



香港建築師學會

The Hong Kong Institute of Architects

13 November 2008

Our Ref. : P&L/BHR/RL/cw/0811

Mrs Ava Ng, JP  
Director of Planning  
Planning Department  
17/F North Point Government Offices  
333 Java Road  
Hong Kong

By Fax and By Post  
Fax No. : 2116 0751

Dear Mrs Ng

**A Position Paper by the HKIA  
on the Current Building Height Control Mechanism imposed by the recent Amendment of OZP**

The Hong Kong Institute of Architects (HKIA) is continuously avowed to the promotion of better built environment for Hong Kong. For our civic efforts to come into fruition in practice, good-quality urban planning policies by the Government are inextricably needed to provide the necessary foundation to ensure any urban intervention shall follow a direction appropriate and beneficial to the city at large. Policy-making is the Government's unequivocal responsibility. As a professional body, the HKIA has the moral duty to revert to the Government from time to time on the concerns of our profession, and offers advice to help shape better policies. With this intention in mind, HKIA is now writing to voice out our grave concerns on the current building height control policy.

HKIA is **deeply concerned** that our present building height control policy as manifested by the recent OZP amendments initiated by the Government is **convoluted with administrative considerations**, as we were given to understand after our discussion session with your goodself, Hon. Patrick Lau and our members on 29 Sept 2008. The current policy to amend building height limit **without any corresponding review on building density as well as other balancing factors** is not conducive to **wholesome urban solutions** and hampering our Government's vision to develop Hong Kong into a world class city of the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

The following are our concerns that the built environment would likely be adversely affected by the new height restriction imposed by the recent OZP amendments:

1. **Lowering / restricting building height limits without a comprehensive urban design review and assessment of the urban area in particular on density** - Land lot owners would without doubt fully utilise the development potentials entitled to them and build the same GFA within a much tighter volumetric space with little flexibility on building mass manipulation. New developments would then be built **squattier and fuller** to fill the space bound by development boundaries. Such kind of **singular consideration focused solely on building height** could result in more "Wall Effect", or even "Jungle Effect", at pedestrian and low levels.

*It was a shock to the professionals to learn the Plan's concept presented that lower building heights is equivalent to sustainable design – It is a fundamental concept that taller building does not necessarily make bad micro-climate. It can be demonstrated in so many built examples that it is all a matter of design and balance of various elements at various levels.*

2. **Lack of detailed scientific and analytical assessment on the setting of arbitrary height restrictions in the recent OZP amendments** – The Visual Impact Assessment and the vantage points chosen for consideration of the ridgeline preservations are **totally arbitrary** at present. There is **no objective set of guiding principles** for the establishment of such reference points, such as the impact on urban vista, public demand, maintenance of sustainable growth of the city, and how these could benefit Hong Kong at large.
3. **Stepped city skyline: TPB/ PlanD are literally repeating the Tsim Sha Tsui East phenomena all over Hong Kong** – An orchestration of varying building masses can have the benefits of creating visual punctuations, rhythm, highlights, district identifications and orchestrated vistas and view corridors. It is so much more interesting as an urban form than an administratively set stepped building height that bears no correlations with the locality of buildings. HKIA supports the concept of preserving the ridgeline and view corridors, but **disagrees to the regimental and inflexible and methodology and implementation**, which is not a desirable way to plan and build our city. Tsim Sha Tsui East is a well-known textbook case for planning disasters and the **lesson must be learnt**.

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Patron: The Honourable Donald Tsang Yam-Kuen, Chief Executive, Hong Kong Special Administrative Region  
A Member of The International Union of Architects (UIA), Commonwealth Association of Architects (CAA) and Architects Regional Council Asia (ARCASIA)

19th Floor, One Hysan Avenue, Causeway Bay, Hong Kong. P.O. Box 20334 Hennessy Road Post Office Tel: 2511 6323 Fax: 2519 6011, 2519 3364  
Website: <http://www.hkia.net> E-mail: [hkiasec@hkia.org.hk](mailto:hkiasec@hkia.org.hk)

香港銅鑼灣希慎道1號19樓



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4. **The current revised OZP amendments have deprived the G/IC Stakeholders for any possible improvement, alterations and addition and/or redevelopment in their GIC Sites** – Traditionally, G/IC sites have been planned to have a relatively lower building density so that they can also serve as “urban lung” or ventilation space in an urban context. As an impact of the proposed building height reductions, new G/IC developments have to be built squattier and resulting in “less enjoyable open space” within the site. The recent incidents where G/IC developments have been forced to reduce the number of storeys to meet arbitrary building height restrictions is seen to be a contradiction to the 1<sup>st</sup> principle of the Town Planning Ordinance to promote the health, safety, convenience and general welfare of the community. The Government is strongly requested to carry out extensive consultation on this issue which directly affects the welfare for the public.
5. **The suggested administration procedures to modify the regimental height control and through applications to TPB is conceptually questionable and not realistic** – It would be equally arbitrary for each application if there is no established principles.
6. **With the promotion of ‘World-class City’, there is need for Hong Kong to appreciate and promote respective world-class quality city living with quality urban space**, which involves the following aspects:
  - **Less incentive for footpath, open space dedicated to public and causing poorer urban spatial quality on pedestrian levels** – As a consequence of the above issues, there will be less incentive for any new development to incorporate dedicated public footpaths, open spaces and publicly accessible areas at ground floor level. Our street level environment will be further deprived of the permeability of pedestrian circulation and active street life, which is one great character of Hong Kong.
  - **Need for flexibility in floor to floor height control vs. unnecessary and irrelevant control on floor to floor heights by PlanD** – The underlying assumption of the “appropriate floor height” is clearly at odds with, and falls short of, the current standards in other developing and established world class cities. The benefit of higher floor to floor height to improve indoor comfort with less dependency on mechanical air conditioning is a known fact supported by scientific studies and should be instead encouraged. It would be a short sighted policy to compromise and mix with the issue of overall building height.

With developments taking a new vision and public demand taking a new twist, it is perhaps the most critical time for the Government and the building industry to take a holistic and scientific review of our cityscape, to identify the critical issues in a scientific, and embracing approach, with the aim to establish the best way forward to achieve quality life, quality urban space and built environment. The current singular consideration on building height is, on the contrary, is likely to create adverse impact on our built environment, such as ‘low wall effect’ and ‘jungle effect’ and is leading our city in the reverse direction.

HKIA strongly requests for an **immediate and unconditional halt** on the current amendments. In the mean time, HKIA also demands a sustainable and constructive dialogue on the above issues and would like to meet with the Development Bureau and the HKSAR Government for a **major review** of the current situation.

Yours sincerely

Dr Ronald Lu, FHKIA  
President

c.c. Prof Hon Patrick Lau, Legislative Councillor (Architectural, Planning and Surveying)  
Mr Bernard Hui, Honorary Secretary  
Mr K S Wong, Chairman, Board of Local Affairs  
Mr Ivan Ho, Chairman, Planning and Lands Committee