

Secretary, Town Planning Board
15/F, North Point Government Offices
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香港觀鳥會
THE
HONG
KONG
BIRD
WATCHING
SOCIETY

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24 June 2015

Dear Sir/Madam,

Representation for Draft Chek Keng Outline Zoning Plan (S/NE-CK/1)

The Hong Kong Bird Watching Society (HKBWS) would like to make a representation and raise our comments on the Draft Chek Keng Outline Zoning Plan (S/NE-CK/1).

1. Planning intention of the draft Outline Zoning Plan (OZP)

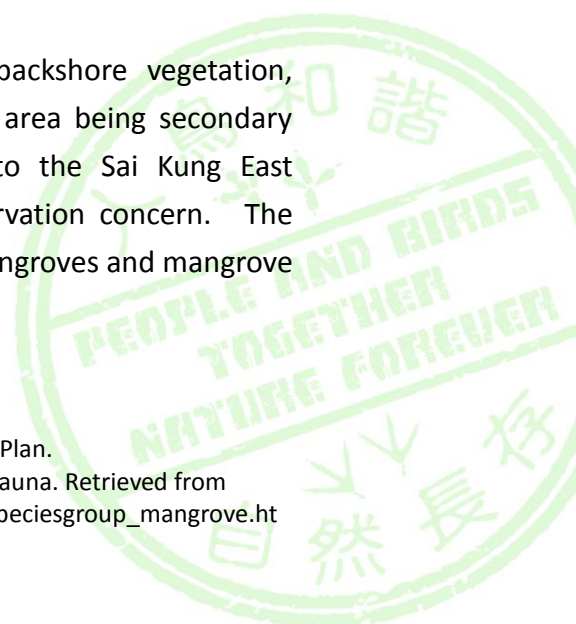
The planning intention of the draft OZP, which is to “*protect its high conservation and landscape value which complements the overall naturalness and the landscape beauty of the surrounding Country Park*”¹, has been well-noted. **The provision of conservation zonings should be applied to the plan to reflect this planning intention.** Any development recommendations or decisions on zonings in the draft Plan that deviates from this planning intention should require specific justifications from the Town Planning Board and relevant Government departments (e.g., Planning Department, Agriculture, Fisheries and Conservation Department, Drainage Services Department, Transport Department, Water Services Department, etc.) for the recommendation/ endorsement of a conflicting zoning in an area of high conservation and landscape value.

2. Ecological importance of Chek Keng

Chek Keng mainly comprises of secondary woodland, backshore vegetation, mangroves and natural streams, with the majority of the area being secondary woodland. These habitats are ecologically connected to the Sai Kung East Country Park and supports various bird species of conservation concern. The intertidal mudflat at Chek Keng supports a wide range of mangroves and mangrove fauna species².

¹ Section 8.1 of Explanatory Statement of the draft Chek Keng Outline Zoning Plan.

² Agriculture Fisheries and Conservation Department. Hong Kong Mangrove Fauna. Retrieved from https://www.afcd.gov.hk/english/conservation/hkbiodiversity/speciesgroup/speciesgroup_mangrove.html



The coastal area of Chek Keng and marine habitats in Chek Keng Hau are frequented by both adults and juveniles of White-bellied Sea Eagle (*Haliaeetus leucogaster*)^{3,4,5,6}, which is a Class II Protected Wild Animal in China⁷. Although the nest of the breeding bird cannot be identified, the coastal woodland habitats in Chek Keng are still potential breeding sites for this species. This indicates that the coastal and marine habitats of Chek Keng are important for the foraging and breeding of the White-bellied Sea Eagle.

Brown Fish Owl (*Ketupa zeylonensis*), a scarce resident in Hong Kong⁸, was recorded in Chek Keng⁹. This species feeds in undisturbed, unpolluted lowland streams and tidal creeks⁸. It is considered to be of Regional Concern¹⁰ and is listed under Class II protection in the People's Republic of China List of Wild Animals⁷. The woodlands in Chek Keng provide suitable roosting habitats for the Brown Fish Owls while the unpolluted natural streams and their riparian vegetation are suitable foraging grounds and perches for this species.

Another uncommon bird species recorded is the Crested Goshawk (*Accipiter trivirgatus*)¹¹. Crested Goshawk is listed under Class II protection in China⁷ and considered to be Rare in the China Red Data Book¹². This species is strongly associated with forest and mature woodland⁸, and often seen perched at woodland edges¹³.

³ The Hong Kong Bird Report 2005-2006, Hong Kong Bird Watching Society

⁴ <http://www.hkbws.org.hk/BBS/viewthread.php?tid=5682>

⁵ <http://www.hkbws.org.hk/BBS/viewthread.php?tid=5746>

⁶ Hong Kong Biodiversity – AFCD Newsletter, Issue 5, August 2003, available from: <http://www.afcd.gov.hk/english/conservation/hkbiodiversity/newsletters/files/hkbonewsletter5.pdf>

⁷ List of Wild Animals under State Protection (promulgated by State Forestry Administration and Ministry of Agriculture on 14 January, 1989).

⁸ Carey, G.J., Chalmers, M.L., Diskin, D.A., Kennerley, P.R., Leader, P.J., Leven, M.R., Lewthwaite, R.W., Melville, D.S., Turnbull, M. and Young, L. (2001). *The Avifauna of Hong Kong*. Hong Kong Bird Watching Society.

⁹ <http://www.hkbws.org.hk/BBS/viewthread.php?tid=16268>

¹⁰ Fellowes, J.R., Lau, M.W.N., Dudgeon, D., Reels, G.T., Ades, G.W.J., Carey, G.J., Chan, B.P.L., Kendrick, R.C., Lee, K.S., Leven, M.R., Wilson, K.D.P. and Yu, Y.T. (2002). Wild animals to watch: Terrestrial and freshwater fauna of conservation concern in Hong Kong. *Memoirs of the Hong Kong Natural History Society* No. 25, 123-160.

¹¹ Hong Kong Live Eco-map by Agriculture Fisheries and Conservation Department (AFCD). Data retrieved from

http://www.hkecomap.net/distribution_detail_species.asp?AnimalID=1&SiteID=1&lang=eng

¹² Zheng, G. M. and Wang, Q. S. (1998).

¹³ Viney C., Phillipps K., Lam C.Y. (2005). *The Birds of Hong Kong and South China*. Hong Kong: Information Services Department.

Other raptor species of conservation concern recorded in Chek Keng include: Western Osprey (*Pandion haliaetus*)¹⁴, Crested Serpent Eagle (*Spilornis cheela*)¹⁵, Besra (*Accipiter virgatus*)¹⁶ and Black Kite (*Milvus migrans*)^{16,17}. Raptors are top predators in the food chain. **The presence of the aforementioned raptor species in Chek Keng indicates that the terrestrial, river and marine ecosystems in the area is in healthy condition, and should be well-protected from pollution and habitat destruction.**

3. Potential water pollution caused by village development

With reference to the Guidance Notes on Discharges from Village Houses published by the Environmental Protection Department¹⁸, a Septic Tank System (STS) “*can only perform well if it has been properly sited, designed, constructed, used, desludged and repaired when necessary....overflow from septic tank or soakaway pit, or direct discharge without passing through a soakaway system, is polluting and should not be permitted*”. Since there are no public sewer for Chek Keng and desludging trucks cannot access the area, we are concerned the septic tanks cannot be properly maintained, and hence the STS itself would become a source of pollution. Moreover, the planned population in the area is 330¹⁹, the HKBWS is concerned that the soakaway systems required to support such a population would exceed the natural treatment capacity in the area, thus causing water pollution problem. The Drainage Services Department already recognized the environmental and hygiene problem of STS in various publications^{20,21,22}.

Given that Chek Keng Hau is the inner stretch of an inlet of Mirs Bay, there is little wave action for the natural dispersion of pollutants in the sheltered bay. HKBWS is concerned the water pollution problem generated from the village development in Chek Keng would increase the nutrient level of the water (i.e., nitrogen and phosphorus) in the sheltered Chek Keng Hau and would likely lead to algal bloom,

¹⁴ HKBWS Bird Record in 2010. Western Osprey is of Regional Concern by Fellowes *et al.* (2002) and listed as Rare in the China Red Data Book (Zheng, G.M. and Wang, Q.S., 1998).

¹⁵ Crested Serpent Eagle is listed under Class II protection in the People’s Republic of China List of Wild Animals and listed as Vulnerable in the China Red Data Book (Zheng, G.M. and Wang, Q.S., 1998).

¹⁶ Both Besra and Black Kite are listed under Class II protection in the People’s Republic of China List of Wild Animals.

¹⁷ Apart from Western Osprey, all other bird species are recorded by AFCD, data retrieved from http://www.hkecomap.net/distribution_detail_species.asp?AnimalID=1&SiteID=1&lang=eng

¹⁸ http://www.epd.gov.hk/epd/english/environmentinhk/water/guide_ref/files/guide_wpc_dv.pdf

¹⁹ Section 6 of the Explanatory Statement of the Draft Chek Keng OZP.

²⁰ http://www.dsd.gov.hk/SC/Files/publications_publicity/publicity_materials/leaflets_booklets_factsheets/Village%20Sewerage.pdf

²¹ http://www.dsd.gov.hk/EN/Files/OpenDay2012/PDF/Sewage_Treatment_07.pdf

²² <http://www.legco.gov.hk/yr13-14/english/fc/pwsc/papers/p14-20e.pdf>

which is harmful or even lethal to many marine organisms. This would then in turn adversely affect the fauna species which are dependent on the aquatic and marine system in Chek Keng (i.e., birds of conservation concern such as Brown Fish Owl and White-bellied Sea Eagle) and the sensitive mangroves and mangrove species at the intertidal mudflats.

4. Our Recommendations and Comments

The HKBWS considers that an “Ecosystem Approach”, which is the primary framework for action under the Convention on Biological Diversity²³, should be adopted to protect the various sensitive habitats in the Chek Keng area. Even though there is no Ecologically Important Stream in Chek Keng, we consider that **all natural streams (including their tributaries) should be protected by “Green Belt (1)” or “Conservation Area” zone of 30 metres along both sides of the banks.** This buffer zone with conservation zoning would protect the riparian vegetation and would also prevent pollutants from soakaway systems associated with small house developments located close to the stream from contaminating the stream, the intertidal mudflats and the sheltered Chek Keng Hau.

Furthermore, the existing village cluster is immediately adjacent to the secondary woodland in Chek Keng. The HKBWS consider that the “Village Type Development” zone should not extend into this ecologically sensitive habitat. We are concerned the felling of trees for small house development would affect the roosting and foraging grounds for various woodland-dependent bird species, and would adversely affect the ecological integrity of Chek Keng and Sai Kung East Country Park.

Lastly, the introduction of planning control alone could not fully protect the sites from activities such as unauthorized tree felling and vegetation removal. In order to fully protect the ecological and landscape values of the site, as well as the overall value of the surrounding Sai Kung East Country Park, the Authority should consider including Chek Keng into the Sai Kung East Country Park following detailed assessments and public consultation. HKBWS believes that Chek Keng and surrounding areas are qualified for such purpose given its significant landscape and ecological value.

Thank you for your kind attention and we hope that the Town Planning Board would take our comments into consideration.

²³ <https://www.cbd.int/ecosystem/>

Yours faithfully,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Woo Ming Chuan', written over a faint, light-colored circular stamp or watermark.

Woo Ming Chuan
Conservation Officer
Hong Kong Bird Watching Society

cc.
Agriculture, Fisheries and Conservation Department
Conservancy Association
Designing Hong Kong
Kadoorie Farm and Botanic Garden
WWF – Hong Kong