



香港城市設計學會  
Hong Kong Institute of Urban Design

26 May 2020

By email: sdev@devb.gov.hk

Mr. WONG Wai Lun, Michael, JP

Secretary for Development

Development Bureau

18/F, West Wing, Central Government Offices,

2 Tim Mei Avenue, Tamar, Hong Kong

Dear Mr. Wong,

**Re: Comments of the Public Affairs Committee of HKIUD on Site 3 of the New Central Harbourfront**

On behalf of the Hong Kong Institute of Urban Design, we would like to submit, on the attached file for your consideration our comments on the Site 3 of the New Central Harbourfront. We are also pleased to meet relevant officers to further explain the contents therein if necessary. Should further information be required, please kindly contact me or Ms. Cherry Lau, our Administrative Officer at 2235 9057.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'Joel Chan', written over a horizontal line.

(Joel CHAN)  
President, HKIUD

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'P. Y. Tam', written over a horizontal line.

( P. Y. TAM )  
Chairman, Public Affairs Committee, HKIUD

cc:

Ms. HO Pui Ling, Doris, JP, Deputy Secretary for Development (Planning & Lands)1, DEVB

Miss CHEUNG Man Yee, Rosalind, Prin AS (Harbour), DEVB

Mr. Vincent NG, JP, Chairman, Harbourfront Commission

Mr. Ivan Ho, HKIUD Representative in Harbourfront Commission

Council and PAC Members

Hong Kong Institute of Urban Design Limited



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## Comments of the Public Affairs Committee of HKIUD on Site 3 of the New Central Harbourfront

1. **We do not** intend to contest the 50:50 split between design and price in the tender process. It is appreciated that the two-envelope approach would take design merit into account, and that Government would only open the price envelopes of those tenders which are found to have sufficient design merit. **We do have concern on** how the designs are to be evaluated, such as in the marking system and the type of expertise required in the assessment panel.
2. Whilst this site is a prime site, it is laden with a lot of constraints. The development on this site would foreseeably require some sort of compromise - a balance between achieving the maximum possible development potential and land-sale price, and at the same time meeting public aspirations for a less dense environ on this and other harbourfront sites, enabling the water edge itself to stand out as a green icon of the new Central Harbourfront - as per views gathered in rounds of public engagement in the Urban Design Study in 2007 to 2011. **We would not** seek for substantial relaxation of building heights and volumes to accommodate the rather ambitious prescribed 150,000 sq m GFA and the indicative 5 basements. **We would** rather further pursue the broad urban design concept as shown in the UDS - that this development should act as a pedestrian corridor linking the hinterland to the waterfront and should provide a broad, well landscaped deck set along low-rise building elements, with ample opportunities for enjoyment of the spaces by the public. **We would** thus suggest that the tender conditions should set out more clearly such planning intentions and requirements, including but not limited to accessibility, walkability, visual interest, appropriate soft landscaping, greening and shading, etc.
3. **Building heights – Design principles** are more important. The building envelope and lines of building height control as shown in the current Planning Brief are quite rigid and may possibly stifle creative design initiatives. The aim should indeed be the quality of the resultant development and not just the ease of vetting of the building plans. It is understood that the parameters may have been derived from the UDS. However, what we need to follow and defend is arguably the planning intentions, design concepts and principles - e.g. provision of pedestrian linkage to the harbourfront; low rise building profile with stepped height; a visual corridor to address the context of the Victoria Peak ridgeline; etc. rather than to follow the UDS masterplan to the letter of its word. In order to help the assessment while meeting the institutes' appeal for flexibility to allow for creative designs, and in the same vein as the comments in our last paragraph, **it is suggested** that the tender document and **Planning Brief be supplemented**

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**by relevant statements of the planning and design principles. We suggest** that this would help the Assessment Panel as well as the TPB, up to a certain point, when they are faced with really creative and meritorious designs which deviate from the very rigid lines on the building envelope plans. It is arbitrary to try to quantify the quality of a good design simply by using a cut and dry diagram. It would be equally arbitrary to say without the underpinning by the design principles, that relaxation by x% may be allowed, since in that case, everybody would assume the maximum allowable level as the minimum permitted level. However, why must the building heights be “stepped and sloping down towards the harbour, as long as the intention to preserve the ridgeline could be achieved? It is in such aspects that “flexibility” could be accepted.

4. **Quality of the project** – Whilst the assessment of the acceptability of a design might be bench-marked against certain design standards, the assessment of its “quality” would plausibly depend on the subjective judgment of the panelists. It thus leads to the question of **who** are making the **assessments** and what **weighting and values are applied**. The matter would also crop up in the subsequent development control process (by LandsD, TPB, etc.) and operation and maintenance stages (by LCSD, the owner, etc.) **These are our concerns.**
5. Whilst some members have earlier on drawn attention to possible points of **public** concern and suggested the need for more transparency and chances for public participation, **we would NOT** particularly ask for design competitions or the opening of all the tenderer’s schemes for public debate or voting. This is partly because the UDS had already undergone protracted and extensive public engagement and many points so gathered have already been taken on board. It is also partly because opening up all the tenderers’ schemes before award may be liable to manipulation to the advantage of certain tenderers. **We consider it preferable** to maintain the exercise and the judgement in the professional fields. If Government consider it appropriate to set up exhibitions of all the submissions to keep the public informed after the tender has been awarded, **we would have no objection.**
6. More specifically, the acid test as far as professional practice is concerned, would be in the design of the **Marking Scheme**, the comprehensiveness and relative weightings of the factors, and how the panelists would give their assessment. The reasons why we asked for meeting with the DEVB was and still is **to explore ways of making possible professional contributions** to how this prime project in the city centre is to be handled, for the benefit of the community as far as possible. In gist, it is about decision making (on the merit of the prospective designs) – more specifically – decisions made against what criteria;

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decisions made by whom ? how and when, and thus, at what stage we could make what kind of contributions in order to be helpful. So far, the weaknesses in the present tendering exercise that we have identified appear to lie in :

- the overly ambitious target development quantum set against the many given design constraints – although the constraints have probably sound justifications per se;
- the relative rigidity of certain design parameters;
- the possible lack of urban design input in the assessment panel and process;
- the subsequent control mechanisms such as the conventional type of lease conditions, and lack of requirement or guarantee on how the future operation and maintenance would be carried out; and
- the inherent rigid interpretation by Civil Servants

7. **On balance -- Flexibility** and Creative design are two sides of the same coin. There needs to be a balance somewhere. Total rigidity would render the designs in all the submissions becoming more or less the same and consequently raising the impact of the price factor and diminish or even defeat the purpose of including a design factor in the tendering exercise. We hope the Bureau would take heed of the Institutes' quest for prudent flexibility. We could perhaps work together on how best and what kind of **flexibility** could be allowed before the tender is launched. Certainly, the exercising of flexibility has to be done in a legitimate and fair manner in order not to jeopardise the equity in the tendering process.
8. On the other hand, we **must also be very clear on certain aspects**, to avoid miscalculation and challenge by the tenderers. e.g.
  - (1) **Heritage ?** - Why should the tender exclude possibilities of preserving the General Post Office building IF some tenderers could achieve the prescribed GFA and all other parameters while preserving the whole or part of the GPO building ?
  - (2) **Basements** - The diagram showing 5 level of basements could perhaps be clarified whether it is only indicative and not mandatory since carparking using new technology might require less spaces.
  - (3) No **bonus** GFA or GFA concessions should be allowed for reasons of dedication for public passage, surrendering for road widening, building set back, etc. otherwise the building bulks may become overly inflated. The pedestrian passages are a definite requirement, without bonus floor areas.
9. Messages about what would be allowed in the development disseminated by Government would be irreversible. Therefore, very important decisions might

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have to be made very early on, such as in replies given to prospective tenderers, at a time when no tangible designs are seen. Government **must identify all possible issues that are likely to come up and prudent responses worked out in advance** and not just wait to be asked, since any inadvertent replies could be binding on Government and also result in significant changes with no return.

10. We understand that a tender exercise cannot be open ended, and to be fair to other tenderers the requirements should be clear and must not be changed after awarding. One of the reasons we requested for meeting the Bureau now is knowing that such important and far fetching questions may crop up very soon, we hope that our comments could alert Government to get well prepared right away, and to engage the professional institutes **the earlier the better and continue to do so as and when necessary.** The gist of issues of most concern are, as mentioned above, the essential urban design parameters. These should be examined thoroughly, and the mandatory ones must be reinforced if necessary and duly spelt out, while areas with possible flexibility are set out separately.
11. With respect to officers who may be constituting the TAP, we consider that the team must possess adequate urban design experience, and be armed with thoroughly considered design parameters, substantiated with urban design guidelines as mentioned above.
12. One other task, if we may be allowed to help, is to help in the **design of the Marking Scheme**, or at least we could be engaged in testing the robustness of your system to make it fool-proof.
13. We envisage that matters are already on the **critical path.** We hope that Government would seriously consider the above comments and take action now.
14. On the whole, we are glad that Government recognises the value of good design and not just look for the highest price in land sales. There are however areas yet to be improved in the process. If possible at all, we also **look forward to opportunities of the continuous participation in the implementation of the design under the Harbour Office after the tender has been awarded.**

**ENDS**

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香港金鐘金鐘道89號力寶中心第二座5樓503室 Unit 503, 5/F, Tower Two Lippo Centre, 89 Queensway, Admiralty, Hong Kong  
Tel: (852) 2235 9057 Fax: (852) 3007 3607 Web: www.hkiud.org Email: inq@hkiud.org