

**Confirmed Minutes of the Nature Conservation Subcommittee Meeting
held on 15 December 2017 at 10:30 a.m.
in Conference Room, 33/F, Revenue Tower, Wan Chai, Hong Kong**

Present:

Dr Michael LAU (Chairman)
Prof LAU Chi-pang, JP
Prof Kenneth LEUNG
Mr Anthony LOCK
Prof John NG
Prof Nora TAM, BBS, JP
Ir Conrad WONG, BBS, JP
Prof Jonathan WONG
Ms Becky LAM (Secretary)

Absent with Apologies:

Ir Cary CHAN, JP
Dr Billy HAU
Dr HUNG Wing-tat, MH
Ms Julia LAU
Ir Michelle TANG
Dr Eric TSANG

In Attendance:

Environmental Protection Department (EPD)

Mrs Vicki KWOK	Deputy Director of Environmental Protection (2)
Dr Samuel CHUI	Assistant Director (Nature Conservation & Infrastructure Planning)
Ms Vivian CHAN	Senior Administrative Officer (Nature Conservation)
Mr Eric LIU	Forestry Officer (Nature Conservation)
Miss Apple LEUNG	Executive Officer (CBD) 2

Agriculture, Fisheries and Conservation Department (AFCD)

Mr Simon CHAN	Assistant Director (Conservation)
---------------	-----------------------------------

In Attendance for Item 3:

Agriculture, Fisheries and Conservation Department (AFCD)

Mr Dennis MOK	Senior Nature Conservation Officer (Central)
Dr Jackie YIP	Senior Conservation Officer (Biodiversity)

Green Power Limited

Dr MAN Chi Sum

Dr CHENG Luk Ki

Mr SIN Kar Wah

Mr YU Kin Kong

Ms YUEN Yan Ling

Chief Executive Officer

Division Head of Scientific Research and Conservation

Senior Environmental Affairs Manager

Senior Education & Project Officer

Senior Education & Conservation Officer

Action

The Chairman welcomed Members to the meeting and informed that apologies of absence had been received from Ir Cary Chan, Dr Billy Hau, Dr Hung Wing-tat, Ms Julia Lau, Ir Michelle Tang and Dr Eric Tsang.

Item 1 : Matters Arising

2. There was no matter arising from the minutes of the last meeting.

Item 2 : Setting up of the Countryside Conservation Office
(ACE-NC Paper 3/2017)

3. The Chairman invited Members to declare interest. Two Members declared that they were involved in the Lai Chi Wo revitalisation project conducted by the Hong Kong Countryside Foundation. In view that the project was not directly related to the subject matter under discussion, the meeting agreed that both Members could stay on and continue participating in the discussion.

4. As invited by the Chairman, Dr Samuel Chui briefed Members on the setting up of a Countryside Conservation Office (CCO) under the Environmental Protection Department (EPD); the creation of a permanent post of Administrative Officer Staff Grade C (AOSGC) (D2) to head the CCO which would also be responsible for the nature conservation policy; and to utilize the \$1 billion earmarked by the Government to take forward the relevant conservation and revitalisation work, as well as minor improvement work.

Minor Improvement Works

5. A Member considered that the scope of work of the new office might be similar to the Financial Assistance for Maintenance Scheme (FAS) under the Commissioner for Heritage's Office (CHO) which provided subsidies to private owners of graded historic buildings to carry out minor maintenance works to preserve these buildings from deterioration.

6. Mrs Vicki Kwok explained that the CCO would co-ordinate with other bureaux and departments (B/Ds) concerned, and provide an integrated and dedicated mechanism with resources for the conservation and sustainable development of the remote countryside in the long run, with a view to preserving the natural environment, enhancing the local biodiversity and

promoting the sustainable development of the remote villages. While the FAS would focus on the maintenance of graded historic buildings, CCO would adopt a project-based approach, and the revitalisation of Lai Chi Wo and Sha Lo Tung had been selected as priority pilot projects for implementation.

7. A Member expressed support for the setting up of the CCO and suggested the CCO consider the overall conservation needs when conducting minor improvement works, taking into account the surrounding architectural environment, for instance, watercourse management and sewerage improvement facilities.

8. Noting that most of the land around villages and village houses were privately owned, the Chairman enquired on how the CCO would take forward the conservation initiatives. Mrs Vicki Kwok said that the CCO would enhance relevant conservation and revitalisation efforts in co-operation with villagers and non-governmental organisations (NGOs) to refurbish signature structures and to ensure the funding would be used in a prudent and cost-effective manner.

Financial resources for the CCO

9. On a Member's enquiry of whether the \$1 billion earmarked would be established as an endowment fund, Mrs Vicki Kwok clarified that the CCO planned that half of the \$1 billion mentioned above, i.e. \$500 million, would be dedicated to funding the relevant conservation efforts, as well as supporting NGOs and villagers to organise diverse and innovative conservation activities or projects based on an interactive and co-operative approach. The remaining \$500 million would be spent on minor improvement works in remote countryside, and priority would be given to the areas with more significant conservation value. Funding for these minor works would be sought by the CCO according to the Government's established procedures.

10. Dr Samuel Chui supplemented that while the funds injected into the Environment and Conservation Fund (ECF) served as seed money to generate annual investment returns to support various projects, funding for these minor works would be sought by the CCO according to the established procedures.

11. On a Member's further enquiry of whether additional funding would be obtained for the staffing and operation costs of the office, Mrs Vicki Kwok replied that resources would be secured through established resources allocation procedure to maintain effective operation of the CCO.

12. On a Member's enquiry of whether the use of \$1 billion dedicated to the CCO would be time-bound, Mrs Vicki Kwok said that the setting up of a CCO marked the initial step towards promoting the sustainable development of remote countryside. She anticipated that more resources would be secured upon review of the effectiveness of the work of the CCO.

Coordination between government departments

13. A Member enquired on whether resources from the CCO would be earmarked for the management of facilities in ensuring its optimum utilization and to better meet the needs of the public.

14. Mrs Vicki Kwok undertook to consider Members' suggestions in consultation with the Advisory Committee (AC) to see the best way for CCO to coordinate with the relevant B/Ds in the management and maintenance of facilities.

15. In response to a Member's enquiry of whether CCO would involve the work of AFCD in the management of country and marine parks, Mrs Vicki Kwok said that the management of country parks and marine parks was governed by the Country Parks Ordinance and Marine Parks Ordinance respectively. Nonetheless, EPD would continue to maintain close collaboration with the AFCD to provide the necessary policy support.

16. A Member was of the view that coordination between the AFCD and EPD was important because the conservation of remote countryside areas as well as the management and designation of country parks were both integral to the overall policy in nature conservation. In the light of certain priority sites identified by the Government for enhanced conservation, the Member suggested strengthening education and publicity efforts to enhance the public's knowledge on the existing conservation projects in the remote countryside.

Setting a vision in the work of CCO

17. A Member considered that it was important for the CCO to gain support and coordination with various B/Ds for the nature conservation policy to be conducted effectively. Another Member concurred and suggested that CCO should be established with a vision to developing Hong Kong into a liveable city, including preserving the natural ecology of the countryside so that more people would enjoy the beauty and nature of the countryside areas.

18. To ensure a prudent use of resources, Mrs Vicki Kwok said that Lai Chi Wo and Sha Lo Tung had been selected as two priority pilot projects for countryside revitalisation. The Government would make reference to the experiences gained and keep under review the implementation of the pilot projects to develop a dedicated and effective mechanism for coordinating collaboration of the relevant B/Ds for conservation and sustainable development of the remote countryside in the long run.

19. With reference to the nature conservation policy introduced by the Government over the past ten years, a Member considered that reference could be made to the experiences gained and to evaluate the effectiveness of the

measures implemented with a view to enhancing existing conservation measures and developing an innovative mindset in nature conservation and sustainable development in Hong Kong.

20. To ensure the implementation of a coherent nature conservation policy, Mrs Vicki Kwok explained that the proposed Assistant Director of Environmental Protection (Nature Conservation) (ADEP[NC]) created to lead the CCO, would also take up the nature conservation portfolio from the existing Assistant Director of Environmental Protection (Nature Conservation and Infrastructure Planning) (ADEP[CI]).

21. The Chairman considered that a clear mission statement for CCO should be developed. Mrs Vicki Kwok agreed that keeping members of the public and stakeholders well informed of the work and mission of CCO was important. She said that the CCO would deploy personnel with the necessary experience and expertise in building a relationship and maintaining a close communication with the villagers in the New Territories as well as other stakeholders.

22. A Member suggested engaging academics in researching and developing a framework for assessing the effectiveness of the existing nature conservation policy and measures with a view to striking a balance between conservation and development. Mrs Vicki Kwok said that the membership of the proposed AC would comprise different stakeholders including academics, green groups and village representatives. She would consider the suggestion of facilitating the participation of academics in reviewing the work of CCO as it developed further.

Collaboration with villagers and stakeholders

23. Apart from agricultural rehabilitation, a Member suggested that diverse and innovative programmes to encourage collaboration with villagers and NGOs could be encouraged. Referring to the experiences in Taiwan, she considered the green camping and family-run lodging or restaurants in the form of village houses could be introduced to Hong Kong as economic incentives for villagers to support the conservation efforts. In response, Mrs Vicki Kwok agreed that economic activities could promote the sustainable development of these areas and to obtain the support from local villagers. She said that the CCO would explore measures to facilitate the granting of relevant licenses for these small businesses.

Education and publicity

24. A Member considered the CCO could provide opportunities to reach out to individuals through education programmes and integrating nature conservation into the syllabus in schools to further promote nature conservation in the community. She agreed that Lai Chi Wo and Sha Lo Tung could be

identified as priority sites for countryside revitalisation with the aim of extending the initiatives progressively to other remote countryside areas, and suggested providing a timetable for implementing the two pilot projects.

25. A Member supported the removal of rubbish bins from country parks and suggested that the initiative of “Take Your Litter Home” should be promoted under CCO in the conservation of remote countryside areas. Mrs Vicki Kwok replied that while local villages would need to be equipped with rubbish bins and recycling bins, AFCD would continue to promote the “Take Your Litter Home” by removing all bins from hiking trails.

26. On a Member’s suggestions of devising a detailed policy guidelines or a roadmap for the work of CCO, Mrs Vicki Kwok said that a review of the nature conservation policy would be undertaken as and when necessary and appropriate having regard to the experience gained from the pilot projects at Lai Chi Wo and Sha Lo Tung and in consultation with the AC.

27. A Member was of the view that more detailed information on the implementation arrangements of CCO should be made available in future. However, he suggested that in the meantime, publicity efforts should be enhanced before the establishment of CCO to instill a sense of participation for individuals on nature conservation.

Item 3 : Application under Nature Conservation Management Agreement Scheme: Habitat and Biodiversity Conservation Scheme in Sha Lo Tung 2018-2020
(ACE-NC Paper 4/2017)

28. The Chairman informed the meeting that one application under the Nature Conservation Management Agreement (MA) Scheme had been vetted by the Assessment Panel consisting of representatives from EPD and AFCD. Members’ views and recommendations on the application would be submitted to the ECF Committee for consideration on funding support.

29. The Chairman invited Members to declare interest. A Member declared that two project team members were his students.

30. With the aid of a powerpoint presentation, Mr Dennis Mok briefed Members on the background, objectives and key activities to be undertaken by the applicant under the project. He also advised Members on the assessment results and recommendations of the Assessment Panel.

[Representatives of Green Power Limited joined the meeting at this juncture.]

31. Dr Man Chi-sum and Mr Sin Kar-wah introduced the background, objectives and goals of the MA project.

Enforcement against non-compliances

32. Addressing a Member's concern on the effectiveness of vandalism control measures including patrolling and using surveillance cameras, Mr Sin Kar-wah explained that traffic signs would be erected at major roads entering Sha Lo Tung to warn drivers against the use of off-road vehicles at ecologically sensitive areas. A villager would be hired to monitor the site and carry out prompt rectification actions as necessary. Furthermore, Green Power had liaised with several off-road vehicle associations with a view to establishing a network to reach out to owners or users of off-road vehicles. Promotion and education activities were proposed to these owners and users. For non-compliances, footages taken by surveillance cameras would be reported to the relevant authorities for enforcement actions.

33. While expressing support for undertaking conservation work at Sha Lo Tung, a Member showed her concerns about the feasibility of the project as Green Power was not an enforcement authority to undertake any actions against non-compliances. Moreover, she also concerned about the lack of insurance coverage for road safety, potential conflicts that might arise among the local villagers and farmers for the project.

34. Dr Man Chi-sum responded that in order to deter off-road vehicles, Green Power was currently liaising with the landowner and the Government on the feasibility of deploying road blocks at the site. He also mentioned that the landowner had already hired security patrolling services at Sha Lo Tung to prevent further environmental degradation.

Effectiveness of proposed measures

35. Considering that Sha Lo Tung had already been extensively damaged when baseline study was being conducted under this project, a Member enquired on whether there were any targets and benchmarks for assessing the effectiveness of the project in restoring the habitats and biodiversity of the site. She opined that experts should be engaged to explore the restoration of ecosystem and ecological functions of the habitats. She further doubted the effectiveness of the project in conserving and restoring the habitats in Sha Lo Tung as the intensive management would be carried out on 1.9 ha out of 11.45 ha of the project site, and the focus of the extensive management was to remove invasive vegetation and debris.

36. On top of the baseline study, Dr Cheng Luk-ki advised that Green Power had commenced a monitoring programme on odonates in 2003 and conducted literature review. The information obtained would be compared with the results of the baseline study to determine whether there were any changes in the biodiversity, as well as the existence and number of individual species. He mentioned that academics and experts would be engaged to conduct the baseline study. With regard to the restoration of ecosystem and ecological

functions of the habitats, he agreed that merely removing invasive vegetation would not be effective with rapid regrowth and might even lead to detrimental impacts on the water quality. It was important to first determine the factors that contributed to the rich biodiversity of the habitats in the past, and this called for the introduction of pilot schemes which involved the establishment of artificial marshes, eco-ponds and organic agriculture on a small scale. The outcome of the pilot schemes could provide information for the establishment of benchmarks and targets for conserving and enhancing the habitats in Sha Lo Tung.

37. A Member was not optimistic that the factors contributing to the rich biodiversity in the past could be identified within the project duration. She remarked that it would take time to establish the artificial marshes and eco-ponds and monitor and analyze the conditions of the new habitats.

38. Mr Sin Kar-wah said that the key to restoring the habitats laid in re-establishing the irrigation system. Through the introduction of organic agriculture, he considered that the hydrology of the site could be restored and this could in turn deter the growth of invasive or exotic species. Dr Man Chi-sum supplemented that Green Power would maintain in close collaboration with AFCD such that the project could tie in with the planned management of Sha Lo Tung after non-in-situ land exchange.

Objective of the project

39. Mr Sin Kar-wah said that the aim of the project was to restore the habitats and biodiversity of Sha Lo Tung given that the ecological value of the habitats had dropped significantly over the past 10 years. Such deterioration was particularly evident in the rapidly declining number of odonates and other species of conservation interest. He further explained that the destruction of the irrigation systems by human activities including the use of off-road vehicles and change of topography had led to the drying up of abandoned wet farmlands. Furthermore, with the intrusion of invasive and exotic species in abandoned farmlands, the survival of species adapted to wet environments including odonates, amphibians, reptiles and freshwater fishes was greatly threatened.

40. Given that AFCD might take over the management of the site after two years, a Member opined that a long term strategy should be devised with clear objectives. Rather than focusing on the conservation of specific species, he considered it more important to restore and enhance the habitats during the transition period so as to attract and support the recovery and growth of a multitude of wildlife taxa.

41. Dr Cheng Luk-ki advised that the ultimate goal of the project was to restore the habitats and biodiversity in Sha Lo Tung. As part of the effort to re-establish the baseline of the habitat before environmental degradation, assistance had been sought from the local villagers to recall from their memory

the hydrology and stream flows in the area. Nevertheless, as the MA project only covered about 11.45 ha of private land, only minimal work including monitoring, removal of traps and invasive/exotic vegetation could be conducted at the streams which were located on government land. The removal of invasive/exotic vegetation would be conducted with care in order to minimize the impact on the water quality of the catchments.

Support from the local community

42. A Member supported protecting and enhancing the existing habitats in Sha Lo Tung via proactive management before the non-in-situ land exchange. He considered that the support of the local community, especially farmers, was vital for the restoration of agricultural activities on abandoned wet farmlands which were favourable for the growth of aquatic insects and amphibians.

43. Mr Sin Kar-wah advised that Green Power had liaised with the village representatives of Cheung Uk and Lei Uk and obtained their support for the project. Furthermore, the village representative of Lei Uk was establishing a social enterprise which would form a partnership with Green Power to restore agricultural activities on wet farmlands. As of now, the social enterprise comprised more than 30 local villagers and farmers and would take up patrolling duties.

44. The Chairman suggested that the applicant could make reference to studies and research conducted in the mid-1990s by researchers and consultants for re-establishing the baseline of the habitats and species at Sha Lo Tung before environmental degradation. Given that the project would only last for two years, he considered that a consensus should be formed with the villagers on the long-term planning and management of Sha Lo Tung.

45. Dr Man Chi-sum said that the objective of establishing the social enterprise was to restore organic agriculture on wet farmlands on a long-term basis. Support had been obtained from the villagers of both Cheung Uk and Lei Uk as well as the land owner. Given that the continued operations of the farmlands would fall under the management of AFCD after the land exchange, it was aimed that a platform could be formed to facilitate cooperation amongst the social enterprise, Green Power and the Government during the transition period.

Monitoring and research

46. The Chairman suggested the applicant explore the possibility of collaborating with local universities to conduct monitoring and research at the project site. The documentation of the restoration of the site could serve as a case study for restoration works at other similar sites.

47. Dr Man Chi-sum agreed to invite local universities and AFCD to undertake long-term monitoring programmes at Sha Lo Tung.

[Representatives of Green Power Limited left the meeting at this juncture.]

Deliberation

48. Considering that the project would only last for two years, the Chairman requested AFCD to provide information on the planned management of the site after non-in-situ land exchange.

49. Mr Simon Chan said that the MA project aimed to prevent further habitat degradation and embark on conservation and restoration works while the land exchange was in progress. AFCD was also planning to undertake pilot restoration projects at the stream courses which were identified as Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI). He mentioned that the establishment of CCO would foster coordinated and dedicated resources for the conservation of remote countryside including Sha Lo Tung. With reference to a conservation plan developed during the undertaking of an environmental impact assessment for the Pilot Project for Public-Private Partnership Conservation Scheme at Sha Lo Tung, the Government would devise a comprehensive plan for the conservation of Sha Lo Tung in the long run.

50. Dr Samuel Chui stressed that the Government had placed great emphasis on the conservation of Sha Lo Tung as it was one of the priority sites identified under the New Nature Conservation Policy. Whilst the Government worked on land exchange arrangements and setting up of the CCO, the MA project provided a good opportunity for gaining experience and knowledge on the conservation of Sha Lo Tung.

51. Given the limitations of the project, three Members considered that priority should be allocated to protecting Sha Lo Tung from further degradation due to vandalism and conducting studies to obtain the necessary baseline data to support long-term habitat restoration.

52. Mr Simon Chan agreed on the priority to prevent further degradation of the site by vandalism, and noted that the project proponent had secured the support of the local community in preventing habitat degradation at the site. Furthermore, AFCD was exploring the feasibility of installing road blocks to deter the access of off-road vehicles in collaboration with relevant government departments.

53. Members generally supported the application with the following recommendations:

- (a) Green Power should make it clear that the work to be carried out at the intensive management areas was on a trial basis, with an aim of

Action

gaining knowledge and experience to inform future long term habitat restoration and management at Sha Lo Tung;

- (b) In view of the ecological importance of Sha Lo Tung in particular for odonates, Green Power should engage professional ecologists to carry out the ecological surveys and monitoring, and bring forward patrolling to prevent further eco-vandalism;
- (c) Green Power should make reference to previous studies on Sha Lo Tung in establishing the baseline ecological profile, to assist the habitat restoration and management work under this MA project;
- (d) The Advisory Committee to be established to steer the project should involve relevant stakeholders and experts/academics on ecology and hydrology; and
- (e) Barrier should be installed across the access road/trail to Sha Lo Tung at appropriate place to prevent off-road vehicles from entering and damaging the valley.

Item 4 : Any Other Business

54. A Member considered that there was a need to review the MA mechanism in view that many MA projects were limited by the funding and time frame to achieve sustained success. Dr Jackie Yip agreed to prepare some background information on the MA projects for Members' discussion at the next NCSC meeting.

AFCD

55. There was no other business for discussion at the meeting.

Item 5 : Date of next meeting

56. The Chairman informed that Members would be advised on the date of the next meeting and the agenda in due course.

**Nature Conservation Subcommittee Secretariat
January 2018**