

## **Proposed Prison Development Plan at Hei Ling Chau and the Site Selection Process**

### **Purpose**

This information paper briefs members on the background of the prison development plan at Hei Ling Chau, including the need of the project, alternative options and the site selection process.

### **The Prison Development Plan**

2. For the purpose of a long-term prison development plan, we propose to build a prison complex at Hei Ling Chau with a capacity of 7,220 penal places. Under the proposal, all penal institutions on Hong Kong Island and in Kowloon, as well as all the remand facilities in the territory, will be relocated to the proposed prison complex. The complex will also provide 2 600 additional penal places.

3. The proposed prison complex will therefore comprise a number of co-located but stand-alone penal institutions. Each institution will be physically separate and independently operated. To meet the operational needs of the prison complex, a fixed crossing will be provided to connect Hei Ling Chau with the land-based transportation network on Lantau Island.

4. Given the scale of the proposed project, the Government has appointed a consultant to conduct a two-stage feasibility study and preliminary site investigation for land formation and infrastructure works, which is now under way.

### **Need of the Project**

5. The Correctional Services Department (CSD) has been suffering from a serious problem of prison overcrowding for the past decade (**Appendix I**). In mid June 2004, the penal population stood at around 13 600, representing an occupancy rate of about 118%. Overcrowding was most serious in maximum-security prisons, remand facilities and female prisons, which were operating at occupancy rates of

139%, 162% and 177% respectively. The overcrowding creates not only difficulties for prison management in maintaining order and discipline within the prisons, but also tension among inmates, which makes it difficult for prison staff to administer rehabilitation programmes effectively to prepare inmates for reintegration into society.

6. The penal population is projected to grow to 14 000 by 2015 and 15 000 by 2024. The projection takes into account regular updating of the numbers of arrests/prosecutions as projected by the Police and the Immigration Department, as well as factors such as crime rate, crime detection rate, conviction rate, sentencing pattern and general population growth.

7. CSD currently operates a total of 24 penal institutions. Of these, half will be over 40 years old by 2013, the earliest expected date of completion of the proposed prison complex, and eight were converted from buildings previously used for other purposes. These outdated or non-purpose-built institutions, with their poor environment and sub-standard facilities, are presenting prison management with considerable operational problems.

8. CSD has all along implemented various measures to relieve the overcrowding situation. Such measures include conversion or expansion within existing institutions. However, the works of these kinds are mostly small in scale due to various constraints in the existing institutions and the lack of decanting facilities. In 2000, the prison co-location concept was presented to the Panel on Security of the Legislative Council as a long-term prison development plan. The proposal has since been deliberated at various meetings of the relevant panels of the Legislative Council<sup>1</sup>.

9. We have also consulted the Islands District Council on the prison development plan at Hei Ling Chau and the proposed feasibility study. The Islands District Council generally supported the proposal at its meeting on 12 August 2002.

10. At the Legislative Council Finance Committee meeting on 16 May 2003, funding approval of \$47 million was given for carrying out a feasibility study and associated site investigation for the proposed prison development plan at Hei Ling Chau in two stages.

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<sup>1</sup> The proposal has been discussed by the Panel on Security on 7 December 2000, 7 June 2001 and 7 February 2002 and the Panel on Planning, Lands and Works on 9 July 2002 respectively.

## **Benefits of the Proposal**

### Meeting present and future needs

11. The new prison complex would solve the problems of overcrowding and archaic facilities in the prisons. It would meet the forecast growth in the penal population up to at least 2015.

### Streamlining penal operations

12. The purpose-built prison complex would allow the strengthening and streamlining of penal operations. As different institutions are co-located at one place, it would enable CSD to pool staff for standby and emergency response duties, and thereby strengthen contingency arrangements as well as reduce related staff costs. Greater flexibility and shorter response time would be achieved in staff mobilisation during emergencies.

### Economies of scale

13. Co-location would lead to considerable economies of scale. With streamlined operations, the manning scale for the prisons could be improved. Supporting facilities and services, such as visitors' reception, prison hospital, kitchen, laundry, escort and transport services and emergency response units, could be combined and shared among the institutions. These would result in substantial savings in operational and manpower costs in the long run.

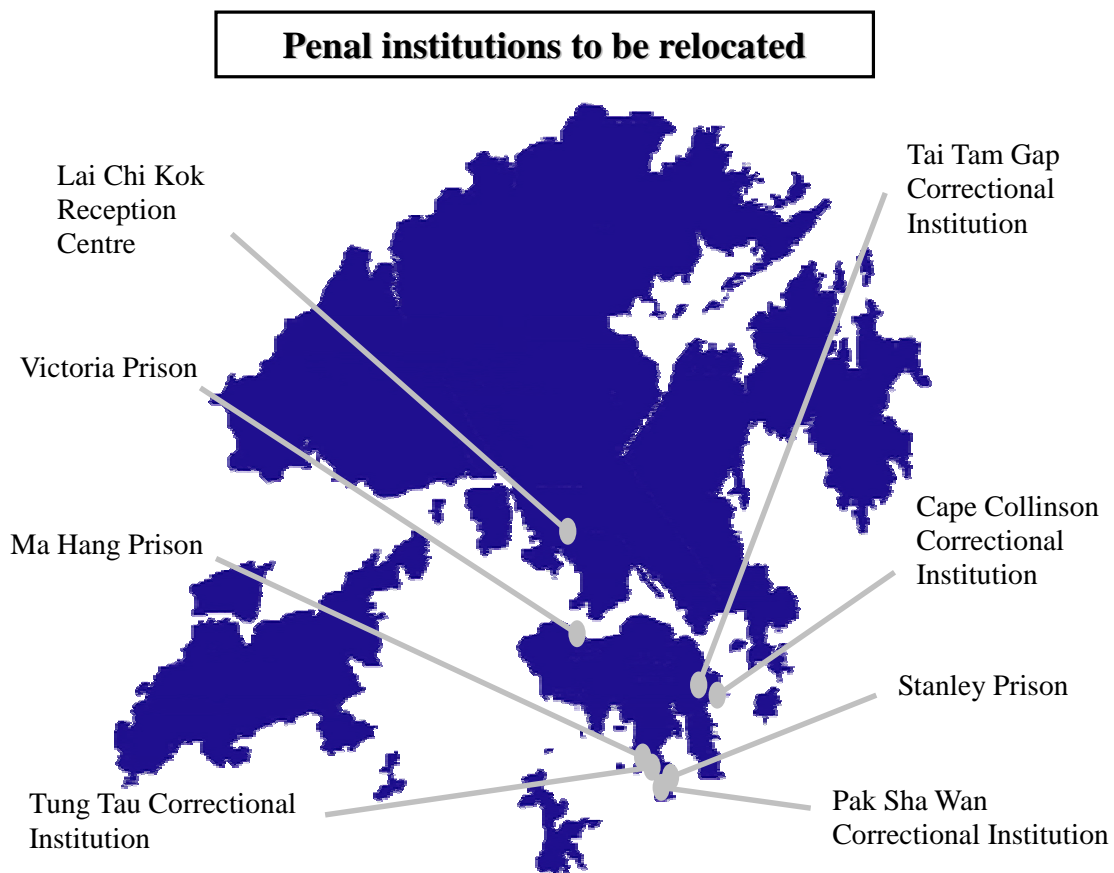
### Improving rehabilitation services

14. The proposal would provide an opportunity to renew and upgrade installations and systems currently in use, which are out-dated or reaching the end of their serviceable periods, and help to bring down maintenance costs. Modern facilities, such as mock office set-ups and computer rooms, would enable the provision of better education and vocational training for inmates. CSD and other non-government organisations would be able to run rehabilitation programmes more effectively.

### Release of urban sites for alternative development

15. The existing penal sites could be released for redevelopment to meet

other community needs. Planning and land use on a territorial basis would be improved.



## **Other Options Considered**

### Building stand-alone new prisons at various places

16. Consideration has been given to building three to five new prisons to provide the additional penal places required. However, this is not without difficulties and constraints. Apart from the question of cost, it is extremely difficult to identify suitable sites for prison development. Moreover, the opportunity to derive maximum benefit from the economies of scale that would be possible from co-location would be foregone and the existing out-dated and sub-standard facilities would continue to incur substantial improvement and maintenance costs.

### Redeveloping some of the existing institutions to upgrade the archaic and sub-standard facilities

17. Upgrading existing facilities is possible only to a very limited extent,

because of physical constraints posed by the old buildings themselves and the surrounding topography and environment. The lack of decanting facilities to enable such improvement works without jeopardising the security and operation of the institutions is also a stumbling block to any such redevelopment.

### **Site Selection Process**

18. Since the inception of the prison co-location concept, the Government has conducted a thorough territorial search to identify suitable sites for the proposed prison complex according to a set of reasonable and objective criteria. The site search criteria are listed in **Appendix II**. Many sites have been considered and eliminated in the territorial search because of their failure in meeting the criteria.

19. Five site options (Kong Nga Po, Heung Yuen Wai, Lin Ma Hang, Tung Lung Chau and Hei Ling Chau) were identified for a preliminary assessment, which took into account the pros and cons of each of the five sites. The planning assessment for the five site options is at **Appendix III**. Both Heung Yuen Wai and Lin Ma Hang are located at the boundary within the Frontier Closed Area (FCA). Apart from pre-empting possible cross-boundary uses in the future, they are subject to various development constraints, such as rugged topography, significant impact on existing villages and flooding problems. Tung Lung Chau has high conservation value and has been endorsed by the Country and Marine Parks Board for designation as a Country Park. Hei Ling Chau and Kong Nga Po were eventually short-listed for further study.

20. A detailed evaluation of these two site options was then carried out, covering cost-effectiveness, operational effectiveness, planning, engineering and environmental considerations and long-term potential for alternative development from a territorial planning perspective (**Appendix IV**). Both sites met the CSD's operational requirements and presented advantages and disadvantages in different aspects. From an overall territorial planning perspective, and after considering the alternative development potential of both sites, Hei Ling Chau was selected for the feasibility study.

21. Kong Nga Po is situated centrally within the FCA. Given its unique strategic location, the FCA has great development potential for purposes that would facilitate closer economic integration between Hong Kong and the Pearl River Delta Region. During the Study on HK 2030 : Planning Vision and Strategy conducted by the Planning Department, the public also called for judicious use of the FCA to foster

the economic prosperity of Hong Kong. The large-scale construction of penal institutions at Kong Nga Po would pre-empt such long-term development.

### **Summing Up**

22. There is a clear and pressing need to build new penal facilities to address the perennial prison overcrowding problem, to meet the forecast growth in penal population in the next decade and beyond, and to replace the archaic facilities in many of the existing penal institutions. Given the scale of the project, it is difficult, if not impossible, to identify a “problem-free” site. In our view, compared with other locations in Hong Kong, Hei Ling Chau is the best available option in the overall context. While reclamation and construction works will be involved, all necessary mitigation measures will be implemented to minimise the impact on the environment. We also appreciate that the public, especially residents of the outlying islands, may have strong views on the proposed development. We are therefore carrying out extensive public consultations during the course of the feasibility study for maximum transparency, and with a view to finding the most acceptable engineering option for land formation and infrastructure works to be carried out at Hei Ling Chau. Stage 1 of the feasibility study is now under way. Upon completion of Stage 1, we will present the findings and recommendations to the Finance Committee of the Legislative Council before proceeding to Stage 2 of the feasibility study.

**Security Bureau**

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