

FOREWORD

Last year a small group of long-term residents and native Hong Kong people asked themselves over lunch what the best strategy was to achieve a world-class Harbour. None of us had any commercial or professional interest in Harbour planning, but we felt strongly that enhancing the Harbour was key to Hong Kong's future development. We immediately realised that the issue was not the Harbour alone – as long as the water quality was improving – but the land surrounding the Harbour, hence the term 'Harbour District'.

What sparked the conversation was the announcement of Sir Norman Foster's winning design for West Kowloon Cultural District. Although the plan appeared to address many relevant issues including a shortage of arts, culture and performance venues, privatisation of venue ownership and management, an attractive and open foreshore without roads, and dramatic architecture, it was also clear that going from 'zero' to 'the world's largest' was a potentially risky proposition for a small part of the foreshore.

Along with the emerging public controversy over West Kowloon, the dispute over the Central and Wanchai reclamations began to attract considerable attention as it was fought through the courts and in the media. It became apparent that to move forward in creating a world-class harbour would require a 'creative initiative' to build community-wide consensus on the right way forward for the Harbour District as a whole.

In November 2003, we arranged funding from independent sources, and asked GML Consulting to conduct in-depth interviews with key opinion leaders and shapers from government, business and civil society groups. In February 2004, we decided to expand the research with a public debate and organised meetings, workshops and conferences in cooperation with the Business Environment Council and the Chambers of Commerce. We also distributed a survey to solicit further community input. The findings of this multi-faceted consensus building project are collated in a series of reports, which can be found on www.harbourdistrict.com.hk. This Summary Report gives an overview of the main findings.

A striking aspect of the debate was the discrepancy between 'professional' and 'personal' opinions. With Government and its many Departments as key players as well as the sole employer of many professionals who are involved inside and outside Government, there was initially a great hesitation to participate and speak freely about why Hong Kong's foreshore areas are in such a deplorable state. However, once participants began to trust the process they, in many cases, spoke with considerable insight and passion – clearly many people care deeply about the future of the Harbour District!

One of the unnerving discoveries during the research was to find that a continuous promenade around the Harbour was already decided upon when the

Government stipulated a promenade around the Regent Hotel development in 1972. In 2004, this and many other excellent ideas for enhancing Hong Kong Harbour District have yet to find their way into a consistent strategy and sustainable planning process.

Recognising widespread community aspirations for an attractive and accessible Harbour, the Government is now responding with new initiatives such as the Harbour-front Enhancement Committee. To move forward, though, there appear to be underlying fundamental issues that need to be addressed. The Designing the Hong Kong Harbour District (DHKHD) consensus building process has indicated that in many cases Hong Kong's land-use and transport planning mechanisms appear to lack the necessary integration, which is resulting in a systemic bias towards land use and reclamation for road building. Combined with a design and procurement process geared at 'highest engineering standards at the lowest cost', the predicament of Hong Kong's foreshore becomes painfully clear. We urge transport-related Bureau and Departments to see the quality of Hong Kong's foreshore 'as their issue' and actively engage in the debate on how they can contribute to a world-class Harbour District. At this point, be assured that the organisers of 'Designing Hong Kong Harbour District' have no specific 'anti-road' agenda. In fact, I personally am involved in the automobile business.

A well-promoted, visual and integrated master planning process with early participation by the community for the future Harbour District is needed. Specifically the placement of the new Central Government Offices, the Convention and Exhibition Centre extension, hotels, offices, arts and culture facilities, parks and amenities, and how these plans interact with transport policy and infrastructure, is critical for improvement of the foreshore of Hong Kong's Harbour District.

The necessary institutional arrangements include a potential 'Chief Planner', a 'Harbour Foreshore Authority', a review of the Town Planning Ordinance, and a review of the current consultation procedures which are extensive, but fail to instill the level of community participation and involvement required to ensure that land-use and transport planning decisions are mature and contribute to a vibrant, accessible and affordable foreshore within a well designed Harbour District.

During the DHKHD process, particularly in the conference, we gained much insight into the possible management of the foreshore and facilities. The Sydney Harbour Foreshore Authority is a good reference model and further research is required in what would work for Hong Kong. Debates regarding Harbour Fest, West Kowloon, the current state of cultural venues and facilities, the prohibition on cooked food at the Avenue of Stars, the prohibition on fishing at many areas, and the absence of public boat clubs or moorings, point towards the need for a review of rules and procedures for licencing activities in public areas, arts and culture financing policies, the way we manage venues, etc. This requires the future engagement of Home Affairs, the Leisure and Cultural Services Department and other Departments in the planning for a world-class Harbour.

We believe the reports are a reasonable and fair reflection of the opinions expressed by DHKHD participants, and they have been validated by an Independent Panel. Although by their nature, the findings include criticism of Government policy and processes, the overriding tone of the initiative has been constructive and supportive. Individual Government officers we spoke with, formally and informally, are all in favour of a great Harbour District. It is very much the process of decision-making, which is failing, and this is frustrating for those inside as well as outside the Government. 'Exasperation' was the term used by many.

The reports give a consensus view of principles, which require further work to convert into practical solutions. We trust that the findings will help focus resources on addressing these issues and improve the planning for the Harbour District and Hong Kong as a whole.

We thank all the stakeholders from the Government, businesses, and the wider community who helped make the *Designing Hong Kong Harbour District* possible. We are specifically grateful for the time contributed by the organisers, researchers, independent panel members, advisors, supporters, sponsors, endorsers, participants, and media over the past 6 months. We hope that readers of this summary and the supporting reports will find them useful and that the coming years bring a renewed spirit of cooperation to the enhancement of Hong Kong's Harbour District.

Paul Zimmerman

Chief Coordinator

Designing Hong Kong Harbour District