

Construction of West Kowloon Government Offices

Purpose

This paper provides the Yau Tsim Mong District Council (YTMDC) with an update on the follow-up to concerns raised by Members regarding the construction of West Kowloon Government Offices (hereinafter referred to as “the WKGO”) at the YTMDC meeting on 25 April 2013 and the subsequent consultation at district level. It further seeks to solicit Members’ views.

Background

2. The proposed WKGO (proposed location: 11 Hoi Ting Road, Yau Ma Tei) will re-provision some of the departments currently accommodated in the Yau Ma Tei Multi-storey Carpark Building (YMTMCB) (planned for demolition), with a view to facilitating the main construction works of the Central Kowloon Route (CKR) project in Yau Tsim Mong district. It also re-provisions government offices mainly accommodated in leased private premises in Yau Tsim Mong district and some of the government offices in the three government offices buildings at the Wan Chai waterfront, with a view to providing the departments concerned with long-term government-owned office accommodation. This will not only cut down the Government’s overall rental expenditure, but will also help to boost the supply of Grade A offices by releasing the leased premises in business districts of Yau Tsim Mong/Wan Chai.

3. At the YTMDC meeting on 25 April 2013, the Government Property Agency (GPA) briefed Members on the proposed project. Some Members raised concerns about the height of the proposed WKGO building and possible impacts on the traffic and food premises in the vicinity upon the commissioning of the building. Members also suggested that the Government should consider providing a post office in the WKGO building, and taking early action to construct a leisure complex with a community hall on the adjacent government site.

Consultation at district level

4. The GPA consulted a number of local stakeholders on the proposed construction project of the WKGO between May and November 2013, including visits to the Hong Kong Management Association David Li Kwok Po College in May 2013 and the Yaumati Catholic Primary School (Hoi Wang Road) in June, August, October and November 2013. We also

participated in the meetings of the Incorporated Owners of Charming Garden in May and November 2013. During the visits, we explained the details to the schools, parents and resident representatives. We also solicited their views and explored with them possible options so as to alleviate their concerns. The concerns expressed by the stakeholders were generally similar to the views put forward by Members. Among the stakeholders, Yaumati Catholic Primary School (Hoi Wang Road) was particularly concerned about the possible impacts on the health issues and traffic conditions brought about by the construction works, and expressed disagreement to the project.

5. We have carefully examined all the views received and have followed up the possible options with relevant government departments. Our responses are as follows:

Site selection

6. The GPA and Planning Department have carefully considered the undeveloped “Government, Institution or Community” sites in Kowloon which can meet the site requirements (i.e. a site with an area of 10,000 square metres (m²) or above, providing a total net operational floor area (NOFA) of 50,000 m²). We confirm that the Hoi Ting Road site is the only option in Kowloon available for the construction of the WKGO.

The design of the WKGO building

7. Some Members suggested lowering the height of the proposed WKGO and adopting the design of high and low blocks. Architectural Services Department (ArchSD) had studied the suggestion and considered that, based on the principle of not reducing the total NOFA area of the premises, it was possible to adopt the design of high and low blocks and reduce the heights of the two blocks from +80 m Principal Datum (PD) to about +70 mPD and +78 mPD respectively.

8. The proposed WKGO project will be delivered by Design and Build contract approach. In the design standards for the WKGO building, the ArchSD will stipulate that, where curtain wall is proposed for the building, the contractor must use high-efficiency low-reflective glass curtain walls which allow good light penetration, with a view to reducing light reflection from the glass surfaces and avoiding light pollution that may affect buildings and residents in the vicinity. Moreover, vertical greening elements will be incorporated into the external walls of the building, and the total greenery area of about 20% of the site area will be provided for the WKGO project. Public art works will be displayed, providing public space for enjoyment of residents.

Public services provided in WKGO

9. Government departments which will be accommodated in the proposed WKGO include the Buildings Department, Civil Engineering and Development Department (CEDD), Department of Health (DH), Lands Department (Lands D), Social Welfare Department (SWD), Transport Department (TD), Music Office under the Leisure and Cultural Services Department (LCSD) and Government Property Agency. The SWD office at YMTCPB will be relocated to the WKGO, providing local residents with services such as processing applications for Comprehensive Social Security Assistance, Old Age Allowance and Old Age Living Allowance. We have also planned to open a Student Health Service Centre under the DH in the WKGO to provide primary and secondary students in the district with physical examination and health assessment.

10. Some residents have requested to establish a new post office in the proposed WKGO. According to the Hongkong Post, on top of the services provided by the nearby Tai Kok Tsui Post Office on G/F, 67 Anchor Street, they have also implemented a “Partnership with the Post” scheme with the management offices of the residential estates in the vicinity (including the Charming Garden, Hoi Fu Court and Island Harbourview), to facilitate the receipt of bulky mail items by residents at the management offices of their respective housing estates. The planned construction of CKR will not affect the services provided by the Post Office at the Kowloon Government Offices at Yau Ma Tei along Nathan Road.

11. Regarding the provision of a post office, the Hongkong Post has carefully examined the planning of the new reclamation area at Hoi Wang Road (including the long-term planning scenarios and anticipated population), and the requests of the government departments to be relocated to the WKGO. In addition to that, based on the planning criteria for setting up new post offices (including the post office network in the area, its service scope and postal service supporting facilities, clients’ long-term demand for postal service in the face of the ever-changing modes of communication) and utilisation of resources, the Hongkong Post has come to the view that there is no justifiable need to set up a post office in the proposed WKGO. The Hongkong Post will monitor the local clients’ demand for postal service closely and make proper arrangements accordingly.

Vehicular and pedestrian traffic flow

12. Some Members and residents were concerned about the possibility of an increase in vehicular and pedestrian traffic flow in the neighbourhood that might affect traffic conditions upon the commissioning of the proposed WKGO. The proposed building will mainly be used as Government departments’ offices which do not provide large-scale frontline counter services or licensing services. In addition, the limited number of parking spaces will mainly

be reserved for government vehicles. Hence, we expect that the commissioning of the proposed WKGO will not trigger heavy vehicular and pedestrian traffic flow. Furthermore, the on and off duty hour of staff of the WKGO is different from the daily travelling in and out pattern of local residents. There would be no conflict in respect of their demand of public transport services.

13. We understand that a school in the vicinity has expressed concerns that the commissioning of the proposed WKGO will bring in extra pedestrian and traffic flow which may affect their students' journeys to and from school. We note that students flock to schools between 7 am and 8 am while staff members of the WKGO go to their offices between 8 am and 9 am. Moreover, the school dismissal time in the afternoon and the time when staff members leave their offices at the WKGO are different. Thus, there is no overlapping of schedules.

14. The proposed WKGO is scheduled for completion in 2018/19. We have all along paid close attention to the traffic conditions of respective districts. To align with the completion of the WKGO, we will review the traffic conditions in the local district and adjacent areas, including traffic flow (pedestrian and vehicular flow), public transport services, transport facilities and the concerns of all stakeholders etc. If necessary, we will adopt appropriate measures, such as implementation of appropriate traffic engineering works and adjusting public transport services to cater for the changes in local demand due to the completion of the WKGO. We will consult District Council on concrete proposals in a timely manner.

Environmental implications brought by dust and noise during the construction period

15. The school in the vicinity has expressed concern about the environmental implications brought by dust and sound during the construction of the WKGO and the possible health hazards to school personnel and students. It should be appreciated that this works project is not a designated project under the Environmental Impact Assessment Ordinance (Cap. 499). While the project will not cause long term environmental impacts, we will implement various mitigation measures during the construction period to control short term environmental impacts. Such measures include:

- (i) stipulating in the contract that the contractor is required to properly control dust, site run-off and noise problems through the implementation of mitigation measures at the construction stage, which include frequent cleaning and watering of site, provision of wheel-washing facilities, using suitable noise suppressing devices, acoustic lining or shields for construction activities;

- (ii) requiring construction vehicles to access the site through the future public open space near Hoi Wang Road, which is to double as a barrier keeping the site a distance from Hoi Ting Road and Yaumati Catholic Primary School (Hoi Wang Road). A buffer zone for construction vehicles at the future public open space will serve as a temporary stopover for construction vehicles so as to forestall the build-up of traffic in Hoi Wang Road; and
- (iii) putting up additional facilities such as landscaped barriers at the Hoi Ting Road's site to furbish the surrounding environment.

We will work hand in hand with the departments concerned to keep close tabs on the situation and maintain regular contacts with the schools in the vicinity (including the formation of a Task Force Group designated with officers who will liaise with the representatives of schools in the vicinity, relevant organizations and concerned District Council members during the construction period, and monitor the construction of the proposed WKGO) in order that necessary construction arrangements can be duly put in place to minimise impacts on the surrounding environment.

16. Some stakeholders have expressed worries about the possible impacts brought about by the concurrent construction of Guangzhou–Shenzhen–Hong Kong Express Rail Link (XRL) and the WKGO. According to the existing schedules, the project of WKGO will be commenced in the second half of 2015. In the first few months of the project, only early preparatory work will be conducted. It is estimated that reinstatement works will be carried out on the XRL site at the junction of Hoi Wang Road and Hoi Ting Road in 2015. The site will be returned to the Government upon completion of the works in the third quarter of the same year. We will liaise closely with the MTR Corporation and make necessary fine-tunings so that the major works of the WKGO and XRL projects will not be carried out concurrently.

Food premises

17. Some Members have expressed concerns about the possible significant pressure on nearby food premises during lunchtime that might be brought about by the commissioning of the proposed WKGO. We have considered the following situations:

- (i) According to information available, commercial premises at a distance of 300 to 600 metres from the WKGO currently accommodate a total of about 50 different types of food premises with a total area of over 8,800 m². Upon the commissioning of the WKGO, improvement to the public transport

network nearby will be made and more meal choices will be offered;

- (ii) We have planned to reserve spaces for leasing within the WKGO for the operation of convenient store(s), coffee shop(s) or take-away shop(s). We will also consider putting up vending machines to sell light refreshments to staff working in the WKGO so as to allow staff with a wider variety of food choices;
- (iii) Some of the government departments to be relocated to the WKGO have already implemented staggered lunch breaks, while others have also indicated that they will consider making the same arrangement so as to avoid overloading nearby food premises during peak lunch hours; and
- (iv) Some staff members may bring their own packed lunch boxes or take a walk and go to Yau Ma Tei for lunch. Furthermore, for some departments (such as the BD, the CEDD, the Lands D, the TD, etc), a number of their staff are required to carry out fieldwork and therefore they may not choose to have lunch in the district.

The above appropriate separations/arrangement will alleviate the heavy load on the nearby food premises during the lunch time rush hours.

Community facilities

18. Some Members and residents expected that the Government will provide a complex for leisure and recreational facilities at the government site adjacent to the proposed WKGO timely. The LCSD is considering the views and is planning a complex with indoor recreation centre, indoor swimming pool and a small library. The LCSD will consult the Community Building Committee of the YTMDC about the above-mentioned facilities in due course. Home Affairs Department will consider the request of providing community halls facilities based on the review of the size of the abovementioned site and the usage rate of the community hall(s) in the district.

Job opportunities

19. We estimate that the WKGO project will create around 2,100 jobs including professional, technical and labour.

Advice sought

20. Members are invited to note the response and follow-up action by the Government relating to the key issues. Comments are welcome.

Government Property Agency
December 2013