

Plover Cove site dug up to make a park

Trees cleared to plant more trees, says owner of a project that has polluted Bride's Pool

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An owner of a site in Plover Cove Country Park where excavation has polluted a stream running through a beauty spot says the land has been cleared to make way for a HK\$200 million park within a park that will be open to the public.

"We only want to build a country park that can benefit the elderly and students," Albert Leung Sai-on said. "We cleared the site so we can plant more beautiful and rare trees like incense trees and buddhist pines."

He said the project upstream from the Bride's Pool waterfall also involved the "reconstruction" of 11 old village houses, the use of which had not been determined.

He was speaking a day after another owner, Leung Sai-lin, whose name is on the sale and purchase agreement for the site, told the *Post* they planned to build village houses.

She referred further queries yesterday to Albert Leung, saying he was fully responsible for the project.

He said the park, named Jade Emperor Palace, is a project of the Chun On Group, a property development company of which he is managing director. He said the company had filed an application to the Lands Department, but the department could not confirm receiving it yesterday.

"We didn't mean to pollute Bride's Pool. The excavation is suspended now and will only resume on fine days to avoid causing pollution again," he said.

Hikers and environmentalists complained that the stream had been turned a muddy brown by run-off from the site. Work had stopped yesterday but the stream was still milky-coloured.

Albert Leung said the "environmentally friendly" project would provide benches and a snack pavilion.

He said the 11 Hakka-style houses, which are 200 years old, were "too dilapidated to renovate, that's why we will rebuild them".

Asked if the houses would be sold or become another of the numerous private columbariums now dotting the New Territories, he said: "We haven't decided yet. I'd like to focus on the park first."

Under the plan, a sculpture of the Jade Emperor will be placed on the top of the hill on the site, which Leung said would be similar to the Big Buddha on Lantau.

Just off Bride's Pool Road, construction workers had cordoned off the work site with lengths of string and fencing yesterday.

The excavation had stopped but a steady stream of murky water, full of sediment, extended from the construction site and was breaking through a barrier of sandbags to mingle with the stream, which, while clearer, was also slightly murky.

Felled trees also dotted the long corridor of muddy unsettled soil excavated by diggers.

A spokeswoman for the Environmental Protection Department said its staff inspected the site yesterday but did not spot any activity and there was no muddy water in the river.

The department said it would carry out further investigations and monitor the situation closely.

Under the Water Pollution Control Ordinance, a person causing polluting discharges into inland waters commits an offence and could be subject to a maximum penalty of a HK\$200,000 fine and six months in jail.

The site's workers were prosecuted by the Agriculture, Fisheries and Conservation Department in April for felling at least 13 trees.

The department said it would step up its patrolling efforts in country parks but said there was no real need for the government to buy back private land inside the parks, which made up about 2 per cent of their area. "So far the mechanism runs effectively to control development inside country parks," the spokeswoman said.

Under the existing mechanism, land owners have to obtain approval from the Lands Department if they want to carry out development in country parks. The department would seek the views of the AFCD's director, who may consult the Country and Marine Parks Board.



An artist's impression of the development in the country park.



Diggers sit idle upstream from the polluted Bride's Pool waterfall yesterday.