



Christine  
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## Prove your worth

In an attempt to win popularity, Chief Executive Donald Tsang Yam-kuen has tried to pacify the public by defending the government's handling of the Central reclamation work which has led to the destruction of the Star Ferry clock tower and the likely demolition of Queen's Pier.

He made the following public statements at various times. First, that there had been proper public consultation. Second, that all proper procedures had been observed. Third, he explained that public objections came too late, as the government's hands were tied by the construction contracts it had entered into. Fourth, that Hong Kong had to "strike a balance between development and conservation".

Regarding his first statement, the recent exchange among *South China Morning Post* letter writers has established beyond doubt that no proper public consultation was ever conducted.

Perhaps I can press the question again because the answer goes to the truthfulness of the government's response. When did it ever carry out any consultation giving the public a fair opportunity to object, in accordance with the law set out in a Court of Final Appeal judgment?

As for his second claim, the record shows that the government had refused to refer the Central works zoning plan, approved in 2002, back to the Town Planning Board for reconsideration. That is despite a 2004 ruling by the Court of Final Appeal that the legal interpretation upon which those plans were approved by the board was wrong. As a result of the judgment, and in fairness to the local community, the board should have been allowed to reconsider the plans based on the correct legal interpretation. This, the government refused to do.

For the first time in Hong Kong, the government is seeking to implement a zoning plan which has never been properly considered by the public or by the planning board. The government's action flouts the whole purpose of the

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Town Planning Ordinance, which is to involve the public in urban development. Therefore, the second claim of Mr Tsang is also wrong.

The documentary record answering his third claim is even clearer. The background facts leading to the government signing the construction contract are set out in arbitration proceedings taken against the government by an unsuccessful bidder.

The decision made clear that the government was fully aware of the court challenge to its legal interpretation, but still decided to award the contract. The administration was criticised for having acted with "undue haste", and the decision went against the government.

Therefore, Mr Tsang cannot rely on the government's own transgression and failure as an answer to the public.

To show he is an honourable and reliable leader, Mr Tsang should investigate this matter and put the full facts before the public. As he is seeking re-election, he should show himself worthy of leadership. He should show that he deals with criticism fairly and does not condone misconduct by the officials he leads. Above all, he must be honest to himself.

Regarding his last statement, Mr Tsang said, in his *Letter to Hong Kong* last Sunday, that he had thought about the people's growing interest in heritage. He said he recognised that people no longer saw urban development as paramount, especially when it meant the loss of heritage buildings. He then went on to say there was a cost involved. Moreover, he added: "We cannot afford heritage preservation if we do not preserve our economic sustainability."

There has been a tremendous imbalance in favour of destruction and there is an urgent need for restoration. That was why so many people were upset over the Star Ferry clock tower. Heritage, culture and identity are important aspects that give a city its competitive advantage. We destroy them at our peril.

It is regrettable that even after thinking about heritage, our chief executive still could not see the danger. Mr Tsang, show us that you are worthy to lead us.

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