

Letter to the editor of SCMP (9 Mar 12)

I refer to the editorial entitled “There’s enough land already available” (23 February 2012), and the article “Harbour ‘cheaper route to gain land’” (20 February 2012).

As the editorial rightly suggests, land supply is a complicated issue with complex environmental, political and social dimensions. Our goal is to strike a balance among the social, environmental and economic factors, so as to achieve a sustainable land supply model and address the political dimension through the public engagement process.

Your article “Harbour ‘cheaper route to gain land’” highlights the cost effectiveness element in considering land supply options. But in all our dialogue with the public and media, we have also been discussing impact on local community, environmental aspects, accessibility and planning flexibility, etc. The monetary cost is not the government’s only or main concern in assessing different land supply options.

We have put forward a six-pronged proposal, with all present land supply options including rezoning, redevelopment, resumption, reuse of ex-quarry site, rock cavern development and reclamation outside Victoria Harbour being deployed flexibly. However, all six options face their respective challenges.

While reclamation may affect marine ecology, land development including rezoning, redevelopment and resumption may have impact not only on terrestrial ecology, but also on social aspects such as local culture, tradition and social network. Land development is not necessarily better than reclamation from environmental and social perspectives. Rather, they are complementary to each other. The new land formed by reclamation can provide an option for resettlement of residents and businesses displaced by land development. Public fill generated by land development can also be handled by reclamation. Reclamation (same for any other options) should not be ruled out as an option, nor should it be regarded as the last resort. We need all six options in play to meet our short, medium and long term needs.

Moreover, the practical meaning of the notion of turning to reclamation as a last resort is hard to conceive. Shall we use up all agricultural land however environmentally sensitive or redeveloping all rural and village land in the New Territories before resorting to reclamation? Timing wise, shall we start planning reclamation only when other options provide no further land? A piece of developable land will take 10 years or more to produce despite its source. We have to act now before it is too late.

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