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Anger over second golf course plan

By SHIRLEY YAM

AN environmental group reacted with anger last night after learning of plans to build a second golf course within Pat Sin Leng Country Park.

While green groups are battling to stop a proposed golf and leisure development at Shalotung, New World Developments wants to build a second course at nearby Luk Keng - depriving the park of 1½ million square metres of land if both are approved.

The Agriculture and Fisheries Department yesterday confirmed that the North District Land Office had received New World's application last Thursday.

But environmentalists claim the new proposal has confirmed fears that the Shalotung case will open the door to more private developments inside country parks - and at the public's expense.

The World Wide Fund for Nature's director of conservation in Hongkong, Mr David Melville, said: "The application for the Shalotung golf course is the thin edge of the wedge. Hongkong country parks have never before been faced with such threats.

"There is absolutely no evidence to suggest that the population at large wishes to play golf or supports loss of park land for such an elitist use."

About 950,000 square metres of park land is earmarked for development in



the New World project, with 550,000 square metres reserved for the golf course.

The remainder will be used for recreation facilities, including a bird protection zone. However, the Luk Keng site includes Hongkong's largest remaining freshwater marsh.

Unlike the Shalotung plan, the second proposal includes no residential development except for a hostel on the course, but it will also require another 300,000 square metres of land outside the country park.

New World has offered to open the course to the public for some hours, but a departmental spokesman said yesterday the proposal still had to be fully considered before it was passed on to the Country Parks Board for its blessing.

Yesterday's news came as the Fund and five other concerned groups were claiming that the Shalotung plan was illegal.

Legal advice had shown,

they said, that a judicial review had a "good chance" of defeating the initial plan, already approved by the Country Parks Board.

Lawyers believe the decision contravenes the principle of the Country Park Ordinance, which is to provide public enjoyment and to ensure nature conservancy, according to Mr Billy Hau Chi-hang of Friends of the Earth.

"Though the course will be partly opened to the public during the day, the public are barred from the private club most of the time," he said.

The board's power in approving the project under the ordinance was also questionable, he added.

Executive committees of the groups will meet in a fortnight to decide whether to start court action which they believe will cost about \$50,000 to \$60,000 with several lawyers offering a free service.

The groups also included the Conservancy Association, Green Lantau Association, Green Power and Lamma Island Conservation Society.

Their representatives petitioned the Executive and Legislative councillors yesterday to halt the Shalotung plan, but councillors remained non-committal.

A joint meeting of four Omelco panels decided to delay their comments for two weeks after a briefing by the Deputy Secretary for Planning, Environment and Lands, Mr Bowen Leung Bo-wing.