Town Planning

Purpose of Town Planning: Town planning aims at shaping a quality living and working environment, facilitating economic development, and promoting the health, safety, convenience and general welfare of the community by guiding and controlling development and the use of land. Based on the principle of sustainable development, town planning seeks to bring about an organised, efficient and desirable place for the community to live and work in. Given the limited land resources in Hong Kong, there is a need to strike a balance in land utilisation to meet the competing demand for housing, commerce, industry, transport, recreation, nature conservation, heritage preservation and other community needs.

Planning Organisations: The Planning and Lands Branch of the Development Bureau is in charge of the policy portfolios of planning, land use, buildings and urban renewal in Hong Kong. Taking directives from the Development Bureau, the Planning Department (PlanD) is responsible for formulating, monitoring and reviewing land use at the territorial and district/local level. It also carries out topical studies and undertakes actions against unauthorised land uses.

The principal body responsible for statutory planning in Hong Kong is the Town Planning Board (TPB). It is formed under the Town Planning Ordinance (TPO) and served by PlanD. Comprising predominantly non-official members, the TPB oversees the preparation of draft statutory plans, considers representations to such draft plans and considers applications for planning permission and amendments to plans. There are two standing committees under the TPB, namely, the Metro Planning Committee and the Rural and New Town Planning Committee. Under the TPO, the TPB may also appoint a committee among its members to consider representations to draft statutory plans.

Planning System: Hong Kong’s planning system comprises development strategies at the territorial level and various types of statutory and departmental plans at the district/local level. The preparation of these plans is taking into account the Hong Kong Planning Standards and Guidelines, relevant development-related policies and principles, and community views.

Territorial Development Strategy: The strategy aims at providing a broad planning framework to guide future development and provision of strategic infrastructure in Hong Kong. It also serves as a basis for the preparation of district plans. The last review, “Hong Kong 2030: Planning Vision and Strategy” (“Hong Kong 2030”), was promulgated in 2007. The Government is currently updating “Hong Kong 2030” under “Hong Kong 2030+: Towards a Planning Vision and Strategy Transcending 2030” (“Hong Kong 2030+”), which provides a spatial planning framework to guide the future planning, land and infrastructure development and the shaping of the built and natural environment of Hong Kong beyond 2030. Building upon the foundations of “Hong Kong 2030”, the Government is adopting a people-centric, proactive, pragmatic and action-oriented approach to draw up a robust development strategy to enhance Hong Kong to become a liveable, competitive and sustainable Asia’s World City.

With increasing economic integration and social interaction between Hong Kong and the Mainland, cross-boundary surveys are commissioned regularly to collect statistical information on various aspects of cross-boundary activities, e.g. travel pattern and behaviour. The survey findings provide valuable input for the planning of cross-boundary infrastructure and formulation of development strategies.

Statutory Plans: Two types of statutory plans are prepared and published by the TPB under the provisions of the TPO. In 2004, the TPO was amended to streamline the planning process and planning approval procedures, enhance the openness and transparency of the planning system as well as strengthen planning enforcement in the rural New Territories. The amended TPO took effect in 2006.

The first type is Outline Zoning Plan (OZP) which shows the land use zones, development restrictions and major road systems of an individual planning area. Areas covered by OZPs are in general zoned for uses such as residential, commercial, industrial, green belt, open space, government, institution or community uses, or other specified uses. Attached to each OZP is a Schedule of Notes showing the uses which are always permitted (Column 1 uses) in a particular zone and other uses for which prior permission from the TPB must be sought (Column 2 uses).

The second type is Development Permission Area (DPA) Plan. DPA Plans are prepared to provide interim planning control and development guidance for rural areas in the New Territories, pending the preparation of more detailed OZPs. DPA Plans indicate broad land use zones and are also accompanied by Schedules of Notes showing Column 1 and 2 uses. DPA Plans are effective for a period of three years and will be replaced by OZPs.

Information on statutory plans, planning applications, related guidelines and procedures as well as the agenda, meeting papers and decisions of the open meetings of the TPB and its Committees can be accessed online from the TPB website at http://www.tpb.gov.hk/ and the Statutory Planning Portal 2 at http://www.ozp.tpb.gov.hk/. The public may also observe those open meetings in the Public Viewing Room located at 1/F, North Point Government Offices, 333 Java Road, North Point, Hong Kong.

Departmental Plans: Outline Development Plans (ODP) and Layout Plans are administrative plans prepared within the framework of the statutory plans. With a much larger scale, these departmental plans show more detailed level planning parameters e.g. site boundaries, location of access points and footbridges, specific types of government or community uses to facilitate the coordination of public works, land sales and land reservation for specific uses.

Views from the public are essential considerations for the formulation of development strategies and preparation of plans. Public engagement in the form of public forums, workshops, exhibitions, etc. is a very important component of the planning process.
Hong Kong Planning Standards and Guidelines (HKPSG): It is a government manual of criteria for determining the scale, location and site requirements of various land uses and facilities. It serves to ensure that during the planning process, the Government will reserve adequate land to facilitate social and economic development and provide appropriate public facilities to meet the needs of the public. Various bureaux and departments will formulate, review and amend the planning standards and guidelines falling under their purview from time to time taking into account the latest policy considerations and initiatives. PlanD will continue to assist bureaux and departments to incorporate updated or new standards and guidelines into the HKPSG for promulgation to the public.

Urban Renewal and Regeneration: The Urban Renewal Authority (URA) is a statutory body established in 2001 to speed up the renewal of old urban areas and to execute the Urban Renewal Strategy formulated by the Government. PlanD co-ordinates with the URA under the statutory provisions in the planning of urban renewal and regeneration projects for the improvement of the old urban areas.

In February 2011, the Government formulated the new Urban Renewal Strategy (URS) which adopts a “people first, district-based, public participatory” approach in providing guidance for undertaking urban renewal work in Hong Kong with a view to building a sustainable quality city.

In June of the same year, the first pilot District Urban Renewal Forum (DURF) was established by the Government in the Kowloon City District for a term of three years. The Kowloon City DURF formulated the Urban Renewal Plan (URP) for Kowloon City which was submitted to the Government for consideration in January 2014. It provides a framework for urban renewal in the district and serves as a reference for the public and other organisations which might participate in the implementation of the URP.

On the basis of the URP, the URA has adopted a holistic and district-based approach in rejuvenating the Bailey Street / Ngan Hon Street / Wing Kwong Street / Hung Fook Street / Kai Ming Street / Sung On Street Area which has been identified as one of the Proposed Redevelopment Priority Areas in the URP. Since 2016, five development projects and one development scheme commenced within the said area by the URA. The URA also commenced a development scheme on Kai Tak Road / Sa Po Road in February 2019. Besides, the project on the Development of the Kowloon City Themed Walking Trail funded by the Urban Renewal Fund, which aims to connect and consolidate the existing and planned historic and cultural facilities within Kowloon City, commenced in January 2018 for a period of six years.

New Town and New Development Areas: Large-scale new town development in the New Territories began in the early 1970s. PlanD’s District Planning Offices have worked closely with the Civil Engineering and Development Department’s Development Offices to prepare plans and oversee the development of these new towns. At present, there are nine new towns, namely Tsuen Wan, Sha Tin, Tuen Mun, Tai Po, Yuen Long, Fanling/Sheung Shui, Tseung Kwan O, Tin Shui Wai and Tung Chung. New Development Areas (NDAs) in Kiu Tung North/Fanling North, Tung Chung East and West, Hung Shui Kiu/Ha Tsuen, Yuen Long South and San Tin/Lok Ma Chau are in various stages of development or study and will constitute a new wave of smart and liveable new town development. Besides, PlanD has carried out a number of studies to examine the development potential of particular locations such as the Lam Tei Quarry and Tseung Kwan O Area 137.

Planning Enforcement: The TPO provides the Planning Authority with enforcement power against unauthorised developments (UDs) in areas covered by the DPA Plans or the replacement OZPs. Within these areas, all developments are unauthorised unless the development is either in existence before the gazettal of the DPA Plan, permitted under the relevant statutory plan or covered by valid planning permission.

PlanD’s Central Enforcement and Prosecution Section is responsible for undertaking enforcement and prosecution actions against UDUs. The Section investigates public complaints and referrals from other government departments, and carries out regular patrols to identify possible UDUs. Once a UD is confirmed, statutory enforcement and prosecution actions will be taken as appropriate.

Topical Studies: PlanD also carries out a wide range of topical studies. The Urban Design Study for the Wan Chai North and North Point Harbourfront Areas, which was completed in October 2019, formulated a sustainable urban design framework and a series of harbourfront enhancement proposals to guide the future development and enhancement of the Wan Chai North and North Point harbourfront areas.

The Study on Existing Profile and Operations of Brownfield Sites in the New Territories captured a snapshot of the comprehensive profile and spatial distribution of the brownfield sites in the New Territories as well as to understand the nature, site characteristics and operational details of the brownfield sites through site inspection, questionnaire survey, and stakeholder interviews. The study was completed in November 2019. To make the Urban Design Guidelines under the HKPSG more user friendly and up-to-date, it is being revamped under a study scheduled for completion in Q3 2020.

The Development of a Common Spatial Data Infrastructure (CSDI) - Built Environment Application Platform (BEAP) Feasibility Study has been completed in early 2020. The study examined the feasibility of developing a CSDI-BEAP, and formulated an overall development framework and recommended potential built environment applications with test case to demonstrate the feasibility of implementing applications for relevant Government departments.

The Study on Active Design for Healthier Lifestyle – Feasibility Study commenced in February 2020. The study aims to explore how to incorporate “active design” in the planning and development process in promoting healthy lifestyle. A set of active design guidelines will be formulated to serve as a reference for public and private sectors in built environment planning and urban landscape design. The study is scheduled for completion in 2021.

Planning Information: The City Gallery, located at 3 Edinburgh Place, Central, Hong Kong, showcases unique achievements and visions for Hong Kong’s planning and infrastructure projects. City Gallery also plays an active role as a platform for exchanging professional ideas and education purpose. For more information on town planning and the City Gallery, please visit the PlanD and City Gallery’s website at http://www.pland.gov.hk and http://www.citygallery.gov.hk or visit the two Planning Enquiry Counters located at:

- 17/F, North Point Government Offices, 333 Java Road, North Point, Hong Kong
- 14/F, Sha Tin Government Offices, 1 Sheung Wo Che Road, Sha Tin, New Territories

For enquiries, please call 2231 5000, fax to 2877 0389 or e-mail to inquire@pland.gov.hk.