

Please reply to :
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Dear Sirs,

Living Islands Movement Response to the Public Consultation on Review of Columbarium Policy

To the general questions posed by the consultation paper we respond as follows:

Section A.

1. We agree with the principle that all districts should be collectively responsible for the provision of adequate columbarium facilities, approximately in proportion to their population densities, although we recognize that the more densely populated urban areas will need to access some facilities in other, more spacious districts. In the rural areas this might include the provision of small scale facilities in the larger villages and townships.

2. We agree that opportunities to sensitively extend existing facilities should be explored, however we would suggest that the existing size of the Cape Collinson and Diamond Hill facilities precludes any further expansion on the grounds of said sensitivity and depersonalization, as well as the landscape impact. In general, we believe that columbarium facilities should be tastefully designed and landscaped and always on a human scale that is compatible with the surroundings. We would be pleased to look at the feasibility of sensitively expanding the facilities at Lai Chi Yuen, Mui Wo, Lantau as suggested in the consultation paper.

We are also interested in the idea of converting industrial buildings to columbarium use. This would also have the advantage of reducing pressure on the suburban and rural facilities and may help increase public acceptance of facilities in their own neighbourhoods. In the case of Lantau, there may also be derelict buildings and sites in Mui Wo and Pui O that could be used for small scale columbaria.

3. We support a continued major and possibly expanded role for BMCPC and religious bodies.

Section B.

4. We support greater promotion of alternative means of disposing of remains, subject always to personal choice. The government may wish to explore if there are waters off Lantau Island that could be designated for ash dispersal ceremonies, assuming these can be made accessible by road or boat without degrading country park or other natural landscapes.

5. In principle, we agree that niches that have been neglected for an unreasonable length of time could be reallocated, subject to sensitive handling of the existing remains. A modest and affordable charge for niche maintenance would not seem inappropriate.

6. On first glance, do we not think that the introduction of financial incentives for relatives give up niches would be a proper use of public funds.

Section C.

7. The steps taken to educate the public so far seem to be adequate for the time being.

Section D.

8. We agree that a licensing scheme along the lines proposed should be introduced at the earliest opportunity. The regime should include a rigorous set of “fit and proper” tests for the operators.

9. This organization firmly opposes all abuses of the planning process in Hong Kong, including “destroy first, build later” activities and the construction of any facilities that do not have proper planning permission and/or are in breach of zoning or leasehold conditions. We are reluctant to support a process whereby retrospective licenses can be granted to any applicant that has acted unlawfully in this respect. Normal “fit and proper” criteria should automatically exclude such operators in any case.

Further, we would object to proposed schemes on remote sites that have no existing access, which are clearly aimed to ensure that access roads and related infrastructure are built as a ploy to open up adjoining land for development.

In this regard, we would also like to express our strong opposition to the proposals for large scale columbarium facilities as reported in the press for Mong Tung Wan and Tung Chung on Lantau. The figure of 300,000 niches quoted for the Mong Tung Wan facility is so outlandish that we assume the proposals will be summarily dismissed, as advocated by the LDAC in their press release of 20th September. However, the proponents are already demonstrating a “destroy first, build later” and commonsense dictates that the surrounding environment and accessibility is not suitable for this kind of facility, particularly in the remote Mong Tung Wan case.

Yours sincerely,

R E J Bunker
Chairman