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\$23m Green centre plan is shelved

By Pamela Ngai 23.4

AN ambitious plan to set up a \$23 million ecology centre has been scaled down to a fraction of its proposed size on the advice of the Government ... on the grounds it might damage the environment.

The Conservancy Association's plan for a learning and research centre to serve professional environmental bodies in the Southeast Asian region has been amended to one serving the local community mainly.

Mr Hung Wing-tat, executive member of the Conservancy Association, said the organisation had asked the Government to allocate them a large site in Sai Kung.

Mr Hung told *The Hong-kong Standard* that the Government had told the association the plan was too ambitious.

Instead, it has suggested the organisation begin with a small centre, Mr Hung added.

He said the Government was concerned the large amount of work involved in the construction of the centre could damage the environment.

The Government has also found it difficult to justify a land grant before the centre proved its worth, he said.

Mr Hung said the association had agreed to change its plan.

The Education Department has since identified a disused school in Tsuen Wan that could be turned into an ecology centre.

The school building is a single-storey structure on a 930-square metre site.

Mr Hung said that with such a small site the original plans for fish ponds and a greenhouse had to be shelved.

The farm and laboratory would have to be smaller in scale too, he added.

"Research projects will have to be substantially reduced. It will serve only as a teaching centre," he said.

The original \$23 million estimate for the centre has now been revised to about \$2 million for renovation work and equipment.

Mr Hung said the association had approached a number of prominent individuals for sponsorship.

The initial response was favourable, he added.

Funding for annual recurrent costs, revised to less than half the original estimate of \$700,000, was also being sought from several organisations, he said.

Mr Hung said he envisaged the major portion of the recurrent costs would be met by revenue from training courses organised by the centre.

The centre will be the first of its kind to enable the general public to learn more about the ecology and ways of protecting the natural environment.

Its aim is to stimulate awareness of the environment and issues relating to the ecology and nature conservation through a variety of events and training courses.

Mr Hung said the association had submitted its amended proposal to the Lands and Works Branch earlier this month.

"We expect a response very soon," he said.