

Dear Editor,

It could certainly be one of the most terrible moments to the government and citizens in Hong Kong — there is a large group of homeless people sleeping on the busy streets at the Central business district of the international metropolis. Meanwhile, using parts of country parks for constructing housing units to ease the shortage of residential estates is proposed by some developers who are concerned about the environment. I am writing to discuss the arguments from both sides of the tug-of-war regarding this proposal and giving my opinion.

The soundest argument from the advocators of the proposal is that the initiative can offer homes to the poor and homeless. Astonishing yet realistic, the statistics of ten citizens competing for one unit in the housing estate is undeniable. The ultimate advantage of using parts of the country parks is to drastically increase the supply of land for building housing estates. Given that only 40% of land is available flatland in the territory, it seems that developing the country parks is an effective way to provide shelters for the poor and homeless. In the long run, the group of poor and homeless can enjoy a higher living standard and this can create a decent image of Hong Kong.

Meanwhile, another advantage of the proposal is that using parts of country parks is a more feasible approach. Comparing to reclamation to provide flatland, studies proved that the cost of developing country parks is one-third of that of reclamation. As it is more affordable to clear the woodlands and obtain flatland, the government can reserve more revenue for other social affairs after the increasingly serious housing problem is settled. For example, the government can invest more in technologies and welfare which can benefit all the citizens in Hong Kong. Therefore, the proposal of using parts of the country parks creates a win-win situation for the government and the citizens.

While the proposal sounds convincing for people eager to solve the housing shortage problem, environmental groups face it with closed fists and clenched jaws.

Notwithstanding the proposal is beneficial to people all around the city, it puts the nature in jeopardy. Most notably, it poses a deleterious impact on the natural environment. According to the result of environmental research done by Green Life HK, the use of concrete and cement for paving the natural lowlands add fuels to the plummeting scores of natural beauties in Hong Kong. Unfortunately, as Hong Kong is well-known as a concrete jungle, the development of parts of the country parks would further worsen image of poor environmental protection in Hong Kong.

Furthermore, the proposal harms the biodiversity in the country parks. Citizens would be appalled after knowing that the construction work and human activities in the country parks could possibly destroy 20% of the existing natural habitats. In this case, the proposal poses danger to the rare and indigenous wildlife species in the country parks as construction brings land pollution. People

living near the country parks after the housing estates are established may also damage the natural habitat by littering and disposal of wastes.

Can we neglect the poor and homeless in the territory? Can we put the natural environment in the brink of destruction? Is utilizing parts of the country parks for building flats a double-edged sword? It seems that the proposal brings no benefits but harms to the nature, which is more concerned by the environmental groups.

Obviously, it is incumbent upon the government to alleviate the alarming issue of housing shortage and ensure the means of housing is sustainable in terms of environment. It is inevitable to sacrifice the environment to protect the right of people having sufficient housing units. No matter whether the government would use parts of the country parks or reclaim the sea, both are damaging to the nature providing it is argued that reclamation destroys the habitat of Chinese White Dolphins. Yet, it is possible for the government to use parts of the country parks while minimizing the foreseeable harmful effects to the nature.

When it comes to construction, the government could wisely plan the use of land by delimiting areas of green belts as buffer zones to improve the air quality near the country parks with better ventilation. Meanwhile, the government should impose stricter environmental regulations for people living near the country parks to tackle and prevent worsening the natural environment. The last thing we can see is that the proposal is effective to mitigate the problem of housing shortage while it is sustainable to protect the environment in the country parks.

All in all, after discussing the arguments from the advocators and skeptics of the proposal, I believe that the government should use parts of the country parks for housing wisely to make sure all stakeholders are winners.

Yours faithfully,

*Chris*

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