

COUNTRY AND MARINE PARKS BOARD

Preparation for the Revalidation of Hong Kong UNESCO Global Geopark

1. Purpose

1.1 This paper aims to inform Members about the ongoing preparation work for the revalidation of Hong Kong UNESCO Global Geopark (HKUGGp).

2. Background and Revalidation of HKUGGp

2.1 Hong Kong Geopark became a National Geopark in 2009, and was then accepted by the Global Geoparks Network (GGN) to become a Global Geopark in 2011. Following the formalisation of the UNESCO Global Geopark (UGGp) label in 2015, Hong Kong Geopark was renamed Hong Kong UNESCO Global Geopark.

2.2 UGGps are subject to a revalidation process every four years. The previous revalidation of HKUGGp was performed in 2017, when the UGGp Council decided to renew the status of HKUGGp as a UGGp for four more years. The UGGp Council also gave several recommendations, which have been the focus of HKUGGp's work in preparation for the upcoming revalidation.

2.3 The revalidation of HKUGGp, originally scheduled for 2021, was postponed due to the COVID-19 pandemic. HKUGGp was informed that the revalidation will take place in 2025.

3. Progress to Address Recommendations from 2017 Revalidation

3.1 Over the last few years, HKUGGp has made substantial efforts in addressing the recommendations made by the UGGp Council following the 2017 revalidation. The corresponding actions/improvements undertaken by HKUGGp are summarised below.

3.2 Recommendation 1: Improve the Kat O Geoheritage Centre and the Lai Chi Wo Geoheritage Centre with more professional, innovative and higher-quality exhibits.

3.2.1 Kat O Geoheritage Centre was upgraded to a new visitor centre, Kat O Story Room, in October 2019. Located within the historic Tin Hau Temple, this centre showcases the history and cultural heritage of the Kat O community through innovative and high-quality exhibits.

3.2.2 Two initiatives were introduced in Lai Chi Wo. In 2021, the new Siu Ying Story Room was opened at a former primary school building. In addition, the original Lai Chi Wo Geoheritage Centre was renovated in the same year and renamed as “Lai Chi Wo Story Room”. Both story rooms contain valuable historical information and materials gathered from the villagers, including first-hand accounts of village life through interviews, old photographs and items, which have been blended into high quality exhibits to illustrate the lifestyle and culture of the rural communities. The two story rooms with different themes provide enhanced visitor services and strengthen local engagement.

3.3 Recommendation 2: Improve the promotion of and update information about UNESCO Global Geoparks around the world and the Regional Networks (APGN, LACGN and EGN) in all visitor centres and geoheritage centres.

3.3.1 Information about the UNESCO Global Geoparks and the Regional Geopark networks was updated in the form of dedicated exhibition panels in all visitor centres and story rooms to better promote UNESCO Global Geoparks and Regional Networks.

3.4 Recommendation 3: Improve research activities through collaboration and partnerships with universities and scientific institutions at the regional and international levels.

3.4.1 HKUGGp has facilitated research by postgraduate students from the China University of Geosciences (Beijing), who published two papers on the geological features of Port Island and Tung Ping Chau in 2018 and 2019 respectively. Since 2024, HKUGGp has collaborated with the Antiquities and Monuments Office (AMO) and the Institute of Vertebrate Paleontology and Paleoanthropology (IVPP) of Chinese Academy of Sciences to conduct research on dinosaur fossils discovered on Port Island in HKUGGp. The discovery demonstrated Hong Kong's geological diversity and HKUGGp's contribution in scientific research.

3.4.2 In addition, HKUGGp has partnered with the South China Research Centre of the Hong Kong University of Science and Technology to record the culture, heritage and festivities of

the local communities in HKUGGp since 2019. Events recorded include the decennial Da Jiu Festival of the Hing Chun Alliance and the Kau Sai Village Hung Shing Festival in 2019, as well as the High Island Tin Hau Festival in 2024. The materials collected would be used in the education and publicity programmes of HKUGGp.

3.5 Recommendation 4: Continue to strengthen collaboration and partnerships with local communities and stakeholders to develop capacity building and partnership projects.

3.5.1 Initiated under the "Same Roots • Same Origins" (SRSO) project, HKUGGp has set up five story rooms since 2017 in collaboration with four geopark communities and other stakeholders, such as Lions Nature Education Foundation, Fung Ying Seen Koon and Chinachem Group. In addition to the story rooms, the SRSO project led to the publication of two books on Ap Chau and Kat O, and the launch of two websites on oral stories (i.e. "The Seven Villages of the Hing Chun Alliance - Our Stories" website (ourstories.hk) and Kat O "Lucky Harbour – Our Stories" website (luckyharbour.hk)). Additionally, the Kat O Heritage Trail was opened in 2021, followed by the launch of the first section of the Hing Chun Alliance Heritage Trail in 2024.

3.5.2 HKUGGp has established partnerships and collaborations with a wide range of organisations, including 1) Geopark Hotels; 2) Hong Kong Science Museum, to establish the Earth Science Gallery and the Palaeontology Gallery; and 3) Hong Kong Monetary Authority, to issue the new \$500 banknotes that display the hexagonal rock columns of HKUGGp in 2018.

3.6 Recommendation 5: Continue the active involvement in the activities of the Global Geoparks Network and the Asia Pacific Geoparks Network, promoting the international value of the territory through the partnerships.

3.6.1 HKUGGp has contributed actively as a UGGp and a member of the GGN Working Group on Tourism. HKUGGp actively participated in the GGN Conferences and Asia Pacific Geoparks Network (APGN) Symposiums held every two years, as well as the annual International Training Course on UGGp Management and Development.

3.6.2 In May 2024, HKUGGp and the Chinese Geoparks Network (CGN) co-organised the APGN Geopark Development Forum in Hong Kong. Representatives from 22 geoparks in the Asia Pacific region gathered to exchange experiences, challenges and good practices in managing geoparks. Since 2017, HKUGGp has also co-organised several capacity-building workshops with the Ministry of Natural Resources. Additionally, student exchange activities for Geopark Schools, both in-person and online, were also organised with participation from geoparks in the CGN and

Japanese Geoparks Network.

3.6.3 Since 2019, HKUGGp has served as the social media coordinator for the APGN. Since 2020, HKUGGp has also initiated quarterly online video meetings for the geoparks in the Asia Pacific region, to exchange views and share experiences. These networking events fuelled the spirit of solidarity among geoparks through the pandemic years. Ms. Chan Yu-nam, Senior Geopark Officer, was elected a member of the APGN Advisory Committee, for the term of 2024-26, in recognition of her knowledge in geopark management.

4. Progress in Key Areas of Work

4.1 The key areas of work as required under the UGGp criteria can be summarised as education, research, green tourism, sustainable development and local engagement, as well as networking. While HKUGGp has focused on some of these key areas of work in response to the recommendations made by the UGGp Council, HKUGGp also made progress on the other key areas.

4.2 Education

4.2.1 HKUGGp has continued to work with various partners, including sister geoparks, schools and universities, NGOs and government departments to provide education programmes. Rock Classroom and talks are open to all schools, while more in-depth activities, such as workshops, field trips and student exchange visits, are provided under the Geopark School Programme.

4.2.2 To celebrate the designation of the Early Cretaceous rhyolitic columnar rock formation of HKUGGp as one of the First 100 International Union of Geological Sciences (IUGS) Geological Heritage Sites, HKUGGp organised a series of sea excursions for local primary and secondary school teachers and students in 2023, enhancing their understanding of this geological treasure.

4.2.3 In October 2024, the Government announced the exciting news of the discovery of dinosaur fossils on Port Island. Following this discovery, HKUGGp has launched a science popularisation activity for primary and secondary school students - “The Dinosaur is Here”. This initiative allows students to learn about the process of fossil formation and mysteries of dinosaurs through interactive activities. In addition, a series of palaeontology workshops on fossils have been organised in collaboration with the AMO.

4.2.4 HKUGGp was a supporting partner of the 1st and 2nd Hong Kong Inter-Secondary School Geology Quest in 2023 and 2024, hosted by The Geological Society of Hong Kong and Hong Kong Discovery, to spark students' interest in geology and develop their teamwork skills.

4.3 Green Tourism

4.3.1 Accessibility to some remote geopark attractions has been substantially improved since 2017. The improvements include: 1) the provision of new minibus service to High Island Reservoir East Dam since 2018, and subsequent service extensions; 2) the provision of new ferry service to Kat O and Ap Chau since 2018; 3) the extension of ferry service to Lai Chi Wo in 2020; and 4) the provision of new ferry service to Kau Sai Village and High Island since 2023.

4.3.2 Since 2017, HKUGGp also made significant progress in creating new visitor facilities and repackaging existing tour routes, including five story rooms, the Biu Tsim Kok Section and Po Pin Chau Section of High Island Geo Trail, Kat O Heritage Trail and the first section of Hing Chun Alliance Heritage Trail connecting Lai Chi Wo, Mui Tsz Lam and Kop Tong.

4.3.3 Regarding the Recommended Geopark Guide System, HKUGGp has continued to support and provide regular training to enhance the quality of Geopark Guides. HKUGGp participated in the Learning and Teaching Expo 2024 to promote green tourism and study tours to the Geopark.

4.3.4 To support the "#ddHK Design Hong Kong" event organised by the Hong Kong Tourism Commission to promote Sha Tau Kok, HKUGGp offered free guided tours for island-hopping experience to Double Haven region. Led by professional Geopark guides, the participants had the opportunity to explore the distinctive natural and cultural landscapes of Lai Chi Wo, Kat O and Ap Chau.

4.3.5 Since 2022, HKUGGp supported the Sai Kung Hoi Arts Festival, an arts and tourism event organised by the Tourism Commission across four islands within the Geopark. This festival encourages visitors to explore local heritage through artworks and a variety of activities. The Arts Festival has promoted tourism and sustainable development in the geopark communities.

4.4 Sustainable Development and Local Engagement

4.4.1 The SRSO project, which covered Ap Chau, Kat O, Kau Sai Village and the seven

villages of Hing Chun Alliance, played a major part in deepening the engagement of HKUGGp with local communities. This project received the Meritorious Award for Excellence in Team Collaboration, Civil Service Outstanding Service Award Scheme 2022.

4.4.2 HKUGGp has initiated events in collaboration with local communities to promote both tangible and intangible heritage. To celebrate the 10th anniversary of HKUGGp's accession to the GGN, HKUGGp co-organised a community fair with local geopark communities to offer a diverse array of activities aimed at promoting local craftsmanship, traditional knowledge, food and culture. In 2023, the new geopark attraction of High Island was launched, and oral history and cultural information of the local Hakka villagers and fishermen was collected and presented to visitors. Guided tours to High Island were also held during the Tin Hau Festival in 2024 to introduce the intangible cultural heritage of the bamboo shed theatre building technique.

5. Major Projects

5.1 We will continue to refine our key areas of work as highlighted in para. 4 above. Significant projects and actions under planning or implementation in the coming year include:

- (a) Palaeontology research and education: we will continue to conduct research on the newly discovered dinosaur fossils in collaboration with institutions, including the AMO, IVPP and the Chinese University of Hong Kong. The research result could be incorporated into the education and publicity materials of HKUGGp, for popularising palaeontology and earth science, and for promoting Hong Kong's valuable geological heritage;
- (b) Renovation of Volcano Discovery Centre (VDC) and the geopark monument at High Island Reservoir East Dam: it is planned to renovate the VDC, which was opened in 2014, to provide attractive and informative displays. In addition, we plan to upgrade the East Dam visitor area by giving the existing geopark monument a brand-new look, and providing a sitting area;
- (c) Sai Kung Hoi Arts Festival: HKUGGp will continue to support the Tourism Commission to promote green tourism at Sharp Island and the local geopark communities of Sai Kung;
- (d) Hing Chun Alliance Heritage Trail: the remaining sections of the Hing Chun Alliance Heritage Trail will be completed by 2027.

6. Advice Sought

6.1 Members are invited to note the progress of HKUGGp and to give their views on the work of HKUGGp as stated above.

Agriculture, Fisheries and Conservation Department
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