

# \$3b development plan unveiled

By Joon Fong and Yonden Lhatoo

COMMUNITY leaders in Sai Kung are trying to persuade sceptical authorities to approve an ambitious \$3 billion development project that could turn the district into a massive tourist and recreation hub.

The Sai Kung District Development Foundation's plans for the district include a rival to Ocean Park's "Water World", that would feature a cable car system linking the scenic area to its cluster of outlying islands.

The foundation, which is seeking government approval for the project, expects the development to create up to 10,000 new jobs and attract about five million visitors a year.

The Hong Kong Tourist Association (HKTA), it claims, has concentrated only on expanding existing urban tourist areas which are needed to cater for up

to 23 million visitors per annum by the year 2011. Hong Kong last year received a record 10 million visitors.

Council members say that if the obvious benefits of developing areas like Sai Kung are not taken advantage of, potential visitors could turn to tourist spots elsewhere in the Pacific region.

Though three of the foundation's council members, including the chairman, are key rural committee figures, they claim that most of the project's features have been planned for government land, meaning that they do not stand to profit personally.

The three members are Lau Wan-hei, chairman of both the council and the rural committee, Chan Kwai-sang and Lee Kang-ching.

Woo Chia-wai, president of the University of Science and Technology, and Sai Kung Dis-

trict Board chairman Ng Sze-fuk, are also council members.

Lau Shiu-kwan, a council member whose consultancy company carried out the strategic study for the project, said yesterday the scheme could turn Sai Kung into the tourist destination of southern China.

Mr Lau said the projected \$3 billion cost did not include land use and the foundation would try to persuade the government to sell or lease land for nominal fees.

"As for the costs, we have potential investors who have expressed interest in the project, and we could ask for donations from organisations like the Royal Hong Kong Jockey Club," Mr Lau said.

The HKTA said Sai Kung was one of the association's immediate development areas and the plans looked promising but needed to be studied further before being endorsed.

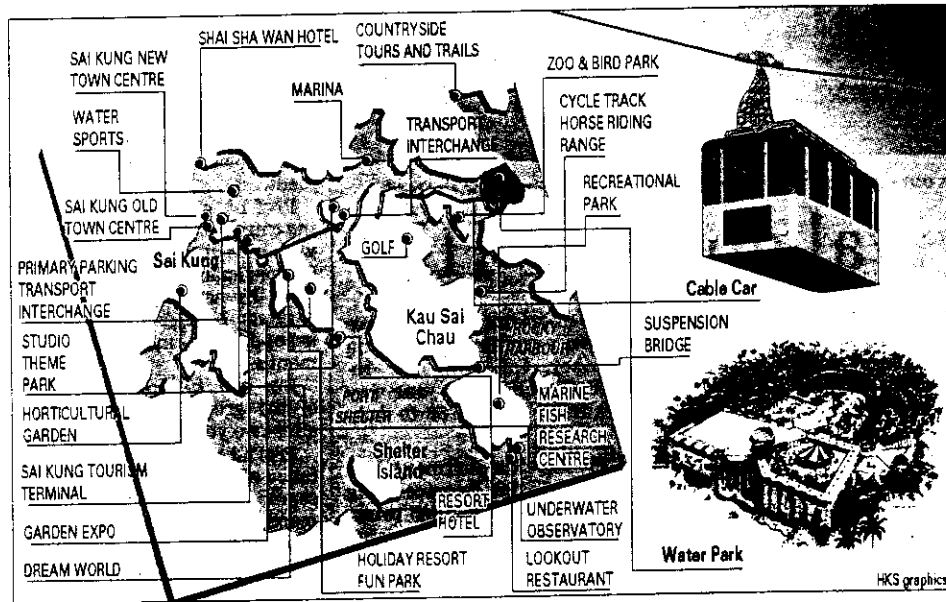
The project is expected to take 10 years to complete, with a tourism terminal linking the promenade of Sai Kung town to the small island of Yeung Chau being a key component.

Another key feature of the project will be a water world theme park built at the High Island Detention Centre site.

The park will include an aquarium, free-form swimming pool with rides and rapids, slides, artificial waves and other amusement facilities.

Council members said they expected the planned cable car system to rival the Tsing Ma Bridge as a tourist attraction. But the HKTA expressed reservations about the technical feasibility of this feature.

Officials from Ocean Park said it was too early to say how the Sai Kung project could affect their business.



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