

Consultancy Study on the Hong Kong Zoological and Botanical Gardens (HKZBG)**Purpose**

This paper aims to report to Members on the background and the consultation process for the Consultancy Study to Hong Kong Zoological and Botanical Gardens (HKZBG) initiated by the Leisure and Cultural Services Department (LCSD). Comments from Members of the Culture, Leisure and Social Affairs Committee are welcome.

Background

Being the oldest park in Hong Kong, HKZBG was founded in 1871 as a “Botanic Garden” and renamed in 1975 as “Botanical and Zoological Gardens” to reflect the increased commitments to zoological exhibits. The HKZBG has always been a popular park for many local Hong Kong residents, as well as to foreign visitors. The Garden receives around 850,000 visitors in average per year. In 2002, LCSD has commissioned the University of Hong Kong and the Hong Kong Baptist University to conduct a consultation study on the HKZBG. This 2002 study has outlined a long-term development strategy aiming towards the improvements to the facilities within HKZBG to meet the needs of the Hong Kong people. This study was completed in 2003, and it recommended that the HKZBG should maintain its role as a zoological and botanical garden in Hong Kong, given that the zoological and botanical collections are well-kept and balanced. The study has also found that the HKZBG’s mission should be aimed towards leisure, education, and conservation purposes. Since the completion of the 2002 study, HKZBG has updated many of its facilities. In terms of animal collections, new aviaries and viewing decks have been constructed. In addition, HKZBG has also introduced many endangered species, including the Bornean orangutans, De Brazza’s monkeys, squirrel monkeys, emperor tamarin, and golden-headed lion tamarins. This year, HKZBG has introduced red-handed tamarins from Germany to enrich its zoological collection. On the botanical side, the HKZBG has added quite a number of thematic gardens, including the Herb Garden, Bamboo Garden, Camellia Garden, Palm Garden, Magnolia Garden, Azalea Garden, and Bauhinia Garden. To enhance the education role of the HKZBG, the Education and Exhibition Centre was constructed in 2008, mainly functioning as a classroom for the HKZBG’s education programmes, as well as displaying animal specimens for education purposes. Since December 2013, the HKZBG has introduced “Meet-the-Zookeepers” to deepen the public’s understanding of the animal collection at the HKZBG and also the conservation works related, which has proved to be very popular to the public. LCSD has always been committed to providing quality service; thus, in January of this year, LCSD has commissioned the Kadoorie Institute of the University of Hong Kong, in collaboration of the Kadoorie Farm and Botanic Garden to conduct a consultation study on the HKZBG, with aims to put forward feasible suggestions to further optimize the facilities and flora and fauna services of the HKZBG.

Existing Conditions

1. Site layout and facilities

The HKZBG is located at the Mid-Levels and is defined by Upper Albert Road to the north, Garden Road to the East, Robinson Road to the south and Glenealy Lane to the west. The site is

approximately 5.6 hectares in size and a thoroughfare, Albany Road, cuts through the HKZBG. A short pedestrian underpass connects the two parts of the HKZBG. Existing facilities include an Education and Exhibition Centre, children's playground, bird aviaries, Greenhouse, Fountain Terrace Garden, mammal enclosures, and a Reptile House.

2. Animal collection

At present, about half of the Garden's land is dedicated to the zoological exhibits. The HKZBG has about 70 mammals, 30 reptiles and 280 birds that are being housed in about 40 enclosures. Within this collection, there are 11 endangered species, the most notable species include: the Bornean orang-utans, buff-cheeked gibbons, radiated tortoises, and red-crowned cranes.

3. Plant collection

There are more than 900 plant species within the HKZBG (including both native and exotic species, such as: Conifer, Figs, Palm, Gum Trees, Orchids, Camellia, and Azalea, etc.), there are 25 listed Old and Valuable Trees (OVTs) within the Gardens as well. In addition, there are 7 thematic gardens and a Greenhouse (with over 150 native and exotic species including orchids, climbers, and bromeliads). Visitors can enjoy the garden plants following a suggested Tree Walk.

4. Heritage

Since commissioned in 1871, the HKZBG has witnessed many of Hong Kong's historical events. There are many structures within the Gardens that are of high cultural and heritage values to many Hong Kong people. The most notable pieces include: the Memorial Arch, the pavilion, and the bronze statue of King George VI.

5. Conservation programmes

Starting from 1980, HKZBG has been members of many international conservation organizations, including the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) and World Association of Zoos and Aquariums (WAZA), etc. In the past, HKZBG has also cooperate with overseas zoos to exchange rare and endangered species for conservation purposes. Successfully bred endangered species include: Bornean orang-utans, buff-cheeked gibbons, and golden-headed lion tamarins, etc.

6. Education programmes

At present, there are two guided Outdoor Learning Programmes (one on zoological aspect and another on botanical aspect) tailor made for HKZBG, targeted towards primary school students (P.1-6), in which, about 6,000 students are engaged each year. These programmes are in line with the primary school curriculum and are available each year between October until May of the following year; advance booking are made by schools in September of each year. To further provide a variety of educational activities, "Meet-the-Zookeepers" were introduced since December 2013, they are held once quarterly lasting for two days and on each day there will be two sessions. Keeper's Talks are led by experienced animal keepers of the HKZBG, to share the fun and story in taking care of the animals and also to spread the message of conservation works. This particular activity is gaining popularity among visitors.

Consultation with the Public and Stakeholders

Besides being a district facility, the HKZBG is also a territorial-wide facility for the general public to enjoy. Therefore, it is considered necessary to gauge the views from not only the views of local residents, but also the views from different stakeholders, such as zoological and botanical experts, education programme participants, animal concern groups, green groups, as well as relevant government departments/ District Council.

Consultation activities for this study includes: interviews, survey, Focus Group Meetings (FGMs), and Public Forums.

1. Interviews

Between May and June 2014, relevant councillors of the Central and Western District Council (C&WDC) were approached in order to initially grasp the general impressions that the nearby residents have towards the HKZBG, e.g. accessibility, concern on animals' callings, heritage and cultural preservation and retaining of existing public open space etc. Through these interviews, suggestions on the engagement methods for consulting the nearby residents were sought.

Besides, the study team will also meet with the relevant government departs, for example, the Education Bureau, Agriculture, Fisheries and Conservation Department and Hong Kong Wetland Park to discuss their perceptions towards the consultancy study.

2. Surveys

To widely collect the public's views towards the concerns and possible enhancement works of the HKZBG, a survey was designed and distributed not only to nearby residents, but also made available to the general public through publicity strategies, including promotional posters, and banners posted at some LCSD major parks.

3. Focus Group Meetings (FGMs)

A thematic FGM was conducted on 19 June 2014 targeted to Green Groups, Animal Welfare, and Concern Groups. Stakeholders can also take this opportunity to collectively express their views of the visioning of the HKZBG. They are concerned on the number of animals and species, animal welfare, the role of HKZBG in conveying education and conservation messages. They also expressed to increase institutional competence to provide more strategic direction for HKZBG.

4. Public Forum

In order to widen the reach to the whole Hong Kong community, two territorial-wide public forums will be held on the 5th (Saturday) and 11th (Friday) of July 2014, on Hong Kong Island and Kowloon respectively. Engagement methods will include group discussion on key issues of the enhancement works for HKZBG.

Local and overseas examples for consideration

Committee Members are welcome to make comments on HKZBG's (1) Mission and Vision, (2) Existing Situations, and (3) Possible Improvements. Below are some local and overseas examples for reference purposes:

1. Thematic layouts and trails
At present, the HKZBG is divided into two parts. The use of themes or thematic areas to display both zoological and botanical collections and guided tours may be considered.
Examples for reference: Singapore Zoo, Singapore Botanic Gardens, San Diego Zoo, etc.
2. Animal collection and display
May consider strengthening the corporation with international conservation organizations, and to select animal collections based on conservation values and education messages, such as endangered species, confiscated live animals, or rescued animals. In addition, the existing animal enclosures should be updated, may consider designs that allow closer contact with animals, or mixed-species exhibits.
Examples for reference: Kadoorie Farm and Botanic Garden, National Zoo of Malaysia, Artis Zoo (Amsterdam), Saint Louisville Zoo, Taronga Zoo, etc.
3. Plant display and thematic gardens
There are many plants within the HKZBG with high education and conservation values. May consider displaying plants by themes or enhancing the ecosystem services message, in order to highlight some education and conservation messages.
Examples for reference: Singapore Botanic Gardens, Toronto Botanical Garden, Alaska Botanical Garden, New York Botanical Garden, etc.
4. Heritage
There are artifacts and structures of heritage value within the HKZBG. Many of these structures have actually become many local Hong Kong people's collective memory; the HKZBG itself is even a part of the Central Route of the Central and Western Heritage Trail. Historical structures within the HKZBG should be retained as much as possible, and may consider to enhance the information signage on these artifacts and to strengthen their linkage with the Heritage Trail and other historical buildings and places nearby the HKZBG.
Examples for reference: Ping Shan Heritage Trail, Lung Yeuk Tau Heritage Trail, Tai Tam Waterworks Heritage Trail, Wan Chai Heritage Trail, St. Stephen's College Heritage Trail, etc.
5. Conservation
Although already members of international conservation organizations, the HKZBG may also consider taking a further step of developing more in-situ and ex-situ conservation plans in the future.
Examples for reference: Convention on Biological Diversity, IUCN, etc.
6. Education and training
To provide more varieties of activities, the HKZBG may consider developing volunteer programmes, trained volunteers to lead guided tours and to promote conservation messages. Provision of staff training, guided tours for public and education programme tailor-made for secondary schools and tertiary institutes may also be considered.
Examples for reference: Taronga Zoo, San Diego Zoo, Melbourne Zoo, etc.

7. Management, special facilities and features

Limited by its geographical constraints, the HKZBG may consider improving its accessibility, such as barrier-free access. For the convenience of visitors, other facilities such as interactive signage or themed food & beverage facilities may also be considered. To provide more flexibility in the future development and enhancement of the HKZBG, may consider strengthening the institutional and management structure of the HKZBG.

Examples for reference: Ocean Park escalators, Central to Mid-levels escalator system, Chi Lin Vegetarian Restaurant, Singapore Zoo, Hong Kong Wetland Park, etc.

Details of the above local and overseas examples will be presented through a slideshow prepared by the Kadoorie Institute of The University of Hong Kong.

Views Sought

Committee Members are invited to take note of this document and give views on the above.

Leisure and Cultural Services Department
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