

# Shaping the Central Harbourfront of Hong Kong

The Hong Kong harbourfront is an important place for most citizens of Hong Kong. In recent years, some major changes have taken place to make the waterfront more accessible. In fact, the park at Tamar has become a much-used public space. Plans are underway to connect the Central waterfront to that of Wan Chai. A 2011 masterplan study of the HKSAR Government gives future perspective on this area between the Central Ferry Piers and the Wan Chai Convention Centre.



Bert Bulthuis

■ By Bert Bulthuis, founder and principal architect at Sitec Studio Hong Kong



One of the core locations within the waterfront development is the area between Statue Square and Jardine House to the south, the IFC to the west and the ferry piers to the north, now known as, 'Location 3'.

The Location 3 lot includes the Central Post Office and the car park at Connaught Road Central. Both will be demolished, according to the government development brief. While the Central Post Office is not a monument, it is very much a valued part of the Hong Kong collective memory. It would be wonderful to integrate the Central Post Office because mixing the old with the new provides a city with more 'time-layers', and as such, a city becomes more diverse and interesting.

To integrate or not was one of the talking points at the ULI (Urban Land Institute) Asia Pacific and ULI Hong Kong-organised summit from 5-7 June, when, on the last day of the summit, a closed workshop was organised to discuss the development of Location 3. The objective was to brainstorm on the development process and come up with recommendations to the Government on how to add a clearer benchmark of quality to the development brief. This involved looking at different mechanisms for the land tender to trigger the highest guarantees for urban and architectural quality.

The Dutch Chamber received an invitation to participate in the symposium. Muriel Moorrees proposed that I be present at the workshop, which took place at the Standard Chartered Bank Building in Central. City planners, real estate developers, project managers and architects from all over the world were present. Following in-depth introduction of the location by David Faulkner of Colliers International and a presentation of global case studies by Tom Murphy of ULI Washington, the general planning brief of Location 3 was discussed among the group as a whole.

One of the generally accepted conclusions was that adding a Master Plan Framework (MPF) would be beneficial. A framework in which all the potentials of the location would be intensely researched and described before any bidding process was to take place (Case study, Barangaroo, Sydney). This would establish a quality benchmark before the bidding and a tool for developers to create a design and bid, perfectly suited to the high potential location.

Four panels were formed to deliver specific recommendations. I was assigned to the group guiding principles for design and development. We came up with some possible additions to the development brief with aims to guarantee greater urban and architectural quality. These included:

- Requiring that the process looks beyond the lines of the exact location to guarantee great connectivity to the rest of the harbourfront and adjoining properties.

A city's quality depends on the whole fabric in which a development can play a connective part.

- Specifying mixed use requirements to include hotels and serviced apartments.

Mixed use of the location will guarantee 24-hour city activity and ensure that the area really will be part of the city.

- Specifying and guaranteeing public access, defining an open space goal and adding an incentive system to the developer for quality public space.

The quality of public space is very important in city building, especially in Hong Kong where public space is under pressure from traffic and private ownership. Giving incentives to the developer for quality of public space has proven to be a good tool (Case Study, Hudson Bay, NY)

- Creating an incentive to the developer on sustainability measures including seawater cooling.

A high level of sustainability is the basis, though the aim should be for maximum circularity and sustainability. By creating an incentive for this aim, we hope to create a beautiful example of sustainability and circularity in the heart of the city.

The recommendations of the groups were shared among all attendees and will shortly be summarised and published by the Urban Land Institute Hong Kong.

The June symposium was a worthwhile discussion of a high-profile location with specialists from around the world giving their input to the HKSAR government and is the start of more public engagement into building the waterfront of Hong Kong. •



17th Floor, Tower One, Lippo Centre,  
89 Queensway, Hong Kong  
Tel: +852 2573 5000 Fax: +852 2802 3553  
Web: [www.tannerdewitt.com](http://www.tannerdewitt.com)

Partners: Ian De Witt, Mark Side, Robin Darton, Kim Boreham,  
Eddie Look, Pamela Mak, Tim Drew, Russell Bennett,  
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For more information please contact:



Tim Drew  
Partner  
[timdrew@tannerdewitt.com](mailto:timdrew@tannerdewitt.com)  
+852 2109 5572 (direct line)



Jan Willem Möller  
Registered Foreign Lawyer  
[janmoeller@tannerdewitt.com](mailto:janmoeller@tannerdewitt.com)  
+852 2109 5582 (direct line)