

Protesters outraged over project at Sai Wan

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Lawmakers, green groups and tens of thousands of Facebook users are protesting against a construction project in Sai Wan that is despoiling one of Hong Kong's top scenic spots.

The government is also being urged by its advisers to review its conservation policy and protect Sai Wan by zoning it a coastal protection area.

The outcry was sparked after the *South China Morning Post* ([SEHK: 0583](#), [announcements](#), [news](#)) reported last week that a businessman, who bought up an abandoned village at the tranquil spot on the unspoilt Tai Long Wan coast, had stripped a site behind a pristine beach of vegetation in preparation for building what some say is a private lodge.

The government in a press release last night said it would meet landowner Simon Lo Lin-shing to follow up the case, saying it "attaches great importance to this site".

A special joint meeting of the Legislative Council's environment and development panels is being arranged this month to look into the issue, says legislator Tanya Chan of the Civic Party.

A Facebook group set up on Friday to protest against the destruction had attracted more than 35,000 members by last night and was growing at more than 1,000 an hour.

The Country and Marine Parks Board, which advises the Country and Marine Parks Authority on parks and special sites, will also discuss the matter at a meeting next month.

Board chairman Professor Nora Tam Fung-yea said the government should consider putting private sites within and near country parks under proper land use controls.

"Buying all the private sites might not be pragmatic," Tam said. "But zoning a site like Sai Wan as a coastal protection area can stop an owner from destroying the land easily."

The Sai Wan site is surrounded by, but not part of, the Sai Kung East Country Park.

Lo, chairman of Mongolia Energy Corporation and Vision Values Holdings, acquired the Sai Wan site for more than HK\$16 million.

Former journalist Wayne Yim said he set up the Facebook group to share frustration about damage done to the site. "I didn't realise how the public felt about it until I set up the group," he said. "I visit Sai Wan with my friends a few times every year. Now I know it's also a popular place for many Hongkongers."

He called on members to gather to plan further action, including a protest at the Agricultural, Fisheries and Conservation Department.

Another Facebook group is planning a petition at the site. "We may camp there," said Damon Wong who visited and filmed the site with 16 Facebook users he did not know previously.

Some members suggested raising funds to run an advertisement in newspapers urging Lo to stop the development.

Paul Zimmerman, convenor of Designing Hong Kong, said: "It's a wake-up call. The Development Bureau should also be held accountable, as it failed to put zoning controls on the site."

He plans to issue a joint statement with at least four green groups including WWF, Green Power, the Conservancy Association and the Green Lantau Association.

Alan Leung Sze-lun, conservation manager of WWF Hong Kong, said the group would urge the government to step in and consider suggestions such as a land swap or buying the site.

Planning-sector lawmaker Professor Patrick Lau Sau-shing said the government should have imposed planning controls on sensitive sites. "The site owner should be required to make an application to the Town Planning Board if he wants to develop the area."

A government spokesman said the site was an agricultural lot and building new structures there would require approval from the Lands Department. The department had not received any such application.

The spokesman said a joint inspection by the Environment Bureau, Environmental Protection Department, Lands Department and Agriculture, Fisheries and Conservation Department was conducted yesterday.

The work does not infringe on the country park boundary but the excavation involves some government land, the spokesman said. The Sai Kung District Lands Office erected notice boards warning against further unauthorised excavation or occupation of government land.

The site owner could not be reached yesterday.