

Secretary, Town Planning Board
15/F, North Point Government Offices
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By email only

19 January 2016

香港觀鳥會
THE
HONG
KONG
BIRD
WATCHING
SOCIETY
Since 1957 成立

Dear Sir/Madam,

**Objection to the planning applications for Proposed Temporary Open Storage of Vehicles
for a Period of 1 Year at Pat Heung, Yuen Long
(A/YL-KTN/503, A/YL-KTN/504 & A/YL-KTN/505)**

The Hong Kong Bird Watching Society (HKBWS) would like to raise an objection on the planning applications A/YL-KTN/503, A/YL-KTN/504 & A/YL-KTN/505 under Section 16.

1. Not in line with the planning intention of the “Agriculture” (AGR) zoning and adverse ecological impacts of the proposed development

Under the Approved Kam Tin North Outline Zoning Plan (OZP) No. S/YL-KTN/9, the planning intention of an AGR zone is “*primarily to retain and safeguard good quality agricultural land/farm/fish ponds for agricultural purposes. It is also intended to retain fallow arable land with good potential for rehabilitation for cultivation and other agricultural purposes*”. As of 7 July 2015, there are 18 Local Accredited Farms in Shek Kong, covering an area of 95.5 dau chung¹. From aerial photographs and our on-site observation, there are still active agricultural lands in the surroundings of the application sites (Figure 1).

According to HKBWS bird records, there are approximately 293 species of birds which utilize agricultural lands in Hong Kong. This constitutes 55% of the total bird species in Hong Kong² and 20% of the total bird species in China³. Among them, almost half of the species recorded (140 species) are regarded as of conservation importance. This indicates that the agricultural land in Hong Kong supports a high diversity of birds, thus should be adequately protected and managed.

¹ http://www.afcd.gov.hk/tc_chi/agriculture/agr_accfarm/agr_accfarm_num/files/map_afs_7_7_2015.pdf

² The total number of bird species in Hong Kong is 531.

³ According to the CBR Checklist of Birds of China v3.0 (2013), the total number of bird species in China is 1434.



The proposed open storage of vehicles would lead to a direct loss of arable agricultural lands in the Shek Kong and Pat Heung area, which is not in line with the above planning intention. Furthermore, we are concerned the approval of this application would set an undesirable precedent for future developments within the AGR zone in the Shek Kong and Pat Heung area, leading to further loss of arable agricultural lands and ecological damage in the area. We, therefore, urge the Board to **reject** these planning applications.

2. The Town Planning Board should not encourage “destroy first, develop later”

We consider that The Town Planning Board should not encourage “destroy first, develop later”. From Google Earth aerial photographs, some obvious landscape changes were observed on the images taken on 11 April 2011 and onwards (Figure 2). The HKBWS strongly urges the Town Planning Board (the Board) to proactively deter “destroy first, develop later” as stated in a press release in 2011, “*the Board is determined to conserve the rural and natural environment and will not tolerate any deliberate action to destroy the rural and natural environment in the hope that the Board would give sympathetic consideration to subsequent development on the site concerned*”⁴. The approval of these applications is not in-line with the Board’s promise to deter “destroy first, develop later”; in fact, it would provide incentives for developers/land owners to undertake eco-vandalism in hopes of the Board’s approval for development in the future. Decisions made by the Board should take into consideration that the undesirable precedent it sets for future applications, hence development permission should not be granted after the site has suffered from eco-vandalism.

3. Justifications for the decision and comments made by Government departments and the Town Planning Board (TPB)

According to the Hong Kong Planning Standards and Guidelines (HKPSG), Chapter 10, Section 2.1 (ii), the TBP has the responsibility to, “*restrict uses within conservation zones to those which sustain particular landscapes, ecological and geological attributes and heritage features*”⁵. We note that all other Government bureaux/departments are also bound to the HKPSG, and the Agriculture, Fisheries and Conservation Department (AFCD) and the Planning Department (PlanD) have the responsibility to advise the TPB on the ecological and planning aspects respectively. Given AFCD’s mission to conserve natural environment and safeguard the ecological

⁴ Press Release – Town Planning Board adopts approaches to deter, “destroy first, build later” activities. 4 July 2011. Available at: <http://www.info.gov.hk/gia/general/201107/04/P201107040255.htm>

⁵ Hong Kong Town Planning Standards and Guidelines – Chapter 10 Conservation. Section 2.1 (ii).

integrity⁶ while PlanD should ensure developments are in line with the planning intention of the zoning, HKBWS would also expect AFCD and PlanD to object these applications. Should AFCD, PlanD or TPB feels otherwise, we urge that the appropriate justifications are provided.

The HKBWS respectfully requests the Town Planning Board to take our comments into consideration and **reject** the current applications.

Thank you for your kind attention.

Yours faithfully,



Woo Ming Chuan
Conservation Officer
The Hong Kong Bird Watching Society

cc.

The Conservancy Association
Designing Hong Kong
Kadoorie Farm and Botanic Garden
WWF – Hong Kong

⁶ AFCD Vision and Mission. Available at:
http://www.afcd.gov.hk/english/aboutus/vision_mission/abt_vision_mission.html

Figure 1. Google Earth aerial photograph of the application sites (approximate location indicated by the yellow circles) and its surroundings. There are still some active agricultural lands in the area. Photograph taken on 14 April 2015.

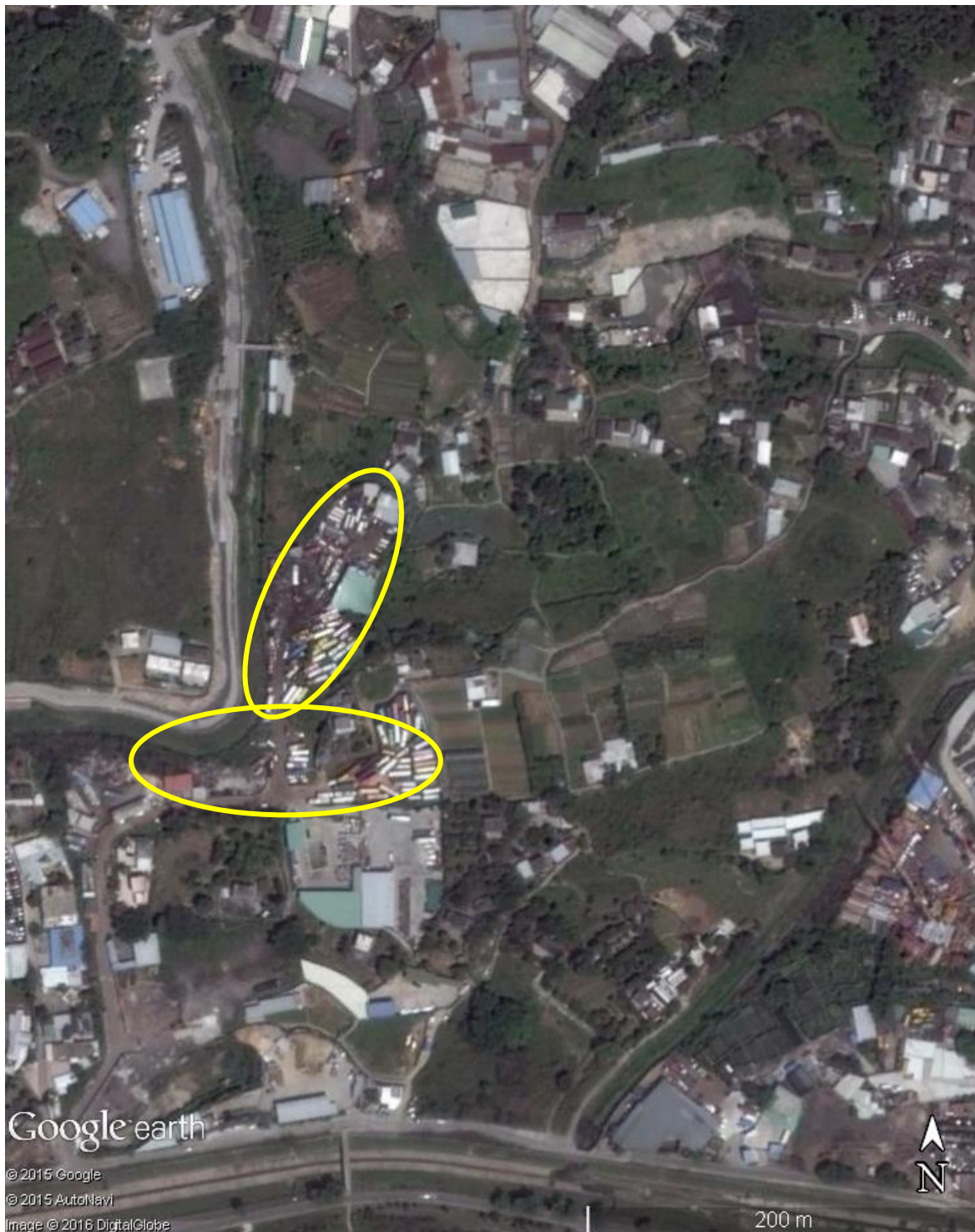


Figure 2. Google Earth aerial photographs showing the change in landscape at the subject sites (approximate location indicated by the red boundary).

