

Done and dusted – down to the last letter of the law

In her article "An overriding public need" (January 4), Christine Loh Kung-wai queried the chief executive's assertion on RTHK on December 23 that the government had conducted all necessary consultations and procedures required in respect to the demolition of the old Star Ferry and Queen's piers.

In fact, the chief executive is absolutely correct. All consultations and procedures required by the Foreshore and Sea-bed (Reclamations) Ordinance, the Roads (Works, Use and Compensation) Ordinance and the Town Planning Ordinance were conducted and complied with.

The demolition of the piers is part of the Central Reclamation Phase III, covered in the Central District (Extension) Outline Zoning Plan. Phase III has gone through the due process of statutory town planning procedures and consultation, in which there was thorough public discussion on matters including the scale of reclamation and the use of land to be made available.

Proposed amendments to the draft zoning plan (with the minimum reclamation required) were gazetted in July 1999. After undergoing public consultation, the draft zoning plan was approved by the Chief Executive in Council in February 2000.

The zoning plan was amended to reflect the location and design of the new Star Ferry pier after consultation with the Star Ferry Company. The plan was gazetted with this change, no objection was received, and it was approved by the Chief Executive in Council in December 2002.

A 2004 Court of Final Appeal judgment prescribed that reclamation be justified on the basis of "overriding public need". The government immediately reviewed Phase III and found that it met the "overriding public need" test. Our report, completed in April 2004, is a matter of public record.

Phase III is needed to provide land for essential transport infrastructure including the Central-Wan Chai Bypass and Road P2 network. It is also needed to re-provision existing waterfront facilities that will be affected by the reclamation and provide the above-mentioned essential transport infrastructure.

Time and again, we explained to the Legislative Council, the Central and Western District Council and the public that the old Star Ferry pier and the Queen's Pier were affected by Road P2, the Airport Railway Hong Kong Station Extended Overrun Tunnel and the necessary drainage box culvert, and that they would have to be demolished.

We appreciate the nostalgia attached to the clock tower. We have kept the old clock face, chimes and mechanical parts. We will reassemble the clock and find a suitable place to rebuild the tower. As for Queen's Pier, we will keep the retainable components as far as practicable, and find a suitable place for their relocation.

Ideas for the design and location of the Queen's Pier components and the clock tower will feature in a Central Reclamation Urban Design Study being commissioned by the Planning Department and including a wide public engagement programme.

We understand that people are asking for more open space and greenery, and better enjoyment of the harbourfront. The land made available in Phase III will provide a unique opportunity for more open space and a vibrant waterfront promenade on the northern shore of Hong Kong Island extending from Central to Wan Chai, for access and enjoyment by the community.

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