

Eco-cultural' park planned for wetlands

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Rural town near Tin Shui Wai slated for tourist development

The government is planning to develop the rural town of Lau Fau Shan into an "eco-cultural park", with a direct access road from the Wetland Park in nearby Tin Shui Wai.

In a study that is under way, the Planning Department has drawn up four zones in the 565 hectares of the northwestern New Territories, which covers the existing fish market, the wetland area in Tsim Bei Tsui, a green belt west of Tin Shui Wai New Town, and a coastal area with mangrove and oyster shell deposits near the entrance to the Hong Kong-Shenzhen Western Corridor.

The blueprint is an outcome of a public consultation conducted last year. It will be discussed by the Town Planning Board on Friday.

The existing fish market would be revamped, with a roundabout reconfigured as a gateway plaza.

At the waterfront, a piazza would be created as an extension of the market and provide space for shops and restaurants. A former police station would become a restaurant and gallery to showcase the history of oyster farming.

Along the coastal mangrove groves near the western corridor, two boardwalks would be added so visitors could see the area upclose.

To connect tourist spots in the area, the department suggests widening a road between the wetland park and Lau Fau Shan and building a car park for coaches.

The road would shorten the journey between Tin Shui Wai and Lau Fau Shan to eight minutes, saving five minutes and relieving traffic congestion on weekends, Yuen Long District Council chairman Leung Che-cheung said.

Lau Fau Shan Chamber of Commerce vice-chairman Chan Choi-hing said businessmen in the area welcomed the plan, but the government was unable to tell them when the makeover would occur.

He said the plan was necessary, as the existing fish market was small and got too crowded on weekends. Traffic jams were also a problem.

A green group, however, has reservations about the plan for one of the four study areas - a green belt west of Tin Shui Wai.

The green belt, privately owned and planned for tourism and private residential development, had seen illegal dumping over the past few years, said Alan Leung Sze-lun, WWF senior conservation officer. "It is not very appropriate for the government to initiate a change of land use for development in these areas, which would amount to encouraging the illegal activities," he said.

Leung also had reservations about adding walking trails in Tsim Bei Tsui, which would disturb birdlife in the area.