

# HKIUD REVIEW OF THE THREE WKCD CONCEPT PLANS

2 December 2010

## 1. Introduction

The Hong Kong Institute of Urban Design (HKIUD) formed an expert panel with a view to reviewing the three WKCD Concept Plans. The Expert Panel met individually with the three design teams—Office for Metropolitan Architecture (OMA), Foster+Partners and Rocco Design Architects Ltd. over a three-day period between 17 and 19 November 2010 and conducted a concluding panel review session to discuss the merits and concerns of each scheme, before reaching a final evaluation. The following recapitulates the main points discussed (see expert panel details in Appendix I and summary matrix at Appendix II) and the conclusion of the HKIUD Expert Panel review of the three WKCD Concept Plans.

## 2. Discussions on the three Concept Plans

### 2.1. OMA: *Project for a New Dimension*

#### 2.1.1. *Overview of the Concept Plan*

Rem Koolhaas divides the site into five areas from east to west, with three villages and two parks in between them. The 'M+ village' at the east is designed using 'staggering blocks'. It comprises an M+ museum, a visual arts factory, residences and hotels. At the west side is the 'Theatre Village', where the music hall, concert hall, performance arts factory, Great Theatre and other theatres of various sizes are located.

The 'Middle Village' bears resemblance to the 'old city' of Hong Kong. All the buildings are small in size and closely knitted together, within the fine grained urban fabric, with the exception of the première cinema and theatres, which are located at the east and west end of the Middle Village. Street markets, shops offering local themed products exist at ground level on both sides of the streets and are complemented with traditional signboards above in order to achieve a local atmosphere.

According to Rem Koolhaas, the concept is based on the premise that the new city needs to develop in an organic manner, using the village as a metaphor and the planning is an extrapolation from the urban morphology and vibrant character of Kowloon.

#### 2.1.2. *Merits*

'Project for a New Dimension' is a visionary project that attempts to think out of the box, pushing the boundary of the design brief and requirements of the WKCD Authority. The scheme emphasizes the importance of serving as the Cultural Map of Hong Kong and the three proposed villages are with distinct characters. The architect presents his in-depth reading and understanding of Hong Kong through carefully considered design without being prescriptive. The scheme, to be implemented in phases, has built in flexibility to enable organic growth, allowing the scheme to evolve, expand, change and develop without the need to alter the overall design concept.

The loop bridge at the west end not only attempts to solve the problem of traffic congestion, it is also a bold statement of the vehicular entrance and a landmark for the Cultural District. The sizable open spaces within the scheme will provide enriching experiences in reading the city and the open space corridors will act as breezeways to ventilate the hinterland. The open plaza south of the Express Rail Terminus offers a sense of arrival from the Terminus to the Cultural District.

The scheme includes several opportunities for land marine interface, bringing water inland and encouraging activities on water, adding vibrancy to the harbourfront.

### *2.1.3. Concerns*

As the design is visionary and attempts to push the boundary of the brief, there would be debates throughout the design and development processes and would require the full engagement and good will of various stakeholders for its implementation.

The loop bridge poses a challenge to the existing legislative framework, that is, the Protection of the Harbour Ordinance. Although the scheme has a fall-back option should the loop bridge option is not pursued, the strong character of the scheme will then be compromised.

The considerable scale of M+ and the fine-grained middle village do not seem to agree. There is a doubt on whether the massing of the middle village is appropriate.

The proposed floating black box theatre will need to resolve issues related to fire escape, noise and air pollution.

One of the pedestrian link with the underground travellers system, despite providing an alternative route for people who are in a hurry or during inclement weather is purely functional and does not offer an enjoyable experience of the city.

## **2.2. Foster+Partners: The City Park**

### *2.2.1. Overview*

The City Park scheme by Foster+Partners is an open space/park response with comprehensive infrastructure integrated below ground. The concept is based on the premise that in order to be successful, the West Kowloon Cultural District should be an extension of the city leaving a vast amount of land for open space in the form of a large 23-hectare city park towards the west for the enjoyment of Hong Kong people.

The designer explains that the cultural identity of the scheme is confluence of east and west embedded within the tight urban quarter. Most of the cultural venues are located within the urban quarter with the exception of MPV and Opera House located on either side with a hotel wrapped around the tunnel portal to capture the magnificent views towards Hong Kong Island. Several pedestrian linkages to the neighbouring developments are included

and vehicular traffic is below grade with an APM above grade for ease of pedestrian movement.

The plan adopts comprehensive sustainability strategies towards a carbon neutral development with several measures such as anaerobic digester to generate bio gases to fuel bio buses etc as a model development for Hong Kong.

### *2.2.2. Merits*

The proposed scheme is simple and well-connected, extending the urban grid of Kowloon with two main east-west axes and a diagonal axis to the Express Rail Station. The tight urban quarter on either side of the east-west axes tries to replicate the tight urban morphology of Kowloon that results in the vibrancy of Hong Kong.

The scheme offers a large 23-hectare city park with some 5,000 mature trees for the people of Hong Kong and a continuous promenade along the edge of the water. It is proposed to be a carbon neutral development and hence has the potential to become a model for sustainable development.

### *2.2.3. Concerns*

The design team makes reference to the West End model in London but misses the opportunity to develop a more unique answer to the task of creating a cultural district for West Kowloon for an aspiring Asian metropolis.

A well thought out open space framework other than the main pedestrian avenue for this large site is missing. The large footprints of cultural venues along the east-west axis closer to the waterfront might question the intended diversity of the tight urban quarter within the District.

The diagonal axis does not emphasize enough the link to the Express Rail station as an entry gateway for visitors from Mainland China and therefore does not create a strong sense of arrival. As a waterfront site, the scheme proposes very limited land marine interface.

The city park may serve as a visual relief for the residents of Kowloon Station but as an urban park and a green lung, it may seem a bit too far from the adjacent districts in densely developed Kowloon. The 5,000 trees proposed to create the city park may take a long time to mature and may become very expensive to maintain in the long run.

The location of the Mega Performance Venue and Opera House on both sides and the hotel wrapping around the tunnel portal seem rather isolated. The urban form (in comparison to similar venues in Sydney) is quite generic. The positioning of these venues is hidden by the proposed forest and may block the connection to the north.

## **2.3. Rocco Design Architects Ltd: The Cultural Connect**

### *2.3.1. Overview*

The 'Cultural Connect' by Rocco Design Limited is a public space response and is built environment oriented. The design creates a public realm framework consisting of alleys, streets, squares and plazas interconnected at multiple levels. The public space framework is central to the scheme. Around the public space there is a different mix of arts, cultural and performance venues with the intention to create cultural synergies.

Additional features for cultural and educational uses have been incorporated into the plan to strengthen the local culture. There is an extensive green space incorporated into the plan and part of this space is situated on a roof level with shopping and exhibition spaces underneath. A large park at grade is located closer to the West and connected to the promenade wrapping the site along the edge of the water.

Additional land marine features in the form of floating pontoons, a suspended bridge and swimming pool are included within the plan to offer opportunities to enjoy the waterfront.

### *2.3.2. Merits*

The scheme exudes a Hong Kong flavour by reinterpreting the local culture, identities and tradition in a contemporary and cosmopolitan manner. The scheme adds additional local cultural and educational uses and is developed with in-depth design and details. It offers a cultural core and a city link integrated with a high quality and intricately designed 3D public space, providing a varied pedestrian experience and integration with the pedestrian link across Canton Road.

The scheme is the one developed with most in-depth design development and detail.

The plan offers a continuous promenade and large green open space along the south and western edge and provides a variation of land marine interface.

### *2.3.3. Concerns*

One of the key elements of the plan is a large single/low rise podium structure with green roofs and buildings forming the edge of the development that gives a sense of rigidity to the plan. This might impose restrictions and render the plan less flexible to accommodate future changes for a more diverse urban development at WKCD.

Green spaces are on the roofs of structures and access from the green roofs to the waterfront promenade is limited. The floating pontoons although a good addition to the waterfront on the southern side may suffer from the noise and air pollution issues generated from marine traffic. The compliance of this measure with the Protection of the Harbour Ordinance needs to be examined.

The implementation of the plan with multiple designers and developers will be difficult as any change may result in the loss of integrity of the master plan unless there is specific design control through detailed guidelines.

### **3. Conclusion**

In the concluding panel review session on 19 November 2010, the merits and concerns of each scheme was discussed including what each proposal offers specifically as a Cultural District at West Kowloon for Hong Kong people for now and for future generations. Towards the end of the concluding panel discussion, the majority of the members of the Expert Panel supported the 'OMA: Project for a New Dimension' scheme followed by Rocco Design Architects Ltd scheme. The OMA scheme was preferred as it offers an innovative approach and an opportunity for the future positioning of Hong Kong as the cultural capital of Asia. The report was prepared by the Public Affairs Committee of HKIUD and the report and the final recommendation was endorsed by the Council on 30 November 2010.

## Appendix I

### A) Review session with OMA

**Date** : 17/11/2010

**Time** : 6:30 p.m. – 8:00 p.m.

**Venue** : InnoCentre - WKCDA Exhibition Venue,  
72 Tat Chee Avenue, Kowloon Tong

#### **Attendance:**

##### **Moderator:**

Mr. Vincent NG	Vice President (Local Policies)
Prof. Bernard V. LIM, JP	President
Dr. Sujata GOVADA	Vice President (International Relations)
Prof. John NG	Hon. Secretary
Mr. Charles LI	Hon. Treasurer
Mr. Ivan HO	Chairman of Public Affairs Committee
Prof. Hendrik TIEBEN	Academic Advisor
Mr. Donald CHOI	Public Affairs Committee Member
Mr. Franklin YU	Public Affairs Committee Member
Mr. Ken CHEUNG	Public Affairs Committee Member
Mr. CHEN Zhi Dong	Panel Member

##### **Representatives from OMA:**

Mr. Rem Koolhaas	Founding Partner , OMA
Mr. David Gianotten	General Manager, Architect , OMA Asia
Ms. Betty Ng	Architect, OMA

**B) Review session with Foster+Partners**

**(i) HKIUD Internal Review Session**

**Date: 17/11/2010**

**Time : 8:00 p.m. – 9:30 p.m.**

**Venue : InnoCentre - WKCDA Exhibition Venue,  
72 Tat Chee Avenue, Kowloon Tong**

**Attendance:**

Moderator:

Dr. Sujata GOVADA Vice President (International Relations)

Prof. Bernard V. LIM, JP President

Mr. Vincent NG Vice President (Local Policies)

Mr. Charles LI Hon. Treasurer

Mr. Ivan HO Chairman of Public Affairs Committee

Prof. Hendrik TIEBEN Academic Advisor

Mr. Donald CHOI Public Affairs Committee Member

Mr. Franklin YU Public Affairs Committee Member

Mr. Ken CHEUNG Public Affairs Committee Member

Mr. CHEN Zhi Dong Panel Member

Mr. Laurence LIAUW Panel Member

**(ii) Review Session with Foster+Partners**

**Date: 19/11/2010**

**Time : 10:00 a.m. – 11:30 a.m.**

**Venue : InnoCentre - WKCDA Exhibition Venue,  
72 Tat Chee Avenue, Kowloon Tong**

**Attendance:**

Moderator:

Dr. Sujata GOVADA Vice President (International Relations)

Prof. Bernard V. LIM, JP President

Prof. Hendrik TIEBEN Academic Advisor

Mr. Ian HAU Panel Member

Representatives from Foster+Partners:

Mr. Spencer de Grey Head of Design

Mr. Colin Ward Partner

Mr. Ricky Sandhu Partner

Mr. Kevin Chan Architect

**C) Review session with Rocco Design Architects Ltd**

**Date : 19/11/2010**

**Time : 6:30 p.m. – 8:00 p.m.**

**Venue : InnoCentre - WKCDA Exhibition Venue,  
72 Tat Chee Avenue, Kowloon Tong**

**Attendance**

Moderator:

Prof. Hendrik TIEBEN                      Academic Advisor

Prof. Bernard V. LIM, JP                      President

Dr. Sujata GOVADA                      Vice President (International Relations)

Prof. John NG                      Hon. Secretary

Mr. Charles LI                      Hon. Treasurer

Mr. Ivan HO                      Chairman of Public Affairs Committee

Mr. Donald CHOI                      Public Affairs Committee Member

Mr. Franklin YU                      Public Affairs Committee Member

Mr. P. Y. TAM                      Public Affairs Committee Member

Mr. Ken Cheung                      Public Affairs Committee Member

Mr. CHEN Zhi Dong                      Panel Member

Mr. Laurence LIAUW                      Panel Member

Mr. Ian HAU                      Panel Member

Mr. Bernie Harrad                      Panel Member

Mr. Kelvin LEUNG                      Panel Member

Mr. Kenneth LI                      Panel Member

Representative from Rocco Design Architects Ltd:

Mr. William Tam                      Director

#### **D) HKIUD Internal Review and Conclusion Session**

**Date : 19/11/2010**

**Time : 8:00 p.m. – 9:30 p.m.**

**Venue : InnoCentre - WKCDA Exhibition Venue,  
72 Tat Chee Avenue, Kowloon Tong**

#### **Attendance**

Moderator:

Mr. Ivan HO	Chairman of Public Affairs Committee
Prof. Bernard V. LIM, JP	President
Dr. Sujata GOVADA	Vice President (International Relations)
Prof. Hendrik TIEBEN	Academic Advisor
Prof. John NG	Hon. Secretary
Mr. Charles LI	Hon. Treasurer
Mr. Donald CHOI	Public Affairs Committee Member
Mr. Franklin YU	Public Affairs Committee Member
Mr. P. Y. TAM	Public Affairs Committee Member
Mr. Ken Cheung	Public Affairs Committee Member
Mr. CHEN Zhi Dong	Panel Member
Mr. Laurence LIAUW	Panel Member
Mr. Ian HAU	Panel Member
Mr. Bernie Harrad	Panel Member
Mr. Kelvin LEUNG	Panel Member
Mr. Kenneth LI	Panel Member

Appendix II

Urban Design Framework for Reviewing the Three WKCD Concept Plans – Highlights and key points

Criteria	OMA: Project for a New Dimension		Foster+Partners: The City Park		Rocco Design: The Cultural Connect	
	Merits	Concerns	Merits	Concerns	Merits	Concerns
<b>Conceptual</b>						
Vision: design for change	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>To think out of the box</li> <li>Visionary &amp; will stimulate imaginations &amp; debates</li> </ul>			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Uses London’s West End as a reference model but misses the opportunity to design a unique ‘cultural district’ at ‘West Kowloon’</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Central to the scheme is the public realm framework</li> </ul>	
Understanding of culture	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Importance of a Cultural Map of Hong Kong</li> <li>Presents the architect’s understanding of the urban grid</li> <li>Film &amp; Popular culture introduced</li> </ul>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Culture embedded within the tight urban quarter</li> </ul>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The plan offers a cultural core &amp; a city link integrated with a high quality intricately designed 3D public space</li> </ul>	

Criteria	OMA: Project for a New Dimension		Foster+Partners: The City Park		Rocco Design: The Cultural Connect	
	Merits	Concerns	Merits	Concerns	Merits	Concerns
Identities/ Character	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Loop bridge forms a major design landmark</li> <li>• Distinct character of each of the three villages</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• If the fallback option instead of the bridge were adopted, the character of the scheme would be affected</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Reflects the urban grid of Kowloon with two main east-west axes &amp; a diagonal axis to the X-Rail Station</li> <li>• The tight urban quarters on either ends of the east-west axes try to replicate the tight morphology and vibrancy in Kowloon</li> </ul>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Gives a Hong Kong flavor by reinterpreting local culture, identities and tradition in a contemporary manner</li> <li>• Offers varied pedestrian experience and integrates well with a pedestrian link across Canton Road</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The MLP design might impose restrictions and discouragement for a more diverse urban development of WKCD</li> <li>• The plan is rather rigid and is less flexible to accommodate future changes</li> </ul>
<b>Approach</b>						
Understanding of existing constraints & mitigation proposals	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Loop bridge could potentially help to resolve traffic congestion problem</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The design may stimulate a lot of debates and require the good will of many stakeholders</li> </ul>			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Adds additional local cultural &amp; educational uses</li> </ul>	

Criteria	OMA: Project for a New Dimension		Foster+Partners: The City Park		Rocco Design: The Cultural Connect	
	Merits	Concerns	Merits	Concerns	Merits	Concerns
Environment and Sustainability		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The proposed floating black box theatre will need to solve fire escape, noise and air pollution issues</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Proposed to be a carbon neutral development with the potential to become a model for sustainable development</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The 5,000 trees may take a long time to mature and may become expensive to maintain</li> </ul>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The proposed floating pontoons may need to solve the problem of noise and air pollution generated by the Hong Kong – Mainland marine traffic</li> </ul>
Flexibility vs fixed cultural programmes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Flexible, not prescriptive, enabling organic growth in phases</li> </ul>					

Criteria	OMA: Project for a New Dimension		Foster+Partners: The City Park		Rocco Design: The Cultural Connect	
	Merits	Concerns	Merits	Concerns	Merits	Concerns
<b>Design Framework</b>						
Built environment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Positioning of the open space will provide an enriching experience in reading the city</li> <li>Open space corridors act as breezeways</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Further clarification on the disposition of the commercial aspect is required</li> <li>The large scale of M+ &amp; the fine-grained middle village appear to be conflicting</li> <li>It is not clear whether the massing of the middle village is appropriate</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>A large 23-ha city park with some 5,000 mature trees with a continuous promenade along edge of the water</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The large plots of cultural venues along the east-west axis closer to the waterfront might question the intended diversity of the tight urban quarters</li> <li>The location of the Mega Performance Venue (MPV) and Opera on both sides with the hotel wrapping around the tunnel portal seems rather isolated and the urban form is quite generic</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>A continuous promenade with large green open space along the southern and western edge</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>A large single/low rise structure with green roofs &amp; buildings forming the edge of the development, giving a sense of rigidity to the plan</li> <li>Green spaces are on the roofs of structures and access from the green roofs to the waterfront promenades is limited</li> </ul>

Criteria	OMA: Project for a New Dimension		Foster+Partners: The City Park		Rocco Design: The Cultural Connect	
	Merits	Concerns	Merits	Concerns	Merits	Concerns
Transportation / Connectivity/ accessibility	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Loop bridge as an attempt to solve traffic congestion</li> <li>• Open plaza south of the X-Rail Terminus offers a sense of arrival to the District</li> <li>• Both at grade &amp; underground access</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Underground alternative traveller system does not offer enjoyable pedestrian experience</li> </ul>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The diagonal axis does not emphasize enough the link to the X-Rail Station &amp; does not create a strong sense of arrival</li> <li>• The MPV and Opera House may be hidden by the proposed forest &amp; block the connection to the north</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The tramway to alleviate internal traffic</li> <li>• Extending the existing street grid from Jordon to site</li> <li>• Main pedestrian spine connects all major open spaces</li> </ul>	
Open Space			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The city park offers a visual relief for the residents of Kowloon Station</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The city park as an urban green lung seems to be located further away from the dense development in adjacent Kowloon districts</li> </ul>		

Criteria	OMA: Project for a New Dimension		Foster+Partners: The City Park		Rocco Design: The Cultural Connect	
	Merits	Concerns	Merits	Concerns	Merits	Concerns
Land/marine Interface	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Active land marine interface, bringing water inland &amp; having activities on along water edge</li> </ul>			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Very limited land marine interface</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>A variety of land marine interface</li> </ul>	
Phasing and implementation		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Loop bridge poses challenge to existing system, e.g. the Protection of the Harbor Ordinance</li> </ul>				<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Implementation will depend on multiple designers &amp; developers and any change may result in the loss of integrity of the master plan unless specific design control with very detailed guidelines is in place</li> <li>The floating pontoons may not comply with the Protection of the Harbour Ordinance</li> </ul>