

## **Public Consultation on Review of Columbarium Policy**

It is not clear what existing Government policy is. We read from Para 2 that government has long been encouraging cremations over traditional burials. There seems however no policy or statement of intent on the responsibility for providing the necessary storage space for the cremains. Para 2 goes on to note the rising public concern of the private columbarium provisions, a clear indication it would seem that the public (as we ourselves do) see the provision of burial spaces to be a necessary public service.

It is clear from Para 4 however that government has accepted the role played by private columbaria in meeting the shortfall in the government provision. And not merely accepting such but considering enshrining this as a permanent and on-going arrangement. Were there a desire for better services (the example of private hospitals is such) then the parallel provision of private facilities would have some merit. However we are talking about affordable repositories for the cremains of loved relatives and not luxury alternatives. We are disappointed that government is so willing to abrogate its responsibilities to the extent that the loss of a loved one is only exacerbated by the need to pay exorbitant prices to secure a final resting place.

The consultation paper poses some questions inviting answers which we now do so:-

A (1) The answer is clearly NO. Nor indeed would we propose landfills in all districts simply because of the refuse generated there. Sensible urban planning looks for appropriate sites and this is not district limited.

However the design of columbaria has stagnated and it would be appropriate to mount a design competition to suggest arrangements which are less intrusive, more pleasant to visit and cause less nuisance. Operational arrangements need to be reviewed too – such as the desire to incinerate offerings and the use of hardwood for coffins.

A(2) Yes this would seem to be a sensible option leveraging on the existing infrastructure and public acceptance of the existing facilities.

A(3) We agree that existing facilities can be investigated for in-situ expansion. However lumping this with the provision of new sites elsewhere is quite inappropriate. Whilst the BMCPC and religious bodies tend to provide affordable niches, which is a very good thing, this in itself is insufficient to give them carte blanche to expand into new locations.

B(4) We agree. There may be other themed ways of scattering cremains. A golfer may wish to be scattered over a course for example.

B(5) We do not agree that niches be time-limited in tenure, but an annual maintenance/rental fee is a good idea particularly if it carries the proviso that the fee if unpaid for say 3 years with due notice would see the niche recovered for re-use.

B (6) We agree

C(7) This should not be necessary if government assumed its duty to provide this very necessary service and provision. D(8) and D(9) are related and we do not wish to comment.

#### Our area of primary concern

The failure of government and the BMCPC to meet more than 40% of needs over the last 9 years has resulted in an explosion of private sector interest motivated solely by the vast profits to be made from meeting bereaved relatives' needs. It is extremely unfortunate that the FEHD and the concerned bureau have abrogated their responsibility in this regard. The administration has for decades been focussed on providing affordable housing for the living, but has failed to extend this concern to the dead.

The private sector involvement has brought – and promises to bring – severe environmental problems. These include:-

- illegal conversion of buildings with associated safety and annoyance factors
- illegal conversion of land with associated annoyance factors
- destruction of land of environmental value
- collateral environmental damage in building illegal infrastructure needed provide access

Indigenous villagers whilst playing the fung shui card in resisting columbaria in their locality are proposing vastly damaging developments on countryside land – much of this involving government land – some within Country Park. You allude to land lease restrictions and land use control, and conveniently ignore the real and substantial problems in detecting and enforcing existing protective measures which make this almost impossible to deal with.

Underlying the whole is this perception that government is actually pleased that the private sector is, in effect, bailing out government inaction - that government is keener to regularize and encourage private sector provision, than to embark on the necessary redesign of columbaria and the marketing thereof of government-built facilities to the district councils.

#### Alternative to Cremation

We have seen literature attributing a high environmental cost to cremation in terms of CO2 released. And then there is the use of hardwood for coffins instead of the much less damaging recycled cardboard coffins.

One article (Economist September 18<sup>th</sup>) reports on a 'water cremation' or alkaline hydrolysis, "where a corpse is placed in a heated solution of water and potassium hydroxide, to be reduced to inorganic liquid in a few hours. This process saves incineration, use of coffins, and repositories, and reduces CO2 emissions by 75%. Might it be possible that such technologies and options be examined as part of this study?

#### Finally

The public needs and deserves attractive, affordable and permanent repositories for the remains of their loved ones. These three requirements are not being provided by private facilities, and the consultation paper fails by not recognizing and addressing this. The paper is mainly about 'process' and not about 'outcome'.

**Green Lantau Association**  
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