

30 September 2011

To: Mr Donald Tsang, Chief Executive of the HKSAR Government

**Submission by
the Government Hill Concern Group for the CE Policy Address 2011
on the Conservation of Central Government Offices, Government Hill, Hong Kong**

Dear Sir,

The Government Hill Concern Group is an alliance of 20 local environmental and heritage conservation groups (listed below) concerned with the protection of heritage properties and particularly with maintaining the significance of Government Hill. The imminent relocation of government headquarters to Tamar and the current policy decision to use a large section of the site for commercial usage is a matter of general public concern.

We believe that the redevelopment scheme proposed by the Development Bureau in September 2010 is short-sighted and based on a distorted assessment of the heritage site. It ignores the obligation to preserve Government Hill, the historic core of Hong Kong since 1841, and one of the city's most significant heritage precincts. The redevelopment scheme involving the sale of a large area of Government Hill, including the CGO West Wing, to a property developer and excavation of the site for a commercial high-rise development will completely destroy the integrity of this heritage site.

The CGO area, and its continuous association with the Hong Kong Government over the last 170 years, underpins the historic significance of the site. As the main offices for both the British colonial government and the HKSAR government, the CGO has been the seat of community decision-making since 1841. It is a civic landmark representing the origins of Hong Kong as a modern city and, equally important for many Hong Kong people, a site where the public has legitimately voiced its opinion towards the Administration through public demonstrations: recently, and in the 1960s towards the colonial government. The CGO site is socially significant as it is where Hong Kong people articulate their core values that are closely related to our identity and the character of the city.

Government Hill is a valuable green lung for Central and the higher reaches of Mid-levels through to The Peak. The surrounding Central Business District is already overdeveloped with high levels of air pollution and traffic congestion. Maintaining public ownership and public use of the CGO and restricting development intensity is an important factor in conserving the ambience of historic Government Hill as a whole and in maintaining a sustainable urban environment.

According to the Development Bureau-commissioned architectural assessment of the CGO site, the CGO West Wing building has considerable architectural merits in its own right and is structurally sound and well maintained and can be used for many years. In line with best environmental-friendly practice, the West Wing building should be kept and enhanced. Furthermore, it is important that the government work with members of the public to explore meaningful new uses for the West Wing.

In a previous policy address, you announced the preservation of the Former Married Police Quarters. This far-sighted policy decision has allowed the preservation of a low-rise site in keeping

with the heritage ambience of SOHO and the nearby Central Police Station Complex. A further rejuvenation of the area has now transpired and we believe that the CGO site can be transformed into an enlarged heritage/park area with improved footpaths, bicycle tracks and community facilities, especially in a preserved CGO West Wing, to compliment and link nearby Hong Kong Park, the Anglican Church's heritage buildings, the Botanical Gardens, the Catholic Cathedral and the soon-to-be renovated Central Police Station Complex – further afield links can be made with Bowen Road, the University of Hong Kong and The Peak etc.. We believe this would be a wonderful legacy and at the same time be both economically and environmentally beneficial for the entire community. We strongly believe that this would far outweigh the limited and one-off gains of developing a commercial high-rise building through selling off an existing park area (Battery Path and environs) to a single private property developer.

As a highly symbolic site, Government Hill deserves conservation and must be handled with great care. As your Administration knows, perceived and real developer hegemony is a serious public issue in this city and it would be unacceptable for Government Hill to become known as "Developer Hill". While the Hong Kong Treasury is not experiencing any financial pressure, and the need for Grade A office space can be satisfied by other options in Central, Wan Chai, Quarry Bay, West Kowloon, Kwun Tong and Kai Tak, there are no justifiable circumstances that allow such an important public asset/heritage site as Government Hill to be "sold out" to a property developer.

There is a clear indication that public aspirations support the conservation of the CGO site for public use. The Government Hill Concern Group's recent application (Y/H4/6) to the Town Planning Board for the conservation of CGO as a heritage precinct has received wide public support with over 6,000 people sending comments in support of this application. Furthermore, a public petition is currently available and international concern has been raised through Forum UNESCO University and Heritage sending a worldwide public message (see attached) calling for international attention to the threat by destruction of Government Hill.

The Government Hill Concern Group requests that the Government rescinds its current sale-and-redevelopment proposal and adopts a long-term vision for the conservation of the CGO and Government Hill for the people of Hong Kong. We also call on the Administration to fulfill its promise to the Legislative Council, when originally seeking funding for the new headquarters at Tamar, to engage in extensive public consultation on the future of Government Hill.

The Government Hill Concern Group therefore requests you and your officials to include in your forthcoming Policy Address a positive reappraisal of Government Hill and for you to include the following:

1. Respect the heritage and integrity of Government Hill and to conserve it as a special protected area under public ownership
2. Recognize that the CGO is an integral and significant part of Government Hill and should be protected from insensitive, inappropriate use and redevelopment
3. Integrate the CGO and Government Hill into a wider heritage/park area with footpaths, bicycle tracks and community facilities in the CGO West Wing
4. Rescind the sale-and-redevelopment proposal for the CGO West Wing and maintain permanent public use for the entire CGO
5. Engage the public in identifying new public uses for CGO West Wing
6. Protect the extensive green lung of Government Hill as well as the low-rise ambience of the area

We are happy to meet you or your officials to discuss our policy suggestions.

Yours faithfully,

Katty Law
Convener of the Government Hill Concern Group

The Government Hill Concern Group is an alliance of the following environmental and heritage conservation groups:

Central and Western Concern Group, The Professional Commons, Designing Hong Kong, Green Sense, Greeners Action, The Conservancy Association, Heritage Watch, Community Alliance for Urban Planning, Community Development Initiative, Save Our Shorelines, Lung Fu Shan Environment Concern Group, HK Redevelopment Concern Group, Heritage Hong Kong, Clear the Air, Green Environmental Health Group, South Tokwawan Concern Group, Society for Protection of the Harbour, Soho Residents Committee, Mini Spotters, World City Committee

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cc.

Members of the Executive Council

Members of the Legislative Council

Members of the Antiquity Advisory Board

Members of the Town Planning Board