

Secretary, Town Planning Board
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香港觀鳥會
THE
HONG
KONG
BIRD
WATCHING
SOCIETY

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國際鳥盟成員

20 Feb 2014

Dear Sir/Madam,

Comments on the Draft Kwu Tung North Outline Zoning Plan No. S/KTN/1

The Hong Kong Bird Watching Society (HKBWS) would like to raise the following concerns and suggestions on the Draft Kwu Tung North Outline Zoning Plan No. S/KTN/1.

Safeguarding Long Valley and its surroundings

Insufficient protection for agricultural land east of Ho Sheung Heung

Since 2008, the HKBWS has recorded a total of 296 bird species at Long Valley and the agricultural area east of Ho Sheung Heung (HSH) (referred to as Ho Sheung Heung), 135 of the total species recorded there are considered to be species of conservation importance (Appendix 1)¹. The bird species diversity here comprises of more than half of the total number of species recorded in Hong Kong², including globally and locally concerned species. Globally endangered species include Black-faced Spoonbill (*Platalea minor*), Japanese Night Heron (*Gorsachius goisagi*) and Yellow-breasted Bunting (*Emberiza aureola*)³ and locally concerned Greater Painted-snipe (*Rostratula benghalensis*)⁴.

Long Valley and HSH have similar habitat characteristics in that both are dominated by agricultural land⁵ (Figure 1) and together they form an intact network of freshwater wetland suitable habitats for a diverse population of birds. In order to safeguard the ecological resources of Long Valley, sufficient statutory protection should be given to HSH. The HKBWS welcomes the protection of Long Valley in the current draft Outline Zoning Plan (OZP) by the provision of Long Valley Nature Park

¹ HKBWS unpublished data: bird survey results of Long Valley, Ho Sheung Heung and Fung Shui woodland since 2008. Surveys were conducted as part of the Nature Conservation Management of Long Valley by HKBWS and Conservancy Association.

² The total number of bird species recorded in Hong Kong is 522.

³ Listed as Endangered (EN) in the IUCN Redlist - version 2013.2

⁴ Greater Painted-snipe is listed as Local Concern under Fellowes et al. 2002.

⁵ EIA-213/2013 North East New Territories New Development Areas – EIA report. Habitat map Figure 13.5h

(LVNP), but we are concerned about the insufficient protection of HSH by the agriculture (AGR) (1) zone. The provision of the AGR (1) zone does not reflect the importance of this area and also neglects the findings of previous studies which have recognized the importance of HSH. Long Valley, HSH and the Fung Shui woodland west of HSH together are listed as one of the top ten priority sites of the New Nature Conservation Policy⁶ (Figure 2). Jointly, Long Valley and HSH form part of the Inner Deep Bay and Shenzhen River catchment Important Bird Area (IBA) (Figure 3) where its importance to birds has been recognized by Birdlife International⁷. The North East New Territories New Development Areas (NENT NDA)⁸ Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) report ranks Long Valley and HSH as having high-to-very-high and high ecological value respectively. Ho Sheung Heung is also a known breeding site for 17 species of birds including the locally concerned Little Grebe (*Tachybaptus ruficollis*)⁹. Records of globally endangered Yellow-breasted Bunting and Black-faced Spoonbill have been obtained from HSH¹ (Figure 4). Finally, findings from the NENT NDA EIA Ho Sheung Heung egret flight line survey revealed that over half (52.8%) of the egrets will forage in HSH and Long Valley¹⁰ (Figure 5).

Given the importance of HSH based on its ecological connectivity to Long Valley and existing habitats, we urge that the Town Planning Board (the Board) to provide a similar level of statutory protection for HSH as LVNP by either an extension of the LVNP or by the provision of Conservation Area (CA) zoning. According to the draft OZP, the AGR zones north AGR (1) and south AGR of LVNP are intended to serve as a buffer to give added protection to LVNP. AGR (1) is specifically designed to, “minimize adverse impacts on fauna in Long Valley and fragmentation impacts on the flight-lines between Ho Sheung Heung and Long Valley” and any filling of land/pond requires permission from the Board. We recognize the good intention of the Board to implement stricter planning controls in the AGR (1) zone, however by controlling filling activities alone would not be sufficient enough to protect this area. We believe that the extension of LVNP or CA zoning should be applied, this would not only safeguard agricultural land, but it would also impose “presumption against development” which the AGR (1) zone does not.

⁶ List of priority sites for enhanced conservation – New Nature Conservation Policy. Available at: http://www.afcd.gov.hk/english/conservation/con_nncp/con_nncp_list/con_nncp_list.html/

⁷ Important Bird Areas in Asia: Key sites for conservation

⁸ EIA-213/2013 North East New Territories New Development Areas – EIA report. Civil Engineering and Development Department

⁹ Report on the importance of Long Valley and Ho Sheung Heung to breeding birds in Hong Kong 2012. Nature Conservation Management of Long Valley by HKBWS and Conservancy Association.

¹⁰ EIA-213/2013 North East New Territories New Development Areas – EIA report. Findings of Egret Flight Line Survey at Ho Sheung Heung: Figure 13.7

Impacts of the technology park and residential development in planning areas 32, 33, 34 and 36

Along the south-west side of LVNP a technology park and residential development are proposed. Due to the close proximity to LVNP, we are concerned that construction and operation phase disturbances from these developments would impose ecological impacts to LVNP. Given that the current conditions of this area is dominated by natural habitats (Figure 6), the provision of such land use would require vegetation clearance (loss of natural habitats) and also create disturbance impacts (human activities and light pollution) which then creates an edge-effect to the fauna within LVNP, making the south-western portion of LVNP to be unsuitable for sensitive bird species.

Building height limits to the technology park (planning areas 31, 32, 33 and 34) near LVNP of 40 mPD should be reduced so that the maximum building height is similar to currently existing structures in those areas. The increase of building height to 40 mPD would result in light disturbance impacts to birds in the LVNP, it also discourages birds from landing in LVNP. According to the Town Planning Guidelines Chapter 10, section 3.6.3, “when town plans are being prepared, the wider implications of conservation zones must be considered. Certain land uses are not satisfactory neighbors and the combination of uses within a particular area must be given careful thought”. Development layout and land use of planning areas 32, 33, 34 and 36 should be reconsidered. We propose these areas to be zoned as CA or GB to discourage development and that existing natural habitats in this area should be retained as far as practicable (Figure 7).

In the draft OZP, section 12.8.12 states that, “urban design plan of planning area 33 shall be approved by the Director of Planning before development proceeds”. We suggest to strengthen development controls not only in planning area 33 but also 32, 34 and 36 as well. Development layouts in these planning areas should not only require the approval by the Director of Planning but also the approval from the Director of Environmental Protection and Agriculture, Fisheries and Conservation. Given its close proximity to LVNP, the need for Ecological Impact Assessments should be considered to identify any potential impacts to birds of LVNP.

Provision of Conservation Area zoning in planning areas 2, 8 and 16

Planning areas 2, 8 and 16 are currently zoned as GB. Given the ecological value of Ma Tso Lung stream (planning areas 2 and 8) as being moderate to high ecological

value¹¹ and the Fung Shui woodland of planning area 16⁵, these areas should be zoned as CA. In recent years, the government has responded to housing demand by proposing to rezone GBs for residential development in both 2013¹² and 2014¹³ Policy Address. Designation of GBs for these three planning areas would not safeguard the ecological sensitive receivers in the long term.

The HKBWS respectfully requests the Town Planning Board to consider our concerns on the draft Kwu Tung North OZP. Based on the reasons above, we hope the Board will strength conservation measures in the OZP by introducing CA zone to HSH and to natural areas as discussed above.

Yours faithfully,



Jocelyn Ho
Senior Conservation Officer
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cc:

AFCDD - Mr. Wong, Director of Agriculture, Fisheries and Conservation
CEDD – Mr. Law, Chief Engineering/Project Division 2
Conservancy Association
Designing Hong Kong
Kadoorie Farm and Botanic Garden
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¹¹ EIA-212/2013 Development of Lok Ma Chau Loop – EIA report. Civil Engineering and Development Department.

¹² 2013 Policy Address: Hong Kong SAR government. Section 73 (II). Available at: <http://www.policyaddress.gov.hk/2013/eng/p73a.html>

¹³ 2014 Policy Address: Hong Kong SAR government. Section 125. Available at: <http://www.policyaddress.gov.hk/2014/eng/p124.html>