

S.C.W.P.

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2,000 sign petition to save tree

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By JIMMY LEUNG

A petition signed by more than 2,000 people to save a 200-year-old banyan tree in Stanley was presented to the Governor, Sir Edward Youde, on Tuesday.

The signatories urged Sir Edward not to sell the land where the tree is growing and use it instead as a "sitting-out" area — with the tree untouched.

The plot is due to be auctioned next month.

The tree is reputed to have been planted 200 years ago in the reign of Emperor Chien Lung of Qing Dynasty. The petition said it was: "a source of pleasure to many, and a symbol that linked the present to the past."

The campaign to save the tree was launched by the Conservation Association and Friends of the Earth, and was supported by four other Stanley residents' associations and MACs.

According to Ms Lipda Siddall of Hongkong Friends of the Earth, whose name was also on the petition, most of those who signed were Chinese. She said that European participation had been in the minority, and she denied that it was an "expatriate" petition.

She said eight elderly ex-fishermen, and other representatives, walked to the East Gate of the Government House to hand it in.

The oldest marcher was Mr Cheng Kun (73), who, after 50 years at sea, had retired from fishing 10 years ago.

Signatures were collected under the banyan tree in Stanley Market Road, from February 13 to 19.

They were received by a station sergeant who promised to pass them onto Sir Edward "as soon as possible."

The letter said: "This is

one of the few large banyan trees still growing in Stanley and, together with another banyan growing on the opposite side of Stanley Market Road, adds to the distinctive atmosphere of this old Chinese fishing village."

They urged the Governor to postpone the scheduled auction so that more thought could be given to the matter.

The 570-square metre site is earmarked for private commercial and residential development. The banyan will, no doubt, get the chop when the site is dug up.

The Urban Council is also making a final attempt to persuade the Director of Lands not to sell, but they said they felt it was "desirable but not essential" to keep the banyan.

District lands officer for Hongkong South, Mr Francis H.K. Ng, said that road widening would inevitably damage the tree, which has spread its roots over a huge boulder.

Yesterday, an elected member of the Southern District said he personally favoured felling the tree as it was a potential danger to residents and pedestrians — particularly during the typhoon season.

Mr Chan Ping-kwan, who is also president of Stanley Kaifong Advancement Association, said large branches could fall when a strong wind came from the southwest or northeast.

"There have been several incidents in the past when children were hit and injured by falling branches."

"It isn't worth keeping the tree if their safety is in jeopardy," he said.

Mr Chan also said there were plans for at least five areas to be turned into recreational areas in the district, and so it was not necessary to designate this site as a sitting-out area.