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Tung Chung River Park Survey showed public support of conservation over recreation use

Green Power calls on the government to prioritize ecological conservation in River Park

The Tung Chung New Town Development will soon commence. Upon completion of the project, which includes reclamation on the east side and development of Tung Chung river valley on the west, population of Tung Chung New Town is expected to increase to 270,000. A notable feature of the development plan is a River Park that takes up an integral function of ecological conservation and flood control of the natural Tung Chung River. It will also be an important milestone in promoting river conservation and water friendly culture in Hong Kong. However, **Green Power's** survey found that public awareness of the River Park is low—80% of the respondents said they had not heard about the River Park, whether they live in Tung Chung or otherwise. The survey also revealed that the public gave priority to ecological conservation than leisure and sports functions of the River Park.

“**In-To Tung Chung River**” is an ecological conservation project organized by **Green Power** with support from the **Hong Kong International Airport Environmental Fund**. An interflow among government officials, academics and environmentalists on Conservation and Development of Tung Chung River will be held in early March. Today, Green Power announced the results from the Tung Chung River Park Opinion Survey⁽¹⁾ which revealed public expectation on the River Park.

The survey found that 80% of the respondents (and an even higher percentage of 85% among those who lived in Tung Chung) were not aware of the future River Park. Those who were aware of the River Park, about 40% were not able to point out the correct location of the future River Park.

Mr. Henry Lui, Senior Conservation Manager of Green Power remarked that the general lack of awareness on River Park may due to the fact that the present Tung Chung New Town is not within the Tung Chung River basin. On the other hand, survey showed that only 50% of the respondents had visited Tung Chung River. “The planned Tung Chung West Extension will situate within the Tung Chung River basin. It is likely that by then many residents will visit the nearby River Park. River Park serves the functions of conservation, flood

control and education, and is a pioneer project to balance conservation with development. If the public can get to know about it early, they can provide more support to the conservation measures of the River Park,” Lui said. The whole Tung Chung New Town Extension work, including the River Park, is expected to complete by 2030. Lui hoped that the government would reach out to the public more concerning conservation measures of the River Park.

As for the expectation on the future River Park, most respondents hoped to “learn about ecology” (26%) and “enjoy the scenery” (24%). 54% of the respondents thought that the River Park should make “conserving and enhancing Tung Chung River ecology” as priority and 30% stated “keeping natural river landscape” as priority. Regarding conservation measures, over half of the respondents selected “planting and retaining native river bank vegetation” as the most important. In addition, 35% of the respondents expected the future education centre in the River Park would provide “information on ecology and conservation” while 33% looked forward to “Tung Chung River Ecological Tours”.

Lui remarked that the survey results showed that the public valued highly the conservation functions of the River Park. “As compared to leisure and sports functions, such as providing scenic points and facilities for biking and picnic, the public emphasized the retaining of original landscape of Tung Chung River and its vegetation, and voiced out their wish to learn about ecology and the environment through the River Park. The government should address the public needs in designing and planning the River Park,” Lui said.

Lui also noted that visitor crowd control received overwhelming support. For example, 74% of respondents backed the “setting up of Park closure period”, 73% had no objection to “the closure of ecological sensitive areas” and 53% agreed with “restriction on number of Park visitors”. The wide public support is favorable to the government’s adopting of conservation measures even it means certain level of restriction on the use of River Park.

In addition, most respondents (91%) supported the setting up of new water quality standard for River Park to safeguard Tung Chung River habitats for animals and plants. Further, 80% of the respondents agreed that diversion of water from Tung Chung River to Shek Pik Reservoir should be reduced so that more water enters the River Park to provide better habitats for the aquatic species. Among them, 26% thought that diversion should be reduced disregarding whether or not there was sufficient storage in Shek Pik Reservoir. Most agreed that half of the water diverted can be cut. Lui concluded that the survey showed a high level of public understanding of the significance of water quality and quantity for the River Park. It reflected public support and expectation on conservation measures in the future River Park.

To facilitate public exchange on the future River Park, Green Power held an Interflow on Tung Chung River Conservation and Development earlier this month. Attending guests included representatives from the **Civil Engineering and Development Department, the Drainage Services Department and the Water Supplies Department, and Prof. Chan King-ming, Associate Professor of the School of Life Sciences, The Chinese University of Hong Kong, and Prof. Ng Mee-kam, Professor and Department Vice-Chairman from the Department of Geography and Resource Management, The Chinese University of Hong Kong.**

Representative from the Civil Engineering and Development Department explained the conservation design of the River Park, including the restoration of the channelized section to revive the natural landscape of the river bottom, and emphasized that protecting biodiversity of Tung Chung River would be of top priority as the river had been designated as “Ecologically Important River”. The Drainage Services Department planned to adopt their greening experience in the future River Park so that it could serve the multi-function of flood prevention, enhancing biodiversity and promoting water-friendly culture. Official from the Water Supplies Department shared the use of bioluminescent testing technology such as Zebrafish and light-emitting bacteria in monitoring water quality, and expressed their view on the feasibility of diverting more water into the River Park.

Prof. Chan pointed out that the future River Park should adopt ecological-based water quality standard as opposed to conventional pollutant-based water quality standard, which could more effectively reflect the ecological status of Tung Chung River, “There are already many research papers that can be taken as reference. We should formulate better water quality objectives and control pollution sources to protect Tung Chung River ecology.” Prof. Ng also highlighted the Sustainable Development Goals of the United Nations in reviewing the River Park, “The River Park embraces the natural environment which benefits the physical, mental and spiritual health of the public as well as the whole community and the ecosystem. A good planning of the River Park fits into the New Urban Agenda of the United Nations.”

The meeting allowed experts, government officials and green groups to exchange their views on the design and use of the River Park. All agreed that ecological conservation ranked top as the objective of the River Park and hoped that the Park would become a model in conservation of local rivers.

(1) The questionnaire survey on Tung Chung River Park was carried out from 28th January to 24th February, 2019, targeting Hong Kong residents above the age of 18. The survey was delivered both on the street and online with the same set of questions. Street interviews were conducted in Tung Chung*, with successful



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completion of 302 questionnaires. For online questionnaires, 325 effective responses were received. Among all 627 respondents, 240 were Tung Chung residents.

** Special thanks to teachers and students from Tung Chung Catholic School who assisted in the conducting of street interviews in Tung Chung.*

Tung Chung River

Tung Chung River is the last remaining natural river in Hong Kong which retains much of its pristine landscape from the headwater to the estuary and the bay. Numerous precious fish species inhabit in the premium water, including the rare Beijiang Thick-lipped Barb. A large area of natural mangrove and mudflat lies at the estuary which is home to many important creatures. Further out in Tung Chung Bay waters is the breeding and nursing grounds for Horseshoe Crab, seahorses, pipefish and other commercially valuable fishes.

“In-To Tung Chung River” programme

In-To Tung Chung River is a three-year programme fully supported by the Hong Kong International Airport Environmental Fund with the objective of engaging the public in “saving our own river” with collaboration among green groups, government departments and community groups. The concept of holistic river basin management is advocated to conserve Tung Chung River and its ecosystem services more comprehensively. One key project is to build a database of Tung Chung River ecology by collective efforts of citizen scientists who participate in ecological survey and regular monitoring. A public platform will be created to facilitate exchange between the public and the government. The public can learn more about river conservation and related measures by the government (such as the River Park proposal in Tung Chung New Town Extension) and have the chance to express their opinion. In addition, a series of guided tours and workshops will be held for the public to explore and protect the ecology and hydrology of Tung Chung River.

Organizer: Green Power

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