residential and commercial property.
- 3.2 To accommodate the increase in transport needs, land was reclaimed to provide space for roads in front of these facilities. Further reclamation originally planned in the 1980s for new residential and commercial uses has now been halted and is controlled by the Protection of the Harbour Ordinance (PHO)¹. The Government is currently pursuing reclamation in selected areas of the Harbour District only.
- 3.3 As a result of the constantly changing waterfront and the above developments, a large proportion of the foreshore of the Harbour District is now dominated by surface or elevated roads.
- 3.4 As early as 1972, there were plans for a continuous promenade along the harbour, and a start was made with the promenade around the Regent Hotel. Planning studies² undertaken by the Government in more recent years have emphasised the importance of enhancing the value of the Harbour using the waterfront and surrounding areas as focal points for leisure, entertainment, and recreational activities.
- 3.5 Public aspirations, particularly those more openly expressed in the last two years, have led to a number of community initiatives on the future of the Harbour District, including Citizen Envisioning @ Harbour activities and Harbour protection demonstrations, expressing public concerns over the development of the Harbour and the waterfront areas.
- 3.6 From a legal perspective, there have been high-profile court cases regarding the Wan Chai Phase II Reclamation and the Central Reclamation Phase III, the legality of which were challenged by the Society for the Protection of the Harbour. The Court of Final Appeal (CFA), in its judgment of 9 January 2004,

¹ According to a Government communication to GML on 17 June 2004, "as a result of the evolving social and economic structure of Hong Kong and the changing public aspiration to protect and preserve the Victoria Harbour, some proposed further reclamation [was] not pursued or will be subject to review. The Government has repeatedly announced that apart from Central Reclamation Phase III and the proposed reclamation schemes at Wan Chai North and Southeast Kowloon, there will be no further reclamation inside the Harbour limits."

² Planning Study on the Harbour and its Waterfront Areas (February 2003), Metroplan Review (March 2003), Hong Kong 2030 (ongoing) and Urban Design Guidelines for Hong Kong (November 2002) – see Paper 1, Appendix B for further information.

provided a final interpretation of the presumption against reclamation under the PHO. The judicial review on Central Reclamation Phase III has been ruled on, while Government's plans for reclamation in Wan Chai and Southeast Kowloon are currently under review and must ensure compliance with the CFA's "overriding public need test" before proceeding. Stakeholders have called for the review of the efficiency and effectiveness of the judicial process as a means of managing land use and planning decisions.

- 3.7 In addition, there is uncertainty surrounding the future design of the West Kowloon Cultural District, which is a significant part of the new harbour front. Further, various projects are under consideration or in progress along the Harbour front.
- 3.8 The Government has enjoyed a relatively 'free' hand in developing the Harbour foreshore in the past and used reclamation to create more land for development and at the same time build infrastructure to deal with the needs of a growing population in line with its territorial development strategy. However, the level and nature of the public sentiment currently being expressed presents a challenge for the Government to come up with a new process and new proposals to ensure the development of the Harbour and the surrounding districts are sustainable and will fulfill Hong Kong's aspirations for the future.

In our stakeholder interviews, almost all stakeholders believe that the Harbour is critical to the future of Hong Kong.

Most stakeholders agreed that:

- *The Harbour is the foremost symbol of Hong Kong and is a unique and irreplaceable asset.*
- *It contains important historic, economic, social and cultural value.*
- *The Harbour belongs to the people of Hong Kong and forms a focal point, which helps to define people's identity.*
- *It is a gathering place and part of Hong Kong's collective memory.*
- *It is an important economic resource for tourism.*

Source: **Paper 1** (Appendix G)

- 3.9 With the Protection of the Harbour Ordinance in place and water quality improving, the emphasis has shifted from the Harbour to the foreshore, i.e., the land immediately connected with the Harbour. Views expressed by

stakeholders include the need for access to the Harbour, population density control, creation and distribution of areas of special activities adjacent to the Harbour, the creation and management of support facilities to support these uses in the future and control of building heights adjacent to the Harbour.

3.10 The foreshore of Victoria Harbour is critical to Hong Kong's global brand image and is an invaluable asset in building this capacity. The survey carried out between April and May 2004 (see **Paper 3**) shows that, for Hong Kong's Harbour District to be world-class, the following attributes are needed:

Vibrancy

- Appealing harbour views
- Marine tourism and leisure activities
- Historic significance
- Impressive architecture and building design around the harbour
- Environmental quality
- A "living" harbour (birds, fishing, sailing, etc.)

Activities

- Wide choice of arts and culture
- Green areas/landscaping
- Wide range of wining and dining
- Plentiful open air spaces
- Facilities for leisure and entertainment

Access

- Ease of pedestrian access and mobility
- Wide range of public transport links

3.11 In order to achieve all of the above, it is necessary to acknowledge the limited availability of land and the need to prioritise competing uses. The foreshore is underdeveloped and used primarily as a vehicular transport thoroughfare. The surface roads and flyovers extending along much of the waterfront put constraints on the development of the foreshore and greatly limit pedestrian access to the Harbour.

3.12 With reclamation less likely to be a material option for increasing the available land, great care and coordinated effort is required to re-engineer our transport infrastructure as well as to re-align our land-use within the Harbour District.

3.13 To reflect the Town Planning Board's vision to make the Harbour "attractive, vibrant, accessible and symbolic of Hong Kong – a harbour for the people and a harbour of life" stakeholders have called for a focus on the "soft"

issues needed to enliven the waterfront including the way we zone the land and license activities.

3.14 Further results from GML’s opinion survey in **Paper 3** showed the following:

Top five topics voted as ‘important’ for the foreshore of the harbour district

• Appealing harbour views	88.7%
• Pedestrian access and mobility	86.6%
• Environmental quality	85.8%
• Plentiful open spaces	85.8%
• Green areas/landscaping	83.7%

(% represents percentage of those surveyed who voted “important or higher”)

3.15 Selected comments from stakeholders³ include:

- *The Harbour District should be developed and improved for the people of Hong Kong, not only for tourists.*
- *Existing promenades and waterfront areas are sterile, concrete, with little diversity and variety of activities.*
- *Better public access is critical for improving quality of life.*
- *Waterfront dining, shopping, sitting-out areas, entertainment should be multiuse-based and be for daytime and nighttime use.*
- *Outdoor art, theatre and other activities can create vibrant and lively ambience.*
- *More open space for relaxation and recreation is needed.*

³ See Paper 1, Appendix G