

Kowloon Park carve up

# \$450 million profit tipped for plan

By MICHAEL CHUGANI

The Government is expected to net a staggering \$450 million with its controversial plan to sell off the front strip of Kowloon Park in Tsimshatsui.

And park users will have to put up with at least 20 months of construction work, according to Government officials.

Crown Land officials refused to reveal how much the land is worth, saying that disclosure would influence tenders.

But it has been learned that the Government intends to carve out a 45,000 sq ft site from the park by cutting into the embankment fronting Nathan Road.

Property experts who asked not to be named said commercial land in that part of Tsimshatsui is worth about \$10,000 a sq ft.

This calculation is based on what property developers paid in the past for low-rise commercial land in the area.

It has been learned that about 57 per cent of the 300 trees which will have to be destroyed are classified as "desirable trees" which should be saved and that the park embankment was never considered by Government town planners as part of the park.

The Executive Council has

decided to go ahead with the controversial shopping complex although no detailed designs have been drawn up to show how the park's environment will be affected by the development.

This means that the Governor, Sir Murray MacLehose, and his advisers reached their decision without having at their disposal design drawings which show what the controversial shopping complex will look like, what type of shops will be involved or what lease conditions will be imposed on the developer to make sure the park environment is protected.

"There are no design drawings at this stage, no architectural drawings," the Government's chief town planning officer, Mr Chau Cham-son, said.

A Public Works Department spokesman also confirmed that lease conditions for the shopping complex "are still in the early stage of preparation."

A member of the Heritage Society, Mr David Russell, described it as "unbelievable."

"It's unbelievable how Exco can debate a subject and come to a decision with no information whatsoever," Mr Russell said.

He said because the park plan was a "controversial one of extreme importance," a team of planners and architects should have been formed to study the area as well as the surrounding area.

He said the Urban Council should have been consulted after which a design should have been produced filling all the requirements.

The plan should then have been given to Crown Lands to see if lease conditions can be drawn up.

"This is normal town planning," Mr Russell said.

However, Mr Chau insisted that the commercial plan "will blend in" with the park.

Speaking publicly for the first time on the commercial project, Mr Chau described the present park front as a "scruffy old slope."

He said: "We don't want to have a scruffy slope there."

"The land can be better used, made environmentally more acceptable."

Mr Chau said none of the 300 trees which have to be felled are classified as "important trees" although 57 per cent are counted as "desirable trees."

"They're small trees anyway," he added.

He said that although no detailed design drawings or architectural plans have so far been drawn up, the Government will "write very stringent conditions to ensure we have proper or the best design."

But Mr Chau said that at this stage he did not know exactly what type of shops will go into the commercial complex or what the whole plan will look like.