

Re-connecting to the harbour

In his January 2015 Policy Address, Hong Kong's Chief Executive, Leung Chun-ying, said, "There has been a marked improvement in the water quality of Victoria Harbour" and "I have instructed relevant bureaux to explore the feasibility of organising water sports activities in Victoria Harbour". There has been water sport in the harbour since 1849, so we assume the CE means there should be more of it.

He added that, "The Government will commission a study this year on how to improve the problem of pollution and odour nuisance caused by the discharge of urban residual pollutants into urban coastal waters, so as to provide venues for water activities along waterfront areas in Kowloon West, Wan Chai and Central."

The Water Sports Council endorses the concept of more water sport in the harbour, with the proviso that it be organized by water sport organisations and not by the government, whose role should be to provide facilities and financial support.

In July the Planning Department released its Urban Design Study for the Wan Chai North and North Point Harbourfront Area, noting that, "the harbourfront is a valuable stretch of reclaimed land centrally located in the Victoria Harbour, presenting a unique opportunity to 're-connect' people to the waterfront."

The Planning Department's vision could mean no more than providing places from which people can look at the water. This will not achieve the Chief Executive's objective of having more water sport in the harbour, but the Planning Department appears to take the view that it is only responsible for the land and what happens on the water is none of its concern. This leaves a large gap in the planning process if people re-connecting to the harbour is to be meaningful.

Year-round sports activity requires that facilities be provided as part of the urban design. Water sports require slipways, steps, pontoons, boat storage and 'clubhouse' facilities. Large boats require mooring areas and facilities to lift them from the water for maintenance, either on site or elsewhere. Water sport organisations can make the case for the land facilities, but where in government does responsibility lie to accept and implement such a vision?

Opportunities exist to host globally significant events such as the Volvo Ocean Race. For that event, apart from accommodating the yachts in a location easily accessible for the public to feel they are a part of the event, an area is



required for a temporary race village from which activities would be organized for the public, including opportunities to visit and even sail on the yachts. Such an area needs to be incorporated in the waterfront as part of re-connecting people to the harbour.

The former Wan Chai cargo handling basin (above) and its surrounds offer the chance to provide facilities similar to those



at Alicante (left), Spain, but do the people in the government have the vision to see what could be created and bring it into existence,

together with facilities for year-round sport? If not, Hong Kong's maritime heritage will be ignored, people will be deprived of the opportunity to take part and Hong Kong will lose the tourism and other economic benefits to be derived from making the harbour a vibrant centre for local and international water sports.