

Anger at revival of golf scheme

By GREG TORODE

LOCAL environmentalists reacted angrily last night to government statements that there would be no formal public consultation on revised plans for the Shalotung golf and country club.

Mr Billy Hau Chi-hang, of the World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF), said that even though the development no longer encroached on country parkland it still affected a beautiful part of Hongkong used by many as a weekend retreat.

"So much for openness. This seems an incredible move considering the Governor's speech last week," he said.

"We are concerned about the whole [Shalotung] valley, not just the park,

"The lives of many people will be affected, yet it looks like we are going to have to battle to make ourselves heard."

The valley is believed to be home to more than 100 species of plants, a number of wild animals and a site of special scientific interest at Fung Yuen that contains 127 species of butterflies including rare ones protected by Hongkong laws.

The new plan involves a 41-hectare, nine-hole "golf country club" and housing development in place of the previous 86-hectare, 18-hole proposal which took up 31 hectares of the Pat Sin Leng Country Park.

The developers, the Shalotung Development Company, will also provide villages with 160 three-sto-

rey houses plus parking and set aside some private land for public use.

The WWF joined other green groups in April to get the High Court to overturn a decision by the Agriculture and Fisheries Department, acting on advice from the Country Parks Board, to approve the initial plan.

Mr Hau said the group had recently written to the Government to try to find out the latest plans to allow public input.

But a spokesman for the Planning, Environment and Lands Branch said no formal consultation would be needed as the new plans involved private land and no longer encroached on country park territory.

"There is no need for consultation as such," he said. "We will consider the environmental impact of this development and we will assess it accordingly. Public opinion will be taken into account."

The company is expected to finalise soon the revised plans to be given to the District and Lands Office.

The office will involve other government agencies, including the Environmental Protection Department and the Highways Department, before deciding whether to seek Executive and Legislative council approval.

A company spokesman said the full plans would be made public at the same time, with copies provided to the Tai Po Rural Committee, representatives of local villages and environmental groups.