

Revitalizing Lei Yue Mun

Following observations are based on a study of information received and a visit of Lei Yue Mun with members of the Harbourfront Enhancement Committee and Kwun Tong District Council, and Lei Yue Mun residents and Government officials, 12 August 2009.

Background

For a visitor, Lei Yue Mun consists of an inner harbour (Sam Ka Tsuen Typhoon Shelter) surrounded by a ferry pier on the south, LCSD sites on the south, west and north, and Lei Yue Mun village on the east side. The village consists of narrow paths aligned with shops, restaurants and residential properties, and runs south and then east (Ma San Tsuen) and ends at Lei Yue Mun's Tin Hau Temple.

Restaurant operators commented on the increase in competition from Lamma Island and Sai Kung, resulting in Lei Yue Mun losing its attraction as a seafood destination.

Several projects are proposed that are intended to enhance Lei Yue Mun:

- Tourism Commission: A new public landing facility with a breakwater and promenade, improvement works at lookout points including landscaping of certain footpaths, construction of a carp-shaped viewing platform;
- LYM residents: Extension of the waterfront promenade to cover Oyster Shell Beach with a platform on which they propose to construct a large Tin Hau Statue;
- LCSD: upgrading Lei Yue Mun Typhoon Shelter Breakwater Sitting-out Area.

Environmental Concerns

There are a number of environmental concerns which impact Lei Yue Mun as a seafood dining experience:

- A. Raw sewage including human faeces flowing through (open) rain water drains into the typhoon shelter and along the shoreline;
- B. The typhoon shelter has polluted waters, floating garbage, inadequate land water interfaces, and is dysfunctional as an inner harbour;
- C. Oyster Shell Beach is littered with debris and remains of illegal structures;
- D. The Lei Yue Mun lighthouse and rock base are defaced and dilapidated;
- E. Refuse collection points throughout the village are dilapidated;
- F. The village layout is irrational and unappealing (beyond 'traditional') including rusting fences, dilapidated structures, unhygienic trash mounts, and other concerns;
- G. The Lei Yue Mun Tin Hau Temple is surrounded by broken temporary structures;
- H. The Sam Ka Tsuen Ferry Pier has been run down.

Recommendations for Revitalizing Lei Yue Mun

The proposals by the Tourism Commission and residents do not address the primary environmental concerns. Drawing tourists to an unhygienic and dilapidated environment appears counter-productive as bad experiences are difficult to erase from internet and blog sites. There are also concerns with the design of the proposed projects. We are setting out a number of relevant issues that need to be resolved together with recommended actions for revitalizing Lei Yue Mun as a seafood dining experience in a traditional village setting for residents and tourists alike.

1. Fix the Sewerage System

There is no foul sewerage within Lei Yue Mun Village except on a short section of the Lei Yue Mun Praya Road. The great majority of the village is unsewered. Sewage and waste water from the village residential premises and restaurants are discharged to the sea and typhoon shelter direct and through (open) rain water drains. The result is unhygienic, unsightly and unbecoming of a dining experience destination. Sewerage must be fixed as a matter of priority.

2. Fix the Sam Ka Tsuen Typhoon Shelter

- Can storm drains be redirected out of the typhoon shelter into the harbour directly?
- Can all crafts using the typhoon shelter be obliged to dispose of sewage and garbage on-shore? Are adequate facilities available for users to do so?
- Can water in the typhoon shelter be cleaned regular and often?
- Can adjoining areas (Lei Yue Mun Typhoon Shelter Breakwater Sitting-out Area, Lei Yue Mun Waterfront Sitting-out Area) be redesigned to facilitate a continuous landing for all vessels (i.e. removal of fences, adding steps)?
- What facilities alongside the typhoon shelter are available for fresh water and other services required by marine users?
- Can moorings be rationalized to create room for junks, kaidos and yachts with arriving/departing visitors?
- How can local residents obtain moorings for leisure crafts?
- What new uses of the typhoon shelter can be considered such as a floating fish market (compare Sai Kung) where residents can buy fish for their own cooking?
- How can responsibilities/facilities between the various departments be reorganized to make better use of this opportunity?
- Can a local 'harbour master' be arranged, paid for with local mooring fees, to ensure the typhoon shelter is managed flexibly and used appropriately?

Note: The Sam Ka Tsuen typhoon shelter is primarily used by licensed and unlicensed stationary vessels and small fishing craft. The stationary crafts are licensed for seafood storage, fish dealing, fish dry hulk, ice boat, landing pontoon, repair pontoon and storage.

3. Fix the Sam Ka Tsuen Ferry Pier

The Ferry Pier is a simple but interesting structure which can easily be enhanced with minor renovations (replacement of windows and doors, painting, etc.). With new residential developments patronage will increase. The pier can be utilized for scheduled and unscheduled public and private marine services, and is a short walk away from Lei Yue Mun village.

4. Fix Lei Yue Mun Typhoon Shelter Breakwater Sitting-out Area

An upgrading programme for this LCSD facility is in progress. Any works must remove the fences and allow for marine supporting uses of the land fronting the typhoon shelter. Look-out points and seats can be directed at both the harbour and the typhoon shelter. Given its location at the mouth of the Typhoon Shelter and opposite Lei Yue Mun village, this site could be considered for a Tin Hau Statue.

5. Review the Lei Yue Mun Waterfront Sitting-out Area

This LCSD facility is immediately adjoining the seawalls of the typhoon shelter and a review is needed to identify how the land and seawall can be redesigned so as to facilitate continuous marine supporting services and uses in addition to recreation by the public.

6. Rationalize the Village Plan

Fire safety has been addressed with operational contingency plans devised specifically for the characteristics of Lei Yue Mun village by the Fire Services Department. However, the village layout is poor and unappealing (beyond 'traditional') and includes rusting fences, dilapidated structures, unhygienic trash heaps, and other concerns. Some of these involve public land and others involve private rights. Through various means and a concerted effort by all relevant departments including Lands and Building Departments and the local district office, the village appearance can be significantly enhanced.

7. Fix Oyster Shell Beach

Oyster Shell Beach is the last remaining beach in Victoria Harbour and should be preserved. A comprehensive clean up action is required including removal of foundations of previous illegal structures. By including Oyster Shell Beach in the daily beat of the FEHD contractors the beach can be kept clean. More stringent control over contractors by FEHD staff may be required.

8. Fix Lei Yue Mun Lighthouse

The Lei Yue Mun lighthouse is a popular destination and kids can be seen climbing the rocks regularly. The lighthouse and the rocks are an interesting visual feature for visitors. The lighthouse can be fixed or replaced, the rock base can be cleaned from graffiti and any broken structures and remains of illegal works can be removed.

9. Fix Lei Yue Mun Tin Hau Temple

The Lei Yue Mun Tin Hau Temple can also be operated as a tourist attraction with suitable opening hours. An appropriate all-weather cover of the area in front of the temple can be designed to accommodate requirements of the staff, residents and visitors. The walk and visit to the temple can supplement the attractions of Lei Mun.

10. Fix the Existing Village Jetty (don't lose the reclaimed areas)

The village jetty is in disrepair. The existing reclaimed areas of this jetty can be used to construct a new jetty which can be used by people to fish, as a general amenity and to accommodate yachts and junks who wish to drop off passengers in the village.

11. Fix the Refuse Collection Points

Most international tourists will have little experience with public refuse collection points in the middle of village areas. Special attention must be given to the design of the RCPs in Lei Yue Mun, beyond standard solutions.

12. Review the Tourism Commission plans

A public landing facility with a breakwater is planned for Lei Yue Mun channel, which is not an ideal location for visitor arrivals. It is located at the back of the village and requires a costly breakwater to mitigate fast currents. Both the village jetty (once repaired) and berthing within the typhoon shelter are superior arrival points for tourists at the front of the village and can be made available at less cost. The Sam Ka Tsuen Ferry Pier can be made available to marine users at no cost and is a pleasant walking distance from the restaurant area with an interesting view across the typhoon shelter.

It is salient to note that the delegation on 12 August 2009 had to step over open drains carrying human faeces exactly in the middle of the stretch of coastline where the new landing for tourist and seafood diners is proposed, highlighting the need to resolve the sewerage system BEFORE any investment in landings or landscaping is made.

The improvement works for footpaths and look-out points in Lei Yue Mun are welcome investments. However the proposals for a protruding carp-shaped viewing platform have been criticized by members of the Harbourfront Enhancement Committee as they saw no merit in introducing such artificial elements to the area. The Harbourfront Enhancement Committee has yet to see the revised detailed designs.

13. A Tin Hau Statue – For prosperity

A Tin Hau Statue for this fishing village adds an appropriate additional visual impression for visitors and promotes greater prosperity for local residents. It is a suitable feature of the revitalization plan for Lei Yue Mun.

However, sacrificing the last remaining beach in the harbour and limiting the view of the existing lighthouse on its rocky outcrop would be unwise.

Options for the size and location of the statue must be considered and finalized. The two look-out points identified in the village, the rest garden immediately adjacent to Oyster Shell Beach or – for a very large size statue – the Lei Yue Mun Typhoon Shelter Breakwater Sitting-Out Area, are appropriate options.

Conclusions - Revitalizing Lei Yue Mun

Given the growing competition both in quantity and quality of options available to local and international tourists - whether it is Sai Kung, Lamma, dining on harbour cruises, visiting Soho East (Ling Kei Wan) or the future West Kowloon Cultural District – revitalizing Lei Yue Mun as a quality attraction requires more than a new landing, a carp shaped platform or a helping hand from the Tin Hau Goddess.

To provide service excellence and quality assurance to tourists, the Tourism District Enhancement Programme for Lei Yue Mun must address the primary environmental concerns with urgency first. Secondly, a sustainable plan must be drawn up for the village and the typhoon shelter as one destination, as one experience.

Given the proximity to core urban areas and its setting as a traditional fishing village, Lei Yue Mun has an opportunity to again become a preferred seafood dining experience for residents and tourists alike, but only if all parties are willing to take a comprehensive view of all tasks ahead.

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