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90% Respondents Showed Support for Conserving Tung Chung River in “Tung Chung River Conservation Questionnaire”

Public View: MTR Expected to Take Up Conservation Responsibility while The Government Should Regulate Land Use

Tung Chung River is designated as an Ecologically Important Stream with its natural landscape largely retained as the last remaining major river in Hong Kong. The river’s rich ecology includes numerous rare species such as Beijing Thick-lipped Barb and Romer's Tree Frog. In the mangroves at Tung Chung Bay estuary, all six species of local fiddler crabs can be found which is rather exceptional. In the forthcoming Tung Chung New Town Extension project, part of Tung Chung River Valley is featured in the west extension – a pioneering attempt of the government to include a natural river and River Park in new town development for conservation purpose. Green Power’s recent questionnaire survey revealed that 90% of the respondents supported conservation of Tung Chung River, but less than 30% believed that the river will be protected properly. At the same time, the new Tung Chung West MTR Station will situate near the river, expected to bring more development and crowds into the area. Almost 90% of the respondents agreed that the MTR Corporation should take up responsibility to preserve the river, and the government should give priority to regulate land use near Tung Chung River. Green Power urged the MTR and the government to put in more efforts and resources in the long term to protect Tung Chung River in response to public expectation.

Today Green Power released the results of Tung Chung River Conservation Questionnaire, which interviewed a total of 313 people—58 of them Tung Chung residents—through online questionnaire to learn about public attitude on Tung Chung River conservation. Most of the respondents (76%) had carried out “nature-related” activities in Tung Chung—60% had been to Tung Chung for hiking. There was a general interest on Tung Chung ecology, with mangroves and birds drawing most attraction. However, when asked about wild flora and fauna with conservational value, most of the respondents showed a lack of awareness. Fewer than 40%, for instance, can pointed out Horseshoe Crab, Romer's Tree Frog or Hong Kong Newt as species of conservation value in Tung Chung River—albeit the three ranked the top most well-known species. Henry Lui, Green Power’s Senior Conservation Manager, suggested most promotional efforts should be carried out in future for the public to learn about the ecological treasure in the area.

Among the respondents, all Tung Chung residents agreed that Tung Chung River improves the local environment and makes it more livable. Over 90% of all respondents agreed that Tung Chung River has ecological value or special conservation needs. Only 26% of respondents agreed Tung Chung River is properly protected and 90% believed that Tung Chung River is now under threat from human activities. Lui remarked that the questionnaire results indicated wide public interest in Tung Chung River conservation. The government should strengthen conservation elements in Tung Chung development project to answer to public expectation.

In terms of conservation policy regarding Tung Chung River, “strictly regulate landuse in the area” stood out as the majority comment (58%). Lui pointed out that land development usually involves enormous interests at stake with broad and profound impacts, and people may have observed in recent years that many rural areas near Tung Chung River have been converted to brown fields with messy landuse. Therefore there is a wide public call for the government to regulate landuse strictly to deter unwanted development and better protect the rural environment.

At the personal level, most people are willing to make behavior changes to protect Tung Chung River. Over 90% of respondents supported the various conservation measures, such as “follow road or crowd control in ecologically sensitive areas” and “do not carry out activities harmful to Tung Chung River ecology”.

To tackle expected increase in future population in Tung Chung area, the MTR planned to build an extension to the Tung Chung line. A new station will be set up in Tung Chung West. The details of the engineering design have yet to be announced. Lui highlighted that the railway as a large scale transport infrastructure attracted more public concern due to the wider and greater impacts, which explained in the survey 90% of the respondents agreed that the MTR Corporation should bear conservation responsibility towards Tung Chung River. Most people hoped that the MTR would “adopt ecologically friendly works procedures” (85%) and “ earmark funding to support education projects in conserving Tung Chung River” (70%). Lui said the survey showed that the public expect the MTR Corporation to not only carry out the engineering work but to further its educational role in conservation. Lui suggested that the future Tung Chung West Station can make use of Tung Chung River ecology as a theme. Taking up the social responsibility of protecting Tung Chung River and improving the environment, the MTR Corporation enhances its image while attracting more flow to the station by featuring the landmark Tung Chung River. Lui also expected the MTR Corporation to announce more design details of the station engineering work soon and allow open discussion with the public throughout the process.

Experts and Departments to Discuss Issues of Conservation of Tung Chung River

Green Power has earlier organized the online forum of Tung Chung River Conservation Annual Inter-departmental Interflow cum Closing Ceremony. The theme was again conservation of Tung Chung River ecology in Tung Chung West development. The online forum was part of In-To Tung Chung River—a 3-year programme run by Green Power with the full support of Hong Kong International Airport Environmental Fund.

This is the last year of the programme and the Closing Ceremony summarized fruitful results from the past three years of work. **Mr. Peter C T LEE, General Manager of Sustainability from the Airport Authority Hong Kong**, in his closing speech commented, “The Airport Authority with the support of Hong Kong International Airport Environmental Fund sponsored Green Power to build up a cross-disciplinary collaboration and exchange platform in In-To Tung Chung River Programme. Different government departments, academics, non-profit groups and community groups are invited to contribute to the conservation of Tung Chung River. This will be a good demonstration for future collective efforts in protecting the community environment.”

Other participating guests of the online forum included: **Mr. FONG Hok Shing, Michael, JP, Head of the Sustainable Lantau Office, Civil Engineering and Development Department, Mr. Raymond IP, Deputy Head of the Sustainable Lantau Office (Works), Civil Engineering and Development Department, Mr. Edwin LAU, Acting Assistant Director (Operations & Maintenance), Drainage Services Department, and Mr. Wilson MA, Assistant Director (Development), Water Supplies Department.**

Mr. FONG Hok Shing, Michael, JP, Head of the Sustainable Lantau Office of the Civil Engineering and Development Department said, “The CEDD has always valued opinions from the public and all stakeholders in launching the Tung Chung New Town Extension Project. These inputs have enhanced our planning and design work, especially the proposed conservation measures of Tung Chung River.” **Mr. Raymond IP, Deputy Head of the Sustainable Lantau Office (Works) from the CEDD** introduced the two measures on Tung Chung River conservation, “We will revive a section of artificial channel on the eastern tributary of Tung Chung River, and together with the natural channel upstream develop into River Park to promote conservation, ecological education and water-friendly culture. In addition, a Sustainable Urban Drainage System (SUDS) will be put in place in Tung Chung West. Surface runoff in the area will be filtered naturally before entering Tung Chung River to safeguard water quality.” **Mr. Edwin LAU, Acting Assistant Director**

(Operations & Maintenance) from the Drainage Services Department added, “The River Park is a forward-thinking design that allows the public to enjoy the environment and improve living quality besides serving the basic function of flood control. **Mr. Wilson MA, Assistant Director (Development) from the Water Supplies Department** concluded, “We are very happy to see more and more people appreciate the value of river conservation. This facilitates our work in advocating protection of water resources and prevention of water pollution in catchment areas.”

Following the ceremony was a seminar on the theme of Aquatic Ecology of Tung Chung River. Speakers included **Dr. LEUNG Sze Lun, Alan, Academic Co-ordinator and Lecturer, Environmental and Conservation Studies, Division of Applied Science, The HKBU College of International Education** and **Prof. SUNG Yik Hei, Assistant Professor, Science Unit, Lingnan University of Hong Kong.**

Dr. LEUNG advised, “At this stage, Tung Chung River is still home to many valuable species. In the River Park to be set up, both hardware and software are essential. Proper management is particularly important. Behaviors challenging the river ecology must be prevented, such as water pollution and catching of organisms. Only then can Tung Chung River be effectively preserved.” **Prof. SUNG Yik Hei** talked about the characteristics of amphibians, “River bank is significant to animals especially amphibians. They utilize a large terrestrial area by the river bank. In the flood control system of the River Park, a lot of space must be reserved for the animals as shelter and escape from flood water.”

⁽¹⁾ *Tung Chung River Conservation Questionnaire Survey was carried out from 5 January 2021 to 18 February 2021. Target respondents were Hong Kong residents above the age of 15. The survey was conducted online and 313 effective questionnaires were collected. Among them 58 were from Tung Chung residents.*

Notes to the Editor

About In-To Tung Chung River Programme

The three-year programme was organized by Green Power with full support of the Hong Kong International Airport Environmental Fund. The public was invited to appreciate, learn about and work on protecting Tung Chung River with their own hands.

One focus of the programme was to build an ecological database of Tung Chung River. Members of the public were trained to become “Citizen Scientists” and participate in regular surveys and monitoring of the ecology, providing important data for the conservation of Tung Chung River. Another focus was to set up an exchange platform between the public and the government to facilitate public understanding of river conservation and government work in the area. Public opinions were actively solicited on issues such as the setting up of River Park and the direction on eco-tourism in Tung Chung. The programme also included a series of ecological guided tours and workshops for the public to explore the wonderful ecology of Tung Chung River.

To learn more : www.greenpower.org.hk/tcriver

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