

Approvals in parks improper

By KATHY GRIFFIN

THE Government acted improperly in approving a landfill and a golf course in country parks, the Commissioner for Administrative Complaints has concluded, in another blow to the Government's handling of country parks.

Ombudsman Arthur Garcia upheld complaints from Friends of the Earth that the public was not properly consulted about the Shalotung golf course and Clear Water Bay Country Park landfill, and that the wrong sections of the Country Parks Ordinance were used to approve them.

The High Court similarly decided two years ago that the Government used the wrong section to approve the Shalotung project, which resulted in it being sent back to the drawing board.

Friends of the Earth, which brought that court case, filed a complaint with Mr Garcia in March after it appeared the mistake was repeated when a landfill was allowed to extend 18 hectares into Clearwater Bay Country Park.

The group's chairman, Mary Riley, was pleased with the report and said it was "very embarrassing" for the departments involved — the Agriculture and Fisher-

■ A LANDFILL being built partly inside Clear Water Bay Country Park is due to open later this year, but a decision on another country park project is bogged down in red tape.

The Southeast New Territories landfill, which will take rubbish from Kowloon and Hong Kong Island, will relieve pressure on older landfills where space is running out.

The Government rushed through approval for the project but objections were raised by Friends of the Earth in its complaint to Mr Garcia.

ies Department, Environmental Protection Department, Lands Department and Planning, Environment and Lands Branch.

Mr Garcia's report comes down heavily in favour of more public consultation over country park development.

He said it was not enough to consult just the district

He said wider public consultation should have been carried out. But he could not substantiate complaints directed against the Shalotung golf course and housing project, such as that it harmed the environment, because it was still going through the approval process.

Shalotung Development's project manager, John Hui Wing-to, said they had been promised a decision on the environmental impact assessment by early this month, but were still waiting.

trovsey over Shalotung should have alerted the Government that wider consultation was desired.

He criticised the administration for claiming the Country Parks Ordinance did not apply to it.

"In my view, such draconian powers being wielded by the bureaucracy would signal a retrograde step in

possible, a regular review of procedures for applying for development in country parks and a speedier review of the Country Parks Ordinance, for which there is no due date.

He also recommended that areas of conservation value be identified to help decision-making, proper management of an environmental impact assessment of the Shalotung proposal.

A government spokesman said the administration agreed with the spirit of these recommendations. It was, however, still considering the last two — that environmental assessments and formal public consultations

be required for any change to the park boundaries, and that approval-in-principle should only be released after all objections have been considered.

Mr Garcia concluded: "There were procedural impropriety and poor decision-making on the part of the administration, but these were due to a belief it was acting in the interests of the public rather than any deliberate intention to act in bad faith or for any ulterior motive."

Friends of the Earth's director, Mei Ng Fong Siu-mei, said the Government had since shown more willingness to consult the public on country parks.

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