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Pilot Study on Underground Space Development in Selected Strategic Urban Areas
Stage One Public Engagement

PURPOSE

The Stage One Public Engagement (PE1) of the "Pilot Study on Underground Space Development in Selected Strategic Urban Areas" (the Study) commenced on 7 November 2016. The PE1 Digest is at **Enclosure 1**. This paper is to brief and seek Members' views on the opportunities, key considerations and preliminary planning concepts of underground space development in Causeway Bay, Happy Valley and Admiralty/Wan Chai Strategic Urban Areas (SUAs).

BACKGROUND

2. We commissioned the Study in June 2015 to explore the potential for underground space development in the four SUAs, namely, Tsim Sha Tsui West, Causeway Bay, Happy Valley and Admiralty/Wan Chai. The Study aims to (i) evaluate the overall merits and identify key issues of underground space development in these areas; (ii) formulate Underground Master Plans covering a wider area; and (iii) draw up suitable underground space development proposals for possible future development.

3. The four SUAs are located within the dense urban core of Hong Kong. The heavy pedestrian and traffic flows in these districts have resulted in a very congested environment. Besides, given the already compact development form, there is limited scope for further development in these areas. Having reviewed the baseline profiles of the four SUAs as well as notable examples of other cities, it is found that with creativity and suitable spatial strategies, underground space can be made use to enhance the connectivity of the areas with the surroundings, improve the at-grade urban environment, create space for various uses and facilities and in overall terms optimise the development

potential of the SUAs.

OPPORTUNITIES AND KEY CONSIDERARIONS

4. The Study considers that the closely knitted urban fabric in the four SUAs, together with existing pedestrian subways, Mass Transit Railway (MTR) station entrances/exits and commercial basements of individual buildings, provides opportunities for development of a holistic underground network. The merits of underground space developments are summarised as below:

(a) Improving pedestrian connectivity - The at-grade pedestrian environment in the four SUAs is generally very congested, uncomfortable, noisy, hot and dusty. Underground space provides an opportunity for additional all-weather and seamless pedestrian connections to strengthen the pedestrian linkages. Opportunity could also be taken to enhance the walking experience by enhancing the vibrancy of these underground spaces through the provision of commercial and cultural elements.

(b) Creating space at prime locations - The development opportunity of the four SUAs is currently constrained by the lack of space. Underground space development offers an alternative mode of land supply for different uses such as passageways as well as retail, dining and entertainment uses at these prime locations.

(c) Enhancing the living environment - The additional floor space created underground could be solution spaces for relocating undesirable at-grade facilities; and for accommodating public facilities such as community gathering places, event spaces or sporting venues in response to different community aspirations.

(d) Addressing local traffic problems - Capitalising on the advantage of immediate connections to the strategic road network and MTR stations, underground space development in the four SUAs provides opportunity for accommodating public transportation facilities. Underground space can also address the shortfall of car parking as well as coach parking facilities.

5. It is also important to note the existing conditions and other technical considerations for the planning and design of underground space development in the four SUAs. We have identified a number of key issues that have to be addressed in the next stage of the Study:

(a) geotechnical, structural, and infrastructural constraints;

(b) interface with existing underground uses including basements, MTR stations and tunnels;

(c) fire safety;

(d) financial viability, construction/operation/maintenance costs and recovery period;

(e) land ownership and town planning issues;

(f) implementation arrangement;

(g) impact to above-ground facilities/activities; and

(h) traffic and social impacts during construction stage.

PRELIMINARY PLANNING CONCEPTS

6. The Study has formulated preliminary planning concepts for the four SUAs as follows:

(a) <u>Tsim Sha Tsui West</u>

The Study recommends enhancing the connectivity between the Tsim Sha Tsui hinterland and the new development areas including the West Kowloon Cultural District and the West Kowloon Terminus of the Express Rail Link by providing a barrier-free underground pedestrian network underneath the Kowloon Park. The underground network, which is an all-weather pedestrian passageway, will also serve as east-west and north-south pedestrian corridors within the district and help to relieve at-grade pedestrian congestion. The

space created could also be used for community, commercial, cultural, recreation and food & beverage facilities with a view to further strengthening Tsim Sha Tsui as an internationally renowned commercial and tourist destination.

(b) Causeway Bay and Happy Valley

The Study recommends enhancing the connectivity between waterfront areas and the hinterland of Causeway Bay by providing an unrestricted and convenient underground pedestrian network running across Victoria Park and connecting the MTR Causeway Bay and Tin Hau Stations. The space created could be used for transport, parking, community, commercial, cultural, recreation and food & beverage facilities with a view to enhancing Causeway Bay's appeal as a major commercial, entertainment and leisure node.

(c) Admiralty / Wan Chai

The Study recommends enhancing the north-south pedestrian connectivity to alleviate the pressure on the existing pedestrian connections, in particular the O'Brien Road Footbridge. The space created under the Southern Playground could be used for community facilities including sports and recreation facilities. The opportunity could also be taken to retrofit the densely developed Wan Chai old areas, for example by relocating the existing Luard Road Refuse Collection Point that would help to mitigate the nuisance caused to the neighbourhood.

STAGE ONE PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT

7. The PE1, which is an integral part of the Study, was launched on 7 November 2016 and will last for 3 months. Apart from the Wan Chai District Council, we shall also arrange briefing sessions for other relevant boards/committees. Focus group meetings will be held to discuss specific topics with different stakeholders. Public planning workshops will be arranged to serve as a platform for the public to express and exchange views. Besides, roving exhibitions at various locations to disseminate information of the Study to the public are on-going and a study webpage

(http://www.urbanunderground.gov.hk) has been established for the promulgation of engagement materials as well as collection of public comments.

NEXT STEP

8. Taking into account the public comments received during the PE1, conceptual underground space development schemes and Preliminary Underground Master Plans will be prepared.

ADVICE SOUGHT

9. Members are invited to provide views on the opportunities, key considerations and preliminary planning concepts of underground space development in Causeway Bay, Happy Valley and Admiralty/Wan Chai SUAs as set out in the Public Engagement Digest (**Enclosure 1**).

ATTACHMENT

Enclosure 1: Stage 1 Public Engagement Digest

CIVIL ENGINEERING AND DEVELOPMENT DEPARTMENT
PLANNING DEPARTMENT
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