

The Hong Kong Institute of Architects' Proposal to the 2023-24 Policy Address

1. Unleash Productivity and Attract Talent

The Hong Kong Institute of Architects (HKIA) supports the Government's strategic infrastructure projects, including the Northern Metropolis (NM) and the Kau Yi Chau Artificial Island (KYCAI), to address the long-standing issue of insufficient land supply in Hong Kong. However, these projects require the support of a large number of architects and other professionals in the construction industry, while the industry is actually facing a severe shortage of manpower, which may hinder the implementation of these infrastructure projects.

To alleviate manpower shortage in the industry, we have the following three recommendations:

a) Streamline Procedures and Promote Technological Innovation

First, it is necessary to streamline the over-complicated government approval procedures. The daily routine of architects in Hong Kong requires the spending of a significant amount of time and effort dealing with the cumbersome government approval processes. Therefore, we have long advocated for the Government to simplify these procedures, allowing industry professionals to focus on more constructive work, such as mastering new technologies like Modular Integrated Construction (MiC), Building Information Modelling (BIM), and Artificial Intelligence (AI), to enhance Hong Kong's professional standards. Streamlining procedures would also enable architects, in both private and public sectors, to handle more projects without the need to increase manpower significantly, thereby greatly alleviating manpower shortage in the industry. The purpose of streamlining procedures is to unleash productivity and allow professionals to focus on enhancing their expertise, rather than dealing with administrative chores such as filling out forms. We are pleased to notice that the Government completed the streamlining of some procedures under the Town Planning Ordinance and related ordinances in the previous legislative year. Nonetheless, there remains a need to streamline procedures in the Buildings Department, Fire Services Department, Lands Department, and other departments so as to further remove barriers.

On April 28, we submitted a detailed proposal (Annex 1) to the Development Bureau regarding the streamlining of procedures in the aforementioned departments, with the hope that the Government would consider and implement them as soon as possible.

b) Enhance Consultant Selection Mechanism

Second, it is necessary to enhance the Government's procurement system to address the long-standing issue of low consultancy fees resulting from fierce competition. Low consultancy fees make it difficult for architectural firms to hire sufficient personnel to handle the workload, leading to excessive working hours and a lack of work-life balance for architects. As such, many young people hesitate to join the architectural profession,

and some young architects seek better professional environments abroad, exacerbating manpower shortage in Hong Kong. This kind of work environment would not attract overseas architectural professionals to come here and work. All in all, a meaningful and purposeful job is crucial for talent retention.

On July 3, we submitted a substantial proposal (Annex 2) to the Development Bureau regarding the streamlining of the procurement process, hoping that the Government would consider and adopt it.

If technical proposals are required during the tendering of consultancy agreements, appropriate consultancy fees should be provided.

c) Consider the Impact on Manpower before Implementing New Policies

The Government has recently implemented many new measures in the industry, such as the New Engineering Contract (NEC), BIM, and the Security of Payment Legislation (SOPL). While the original intent behind these measures is commendable, they often require more personnel or additional people with different expertise to handle. Given the current manpower shortage in the industry and government departments, the Government should consider the tight labour situation before deciding on the urgency and priority of implementing those new measures.

For example, the purpose of the upcoming SOPL is to prevent deliberate payment delays. For example, when the quantity surveyor of a particular project has already issued a payment certificate but the owner did not pay the required fees to the contractor within the specified period, then SOPL could help the contractor pursue payment. Nevertheless, SOPL should not cover those unrelated areas to avoid unnecessary additional workload, such as quality of materials and craftsmanship of workers. These aspects are already monitored by professional architects, which has been effectively regulated for many years without the need for legislation.

d) Increase Government Funding for Professional Degrees

Furthermore, we propose that the Government increase funding for university architecture programmes, including Master of Architecture courses. Currently, only some local universities' Master of Architecture degrees receive government funding, making it difficult for many grassroots students to afford self-financed master's degrees. Increasing government-funded master's degrees would help them pursue their dreams.

In addition, the Government should also increase funding for other relevant degrees, such as environmental architecture, heritage conservation and BIM.

2) Building a Sustainable City and Quality Living Spaces

The Government's strategic infrastructure projects, including NM and KYCAI, not only address Hong Kong's long-standing issue of severe land shortage but also provide an opportunity to enhance the quality of urban development.

Improving the liveability of Hong Kong not only enhances the quality of life for citizens but also attracts international professionals to work in Hong Kong, thereby enhancing our competitiveness. On creating high-quality living spaces in Hong Kong, we have the following recommendations:

a) Ecological and Traditional Cultural Resources

Taking NM as an example, the area is rich in ecological environmental resources, historical buildings, cultural landscapes and intangible cultural traditions. HKIA submitted suggestions on the planning of San Tin Technopole (Annex 3) to the Development Bureau on 28 July, and joined six other professional institutes to make another submission on 9 August to the Development Bureau, recommending the Government to conduct comprehensive surveys on the points, lines and planes of cultural landscape, and incorporate these resources into the planning of new development areas to create liveable, diverse and characteristic communities through the spirit of urban-rural integration. (Annex 4)

Simply combining different elements without correlation is not the best strategy, true integration is the most effective approach. There is “you in me”, and “me in you”. Ecological landscapes are retained in development areas, small buildings are conserved in conservation areas, water friendly culture is retained, and so on and so forth. For those heritage buildings in remote areas that are difficult to access and have fallen into disrepair over time, the Government should build roads where feasible to facilitate maintenance of such buildings.

b) Cultural Atmosphere

A quality liveable city requires a strong cultural atmosphere, as well as modern sports and recreational facilities. Please refer to the recommendations in paragraph (3).

The above only takes NM as an example. Other projects such as KYCAI and Yau Mong urban renewal also have their own district characteristics, which must be well utilized, and combined with modern elements to create a unique colour for each district, in order to do away with the past shortcoming of lack of characteristics in Hong Kong's new development areas, and produce higher quality urban living spaces.

c) Healthy City

Hong Kong has just emerged from the shadow of the COVID-19 pandemic. HKIA recommends the Government to establish a cross-bureau and cross-departmental "Healthy City Task Force", including doctors, nurses, architects, planners, engineers, urban designers, scholars, social workers, etc., based on the anti-epidemic experience over the past three years, to formulate planning, urban and architectural design guidelines and standards, such as design standards for hospitals and nursing homes, so as to enhance Hong Kong's urban resilience in responding to epidemics. The authorities also need to improve the design, greening ratio, landscape and accessibility of public

space, such as parks, waterfronts, streets, etc., in order to take care of the physical and mental well-being of citizens.

d) Opportunities under the New Normal

In addition, after the pandemic, many sectors around the world have proven that if modern IT and internet functions can be properly utilized, work from home has little impact on employee efficiency, and not having to go to work every day is their new normal. This model is conducive to reducing the load on urban transportation systems, reducing carbon emissions, and allowing employees to take care of their families more easily, which is a good lifestyle and work mode. However, work from home is not as easy for many people in Hong Kong because of the congested living space, making it difficult to arrange workspace.

Our proposed cross-departmental task force should review the impact of this new work mode on urban planning and building design, such as whether it is necessary to modify the Hong Kong Planning Standards and Guidelines (HKPSG), or the design and per capita living space standards of public housing, so as to make corresponding policy adjustments. The authorities should also review the employment requirements of civil servants and whether government consultancy contracts have the flexibility of allowing work from home.

e) Aging in Community

In response to the aging population in Hong Kong, the urban and building design here needs to strengthen elderly-friendly elements to facilitate aging in community. At the same time, the overall accessibility of Hong Kong must be improved to facilitate the elderly's independent healthy lifestyle.

For example, the Civil Engineering and Development Department (CEDD) recently launched the Pier Improvement Programme (PIP), rebuilding many piers on outlying islands and remote areas, and improving the accessibility of those piers for wheelchair users. Nevertheless, most Kaito ferries serving outlying islands currently do not have facilities for wheelchair access. Therefore, even if pier accessibility is improved, many elderly and wheelchair users still cannot enjoy it. HKIA suggests the Government to introduce measures to encourage these Kaito operators to upgrade their ferries to allow the elderly and wheelchair users to enjoy outlying island trips.

f) Sustainable Development

Sustainable development is an indispensable component of every major international metropolis. The Government should formulate policies to implement the 17 Sustainable Development Goals of the United Nations (<https://sdgs.un.org/goals>) covering climate action, biodiversity, clean energy, etc. The authorities also need to develop a roadmap to ensure that Hong Kong can achieve carbon neutrality by 2050, such as increasing the use of renewable energy and recycled materials, and reducing abuse of energy and earth resources. In addition to further improving the energy efficiency of new buildings, it is

more important to improve the energy efficiency of tens of thousands of existing buildings. Carbon neutrality is not an easy goal to achieve, requiring concerted efforts across bureaus and departments. We suggest the Government to establish a cross-bureau and cross-departmental "Carbon Neutrality Task Force" to coordinate work in this area.

To align with the gradual full ban on gasoline vehicles, the Government should legislate to require new development projects to provide sufficient charging facilities, and also offer administrative incentives to encourage existing housing estates to install charging facilities. In new development areas such as NM, the feasibility of constructing bicycle paths should also be explored to reduce the need for residents to use energy-consuming buses and cars.

Some low-carbon materials commonly used abroad cannot be used in Hong Kong due to current fire safety regulations. In addition, it is also worth reviewing some of the requirements of PNAP 151 and 152 that have been in place for many years, as well as the effectiveness of measures such as green balconies.

HKIA suggests amending regulations to require buildings with glass curtain walls to install more openable windows, so that users can reduce the need to turn on air conditioning. Energy efficiency can also be enhanced by allowing the installation of sun shading devices when renovating old buildings.

g) Economic Diversification

Full and diversified employment opportunities are an important element in enhancing economic vitality. As such, our urban planning needs to align with industry planning, economic positioning and Hong Kong's role in the Greater Bay Area. In addition to innovative technology, the needs of environmental protection industries, MiC plants and other related industries must also be met. The positioning of different development areas such as NM and KYCAI should be different, and their land planning needs to be adjusted accordingly.

h) Quality Design

Quality living requires quality design. Quality urban and architectural design is indispensable for a liveable city, and is one of the important conditions to attract high-end talent to work in Hong Kong. Please refer to Annex 5 "Promoting Hong Kong Architecture to Boost Culture, Economy and Tourism".

HKIA suggests the Government to enhance the procurement system, change the "lowest bid wins" mode that dominates the appointment of project consultants, to one that focuses on judging the professional level and design quality of consultant firms. Consultancy fees actually account for a very small share of project costs, and obtaining a quality design at a reasonable consultancy fee level is actually cost-effective.

i) **Open Design Competitions**

We propose selecting key public buildings for international open design competitions, such as museums, theatres, government offices, etc. In addition to selecting high-quality designs for the facilities, it can also promote Hong Kong's new development areas such as NM and KYCAI internationally, and allow Hong Kong architects and firms to demonstrate their capabilities on the international stage, achieving multiple goals at once.

The Government should select some smaller key projects for local open design competitions, so that smaller firms and young architects also have opportunities to excel, which would be a tactic to nurture young architects and small firms. The shortlisted competition entries will need proper funding support to ensure design quality. Please refer to Annex 6 "Promoting a Culture of Architectural Design Competitions" for reference.

j) **Maintenance of Old Buildings**

Hong Kong currently has tens of thousands of old buildings, many of which are dilapidated over time and pose a serious threat to public safety. As such, the Government should expedite the pace of urban renewal in old districts, and educate the public on the responsibility of maintaining private properties.

Relying solely on the Urban Renewal Authority may not be able to keep up with the pace of decay in old districts. We suggest the Government to provide incentives to attract private developers to participate in urban renewal works in old districts with lower profit margin, in order to eliminate excessively dilapidated buildings.

The authorities also need to educate the public on the responsibility of maintaining private properties. In fact, not only buildings that are 40-50 years old require maintenance, general maintenance work needs to be done properly for all buildings. This requires the Government to educate the public, and legislate to ensure that property management companies shoulder the responsibility of proper building maintenance. For those old buildings that are "three nil", the Government should assist residents in carrying out proper building maintenance. The authorities should also consider providing subsidies for elderly citizens and those who cannot afford expensive costs to do the maintenance work.

3) **Housing Policy**

HKIA supports the Government in launching strategic infrastructure projects that aim to fundamentally resolve Hong Kong's insufficient land supply issue. In the long run, with adequate land supply, property prices will return to reasonable levels, allowing citizens to live comfortably without enduring hardships like living in nano flats or subdivided units. We also support the Government's transitional housing policy as a temporary measure to quickly reduce public housing waiting time.

a) Subsidized Housing

HKIA supports the Housing Department's "Private Subsidised Sale Flat - Pilot Scheme", which utilizes private developers' resources to build subsidized housing and reconstruct the housing ladder. Please refer to the recommendations published by our Institute on June 14 (Annex 7).

In addition, the previous "Home Ownership Scheme" had its advantages. We suggest the Government to reintroduce this scheme in a timely manner.

b) Ratio between Public and Private Housing

Currently, the planning of new development areas stipulates the ratio between public and private housing as 70:30. We opine that the Government should allow flexibility for this ratio in land planning. If property prices fall back to reasonable levels in the future as a result of the Government's long-term land supply policies, it will stimulate citizens' desire to purchase homes leading to increased demand for private housing. Therefore, the 70:30 ratio needs to be adjusted according to changes in market conditions.

c) Per Capita Living Space

If land supply returns to normal tracks, the Government should review its per capita living space policy. In addition to improving the living quality of Hong Kong citizens, as suggested in paragraphs (2)(c) and (d), resilience is needed to respond to future epidemics, and the needs of new normal work and lifestyle modes must be met. Overall, Hong Kong's urban planning and per capita living space, including both private and public housing, need to be reviewed.

d) Public Housing Design

The current public housing design in Hong Kong has been adopted for many years. As suggested in paragraphs (2)(h) and (i), design is an important element of quality living spaces. The Government can take this opportunity to review and improve public housing design. The Government could select several public housing projects for open design competitions, allowing young architects to exercise creativity and develop new generation public housing designs.

e) Redevelopment and Heritage Conservation

Regarding the plan to redevelop Cha Kwo Ling Village, Ngau Chi Wan Village and Chuk Yuen Village into public housing, HKIA submitted a position paper to the Housing Department in April this year (Annex 8), suggesting to adopt the principle of "equal emphasis on development and conservation", conserving village buildings, architectural fabrics, cultural ambience and cultural heritage with historical value, and integrating them into new developments.

4) Cultural, Arts and Sports Atmosphere

International metropolises must be quality liveable cities in order to attract international talent and drive economic development. A vibrant cultural and arts atmosphere, as well as high-level sports and recreational facilities, are indispensable for a liveable city. Attractive cities have competitiveness and soft power, which can tell good stories about Hong Kong.

The Government's strategic infrastructure projects, including NM, KYCAI, and the URA Yau Mong urban renewal plan, etc., should all contain diverse cultural, arts, sports and recreational facilities. Accordingly, the Government needs to formulate long-term cultural, arts, sports and recreation policies. As a city where Eastern and Western cultures converge, Hong Kong must ensure that it can carry traditions forward while integrating with the latest international arts trends.

Under the framework of cultural and arts policies, architects can proceed to design cultural and arts facilities. Cultural and arts facilities are symbols of a city and must have quality architectural design. Please refer to the recommendations on quality design in paragraphs (2)(h) and (i).

5) Tourism Facilities

We believe that Hong Kong can regularly organize cultural events to attract tourists. For example, HKIA can take the lead in organizing an Architecture Festival, but government funding is needed.

In fact, Hong Kong itself has rich ecological environment resources and quality UNESCO Global Geoparks. However, the importance of ecological and geological tourism has been ignored for many years. For example, Sam Po Shue Wetland Conservation Park in NM is located near Mai Po Nature Reserve, which is a great eco-tourism site. The Robin's Nest Country Park is also a high quality natural woodland, but the existing tourist facilities there are very basic, not making good use of Hong Kong's resources.

Secondly, many country parks lack public toilets, often resulting in hikers unable to find a restroom after hiking for hours. The Government should install more eco-friendly toilets commonly used in national parks overseas and not requiring tap water, for the convenience of hikers.

In addition, many popular hiking trails lack sufficient and clear signage. The Government should review the design and content of hiking trail signage to keep up with the times. Hikers also need signage to display sufficient information such as distance to the next location and required time.

Many remote areas and outlying islands in Hong Kong have beautiful scenery, but can only be reached by Kaito ferry. Nonetheless, most Kaito ferries in Hong Kong are very dilapidated now, and they run on diesel which causes serious pollution that damages Hong Kong's image. As suggested in paragraph (2)(e), the Government needs to introduce

administrative measures to encourage Kaito operators to modernize their fleet, which can improve Hong Kong's image while also ensuring accessibility for the elderly and wheelchair users to enjoy the beauty of the outlying islands. The Government can also consider encouraging operators to use electric ferries to reduce carbon emissions and avoid polluting the surroundings of the outlying islands.

(Translated version of the original Chinese submission)