



Response to the Planning & Engineering Study on Future Land use at Lamma Ex-Quarry Area at Sok Kwu Wan, Lamma Island

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“The maturity of a society is measured not just by its economic achievement but also by its appreciation of the broader environment which allowed that achievement to be attained, and, more importantly, sustainable. It is the common duty of everyone who treasures what we now have to protect the ecology. Each of us must do our part to ensure that what Mother Nature has bestowed upon us does not wither away out of neglect, or, worse, destroyed in the name of development.”

CY Leung

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Executive Summary

This paper has been submitted to government in response to initial land use options proposed by the Planning and Engineering Study on the Future Land Use at the Ex-Lamma Quarry Area at Sok Kwu Wan, Lamma Island. It provides the context for discussion on the future land use options of the quarry by telling the story of development on the island. This context has not been presented to the public as part of the community engagement. Indeed, the study digest does not provide any information on which the public could make an informed decision. Rather it is a marketing tool for the three options presented, all of which focus on a type of real estate development that is not in keeping with the planning intention for the island.

The story is not unique to Lamma and presents a real problem for Hong Kong today. As a result, we have a situation whereby:

- Government appears to be pushing a vision of development that will benefit the interests of large-scale property developers, who have built up a significant land bank on the island;
- The potential of Lamma's planning intention to create for Hong Kong a centre of excellence for environmental education, incorporating outdoor pursuits will be lost forever;
- There are no consolidated measures provided that could reverse Lamma's environmental and economic decline for the benefit of the wider community; and
- Other options cannot be adequately explored given the timetable for consultation, the information (or lack thereof) presented to the public, and the constraints of bureaucracy.

We hope that this paper gives those assigned to making decisions on the future of our community reason to hold off on any option that could be seen to provide the means for vested interests to gain advantage at the expense of the wider public. We would welcome further discussion and a restart of community engagement to allow good ideas to be generated and explored for the implementation of Lamma's planning intention for the benefit of the community and for Hong Kong.

List of terms

AFCD – Agriculture Fisheries and Conservation Department

CEDD – Civil Engineering and Development Department

DSD – Drainage Services Department

EPD – Environmental Protection Department

FEHD – Food and Environmental Hygiene Department

HAD – Home Affairs Department

PlanD – Planning Department

1. Introduction

Living Lamma was formed by a group of concerned residents in May 2009.¹ The motivation of residents was simple – to clean up our living environment and ask that works that were carried out were well-designed, both from an aesthetic and functional standpoint. For a variety of reasons, these simple ambitions for our community have proved very difficult, or even impossible, to achieve.

The group is not against development, and has put forward many suggestions for improved facilities and services (see examples below under Section 3.v.). However, such is the scale of the problem, that urgent reform of the local system of administration is needed to ensure that designs are appropriate and suitably located, and that the environment (which includes ecology, landscape, heritage and character) is not unnecessarily destroyed.

We look for opportunities for improvement in our living environment for the benefit of the wider community. This means conserving nature, preserving the community and enhancing facilities, so as to make Lamma a nicer place to live and a great place to visit, all of which helps sustain our local economy. We believe each district in Hong Kong should be empowered to do this for the people of their community and their visitors, through open and transparent participation of citizens.

In pursuit of these goals, we have held numerous meetings with government departments and we have experienced first hand the limitations of bureaucracy in Hong Kong. We have also uncovered reports from other Lamma-based groups dating back 20 years, which clearly demonstrate the same problems with government inertia and resource allocation.

Unfortunately, there is no easy and obvious means for good ideas to be adopted in Hong Kong. Standard designs and standard procedures prevent the implementation of even simple measures that would enhance our community. From the choice of street lighting and bin design, to measures to clean up and landscape unsightly areas, to providing adequate medical services or community facilities, all are based on a colonial system of administration that has failed to keep step with the changing needs of our living

¹ Registered Society No: CP/LIC/SO/19/40679, with charity status pending.

environment. It is also very difficult for community groups to step in where government is unwilling or unable to act, most often for bureaucratic or land ownership reasons.

Hong Kong has rightly been proud of its laissez faire system of government that has allowed business to boom and Hong Kong to prosper.² Only now are we witnessing the flipside of that advantage that has also opened the door to dominance of business interests over community needs, preventing alternative ideas for quality living to flourish. The strategy by major property developers in the rural New Territories to acquire agricultural land from villagers at negligible cost with the aim at applying for a lease modification to allow for development is now well known.³

Less well-known is the story of land acquisition on Lamma and the ambitions of two large developers to radically alter the character, landscape and environment of the island (see Sections 3.ii and 3.iii).

Living Lamma has taken part in several consultations and has researched and documented the experience of other community groups dating back to 1995. Unhappily, the consultation process is often flawed. Whether by design or by default, the process is often geared towards pushing an agenda formulated by a small circle of interests rather than being a means to capture good ideas and to seriously investigate and respond to the real needs of the community. This, we believe, is the perception of the consultation on the future use of the former quarry area on Lamma Island thus far, and we would like to appeal to government and the community, given the existence of significant vested interests, to provide an opportunity for further discussion and due consideration of factors before the fate of the site is sealed.

² See, for example, *The Hong Kong Advantage* by Michael Enright.

³ See, *Land and the Ruling Class in Hong Kong* by Alice Poon.

2. Lamma's Planning Intention

The planning intention and the reality of development on Lamma must be understood in order to put the plans for the quarry site in context. This understanding is something that the public consultation fails to provide before presenting a short-list of options that will forever alter the island.

The planning intention for Lamma Island is visionary. It provides the opportunity to create for Hong Kong a place without parallel in Asia, or perhaps even the world. Where else would you find an island with such a unique features – a walking community of some 60 nationalities living in communities based on family-owned and operated businesses with a wealth of ecology, stunning landscape, important archaeology and authentic heritage - just a 25-minute boat ride from the Central Business District of a major finance centre?

The planning intention states:

*“The general planning intention is to **conserve** the natural landscape, the rural character and car-free environment of Lamma Island; to **retain** Luk Chau in its natural state; and to **enhance** the role of Lamma Island as a leisure destination. The ecologically and environmentally sensitive areas including the Sham Wan SSSI, the South Lamma Island SSSI, mountain uplands, woodland and the undisturbed natural coastlines should be protected.*

Future growth of the settlement is limited to the existing villages and development nodes. The existing low-rise, low-density character of the traditional villages and other residential areas should be retained. Supporting Government, institution and community and open space facilities have been allowed for. Opportunities have also been provided for the enhancement of the waterfront of Yung Shue Wan and integrating recreational and visitor attractions. It is also the planning intention to preserve the cultural heritage of Lamma Island, which is one of the most ancient settlements in the territory. The heritage sites could also serve as visitor attractions to enhance the role of the island for conservation and as a leisure destination.”

(Statutory Outline Zoning Plan for Lamma Island)⁴

⁴ Approved Lamma Outline Zoning Plan No. S/I-LI/9: http://www.ozp.tpb.gov.hk/pdf/S_I-LI_9_e.pdf

In a city where natural landscape is used for the disposal of construction waste, rural village communities with family run businesses have given way to single developer complexes and chain stores, former beautiful villages stand shabby and neglected, and our roadside pollution levels are dangerously high, shouldn't we be doing everything in our power to uphold the planning intention for Lamma and develop the elements it puts forward to their full potential?

As it is the vision is far from reality. On Lamma:

- The natural landscape is being undermined by insensitive design and waste problems.⁵
- The rural character is under threat from large-scale development, particularly in plans put forward by government for the quarry site near Sok Kwu Wan and in similar designs presented by a private developer for South Lamma.⁶

⁵ Living Lamma reports submitted to government including: *The Submission to the Legco Sub-Committee on Combatting Fly-tipping* (29th April 2009); the *Response to the Consultation Document - Safe and Sustainable: A New Producer Responsibility Scheme for Waste Electrical and Electronic Equipment* (30th April 2010); *Response to the Relaunch of the Phase II Reclamation* (February 2011); the *Stop the Mess! Report* (23rd February 2010); the *Response to the Administration's Proposed Legislative Amendments to "Require and person who intends to carry out depositing activity on land held under private ownership to obtain the prior written permission of all the landowner(s) concerned that bears the authority's seal, failing which will be liable to prosecution"* (30 March 2010); the *Response to the Consultation Document - Sustainable Waste Management, Strengthening Waste Reduction: is Waste Charging an Option?* (31st March 2010); *Improving Bike Parking in Yung Shue Wan: Towards a More Beautiful Lamma* (7th September 2010); *Response to the Planned Redevelopment of Central Ferry Piers 4, 5 & 6* (4th May 2011); *Comments on the EIA Report Reference 0116093 concerning the Baroque on Lamma* (20th May 2011); *Submission on the Social Impact Assessment for the Baroque on Lamma (Planning Application Y/I-LI/1)* (22 June 2011); *Comments on the EIA Report Reference 116093 - ESB229/2011* (June 2011); *Objection to the Scope of the Planning and Engineering Study on Future Land Use at the Ex-Lamma Quarry Area at Sok Kwu Wan, Lamma Island* (27 June 2011); *Assessment of Recent HAD Minor Works Projects on Lamma* (5th January 2012); *South Lamma: the Way Forward* (9th January 2012); the *Response to the Stage 1 Public Engagement Exercise on Enhancing Land Supply Strategy* (27th March 2012); the *Response to a further round of consultation on Sustainable Waste Management, Strengthening Waste Reduction: is Waste Charging an Option?* (9th April 2012); *Submission on Opportunities for Environmental Improvement on Lamma through the Greening Master Plan for the Island's District* (9th November 2012); and various site visit reports and presentations, including *Yung Shue Wan's Harbour* (March 2011); *Lamma's Street Furniture* (May 2011); *Yung Shue Wan's harbour Reclamation Phase II* (May 2011); *Another Blot on the Landscape: How the Provision of Utilities on Lamma island has Defaced the Rural Environment* (June 2011); *What does Asia's World City do with its Waste?* (December 2011), among others.

⁶ See, <http://www.ex-lammaquarry.hk/> and <http://www.bol-hk.com/>.

- Such plans present an alternative vision for development based around big business and convenience. These elements are not currently part of Lamma's planning intention or its essence.
- The rural character and natural environment has also been eroded through the deployment of standard designs and materials in government projects. With the single exception of the Drainage Services Department Phase II design for a pumping station, no government departments adhere to the planning intent in carrying out works, to the extent that their contractors often leave their waste behind.⁷
- There have been few projects to enhance Lamma as a leisure destination:
 - Lamma Island has no visitor's centre
 - There is little to explain the important ecology to residents or visitors (we have witnessed the destruction of protected species without penalty and inadequate measures to ensure the protection of these species such as the green turtle, Romer's tree frog, finless porpoise and incense trees).⁸
 - There are no local community venues that are accessible to the whole community. There is, therefore, no venue for local artists to exhibit, or for people to give talks or performances as value-added attractions.
 - There has been no investigation into the opportunities to develop a range of sporting, leisure and authentic visitor attractions to promote tourism and boost the local economy.
 - Interesting archaeological sites, such as the Loh Ah Tsai stone circle⁹, are unmarked and unnoticed. Lamma residents have to venture to the Hong

⁷ See, Living Lamma reports above, particularly Stop the Mess! (February 2010) and the Assessment of HAD projects (January 2012).

⁸ For references to Lamma's wildlife, see Bird species of conservation importance on Lamma Island: http://www.epd.gov.hk/eia/register/report/eiareport/eia_0912003/eia/pdf/8.1.PDF, the wildlife photo of the day and related reports on www.lamma.com.hk, and Living Lamma newsletter #1 (May 2009).

⁹ See, <http://scholarspace.manoa.hawaii.edu/bitstream/handle/10125/16741/AP-v8n1-148-149.pdf?sequence=1>.

Kong History Museum to learn about what artifacts have been found in their community, and then there is scant description to illustrate the story.

- Government cannot make pathway improvements where needed, yet can despoil a hillside hiking trail with concrete, or vandalise breathtaking coastal landscape with the installation of a large, unsightly concrete wall.¹⁰
- There is no information to instill an appreciation of Lamma's six ancient temples and local traditional customs. As of June 2011, when Living Lamma wrote to the Antiquities and Monuments Office, there were no declared monuments on Lamma. The last prominent traditional village house at the heart of Yung Shue Wan is due to be destroyed in favour of a 3-storey residential block, while other examples of traditional architecture are left to fall into disrepair.
- Lamma is home to boating enthusiasts from different walks of life, from those who still mend their nets on Sundays to those who compete in international races. Yet, there is nowhere for people to store their boats and equipment. Teams that represent Hong Kong and hold popular competitions on the island, boosting local trade, have been threatened with eviction, while local fishermen in Yung Shue Wan have seen their easy access to the sea reduced by a large, concrete reclamation. Though sensitive designs for alternatives to large-scale, featureless reclamation were put forward by the community in 1995 and 2003 (see Section 3.i) government continues to push plans to complete the reclamation of the harbour in Yung Shue Wan.
- There is no stewardship of the countryside that would enable the development of Lamma as a leisure destination or commitment to pursue its potential. The YMCA has been allowed to undertake activities such as camping, archery and kayaking and orienteering, but has only been granted a 3-year lease to do so, not sufficient time for significant investment in the long-term development of activities.

¹⁰ See, Living Lamma's Assessment of recent HAD project (January 2012).

- A combination of laissez faire, lack of responsibility, bureaucratic standards and land ownership issues have prevented sensible and sensitive improvements to the existing villages to the extent that it proves very difficult to get anything done. Littering, dumping, graffiti, concrete and railings continue to erode the attractiveness of the villages, years after these were reported as problems to government.¹¹
- Though the planning intention is about developing Lamma as a destination, budget for public works and services is dependent on resident headcount. Thus, even simple measures, such as having a doctor on call, prove impossible (even when the influx of visitors at weekends and holidays means the government flying service being employed to an extent that fully warrants a doctor.)
- Similarly, budget and bureaucracy govern the type of projects that can be pursued. The relationship between government (District Office), local representatives and concrete dates back to colonial times when villagers needed to repair a path or a well.¹² Today, the budget allocated to District Minor Works is HK\$20 million (soon to be raised to HK\$100 million), with no apparent guidance on sensitivity to rural design and natural landscapes, or effective system of local administration to ensure that those funds do not serve small circle interests. This has created a succession of projects that have caused blots on the landscape and which the public has not used or disliked.

Rather than a discussion of real estate options that will change Lamma for good, while not addressing the existing problems in the communities and potential for the island, it would be of value to the community to provide a means for open discussion of these issues with a view to developing mechanisms to support and implement the planning intention. There is much to be learned from the sharing of experience, and there is a communality of frustration and disappointment with the lack of action “*to enhance the role of the island for conservation and as a leisure destination.*”

¹¹ See, Living Lamma Reports listed above, particularly *Stop the Mess!* (February 2010).

¹² See, *Southern District Officer Reports: Islands and Villages in Rural Hong Kong, 1910-60* edited by John Strickland (Royal Asiatic Society).

3. The Quarry Development in the Lamma Context

The quarry site was rehabilitated with the intention of “creating anticipated climax vegetation communities that will blend ecologically and aesthetically with the surrounding natural vegetation and providing favourable habitats for wildlife.”¹³ Viewed from Sok Kwu Wan, this provides a view of a forest and lake. From within, the quarry provides a haven for birdlife and a joyous escape for visitors who enjoy hiking, biking, swimming, camping, or simply observing nature. It is a place for fun and freedom, or was until quite recently.

The YMCA was granted a 3-year short-term tenancy to run a centre for outdoor activities and environmental education. Under this lease, the first thing that happened was that a large and unsightly metal fence was erected around the perimeter, complete with notices warning people to keep out, thus discouraging access. This does not deter residents who have been fortunate enough to experience the area. But it has reduced the ability of people to enjoy the area and gives the impression, for the purpose of the consultation, that the site is not used by local people.

Ironically, though the rehabilitation of the quarry won an award¹⁴, an ecological expert assigned to the feasibility study on the future of the area has labeled it as being of “low ecological value” because of the use of non-native species, used to secure the soil, which had been badly eroded. Local nature watchers who have been visiting the site for years have disagreed with this assessment, making their views known at the public and community forums of the Stage 1 engagement on the quarry’s future.

Though the quarry is considered a remote location, discussion about its future must take place in the context of the wider community, given the impact the proposed additional 2,800-7,000 people will have on a current population of 5,900. Lamma Island has two main villages, Yung Shue Wan and Sok Kwu Wan, but four areas that have been openly targeted for major development. Three of these involve existing areas - Yung Shue Wan

¹³ http://www.cedd.gov.hk/eng/publications/fact_sheet/doc/ess.pdf

¹⁴ See <http://www.shuion.com/eng/Group/MediaRoom/2003/news200303a.asp>: “The Outstanding Greening Project Award is organised by the Leisure and Cultural Services Department, and co-organised by the Hong Kong Institute of Landscape Architects and the Institute of Horticulture (Hong Kong), aiming to promote greening and environment-conscious development in Hong Kong, to foster awareness and recognition of the landscape and horticulture professions, and to encourage good practice in these fields.”

(both government and private projects), South Lamma (a private project) and the Quarry (a government sponsored proposal). There has also been a plan for two reclamations to house people off Lamma.

This developmental context was not presented by government as part of the public consultation, leading to doubts about the government's support of the planning intention for Lamma, its efficacy to consider relevant factors, and intention to plan holistically.

Also of importance to any discussion of development on Lamma are problems associated with waste and the lack of meaningful controls to prevent damage to the environment. These will also be explained below. First we look at development, which as well provides insight into government's track record in consultation and delivery of community improvements, by providing a short history of projects presented and the reaction to them:

i. Yung Shue Wan – Reclamation and Decline

In 1995, the government put forward plans to reclaim a large section of the harbour in Yung Shue Wan – the Phase I reclamation. At the same time, local residents put forward alternative plans for more sensitive development, which retained much of the natural landscape and included space for public facilities. In the end, the government plan went ahead, despite public opposition. In a survey of 700 residents carried out by the Lamma Island Conservation Society (70% of whom were Chinese and 30% non-Chinese), 96% were against the reclamation.¹⁵

Today, 18 years later, an ugly sea wall dominates the harbour, with a waste transfer station, sewage treatment plant, prefab buildings and building sites as the main features. In addition, Yung Shue Wan still lacks community waste and recycling facilities and the beautification of open public space, all of which were included in the report submitted by residents in response to the government's proposals for foreshore reclamation in 1995.¹⁶

¹⁵ See lamma.com.hk of Lamma-zine issue #25, October 2003.

¹⁶ See: *A Different Future for Yung Shue Wan: An Alternative Planning Approach*, submitted to government in March 1995.

In 2003, government put forward plans to reclaim the rest of the harbour – the Phase II reclamation. Residents objected and suggested alternative, sensitive enhancements.¹⁷ This time local green groups, ABLE and Green Lamma carried out an extensive survey between December 2000 and June 2001, in which 1300 people returned surveys. 93% of local residents opposed the plan, as did 98% of local tourists and 100% of foreign tourists. Thankfully, government responded to public opinion and shelved the plans for the Phase II reclamation.¹⁸

In 2008, without any discussion or notice in the community, government committed to bring back the Phase II reclamation at a meeting of the Island’s District Council, promising to “expedite the implementation” of the project.¹⁹ Waterfront bars and restaurants, which stand to lose business should the project go ahead, only found out about these plans in 2011 after CEDD had successfully applied for an Environmental Impact Assessment study brief. The 2011 plans resembled those that were opposed in 2003, provided no history of the project, or included any of the ideas that were earlier forward by the community. In fact, since 2003, there has been no work to improve the outlook of the harbour.

Starting February 2010, Living Lamma has been campaigning for simple enhancements to our harbourfront, but we have seen no meaningful action.²⁰ Residents and the ever-increasing numbers of visitors to the island are still greeted by the sight of an ugly grey wall, derelict shoreline, a disused platform and graffiti. We have highlighted the differences in standards between government projects in Yung Shue Wan, which add to the general shabbiness of the village, to the positively attractive improvements in other locations such as Sok Kwu Wan and Cheung Chau, yet can get no satisfactory explanation why this should be. We have also documented, and shared, the experience of Peng Chau, a similarly beautiful and thriving rural island community, which now has a concrete

¹⁷ See: *A New Vision for Yung Shue Wan*, delivered to government in October 2003.

¹⁸ This was reported in the press at the time as “a victory for common sense” – see: Lamma Saved, SCMP 23rd February 2003.

¹⁹ See District Council Minutes of 14th April 2008.

²⁰ See, in particular the *Stop the Mess!* report (February 2010) and the *Greening Master Plan* report (November 2012) listed above.

seawall and rubble mounds as the main defining features of its shoreline and has lost much of its charm.²¹

The situation raises many questions, as yet unanswered. For example: Why is it so difficult to help the local economy by carrying out sensible and sensitive improvements to clean up Yung Shue Wan and make it more attractive? Why has government resurrected a plan that was rejected by residents, and which will cause such disruption that few local businesses are likely to survive the construction period and residents may not be able to endure?

ii. Yung Shue Wan: Real Estate Development

The community engagement digest for the consultation on the quarry mentions “imminent demand” for housing – yet does not provide one figure to demonstrate what that demand might be, or provide any details of housing supply on Lamma or of vacant housing lots. This information is difficult to come by. While members of the public can obtain information on specific lot numbers from the Lands Department, there appears to be no publicly available data to show current and potential levels of housing demand and supply on the island.

There is empty property on the island. In some cases, this has been abandoned or neglected by absentee owners, or perhaps is being held for future development. There are also a number of village houses currently under construction, with an unknown number of village lots still to be developed. There are other areas that have been turned into building sites or dumping grounds, which are zoned as “village” and on which we can expect to see more housing. Most worryingly, dumping has occurred on Lamma’s agricultural land, thus despoiling it for any other use but housing.

Though government has said that it will not reward developers by changing the zoning on agricultural land that they themselves have destroyed, there is no mechanism by which the Outline Zoning Plan can be enforced on Lamma to prevent such dumping or force remedial action. Thus, it may be only a matter of time before agricultural land,

²¹ See, Living Lamma’s presentation on Peng Chau (April 2011).

such as the Yung Shue Long valley, are taken over by housing developments.²²

Currently, with one notable exception, all housing on Lamma is of the village house type, based on a 700 square feet footprint. According to the South China Morning Post, there is a single developer who has acquired 3 million square feet of land on Lamma (much of it not yet zoned for development).²³ The developer, Bobby Li, has built residencies at Nga Kau Wan (Tannery Bay), a 10-minute walk from the ferry pier at Yung Shue Wan – the only residential development on the island not to follow the standard village house design.

The website for the property, named “Lamma 1,” claims it to be “one of the top locations for family living in the territory.”²⁴ However, though the property was reported to be ready for occupancy at the end of 2006, there have been no reports of occupancy. Bobby Li’s company is also a joint venture partner for another would-be development, the Baroque planned for South Lamma (see below). He is also reported to be building a hotel in Sok Kwu Wan and be the owner of 174,000 square feet covering the ‘old shipyard’ in the quarry site, as well as 111,078 square feet in Lo Tik Wan, the fishing community on the opposite side of the hill to the quarry.²⁵

iii. South Lamma

In December 2011, the Town Planning Board turned down a second application by the Baroque on Lamma to develop South Lamma and all those who fought to uphold Lamma’s planning intention breathed a collective sigh of relief. The development sought to convert land that is currently zoned for agriculture, conservation and coastal protection to build 900 flats, a hotel, shopping plaza and 500 berth marina, complete with car parking for 140 cars, 20 coaches, 16 taxis and 6 lorries (on an island that is car-free).²⁶

²² See Living Lamma’s submissions to Legco on the problems of Fly-tipping (2009, 2010) listed above.

²³ See Bid for Luxury Project on Lamma Revived <http://citizenmap.scmp.com/reports/view/206>

²⁴ See <http://www.kwd.com.hk/lamma1.htm>. Comparisons have been drawn to Sea Ranch – a remote luxury development, which is practically empty. See *Abandoned Luxury Development* on <http://www.timeout.com.hk/around-town/features/8906/secret-hong-kong.html>.

²⁵ See www.lamma.com.hk: Lammarina Development #1 of 7, November 25, 2005.

²⁶ See: <http://citizenmap.scmp.com/reports/view/206>

Both the government's proposals for the quarry and the proposals for the Baroque take elements that are currently enjoyed by Lamma's visitors and residents – the view and the conservation areas – and make, respectively, “view corridors” and a “conservation corridor” between the residential properties proposed. These elements are among Lamma's chief advantages as a destination for tourism and leisure.

Neither government nor the private developer have demonstrated any track record of sensitive design or commitment to environmental improvement and there is no guarantee that the pretty pictures contained within either presentation will have any bearing on reality. Most of these are of alien environments, some of which are urban in context.

In 2006, the CEO of the Baroque was appointed as a member of the Town Planning Board, sitting on the same committee, that determines the fate of South Lamma and the Quarry.²⁷ The Baroque continues to work on the Environmental Impact Assessment for the site and issue marketing in support of the development. Though the planning application was unsuccessful, it is likely only a matter of time before further applications are made. Clearly, the existence of a compatible development at the former Quarry might help improve the chances of gaining planning permission.

Known supporters of the Baroque were the only two enthusiastic voices in support of the government's proposals for the Quarry at the public forum at City Hall on 19th January 2013. They claimed to speak on behalf of “local” people, but more accurately they speak for a smaller group, the “friends of the Baroque.” There were many other residents who spoke out against the Baroque/Seaside Living/Seaside Paradise vision for development, and others who asked for alternatives or for more information. While there has been no independent study of visions for development on Lamma, the latest Town Planning Board application for the Baroque attracted 1107 written submissions against that type of development - including some from local indigenous villagers - and only 64 in support of the plan.²⁸

²⁷ See: <http://ricebowlrepublic.wordpress.com/2011/11/23/baroque-and-a-hard-place/>

²⁸ Reported on <http://www.inmediahk.net>.

iv. Other Reclamations

In early 2012, government held a consultation on the use of reclamation outside Victoria Harbour to increase land supply for residential use. Of the 25 sites suggested, two were off the coast of Lamma: a 100 hectare island near Pak Kok and a 10-29 hectare reclamation at the Lamma quarry. Neither of these was included in the information provided to the public in consideration of the options for development at the quarry, though the same department and consultant (CEDD and Arup) put forward the plan.²⁹

v. Environmental Problems

Lamma's environment is in a shocking state, particularly for an island designated for conservation and tourism. Similar problems are found all over Hong Kong. Rubbish is dumped down the hillside on the Peak and at Stanley; agricultural lands have become dumping grounds all over the rural New Territories; and every district has its examples of unnecessary concreting and railings. Where large-scale mass housing developments have arisen, former thriving, picturesque villages have suffered neglect. A recent article in Time Out magazine, highlights the example of Ma Wan in this respect. Elsewhere villages have been abandoned as people have moved to be closer to jobs and services.³⁰

We would like to provide some examples of Living Lamma's work to demonstrate the extent of the problem, which colonial administrative practices struggle to address, and which are further exacerbated by the system of land ownership and a lack of tradition whereby individuals take personal responsibility for waste they produce and the conservation of the environment around them.

In 2009, in response to the problem of dumping on agricultural land, Living Lamma tried to find redress and enforcement of the protection of such land through Legco and various government departments. We were unable to find the means to close the loophole in the law that allows such behaviour, and, to date no action has been taken to tackle this problem.³¹

²⁹ See <http://www.landsupply.hk/>.

³⁰ *Hong Kong's (near) Abandoned Villages*, Time Out, January 30 - February 12, 2013.

³¹ See: Legco reports and newsletter

Living Lamma then turned its attention to cleaning up the environment more generally. We compiled a report containing some 250 photos of environmental problems throughout north Lamma, which was circulated to relevant government departments and formed the basis of joint site visits and follow up requests. The “Stop the Mess!” report identified common problems around dumping and waste management, shoddiness in work carried out, the lack of controls over building site operations, the lack of maintenance, particularly with the railings, the lack of tree care and system to effectively dispose of green waste, and insensitive design.³²

The Stop the Mess! campaign highlighted problems in government structure and the allocation of resources that inhibited responsiveness even in simple cases. For instance, it took 10 months, and a lot of persistence, for us to effect a clean up of mixed waste on government land on the harbour front and 15 months for the flowerbeds in front of the library to be cleaned up and planted. We have also seen a variation in the willingness of departments to work with the public and ability to modify their operations to address problems, as can be seen by the following examples:

- With HAD, we have attempted to address the problem of minor works projects that follow standard designs that might be suitable to an urban environment, but that are proving detrimental to a rural one.³³ We have also tried to prevent the last bit of rocky shoreline in Yung Shue Wan from being turned over for a concrete platform for bike parking that will not provide sufficient spaces. With the assistance of an award winning cycle park architect and landscape designer, we have put forward suggestions and alternative designs that will meet demand for bike parking while improving the outlook of the harbour and preserving its landscape value.³⁴ In this example, unfortunately, the consultation process was not aimed at resolving problems of design, but simply rubber-stamping a project that had been in the system for 10 years. The case is now before the Ombudsman and the Chief Executive in Council.

³² See Living Lamma’s *Stop the Mess!* (February 2010).

³³ See Living Lamma’s paper on HAD project (May 2012) and, for example, The Government Must Stop ‘Improving’ our Countryside, Markus Shaw, SCMP 30th October 2012.

³⁴ Living Lamma preliminary suggestions were put forwarding the report Improving Bike Parking in Yung Shue Wan (September 2011). Other suggestions were made in meetings up to September 2012.

- With EPD and FEHD, we have been working to address problems of littering and dumping, as well as reforming the system of waste collection, so as to assist in Hong Kong's waste reduction and recycling efforts. We have tried to do something to improve local facilities, which have not been updated in decades and which are often overflowing, in order to encourage people to be responsible with their waste. Though it has taken a long time, with bureaucratic considerations often preventing the adoption of simple common sense measures, the departments are responding positively. We hope to see steps towards upgrading our waste services soon, but find that those in government tasked with tackling the problem are often as frustrated as we are by the lack of responsiveness in the system.
- We have written to AFCD to ask for measures to enforce the protection of the green turtle and Romer's tree frog after their environments have been threatened or destroyed. Sadly, no action has been taken. Despite the designation of South Lamma as a Country and Marine Park under the 2001 South West New Territories Development Strategy Review and the threat to this area from large-scale development, AFCD has said: "The coastal waters off Lamma are not our priority as far as marine park designation is concerned." AFCD is also unable to act with regard to dumping that destroys habitats, as all evidence is buried under construction waste.
- DSD and their consultants have distinguished themselves in their response. Living Lamma engaged them, first over the management of their works sites and then over the design of the sewage treatment plant on the harbour front. Their contractors not only cleaned up their act, but went further to carry out their own beach clean ups, install recycling bins on site and improve the look of their hordings. Equally, though little could be done about the design of the sewage treatment plant as work was well underway, for the design of future pumping stations, the department engaged an architect who first provided a design philosophy in keeping with the planning intent and then suggested designs to match. This is the first and only time we have seen such action, and we are very grateful for it.

In total, Living Lamma has submitted some 50 reports concerning community improvement to government over the last four years. We have also attempted to actively do something about the rubbish that turns up on our beaches or is discarded into the undergrowth. This has to be seen to be believed, as this picture, taken on a beach on South Lamma demonstrates:



The picture shows a volunteer standing on an inlet at the beach at Shek Pai Wan, close by Sham Wan, the nesting area for green turtles, which used to be a natural typhoon shelter. We are now gathering data about where marine waste is coming from by carrying out a clean up every 4-6 weeks at one of Lamma's northeastern beaches, at the opposite end to this one, facing Hong Kong Island. Our first clean up yielded 579 plastic bottles and much more besides; four weeks later we collected 238 plastic bottles and assorted landfill from the same beach. We hope to use this activity as an awareness raising exercise and have already attracted significant participation from non-Lamma residents and local residents.

Trying to make simple changes to improve the quality of the environment in which we live has been a very frustrating experience. Without government action to cut across

bureaucratic silos to reform processes, there can be little lasting progress. Equally, government has to ensure that measures are taken to prevent and discourage actions by individuals who care little for the impact on others or the environment.

For the options put forward for the future of the quarry, one frustration is that government appears so determined to create a “green community” for up to 7,000 people who do not live on Lamma yet (and may not wish to), but is so slow at making simple improvements for the existing 6,000 members of the community. Further, no indication has been given about the impact of so many more people on the island’s environment when, for instance, they start to move around, or how much waste they will generate, and how it will be handled.

We would also like to note that the labeling of the Quarry as “low ecological value” and the use of the term “mitigate” – as in: “Major disturbance to these existing land use features should be mitigated as far as possible,” make little sense in a context where there is no protection for that which has high ecological value in neighbouring areas and, where in practice, workers throw their trash down the hillside. Hong Kong is not Germany, or some other location where such consultant-speak might be meaningful.

4. The Quarry Development in the Hong Kong Context

Hong Kong’s 2013 Policy Address rightly gave priority to providing land for housing, particularly for those in need. It also addressed Hong Kong’s other priorities, which included: improvements in the environment, in education, and in arts, culture, and sports development. The Chief Executive talked about “leveraging strengths and advantages” and “addressing district issues at the local level and capitalising on local opportunities”.³⁵

The 2013 Policy Address mentioned specific areas that would be developed for public and private residential units. The site of the ex-quarry on Lamma was included. The Chief Executive, CY Leung, said:

“In order to expedite these four development projects, we will actively consider making use of private developers’ capacity for development in providing infrastructure and

³⁵ <http://www.policyaddress.gov.hk/2013/index.html>.

ancillary facilities, and construction of public and private residential units on these sites.”³⁶

In the 2012 Policy Address, the then Chief Executive, Donald Tsang, said:

“Other sources of land supply include sites at the new development areas in the northern New Territories, Anderson Road Quarry, the former Cha Kwo Ling Kaolin Mine, the former Lamma Quarry and the remaining development areas of Tung Chung New Town. Advance works on these sites are well underway.”³⁷

Two elements stand out as surprising in both these Policy Addresses:

1. That the preliminary engagement of the public to gather views about the future use of the former quarry on Lamma is taking place 15 months after Donald Tsang’s address and, at the same time, that CY Leung is promising to “actively consider” using private developers to expedite the development of something that the public has only just been given the opportunity to scrutinize.
2. That the Lamma Quarry, a rural island location, which currently has no infrastructure for habitation or transportation links, is considered to warrant the same development treatment as the other areas mentioned, all of which are urban locations, well-equipped with transportation links and services. This is in spite of a planning intention, which emphasizes the importance to conserving, retaining and enhancing the rural environment of Lamma, so as to develop its potential as a destination for leisure and tourism.

In the 2013 Policy Address, the Chief Executive stated:

“We need land for housing development; we also need land for elderly homes, students’ hostels and venues for hosting sports, religious, arts and cultural events.”

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ <http://www.policyaddress.gov.hk/11-12/>.

“We should bear in mind that public demand for land is generated as much from the surging population as from people's aspirations for more space to alleviate their cramped living conditions.”³⁸

Until the time when the Baroque sought to convert land zoned for agriculture, conservation and coastal protection for development, Living Lamma’s membership consisted of a few dozen Lamma residents. In response to this threat to Hong Kong’s “back garden”, we found supporters in school children from Discovery Bay to Clearwater Bay, and adults from densely populated areas of Kowloon, some of whom have become our most committed volunteers.

The current user of the site, the YMCA of Hong Kong, responds to some of the other challenges, aside from housing, that Hong Kong people are facing. The YMCA addresses “lack of time outside, loneliness, sedentary lifestyles, and pressures” by providing access to outdoor pursuits and environmental education at their centre at the quarry.³⁹

Hong Kong needs public and subsidised housing. However, this has to be placed in the right location for people who need it. For the quarry site, even the costs of transportation will be prohibitive to those on lower incomes. At the same time, Hong Kong has other needs, which Lamma Island can meet, and for which suitable projects could be undertaken that would bring opportunities for prosperity and community improvement. Lamma's strengths are in its ecology, landscape, archaeology, heritage, and potential for outdoor pursuits and environmental education.

Hong Kong has become the subject site for the study of a condition called biophobia – whereby individuals have become so cut off from the natural world that they suffer anxiety if they come into contact with it.⁴⁰ Lammaites may joke about visitors who flinch if they see a butterfly, but the consequences of such alienation could be serious for the environment. It is very difficult to empathize with something of which you are afraid. This has direct implications for conservation in Hong Kong, and on environmental

³⁸ <http://www.policyaddress.gov.hk/2013/index.html>.

³⁹ Quoted from the YMCA flier provided at the workshop for the Stage 1 public engagement on the quarry on 5th January 2013.

⁴⁰ See for instance: <http://www.scmp.com/article/680648/battling-biophobia> and [http://depts.washington.edu/hints/publications/Developmental Psychology Biophilia Hypothesis.pdf](http://depts.washington.edu/hints/publications/Developmental_Psychology_Biophilia_Hypothesis.pdf)

improvement for future generations. It may already be contributing to the struggle Living Lamma has experienced in trying to clean up the environment. As one academic concludes:

“People may take the natural environment they encounter during childhood as the norm against which to measure pollution later in their lives. The crux here is that with each ensuing generation, the amount of environmental degradation increases, but each generation takes that amount as the norm—as the non-polluted state.”⁴¹

In the UK, a former quarry site has become a world-class visitor attraction that provides a venue for social and environmental education aimed at promoting sustainable living practices. Covering 15 hectares, the Eden Project attracts over 1 million visitors a year and achieved an operating surplus of £2.4 million.⁴² In addition, from March 2001 to the end of 2009, the attraction contributed £1 billion to the Cornish economy in off-site tourism related business in Cornwall and the rest of the region. The Eden Project employs almost 500 staff and supports an estimated 3,000 other jobs locally.⁴³ While we do not suggest that Hong Kong attempts to replicate features of the Eden Project, which are incompatible with Hong Kong’s climate, we do think there is merit in exploring the concept of a flagship project that could help kick start a reversal in Hong Kong’s environmental decline and serve as a centre of excellence on sustainability issues for Asia.

It is disappointing that the only options that have been put forward for the future of the Lamma Quarry involve real estate developments that are completely out of scale with Lamma’s rural character, that will prevent the adoption of new and exciting projects to inspire environmental improvement, the creation of jobs to facilitate sustainability and the fulfillment of the planning intention. We hope that there will be a reconsideration of options in favour of a wider range of projects that are not all based on large-scale real estate developments.

⁴¹ Development Psychology and the Biophilia Hypothesis: Children’s Affiliation with Nature by Peter Kahn:

[http://depts.washington.edu/hints/publications/Developmental Psychology Biophilia Hypothesis.pdf](http://depts.washington.edu/hints/publications/Developmental_Psychology_Biophilia_Hypothesis.pdf)

⁴² See <http://www.edenproject.com/>.

⁴³ <http://living-places.org.uk/living-places-in-action/case-study-subject/landmark-examples/understanding-the-eden-effect-local-economic-impact-of-the-eden-project.html>

5. Evaluation of the Stage 1 Community Engagement

We hope that the consultation on Lamma's rehabilitated quarry does not follow that of the Phase I reclamation of Yung Shue Wan, where good, alternative designs were ignored in favour of an ugly sea wall. Or, that it does not follow the experience of the Phase II reclamation, whereby the government withdrew plans only re-launch them quietly 10 years later, following the same approach and the same design that had been rejected by the public. We also hope that we are not witnessing another bike park scenario, whereby none of the questions or problems raised by the public have been adequately addressed and the participation of "green groups" is used to rubber stamp the process in government reports and correspondence with the public.

Already, at the forum held in Central on 19th January 2013, we have witnessed a consultant for the government implying that the options that government is proposing – all of which are for real estate development - were endorsed by green groups. This is not the case.

The "green group consultation," with PlanD and CEDD in May 2011 to which the consultant referred, was instigated at Living Lamma's request. At that meeting, despite repeated questioning about the directives from the 2011 Policy Address and the real intention of the study, the government panel insisted that the study could look at anything, "including housing." There was no suggestion that the study must include housing.

As the meeting adjourned and people were packing up to leave, the Chairman of the meeting surprised Living Lamma representatives by asking if he could record that there were "no objections." "Objections to what?" We replied.

The purpose of the study had been set out in IDC Paper 32/2011, which stated that the "overall objective of the study is to examine the future land use of the ex-Lamma quarry area including residential and other compatible uses." A few weeks later, in the project profile submitted to EPD, emphasis was shifted to examine the development potential of the Study Site for "predominantly residential use with compatible developments."

We sought clarification and lodged an objection with EPD concerning the confusion over the planning scope and asked that the study:

- Adhere to the planning intention for Lamma;
- Include representatives from other disciplines (sports development, tourism and conservation) on the study team to provide alternative visions of land use; and
- Consider the wider environment.

On 19th March 2012, Living Lamma was represented at a meeting with consultants to the study, but again no proposals were tabled. No further information was provided until notice was received of the start of the public engagement on 7th December 2012.

While it was good that the two forums and workshop provided an opportunity to hear differing views, with simultaneous translation provided (most consultations regarding development on Lamma do not even provide a venue for different stakeholders to come together), Living Lamma still has concerns about the process. These include:

a. Timing

The community engagement was launched on 7th December 2012, just 2 weeks before Christmas and New Year – a period when most people are busy, be it with year end work preparations, travel, family celebrations or supporting children through their exams. It ends just two days before the Chinese New Year holidays, thus precipitating a break in public discussion and press interest.

b. Information Provided to the Public

Both the study digest and the exhibition billboard relied on colour, buzzwords and photographs of alien environments to sell the options presented to the public. We would have preferred to see a document, which accurately stated the context and provided some indication of the social, environmental and economic costs and benefits of the options presented, based on sound research.

In fact, there was no mention of the developmental or environmental context provided in this paper. There was no mention of the existing use as a YMCA camp or by hikers, bikers and nature lovers. No data was provided on the need for housing at this site, or on the estimated costs of each option. In short, no facts were provided on which it was possible to make an informed decision.

We wonder what research the government is basing its vision of a “Seaside Paradise: a Tourist Paradise for All” (option 2 under the consultation)? We do not believe that tourists will be attracted to this kind of development any more than the tourists surveyed in 2003 were attracted to the Phase II reclamation. (Neither Ocean Park nor Disney had housing as a prerequisite for development of their sites.)

c. Forums and Workshop

The public asked questions rather than gave opinions at the forums and workshop, of which Living Lamma attended and recorded all three events. Of concern is how government will record, analyse and share the input from these events. We noticed for the final meeting, initial conclusions were attached to the presentation only days after the event the first two points, which read:

- Support for more intensive housing development for over 5,000 people, with affordable housing and supporting infrastructure facilities
- Also objection for housing development

This summary gives weight to the middle option put forward by government, which we do not feel came out strongly at any of the meetings. There has, thus far, been no reporting of the questions raised or answers provided. If anything came out of the Stage 1 engagement it was the message that more homework needs to be done, and information presented to the public, before options are narrowed further.

Conclusions and Recommendations

We do not believe it is the intention of government to hand over Lamma to private developers. However, given the absence of enforcement of the Outline Zoning Plan, the options for the development of the former quarry site will do just that. As Alice Poon indicates, developer’s profits come not only from the sale of property, but from the rents to businesses, the collection of management fees, the charging of transportation fares and provision of daily consumer products. Residents are unable to eat, sleep or move without contributing to these “money-spinning tools.”⁴⁴

⁴⁴ See: *Land and the Ruling Class in Hong Kong* by Alice Poon

This is anathema to Lamma, where local family businesses thrive and where the character and attraction of the island rests on the absence of large-scale developments. Hong Kong has competing needs for housing, leisure activities, open space and conservation. Lamma can contribute to Hong Kong's housing stock, but to do so in a way that is suggested by the current proposals put forward by government would undermine and ultimately destroy the contribution it could make to future generations by fulfilling the promise of the planning intention.

Given the timing and presentation of the consultation, and the existence of significant vested interests, we recommend that the study team delays moving to the "preferred option finalisation phase" pending a thorough review of development on Lamma, including possible ties with government. We would also like to see measures taken to make the Outline Zoning Plan for Lamma enforceable and further discussion on the future of Lamma based on the objectives of planning intention, which we believe could provide immeasurable benefits to the local economy and to Hong Kong.

Living Lamma

6th February 2013