

Appendix E - Supporting Documents

1- Peter Thomson Letter

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15 May 2018

Mr Stanley Wong Yuen-fai
Chairman
Task Force on Land Supply
Development Bureau
19/F, West Wing Central Government Offices
2 Tim Mei Avenue, Tamar, Hong Kong

Dear MrWong,

Allow me to introduce myself. My name is Peter Thomson and I am a retired professional golfer. Over the course of my career I won 84 professional tournaments around the world, including the Open Championship, one of golf's four major championships, on five occasions, becoming the first player to do so. For over 30 years, I was president of the Australian Professional Golfers' Association and in 1998 I captained the international team to victory against the United States at the Presidents Cup. In 1988 I was inducted into the World Golf Hall of Fame and my golf course design company has been responsible for the creation of more than one hundred courses in 30 countries. In short, when it comes to golf, I know what I am talking about.

From my home in Australia, a country I believe you know well, I have read about the situation regarding the Hong Kong Golf Club with increasing concern. Indeed, the prospect that the club and its three wonderful golf courses in Fanling could disappear in order to make way for housing has compelled me to write this letter to you.

I do not wish to make light of Hong Kong's need for public housing. Clearly this is a significant and important issue that needs to be addressed and overcome. But it should not be at the expense of what is undoubtedly a historic and world-class golfing venue.

I have had the privilege of visiting Hong Kong many, many times - and I feel a close affinity with both the city and the Hong Kong Golf Club itself. I played in the very first Hong Kong Open staged at Fanling (in 1959) and would go on to win this prestigious championship on three occasions. I have also had the good fortune to be able to lend my expertise in the design of the club's Eden Course as well as the renovation of the majestic Old Course.

Let me state clearly: the Hong Kong Golf Club is an incredibly special place in the world of golf. Not only is it historically important - its courses, notably the Old Course, are architectural gems that have

been laid out over pristine, ancient terrain - but its role as the focal point for all of Hong Kong golf cannot be understated.

As I am sure you are aware, there have been a lot of falsehoods written about the club, especially in terms of public access. While it is a private members' club, it is one of the most 'open' members' clubs anywhere in the world, with over 140 per cent of rounds there played by non-members. It has been at the very epicenter of golf's development in Hong Kong, allowing countless youngsters an opportunity to get their start in the game and grow into accomplished players who represent Hong Kong on the international sporting stage with pride.

Furthermore, as home of the Hong Kong Open, unquestionably one of the most significant golf tournaments in all of Asia, the club has enhanced Hong Kong's reputation as a bona fide sporting centre - and has done so admirably and with distinction.

There are myriad other arguments in favour of the club's continuing existence - from its status as a vital, life-giving green 'lung' to the northern New Territories, to the millions of dollars that are raised each year for charity through events held there.

Mr Wong, I fully appreciate the difficulty of your task and I wish you well. But let me end this letter by being frank with you. Take away the Hong Kong Golf Club and the game of golf, and indeed Hong Kong itself, will be a much poorer place.

Sincerely,



Peter Thomson



The Hong Kong Golf Club (Old Course): A landmark for Golden Age Architecture in Asia

An architect's perspective

The Old Course at the Hong Kong Golf Club (Fanling) represents the first installment of the “Golden Age” of golf course architecture in China. It’s also representative of a period in golf course Architecture (1900 - 1939) where golf courses were inspired in large by the Old Course at St Andrews, Scotland. This period also produced the greatest number of golf courses currently ranked in the top 100 across the globe.

The primary mark of a golf course designed and built during this period was to discover and then present the golfer with challenging shots inherent in the landscape. It was of the utmost importance to make the fullest use of existing features: holes were designed to possess a striking individuality though some gift of nature, anything stereotyped would be avoided and all construction work would follow the irregular lines of nature. This is evident throughout the Old Course where the land dictates the play and gives rise to a layout that is unique in style and character and different from anything else in Hong Kong and indeed China. What other golf courses in the region would you find blind shots and crossing holes that are common place at Fanling and other golden age venues?

Much of the St Andrews charm lies in its quirkiness and evolution and the same can be said for the Old Course at Fanling. Like St Andrews the Old Course has been refined over the years to keep up to date with advances in technology, new infrastructure surrounding the facility and because of continual vegetation growth and expansion but very little of the quirkiness and unconventional has been taken away and thus still remains a showpiece for any budding golf course architect or golf historian. The primary inspiration back when the Old Course was built in 1911 was the Scottish way of playing close to the ground which differs greatly from the modern courses built post 1950 where the layout requires the golfer to attack the target more through the air. This is evident on the Old Course where it would be possible to get around with a putter and where there is typically always an open route into a green or landing area.

During the golden period in the early twentieth century match play was the preferred format for playing golf. This allowed architects more freedom to create daring and unconventional holes that would often produce high scores. Golf is very different today. Stroke play is the primary competition where the goal is to complete a round in the fewest number of shots. Anything that is deemed too quirky or unconventional and requires an element of luck is seen in the negative because it’s possible that a player will produce a high score which will impact the end score. This is one of the reasons why there are few courses left that look and play like the Old Course at Fanling today.

During the golden age period of architecture “luck” was regarded as part of the legitimate fun of the game, without which as a sport the game would suffer. The attraction that counted most was the test of ingenuity in getting round difficulties and overcoming new and unexpected situations. Contrary to this modern golf course architects and superintendents are asked to do everything in their power to eliminate luck, which limits more creative design concepts and unconventional golf. The outcome being that all of our modern golf courses have become relatively standardized in their demands and hazards to the point that the golfer seldom encounters a bad lie in the fairway or bunker, or a bad bounce on his approach. Today anything

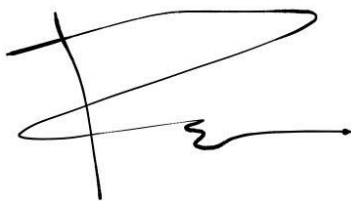
remotely challenging and out of the ordinary is quickly criticized as “unfair”. This includes a blind tee shot or uneven lies which are all common place on the Old Course.

To go further modern architecture has had a tendency to apply so many standards of “fairness” that all holes have begun to look and play alike. One of the undeniable strengths of the Old Course is the variety of the holes. Not one hole looks or plays the same and the route constantly changes direction allowing golfers an opportunity to appreciate different views and terrain. Furthermore the modern game has become plagued by a “mechanical number driven” mind set and as a result most golf courses are judged on mathematical lines. If a layout does not conform to a particular sequence, holes don’t follow a set formula or the course does not stretch to well over 7,000 yards and play to par 70 (or more) it’s not considered a worthy test. To put it simple the Old Course is one of only a few golf courses outside of Great Britain and Ireland that rebuffs this thinking. Instead the course carries a classic old school look and feel where holes are original and don’t follow any formula - see for instance the green site on the Meadow (Hole No. 1) or the drive on the Twins (Hole No.2) and Tommy Tucker (Hole No. 10) and even the crossing shot on the Horizon (Hole No. 13). These are all unique golf situations you would not find anywhere else in the region.

In addition to this the layout is ‘out and back’ (like St Andrews and so many of the other classic golf courses of the golden age era) which is also testament to its uniqueness in a day and age where the majority of golf courses return to the clubhouse and go back out again.

There is a little bit of the St Andrews Old Course strategy and nuance in every golf course of the golden age including on the Old Course at Fanling. Golfers are required to think a little as they plot their way around the course all the time aware of the beauty of the surroundings and the abundant wildlife that wanders free there. Manufactured features - prevalent on so many of the modern courses in Asia and beyond - are few and far between. Instead the principal inspiration in the design was to seize on any natural features and accentuate the best golf points on them. On the Old Course the existing ground contours, big and small, influence the play strategy from start to finish and provide worthy hazards, negating the need to build man made features at a cost and lesson for any client or budding golf architect. The original charm of golf was its simplicity and naturalness and helped by the fact that back at the turn of the twentieth century golf courses were built using horse drawn slip scrapers and man’s hand, which gave rise to the notion that its best to use what is there versus create something new. So much of the quirkiness and unique character of the Old Course is as a result of the multitude of natural features that remained during the construction and continue to determine the play strategy.

The principal thought in designing and building golf courses of the golden age era was to limit the hand of man and in doing so provide a constant adventure in a natural setting like is the case at St Andrews and the Old course at Fanling. Much like what the National Golf Links of America did for golf in the USA (and note it was also built in 1911) this was the first “great” eighteen hole golf course built in China and testament to the achievement that a course had been produced - outside of Great Britain and Ireland where every hole is a good one and presents a new problem. Most important, it laid the platform for the growth of the game of golf in the region.

A handwritten signature in black ink, consisting of several overlapping loops and a long horizontal stroke extending to the right.

Paul Jansen
February 2021

