

RETHINKING LANTAU

Submission to Development Bureau

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PART 1: RESPONSE TO THE LANDAC REPORT

The plan for Lantau development, as set out in the LanDAC report and the 'Space For All' document, is deeply flawed and unsustainable in both economic and environmental terms.

Exclusive Policy-Making Process

The decision-making process on Lantau's future appears to be explicitly designed to exclude community and civil society input. Besides *ex officio* civil servants, the LanDAC committee membership from day one has been almost wholly drawn from the real estate, tourist, travel and logistics industries, along with government political supporters and appointees. A number of members have commercial interests on Lantau (the limited transparency of this process means it is unclear what role those members have played).

The public rightly doubts the genuineness of this 'consultation.' It is well-remembered on Lantau that the four years of 'public consultation' over the Shek Kwu Chau incinerator yielded exactly zero changes to the original plan. The same applies to the 2014 consultation over political reform and, so far, to the Biodiversity Strategy & Action Plan consultation now underway. If the government is genuinely willing to take into account public views, we will see those expressed in the final plan. But the record to date suggests the decisions on Lantau 'development' have already been made.

No Vision & No Supporting Data

The plan offers no vision for the island: what will it be like to visit, live or work in Lantau in 2026, 2036 or beyond? The report doesn't say.

At the same time it tries to micro-manage tourist development in ways that are counter-productive. The allocation of specific themes in locations around Lantau is beyond the scope of government and the expertise of the LanDAC committee. The purpose of these themes is unclear: if they are prescriptive how government would 'enforce' these themes and what other roles would the government would play?

The plan offers no specific data to support any of its assumptions and offers no forecasts of any of the key metrics, e.g., population, visitor numbers, residential housing volume and investment, tourist industry investment, road traffic, etc.

No Conservation Protection

The report claims to achieve a 'balance' between conservation and development. In fact the word 'development' appears 126 times in the LanDAC report and 'conservation' just 20 times. The report makes no

mention of wetlands, dolphins or buffalo and cattle - not only three of the most critical conservation topics, but major tourist attractions in their own right.

The plan overturns the core principle of the previous Lantau concept plans of no large-scale development.

The biggest problem of the government approach is that it sets no limits on development and offers no protections to the natural or cultural heritage, despite claims to the contrary. It offers no guarantees to protect South Lantau's unique coastline, plants and animals. These omissions make it clear the intention is to introduce a mass tourism economy to South Lantau, with no ceiling on visitor numbers, vehicles or housing and hotel construction.

(NB: LanDAC's indifference to conservation issues contrasts markedly with the time and effort taken in identifying and mandating possible commercial tourist projects.)

High-Speed Broadband: Essential for 21st Century Development

The government plan purports to be about 'economic development' but does not even touch on the most critical 21st century infrastructure requirement: high-speed broadband.

The average broadband downlink speed for South Lantau residents, businesses, government services and schools is approximately 5% of the SAR average. This is a direct result of the failure of government policy to achieve competition in the islands district.

My group, [Islands Broadband Concern Group](#), has tried to engage with the government on the issue but neither the Commerce Bureau and Ofca are willing either to acknowledge this policy failure or to take any positive steps to remedy it.

Any credible Lantau development plan must address this.

Low-Carbon Lantau

LanDAC makes many references to creating low-carbon communities on Lantau, but these appear to be symbolic only. It offers no serious discussion about the carbon impact of the road-only Macau bridge, the Chek Lap Kok-Tuen Mun freeway link and the third airport runway - all major generators of carbon emissions and all otherwise a central part of the 'bridgehead economy.'

It seems that low-carbon is important only in the context of certain aspects of 'Lantau development' and not in others, and certainly not in the context of Lantau's current situation, including planning, house design, electricity supply, transport, etc.

East Lantau Metropolis

The LanDAC report expends no effort in making the economic case for the East Lantau Metropolis. An expert from real estate consultancy Icon City has [said the government's projections "belong to the unknown."](#) The project is environmentally destructive and assumes [population projections that also have been called into question](#). Furthermore, it implies freeway and flyover development across Lantau country parks and Mui Wo that are inimical to South Lantau as a prospective tourist destination.

The massive scale, cost and environmental impact of a project such as this mean it should be subject to a full public debate, not as an add-on to a discussion about Lantau.

PART 2: RETHINKING LANTAU



Sunset at Pui O Beach.

The Tourist Experience

The LanDAC report makes many suggestions for tourist activities that seem intended to replicate commercial experiences available elsewhere in the world. Instead of offering stale attractions, we should acknowledge the impressive experiences already available on Lantau and ensure that they do not disappear.

From Central Hong Kong, Pui O Beach can be reached by a ferry and bus journey of less than an hour, followed by a short walk past a thriving but shrinking wetland where buffalo frolic in the mud and sometimes sport egrets on their backs. The beach has a bar/restaurant and a picnic and camping ground. At dusk it offers spectacular sunsets such as the one above. No other major city in the world has such a simple but powerful experience so close to hand.

But because of the lack of conservation protection, the wetlands that form the unique and magical part of this experience will soon disappear under the weight of repeated waste dumpings. This inadequate environmental protection, combined with the kind of unrestrained development model that LanDAC advocates, mean that this and other Lantau wetlands have a limited lifespan. Before long, visitors will find themselves strolling past a mountain of waste material after which, inevitably, the land will be sold for commercial use. What will be left is a beach next to a hotel or apartment complex and a stunning tourist experience will have disappeared.

Conservation is Key to Lantau's Future

The starting point for any kind of commercial tourism planning in South Lantau must be the recognition that South Lantau has strong natural attractions that must be protected.

Environmental and economic sustainability are inextricably linked. Protection of the plant, coastline and wildlife will not only preserve Lantau's assets for future generations but will ensure its sustainability as a tourist destination.

The key steps are:_

- Conduct baseline environmental survey
- Change the zoning and development laws to ensure protection for the coastal areas and wetlands
- Make owners of private land responsible for dumping on their land and impose severe penalties for dumping and to
- Guarantee the boundaries and sanctity of country parks
- Establish and set limits on visitor and population numbers
- New tourist developments must pass environmental audit - no adverse impact on biodiversity, coast protected areas - to be carried out by an independent agency (ie, not the EPD).

The micro projects and tourist 'zones' set out in the LanDAC report serve no purpose and should be scrapped.

A full study of East Lantau Metropolis's to assess future population needs, economic viability and environmental impact should be carried out.

Create Fresh Low-Impact Tourist Experiences

The other starting point for considering tourism is acknowledging Hong Kong has no expertise whatsoever in green, low-impact or eco-tourism. Hong Kong tourism industry currently revolves around large hotels, retail shopping and transporting busloads to tourist spots. That path is a dead-end for South Lantau.

Thus instead of creating a random list of possible projects, we should encourage fresh ideas and engage with those who have ideas and experience.

One idea is to hold a contest: either for a design team to come up with green, sustainable tourist plan for South Lantau, or perhaps for a single project. A competition would attract attention and ideas from around the world and promote Lantau as a green holiday destination.

Other ideas:-

- * Create a historic walking trail between north and south Lantau, starting from the future Tung Chung West MTR, widening the footpath and planting trees for shade on the existing Tung Chung Road and making use of the old Tung Chung Road (this is the historic path between north and south Lantau.)

- * Establish a min-bus shuttle or a free bike or bike hire service along South Lantau Road (the road is largely flat between San Shek Wan and Shek Pik).

- * Conduct an oral history programme to capture Lantau's 20th century history.

High-Speed Broadband

Instruct Ofca to conduct a study into how to narrow the divide between islands broadband services and those of the rest of the SAR. It may consider measures such as - a compulsory minimum speed, introduction of a broadband Universal Service Obligation, infrastructure sharing, public-private partnerships.

Environmental and Carbon Emission Audit

Instead of arbitrarily advocating green policies for certain projects, why not use Tung Chung and the villages of South Lantau as a test-bed for low-carbon, low-waste green living and environmental policies? This is not mere symbolism; if it is not worth pursuing a low-carbon Lantau now, why is it worth pursuing under the 'development' plan?

The sensible starting point is an environmental audit of all current policies and practices on Lantau - housing planning and design, electricity supply, transport services, water supply.

Low-Carbon Ferries

The proposed use of ferries for around-island transport could be a promising one as it can service tourists and local residents while taking pressure off the road network.

However, this will require some significant new licensing and franchising arrangements from the Transport Department. To implement properly and to

allow service provider to gain the scale necessary to acquire clean-burning vessels would require a revamp of all the outlying island ferry services. This will require concerted effort and coordination between government agencies.