

6th February 2012

With the correct land policies, government could avoid reclamation

Society for Protection of the Harbour fully supports your editorial ("There's no need for land reclamation", January 30).

For the past 17 years, we have been advocating that the government should properly plan the development of the New Territories instead of reclaiming the harbour and our sea to make land. That should be Hong Kong's proper direction of growth.

The government must change its mindset as a land producer and land supplier to raise revenue through land sales.

It ought to remember that its primary responsibility is the administration of Hong Kong.

It should put the interests of the people before its own interests by providing affordable housing and protecting the environment.

The economic policy that the government has adopted over the past half century is outdated.

The policy works in this way. The government acquires and produces land for sale, sells the land to developers, ensures high prices for the housing built thereon by restricting supply and thereby also ensures high land prices. It transfers the land sales proceeds to the Capital Works Reserve Fund and then with this fund pays for more reclamation projects to produce more land. The cycle is then repeated again and again.

This economic policy enriches the government (which now has total reserves of over HK\$1 trillion) as well as the developers, but is at the expense of the environment. As a result, Hong Kong almost lost its Victoria Harbour.

The public also pays a heavy price. It has to suffer from very expensive housing, bad living conditions in very small flats and a low quality of life.

Now that Hong Kong enjoys a measure of democracy and the people have a voice, they must stand up and speak out. This system has to change.

Developing the New Territories has three major obstacles. Firstly, there is the village house policy which the government unwisely adopted. Secondly, the various New Territories ordinances give a different legal status to New Territories land. Finally, Article 40 of the Basic Law protects the traditional rights and interests of the indigenous inhabitants of the New Territories.

The government must overcome all these difficulties so that all the land in Hong Kong will be the same and all the people of Hong Kong will be equal with the same rights and duties.

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