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Arts hub chief dismisses fears of design mishmash

Tanna Chong

The West Kowloon Cultural District Authority has brushed aside concerns that the final design of the arts hub will end up being a mishmash of incoherent elements.

The final plan for the 42-hectare project would maintain the integrity of its original design, the authority's chief executive, Graham Sheffield, said.

His comments came amid criticism that a final blueprint incorporating features of all three shortlisted proposals would result in the arts hub being an awkward mismatch.

Three proposals have been submitted for an initial three-month city-wide public consultation. The proposals, from three renowned architects - Hong Kong's Rocco Yim Sen-kee, Britain's Norman Foster, and Rem Koolhaas from The Netherlands - all accentuate light, air and greenery, but in unique and novel ways.

Chief Secretary Henry Tang Ying-yen, who is chairman of the authority's board, said the final plan would be "complete and organised". Only one plan would be chosen and a master planner would oversee execution of the whole project, he said.

There were features in each of the plans that could be incorporated into the others - "such as strengths in

environmental and transport measures in particular proposals, they can be all combined", Tang said.

Yesterday was the third day that the three master plans had been on display in the Convention and Exhibition Centre. More than 3,500 visitors dropped by to take a look.

It was also the venue of the first public forum, which drew an audience of 260, with some airing worries



Authority chief Graham Sheffield

that flats built in the district would be exclusively for the rich.

Addressing the forum, consultation panel chairman Professor Stephen Cheung Yan-leung and architect Koolhaas both said they doubted any residential area would be exclusively for the rich.

"We are definitely not on the side of the rich," Koolhaas said.

Yim went further. "The flats can

be in the lower price range," he said. "Or we can build Home Ownership Scheme flats there."

Another topic of concern was facilities for the disabled, with some complaining that disabled people had already been inconvenienced by the consultation.

One member of the audience said: "Some visually impaired people also came today but they could not see the three-dimensional models. We cannot see how the plans will cater to the needs of the disabled."

The authority says the next stage of consultation will deal more with details.

Spencer de Grey, of Britain's Foster and Partners, said he believed the final product would be an exemplar of access for all.

Liu Pok-hing, father of disabled painter Liu Tung-mui, said: "The authority should make sure the final product does not disappoint the disabled."

Yim said people should focus more on the overall architectural plans rather than get bogged down in the fine details of each building.

"Although the opinions raised in today's forum were useful," he said, "many of today's questions should be put to the government, not to the authority and the architects."

This stage of public consultations ends on November 20.