

COUNTRY AND MARINE PARKS BOARD

Hong Kong UNESCO Global Geopark: Current Status and Plans to Improve Its Functioning and Quality

1. Purpose

1.1 The aim of this paper is to inform Members about the current status of Hong Kong UNESCO Global Geopark (HKUGGp) and to seek their support for the plans to improve its functions and quality, as well as its sustainable development.

2. Background

2.1 A Global Geopark is recognised by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) as a single, unified geographical area, where sites and landscapes of international geological significance, verified by scientific professionals, are managed with the holistic concept of protection, education and sustainable development. It must have a clearly defined boundary and be of adequate size to fulfill its functions.

2.2 HKUGGp is a single entity with a land area of over 150 km², covering both local communities and geosites, the latter are protected by the Country Parks Ordinance (Cap. 208) and the Marine Parks Ordinance (Cap. 476) (**Figure 1**).

2.3 HKUGGp was first planned and developed using Hong Kong's long-established country park system and was officially accepted as a member of the National Geoparks of China in November 2009. It was admitted as a member of the Global Geoparks Network (GGN) in September 2011. In 2015, following the formalisation of the Geopark Programme by UNESCO, Hong Kong Global Geopark was renamed Hong Kong UNESCO Global Geopark in November 2015. Major activities of HKUGGp since its establishment are summarised in the following sections.

3. Management Structure

3.1 A Geopark Division was set up under the Country and Marine Parks Branch of the Agriculture, Fisheries and Conservation Department (AFCD) in April 2010 to take charge of developing and carrying out strategies for geo-conservation, science popularisation and networking as well as coordinating measures for the improvement of visitor services and facilities of HKUGGp.

3.2 The geosites of HKUGGp are holistically protected and managed under the longstanding protected area systems including country parks, special areas and marine parks. The manpower of country parks and marine parks divisions and their park management experience provide effective synergy to the effective conservation and protection of HKUGGp. AFCD, which is the management authority of HKUGGp, has formulated management plans and deployed staff to patrol and manage the geosites and visitor facilities of HKUGGp regularly. These ensure the most sensitive areas of geological and ecological significance are effectively protected and managed under the prevailing legal framework in Hong Kong both on land and in marine areas.

4. Visibility Enhancement

4.1 After the formalisation of the Geopark Programme by UNESCO, it is a key requirement for a UNESCO global geopark (UGGp) to give visitors and local people a clear understanding that it is a UGGp and a member of the GGN. In the case of HKUGGp, it is also a member of the Asia Pacific Geoparks Network (APGN) and the Chinese Geoparks Network (CGN). To ensure this identity is clearly visible to visitors and locals and to enable them to find relevant information about the geopark, respective logos are displayed on our geopark thematic website, in our publications, at our visitor centres, and on signboards and other relevant facilities.

4.2 In addition, a series of visibility enhancement initiatives, including the installation of geopark-themed visitor panels along the geo-trails and 3D mural paintings at certain tourist spots, were made in collaboration with non-governmental organisations (NGOs), local publishers, artists and other geopark partners. Three new definitive stamps, with associated philatelic products that feature some of the

unique geo-attractions in HKUGGp, which are in line with those issued in 2014, were launched by the Hong Kong Post on 1 January 2018.

5. Local Engagement and Empowerment

5.1 In order to be a UGGp, besides world-famous geological heritage of outstanding universal value, the management of the UGGp should also contribute towards sustainable development of the area with the involvement of local communities. To this end, guidelines on partnership arrangements have been prepared, and HKUGGp is actively engaging local communities to preserve their unique cultural heritage.

5.2 To showcase the harmonious relationship between local communities and the ambient environment in HKUGGp, and to promote public awareness of the importance of conserving the natural environment and cultural heritage, local villagers and other geopark partners have been engaged in designing and establishing two new visitor centres in Lai Chi Wo and Ap Chau respectively. The new visitor centre on Ap Chau serves not only as a new visitor base to promote HKUGGp and the UGGp concept, it is also a platform to engage the Ap Chau community in preserving and publicising the island's unique geological and cultural heritage.

5.3 Another partnership scheme, the Signature Project Scheme, is underway in the Northeast New Territories to improve the visitor facilities in HKUGGp. Under the Scheme, an old rural school in Lai Chi Wo is being converted into an education and visitor centre, called the "Double Haven Siu-ying Story Room". In addition, the wooden boardwalk through the mangrove in the vicinity is being refurbished, and the walking trail leading to Lai Chi Wo from Wu Kau Tang is being enhanced.

5.4 At the moment, a number of community projects are being carried out in Lai Chi Wo. A community project funded by the Hong Kong Jockey Club Charities Trust is in progress to conserve and renovate a group of village houses to develop a Hakka life experiential learning programme with visitor accommodations. Also in place are the 'Sustainable-Lai Chi Wo' project for promoting sustainable development

through social innovation and cross-sector cooperation, and the ‘Management Agreement Scheme at Lai Chi Wo Enclave 2017-2019’ project to enhance farming practices and local biodiversity. All these projects would contribute to the sustainable development and village revitalisation of Lai Chi Wo.

6. Facilitating Quality and Sustainable Tourism

6.1 According to our survey, HKUGGp received about 1.5 million local and overseas visitors each year in the past five years, and the number has increased recently because of the improved accessibility. This includes the introduction of a guided shuttle bus tour to the High Island Reservoir East Dam and the launch of a kaito ferry service between Ma Liu Shui and Lai Chi Wo. To provide more choices for visitors, we are in collaboration with relevant government departments to explore the launch of a minibus service between Pak Tam Chung and the East Dam in Sai Kung and a new kaito ferry service between Ma Liu Shui, Kat O and Ap Chau in the Northeast New Territories.

6.2 In consideration of the local community’s needs and the huge demand for geo-tourism in Sai Kung, the Sharp Island Pier is being reconstructed under the Signature Project Scheme of the Sai Kung District. The reconstruction works are expected to be completed by the end of 2018. We are also facilitating the improvement of six public piers under the Pier Improvement Programme, and the implementation of a series of short- and long-term improvement works to enhance the tourism infrastructure to be carried out by the relevant Government departments.

6.3 In addition to enhancing accessibility and visitor facilities, HKUGGp has encouraged and provided capacity-building opportunities for local communities to preserve their cultural heritage and make use of their indigenous knowledge to promote sustainable, community-led countryside tourism. Trained villagers are actively engaged in geopark activities and have been recruited to deliver guided tours and programmes for geopark schools and the public.

6.4 Currently, HKUGGp has 48 geopark guides. To maintain high-quality

visitor services and to tie in with the GGN requirement for the promotion of cultural heritage in the geopark, we have been organising capacity-building sessions for the geopark guides and the most recent one was on “Heritage, Education and Tourism” organised in March 2018.

7. Regional and Global Networking

7.1 UGGps cooperates not only with local communities, but also with other UGGps through GGN and other regional geopark networks. By working with other geoparks across borders, HKUGGp strives to contribute to the development of GGN and to function as a bridge for regional and global geopark networks for knowledge exchange and better mutual understanding. HKUGGp is playing an active role in GGN through serving as a member of its Tourism Working Group.

7.2 HKUGGp supports and participates in a variety of networking and capacity-building activities, with the aim of building partnerships with other UGGps and promoting best practices on the sustainable development of geoparks. On top of the ongoing support provided to aspiring geoparks of APGN and CGN, HKUGGp recently organised two workshops together with APGN in early April 2018 to provide training opportunities for over 30 participants from APGN and CGN. Moreover, HKUGGp has so far established partnership arrangements with eight sister geoparks and two cooperation partners. These networking activities have proved effective in benefiting the participants and making a continuous contribution to GGN.

7.3 Last year, the head of the UGGp programme, Professor Patrick McKeever, and other representatives from the UGGp Council and the GGN Executive Board visited HKUGGp on various occasions. During the visits, HKUGGp representatives exchanged views with the visitors, explained HKUGGp’s engagements with local groups and communities, and discussed the outcome of these efforts with them, who also gave valuable advice and commended on the breadth and depth of the global networking, management, visibility enhancement and local engagement work of HKUGGp.

8. Way Forward

8.1 The year 2018 marks the 10th anniversary of HKUGGp. To maintain and reinforce HKUGGp's global status, and taking into account the advice and recommendations of GGN, we will continue to maintain our high-quality management and geopark services on the aspects broadly covered in the above sections along with the following specific actions:

- a. Improving the existing visitor venues, including the Kat O and the Lai Chi Wo Geoheritage Centres, with more professional, innovative, and higher-quality exhibits;
- b. Improving the promotion of and updating information on UNESCO Global Geoparks from all over the world and the Regional Networks (e.g. the APGN) in all Visitor Centres and Geoheritage Centres;
- c. Improving our research activities through collaboration and partnerships with universities and scientific institutions of regional and international level;
- d. Continuing and strengthening collaboration and partnerships with local communities and stakeholders on capacity building and partnership projects; and
- e. Continuing our active involvement in the activities of GGN and APGN and to promote the international value of HKUGGp's geological and cultural resources through our partnerships with global geoparks under the umbrella of UGGp.

8.2 The comprehensive legal framework of Hong Kong's Country and Marine Park system has ensured the sustainability of the protected areas in Hong Kong and will continue to act as the foundation for the conservation and sustainable development of HKUGGp. We will continue to improve the functions and quality of HKUGGp before the next revalidation in 2021.

9. Advice Sought

9.1 Members are invited to note the progress of HKUGGp and to give their views on and support for the planning and on-going work of HKUGGp as stated above.

Agriculture, Fisheries and Conservation Department
April 2018