

12th July 2018

Joint Statement

Green groups refuse to participate in the destruction of Country Parks

Paragraph 117 of the 2017 Policy Address considered the allocation of country park areas for development of public housing and non-profit-making elderly homes. On 17th May 2017, the Government confirmed that it had invited the Hong Kong Housing Society (HKHS) to undertake studies regarding two sites located on the periphery of Tai Lam Country Park and Ma On Shan Country Park. On 27th April 2018, HKHS announced that it had appointed consultant to study the feasibility of developing the sites.

Green and concern groups received an invitation to attend a consultation meeting on 11th July and to comment on the proposed ecological survey methodology. We are frustrated and discontented with the Government's proposal of developing the Country Parks, which ignores the original intention of the Country Park Ordinance, the function of Country and Marine Park Board, and undermines the well-established and effective system of protected areas. Furthermore, the Government and HKHS started to plan for developing the periphery of Country Parks before the completion of the public consultation for land supply which claimed to seek for public consensus. All of the above suggests that the Government has always intended to develop the Country Parks. And therefore we refused to join the meeting under such premise and to endorse the act to destruct Country Parks.

Comprising 40% of total land area, Country Park is a valuable asset for Hong Kong. Apart from ecological value, Country Park also contains the value of protecting water gathering grounds, education, landscape, recreation, and so on. The function of Country Park should not be served as land reserve for development. However, the study by HKHS focuses on the ecological value of Country Parks and the technical feasibility for development. Such practice would neglect other important and legal functions of Country Park other than ecological aspect. This would mislead the public to think that the areas of relatively low ecological value at the periphery of Country Parks can be identified solely through the current ecological assessment, thus justifying Country Parks can be developed in a scientific and legitimate way.

The government misleads the public further by using the ambiguous term “periphery” suggesting that these areas are of relatively low ecological value. However, the study areas provided to HKHS are clearly within the Country Park boundary. Country Parks are delineated under the Country Park Ordinance without distinguishing their core or periphery. There is in fact no difference in developing Country Parks or developing the periphery of Country Parks. All such development causes irreversible impacts on their ecological, landscape, recreational and educational values. Moreover, any predetermined development of Country Park areas sets a bad precedent.

Finally, the Government has proposed to use Country Parks for public housing and elderly homes and to test the Country Park Ordinance by using the term “public need”. Without consideration of the availability of ample suitable sites for these types of development, the government puts conservation and housing development unnecessarily in a confrontational position. The Government continues to emphasize the urgency of development of Country Parks and create unnecessary social conflicts. Instead, comprehensive planning and the wise-use of land resources for all social needs should be promoted with priority for redevelopment of brownfields and other under-utilized or idle sites.

Co-signatories:

The Conservancy Association, WWF-Hong Kong, Green Power, The Hong Kong Bird Watching Society, Designing Hong Kong, Greenpeace, The Green Earth, Greeners Action, Green Sense, Friends of Sai Kung, Friends of Hoi Ha, Living Islands Movement, Hong Kong Outdoors, Save Our Country Parks, Friends of the Earth (HK), Ecology & Biodiversity Society, SS, HKUSU, Hong Kong Dolphin Conservation Society, The Hong Kong Countryside Foundation