

## **Pilot Study on Underground Space Development in Selected Strategic Urban Districts**

### **PURPOSE**

This paper briefs Members on a pilot study on underground space development in four selected strategic urban districts (the Study) to be commissioned by the Government.

### **BACKGROUND**

2. There is a pressing need to increase land supply for various uses by sustainable and innovative approaches to support social and economic development. One potentially practicable approach is through the enhanced use of underground space for commercial and other suitable uses, particularly in congested urban areas with little potential of new land supply.

3. The use of underground space in densely developed urban areas will offer good opportunities for creation of space, enhancement of connectivity and improvement of the urban environment. Moreover, underground space can be used to house new facilities or relocate existing above-ground facilities that are incompatible with the urban setting, thereby releasing valuable surface land for other beneficial and compatible land uses.

4. Hong Kong has been using underground space for public and commercial facilities for many years. However, most of them are associated with individual development projects, such as basement car parks and shopping centres, as well as Mass Transit Railway (MTR) station development. In order to develop underground space strategically, we need to further review the relevant policies, regulations and administrative measures.

5. The 2013 Policy Address (PA) highlighted that underground space was a viable source of long-term land supply and there was a need to further explore the potential of developing underground spaces in the urban areas of Hong Kong. To take forward the initiative, the Civil Engineering and Development Department (CEDD) commenced a territory-wide study in December 2013 on underground space development in the urban areas of Hong Kong, which aimed at identifying broadly districts with potential for developing urban underground space. The study is expected to complete by December 2015.

## THE STUDY

6. As a further step to expedite underground space development (highlighted in the 2014 PA), we have selected four strategic districts, namely Tsim Sha Tsui West, Causeway Bay, Happy Valley and Admiralty/Wan Chai, for a pilot study to identify suitable priority projects for early implementation (**Figure 1**). These districts were selected for the following reasons:

- (a) With the continuous economic growth of Hong Kong, these districts have been transformed from traditional commercial-cum-residential areas to densely developed nodes for commercial, entertainment and tourism purposes. However, the complex urban setting and the limited land resources in these districts are imposing constraints on improving the built environment and hindering further development. The above-ground space is also limited and becoming more and more congested due to the large pedestrian and traffic flow.
- (b) The four strategic districts are of high development potential, as they are mostly covered by existing and/or planned MTR networks and serve as transportation hubs to the nearby areas. In addition, there are new and planned development/redevelopment projects as well as sizeable parks or open space, such as Victoria Park and Kowloon Park, which can provide suitable conditions and opportunities for large-scale underground space development for commercial and other uses, while maintaining their current uses as parks on surface land. Underground shopping streets connecting MTR stations and the existing or planned developments could also help relieve the heavy pedestrian flow on the ground and enhance the accessibility to the adjacent areas.

## STUDY SCOPE

7. The scope of the Study comprises –

- (a) planning and engineering study and technical assessments, including:
  - (i) evaluation of overall merits and key issues of underground space development in the four selected strategic urban districts;

- (ii) formulation of an Underground Master Plan for each of the four strategic districts;
  - (iii) identification of priority underground space development projects within the strategic districts and preparation of conceptual design schemes for these priority projects;
  - (iv) establishment of engineering feasibility of the priority projects in item (iii) above by carrying out broad planning and technical assessments (including assessment of impacts on road traffic and pedestrian circulation) and preliminary environmental review, and highlighting of any development constraints and key issues to be addressed in the implementation of these priority projects; and
  - (v) financial assessment on cost-effectiveness and recommendation of further study for implementation of each priority project as needed.
- (b) public engagement and consultation with relevant stakeholders; and
  - (c) associated site investigation works and supervision.

## **PUBLIC CONSULTATION**

8. We consulted the following Committees of the relevant District Councils (DCs) on the Study:

- (a) Development, Planning and Transport Committee of the Wan Chai District Council (WCDC) on 11 February 2014;
- (b) Community Building Committee of the Yau Tsim Mong District Council (YTMDC) on 13 February 2014; and
- (c) Planning, Works and Housing Committee of the Eastern District Council (EDC) on 20 March 2014.

9. The majority of the WCDC, YTMDC and EDC members supported the Study, whilst a few in WCDC expressed reservations. Members of the three DCs suggested that the Study should address the potential traffic and environmental impacts in developing conceptual design schemes and due consideration should be given to interface issues with MTR and other above-ground developments. All DCs consulted requested that opportunities for improving the living environment of the public should be addressed in the underground space development, such as provision of

public space, cultural, arts and recreational facilities, and that the relevant DCs and stakeholders should be engaged during the course of the Study.

10. In addition, we submitted an information paper to the Food, Environment, Hygiene and Works Committee of the Central and Western District Council (CWDC) in March 2014 on the Study. The CWDC members noted the proposal. We will address the various concerns of the four DCs in detail during the Study.

## **STRATEGIC DISTRICTS IN THE HARBOURFRONT AREAS**

11. Among the four selected strategic districts, the study areas for three of the districts, viz. Tsim Sha Tsui West, Causeway Bay and Admiralty/Wan Chai, fall partly within the harbourfront areas.

12. In formulating underground space development proposals and identifying priority projects under the Study, due respect would be given to the compliance of the Harbour Planning Principles and the various aspects specified in the Harbour Planning Guidelines for Victoria Harbour and its Harbourfront Areas. In particular, the Study would explore the opportunities to enhance the accessibility and connectivity of the harbourfront areas with the hinterland areas by providing underground pedestrian linkage. We will also undertake technical assessments to evaluate the sustainability implications of the development proposals, and prepare an Underground Master Plan for each strategic district, with a view to achieving a proper balance and integration of the key considerations from the economic, social and environmental perspectives. We will continue to consult the Harbourfront Commission as well as the relevant DCs and stakeholders during the course of the Study.

## **WAY FORWARD**

13. We will consult the Panel on Development of the Legislative Council (LegCo) on 5 May 2014 and seek funding support from the LegCo in June 2014. Subject to funding approval of the LegCo, we plan to commence the Study in September 2014 for completion in early 2017.

## **ADVICE SOUGHT**

14. Members are invited to offer views on the Study.

**Civil Engineering and Development Department  
Planning Department  
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**Figure 1. Location plan of the four strategic urban districts**

