



# CTBUH Research Paper

[ctbuh.org/papers](http://ctbuh.org/papers)

---

Title: **New Towns in Hong Kong: Planning for the Next Generation**

Author: Pun Chung Chan

Subject: Urban Design

Keywords: Density  
Development  
Planning

Publication Date: 2001

Original Publication: CTBUH 2001 6th World Congress, Melbourne

Paper Type:

1. Book chapter/Part chapter
2. Journal paper
3. **Conference proceeding**
4. Unpublished conference paper
5. Magazine article
6. Unpublished

© Council on Tall Buildings and Urban Habitat / Pun Chung Chan

## URBAN SYSTEMS

# New Towns in Hong Kong: Planning for the Next Generation

Pun Chung Chan

Hong Kong is perhaps the city in this planet that is subject to the most intense development pressures. I said this not because Hong Kong has the highest population growth rate – there could well be other cities having higher population growth rates than us. I said this because our development pressures come not only from very high population growth, at an average rate of about one million every decade over the last 40 years; but also from the rapidly expanding economic activities in the Pearl River Delta region much of which are handled in some ways in Hong Kong.

Our responses to meeting the development needs have to be largely framed within the span of about 1100 square kilometers of our own territory, a size compares very unfavourably with other big cities. Worst still, we can only develop on about 50% of our land mass as the remaining land is mainly Country Parks, which are ‘no-go areas’ for development.

How do planners in Hong Kong cope with these development challenges?

Many of you may be familiar with our high density developments, visually perhaps if not about the substance. Less people, however, know how planners in Hong Kong are planning the new towns. The purpose of this paper is, therefore, to give a brief introduction of the planning of our latest generation new towns which are now almost near completion.

### OUR POPULATION GROWTH

I earlier mentioned that our population has been growing at the magnitude of about a million every decade. The growth had, in fact, accelerated in the nineties during which about 1.3 million people were added to the population. Today, we have a population of approximately 6.8 million. It is predicted that the population could increase to about 8.1 million in year 2011, and then to about 8.9 million in year 2016. (Annex 1)

Our Main Urban Areas, covering Hong Kong Island and Kowloon Peninsula, has a capacity for roughly 4 million population. There is a limit as to how much taller we can stack our developments; ‘spreading out’, in the form of new towns, is, therefore, not a matter of choice.

## NEW TOWN PROGRAMMES

Our New Town Programmes can be said to have commenced in the early 60s when the Government decided to reclaim Gin Drinker's Bay, part of Tsuen Wan (later became one of the first generation New Towns) located some 10 km to the northwest of Kowloon Peninsula. Since then, a total of nine New Towns have been designated and are currently at various stages of development. To date, about three million people, that is about 44% of the territorial population, are living in the New Towns. It is estimated that by year 2011, about 4.1 million, or about 51% of the population at that time, will be living in these communities (Table 1).

The present situation regarding the development of these New Towns is summarized in the following table. The locations of the New Towns are shown on the plan in Fig. 1.

**Table 1** New Towns in Hong Kong

<b>New Town</b>	<b>Present Population</b>	<b>Ultimate Population</b>
1st Generation New Towns commenced in early 1960s & 1970s		
Tsuen Wan	779,000	900,000
Tuen Mun	483,000	620,000
Sha Tin	624,000	760,000
2nd Generation New Towns commenced in late 1970s		
Yuen Long	136,000	210,000
Tai Po	290,000	320,000
Fanling/Sheung Shui	225,000	250,000
3rd Generation New Towns commenced in early 1980s & 1990s		
Tseung Kwan O	246,000	470,000
Tin Shui Wai	163,000	300,000
North Lantau	22,000	320,000
Total:	2,968,000	4,150,000

Source: Territory Development Department, Development Programmes, various years

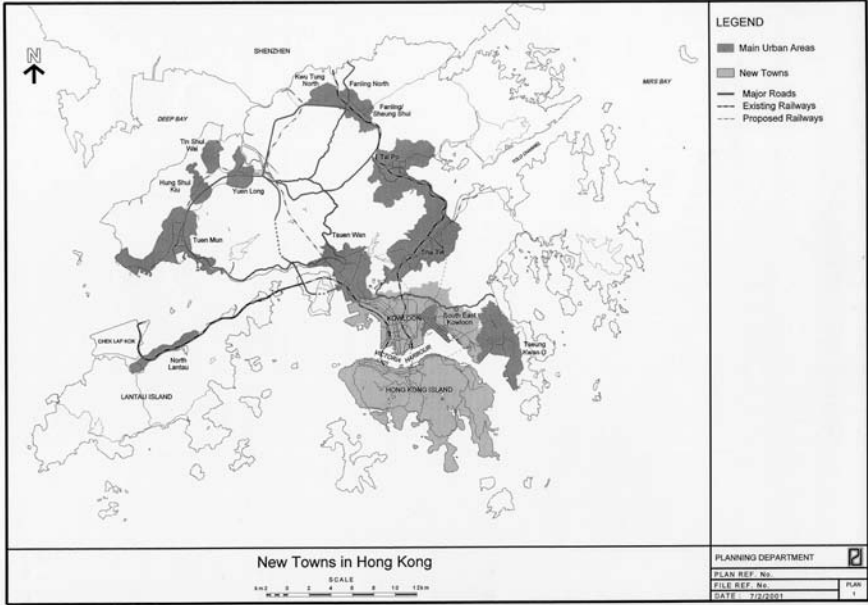


Figure 1 Locations of New Towns.

These New Towns have been successful to a large extent in providing a much improved living environment, which could not otherwise have been achieved in the Main Urban Areas. Development densities in these New Towns are, on average, considerably lower. Modern and efficient infrastructure including internal and external transport links are provided; and so are sufficient and modern community facilities such as schools, hospitals and community centers, to serve the needs of the residents. Above all, recreation spaces in the form of parks and playgrounds as well as amenity areas are provided at a much more generous rate (by Hong Kong standards) than the Main Urban Areas. A less successful element, though, is the provision of jobs, which has not been at the desirable level, resulting in a considerable amount of commuting to the Main Urban Areas for work.

### THE NEXT GENERATION NEW TOWNS

When fully developed these New Towns, together with the Main Urban Areas, will provide accommodation for roughly 8.1 million people, which is still insufficient to meet the anticipated population level of about 8.9 million in year 2016. Creating development land and putting in place the necessary infrastructure on average takes about 12 to 15 years. That is to say, to cater for the population in 15 years' time, we must act now. This we have done, and are currently finalizing the planning of four new towns, namely:

Hung Shui Kiu in north-western New Territories, about 24 km from the Main Urban Areas of Kowloon, to cover an area of 440 ha and accommodate about 160,000 people (Fig. 2);

Kwu Tung North in north-eastern New Territories, about 24 km from the Main Urban Areas of Kowloon, to cover an area of 500 ha and accommodate 100,000 people (Fig. 3);

Fanling North, essentially an extension to the existing New Town of Fanling located some 24 km to the north of Kowloon along the Kowloon-Canton Railway, to cover an area of 192 ha and accommodate 80,000 people (Fig. 4); and

‘A City within the City’, a new town proposed at the ex-Kai Tak International Airport located in the heart of Kowloon, to cover the former airport site of about 280 ha, adjacent restructuring areas of 47 ha plus a reclamation of 131 ha and accommodate 246,000 people (Fig. 5).

The locations of these new towns are also shown in Fig. 1.

Let me now briefly explain some important economic and social trends that have influenced the planning of these new towns, and the basic planning principles that we have adopted.

### **Economic Restructuring**

Over the last twenty years, mainly as a result of Mainland China’s ‘Open Door’ policy, Hong Kong has undergone fundamental changes in its economic structure, and has transformed from a manufacturing-based to a service-oriented economy. In 1980, the manufacturing sector employed some 890,000 people, or 50% of the total employment; today, manufacturing employment has drastically dropped to about 570,000, i.e. only 18% of the total employment (Annex 2). In 1980, the tertiary sector accounted for about 48% of the employment and contributed to about 68% of the GDP; today, 82% of our employment is from the tertiary sector, contributing some 85% of the GDP (Annex 3).

As a result of the economic transformation, the demand for industrial land in Hong Kong has diminished significantly, and one of the traditional functions of new towns in the provision of industrial land has also become superfluous.

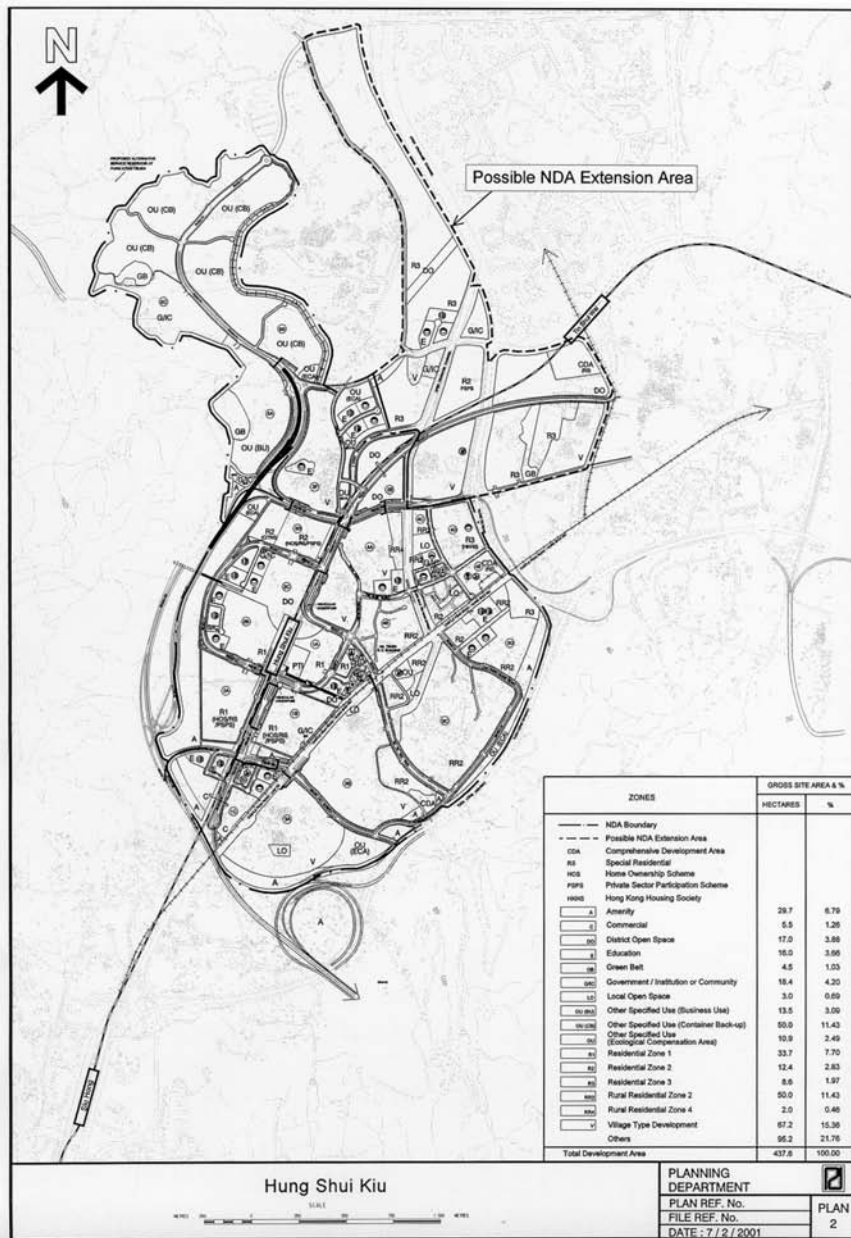


Figure 2 Hung Shui Kiu.

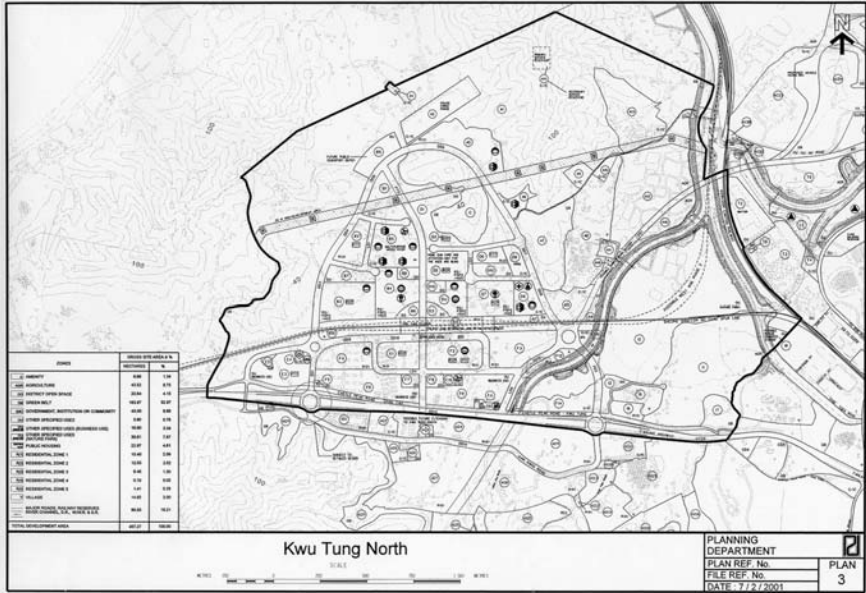


Figure 3 Kwu Tung North.

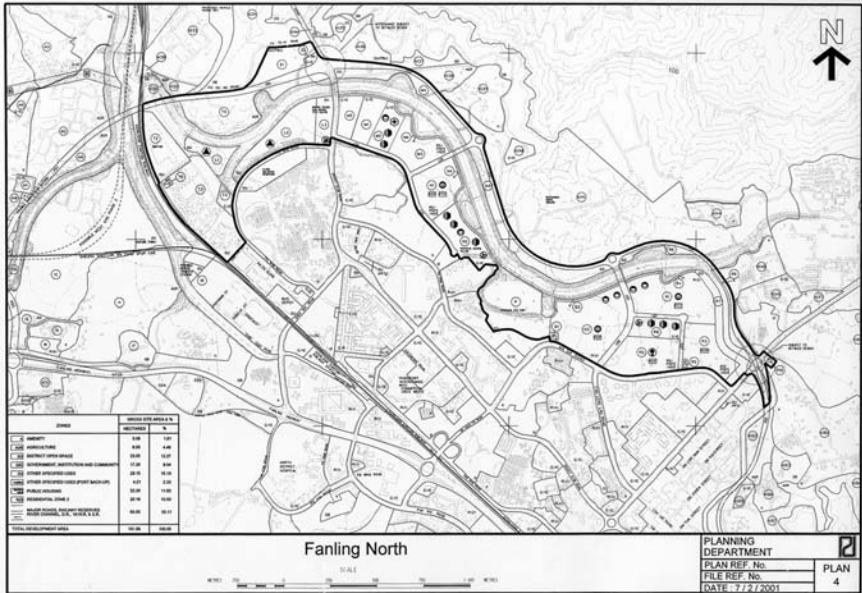


Figure 4 Fanling North.

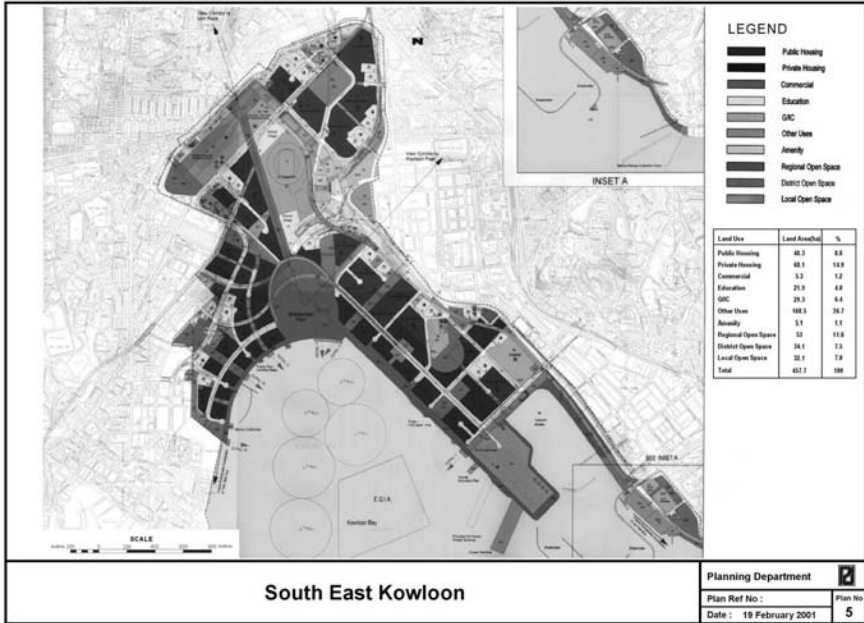


Figure 5 South East Kowloon.

**Cross-Boundary Activities**

On the other hand, as a result of the relocation of the labour intensive manufacturing activities from Hong Kong to Mainland China, particularly the Pearl River Delta region, our economic links with the Mainland have strengthened in many ways. For example, about three-quarters of our container throughput amounting to about 14 million twenty-foot equivalent units in year 2000 (ranks as the world’s No. 1 busiest port) came from, or are destined to, the Pearl River Delta region. Social interactions with the Mainland have also intensified tremendously. For example, record-breaking numbers of people have been recorded every year traveling to the Mainland for leisure, visiting friends and relatives, and for business.

The increasing economic and social interactions between Hong Kong and the Mainland have given rise to a rapid increase in cross-boundary travelling. For example, in 1996 a total of about 65 million cross-boundary passenger trips were recorded at the boundary control points; in 1999, the number had increased to 99 million.

To capitalize on the development opportunities offered by increasing cross-boundary activities, the latest generation new towns proposed in the New Territories are all located in close proximity to existing and planned boundary crossings to Mainland China.



## Rising Aspirations

Hong Kong people have become much more affluent and educated. Associated with this are rising aspirations for a better living environment and increasing awareness of the environmental quality. In tandem with the world trend, people are becoming more concerned about sustainable development.

For example, many are beginning to query the wisdom of building more and more extensive road networks to resolve traffic congestion. They are also becoming more concerned about the quality, not only the quantity, of recreation and green space. They have also demanded better urban design for our developments. Above all, they are also expecting more involvement in the planning process, and be more closely consulted on planning proposals. All these require us to critically rethink about the appropriateness of our conventional and established approaches to new town planning.

## Key Planning Principles

To meet rising community aspirations, we have adopted the following key principles in the planning of the latest three new towns in the New Territories.

***Rail-Based Development.*** As a large proportion of job opportunities in Hong Kong, in particular the high-end service sector jobs, will remain in the Main Urban Areas, it is expected that like their existing counterparts there will be a high degree of daily commuting from the New Towns to the Main Urban Areas. To reduce the reliance on roads, we have selected the locations and planned the three New Towns to cluster around and above the railway stations of a new railway line currently under construction (i.e. the West Rail).

The developments are designed to minimize the noise impact of the railways and maximize convenience in access to the stations for mass transport. In addition, railway station developments will cover a full range of retail facilities to provide convenient shopping.

***Balanced Development.*** A mix of housing types and a full range of supporting commercial, community and recreational facilities are also planned for the New Towns. To take advantage of their strategic locations, proposals have also been made for business and hotel developments to capture the opportunities provided by cross-boundary activities. The intention is to create as balanced communities as possible, not just new towns for dormitory purpose.

***Urban Design.*** Special attention has been given to the built forms to create distinct identities and characters. For example, to take advantage of the mass transport system, residential developments with plot ratios of between 5.0 to 6.5 are located in close proximity to the railway stations. A range of lower-densities, and lower-rise buildings, are placed on the edges of the new towns, nearer to the countryside. Special landmark buildings at key locations are also planned to create identity. Urban design master plans have also been prepared to provide comprehensive guidance to the design of building and streetscapes.

***Environmentally Friendly Transport.*** These new towns are planned as compact and coherent urban communities. Majority of the population are proposed to be accommodated in developments located within a 500 meter walking distance from the railway stations, so as to encourage in-town walking and maximize the use of the railway. To encourage the use of railway transport, enhanced pedestrian facilities (e.g. travellers, landscaped walkways) are also planned to connect activity centres, residential blocks and the railway stations.

For developments located further away from the railway stations, the potential of using environmentally friendly modes of transport, such as electric buses or liquefied petroleum gas vehicles, are being explored. In addition, well-designed networks of cycle paths are planned to encourage cycling both as an alternative means of transport and a form of leisure activity. The intention is to reduce the environmental impacts, such as air and noise pollution, as far as possible.

***Green Neighbourhoods and Attractive Pedestrian Networks.*** Green and leisurely designed neighbourhoods are very much a luxury in the congested Main Urban Areas. To provide a ‘greener and softer’ living environment, extensive district and local open spaces are planned as an integral part of the New Towns. Networks of landscaped pedestrian corridors are proposed to permeate the New Towns linking up these open spaces. It is intended that these people-oriented designs will create a leisurely environment and encourage social interactions.

***Minimize Road Impacts.*** Where roads are necessary and unavoidable, they are planned to minimize their environmental impacts. In Fanling North, for example, the main road is aligned along the periphery of the New Town to discourage traffic penetrating into the residential neighbourhoods. Another example is the main road passing through the Hung Shui Kiu Town Centre, which is designed as a sunken road to reduce the visual and noise impacts. An added benefit of such a design is the creation of a car-free pedestrianized civic square for community enjoyment.

A key feature of the Kwu Tung North New Town is a Central Green Spine to link up the future town centre with a nearby lushly-vegetated knoll. This Green Spine comprises a bus-only lane, landscaped pedestrian way and amenity areas, designed in such a way as to segregate pedestrians from the bus traffic.

***Conservation of Natural Heritage.*** A positive planning approach has been taken to ensure conservation sites are well preserved and enhanced. The Long Valley site in Kwu Tung North New Town is a good example. The ecological study undertaken as part of the planning for the New Town has identified the area as a very important freshwater habitat. Twenty-one different types of bird species warranting protection, including four globally threatened species, have been identified in the area.

To ensure that the new town development would not jeopardize this valuable ecological site, an area of about 40 ha is being considered for designation as a Nature Park, with private properties within the park to be all resumed and proper management measures introduced to place the area under full protection by the Government. Facilities would, however, be included at fringe locations for students and visitors to help raise awareness of the importance and value of conservation.

***Enhancement of Cultural Heritage.*** Within the proposed New Towns and in their vicinities, there are many sites of historical value, such as traditional Chinese walled villages, study halls and ancestral halls. Some of them are already integral components of existing heritage trails. As part of the new town developments, access to these trails will be enhanced to facilitate both local and overseas visitors. Appropriate enhancement schemes for face-lifting of these heritage assets are also being devised.

### **‘A City Within the City’**

The relocation of the international airport from Kowloon to Chek Lap Kok in Lantau Island has opened up an invaluable development opportunity in the heart of Kowloon for building a ‘new city’ within the city. It has also opened up an important section of the central harbourfront for quality and creative developments. The key planning proposals are highlighted below.

***Sustainable Transport.*** Like their counterparts in the New Territories, this new city is designed to encourage the use of public transport. The existing Mass Transit Railway Kwun Tong Line and the future East Kowloon Line will serve as the backbone of the public transport service. The use of these railways for inter-district transportation will be integrated with a local environmentally friendly transport system, possibly in the form of a light-rail or a trolley-bus system

***Urban Design Aspect.*** In addition to the adoption of different building height profiles and urban design requirements, a special feature of the urban design plan is the incorporation of view corridors for Victoria Harbour and Kowloon Hills. In addition, some 5.4 km of new waterfront promenade is proposed for the enjoyment of local residents and visitors, and that a large tract of land, about 25 ha in size, is also earmarked for a regional park, to be named as the Metropolitan Park. These developments will be the future focus for tourists as well as local activities.

***Environmental Aspect.*** The ‘new city’ development also offers opportunities for new environmental designs and facilities, such as depressed roads with wide landscaped decks to reduce environmental impacts, pedestrianized areas with spectacular view corridors, travellers, district cooling systems for buildings and automated refuse collection systems, as well as the utilization of solar energy for special projects.

***Tourism and Leisure Developments.*** To promote tourism, part of the harbourfront, amounting to some 23 ha, is earmarked for leisure and tourism-related facilities to include such possible uses as a cruise terminal, hotels, a entertainment/retail/dining centre, an aviation museum, a IMAX theatre, a children's discovery centre, a monumental observation tower, etc.

### **Public Participation**

I mentioned about the community wanting more and closer involvement in the planning process. In firming up the planning of the latest new town proposals, in addition to the statutory requirement we have also adopted a much more proactive approach to consult the public. Soliciting public views through public forums, meetings with stakeholder groups, expert group discussions, etc. have been organized extensively. We hope a more open planning process, particularly at the early stage of planning, will not only promote mutual understanding and facilitate the building of community consensus; it will also help secure public ownership of the plans and minimize confrontation in the course of implementation.

### **CONCLUSION**

In conclusion, I hope I have given you a brief and yet informative synopsis of how planners in Hong Kong have taken up the formidable task of planning and developing new communities to accommodate the fast growing population and transforming economy. I welcome everyone to visit our website (<http://www.info.gov.hk/planning>) where more detailed information on these new towns are available. Finally, thank you for your attention and patience.

