

**Proposed Minor Relaxation of Building Height Restriction
for Permitted Residential Development
in 105 Robinson Road, Mid-level West**

Supporting Planning Statement

October 2023

Applicant:
Sino Noble Enterprises Limited

Table of Contents

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

1. INTRODUCTION

2. PLANNING CONTEXT

- 2.1 Local Planning Context
- 2.2 Outdated Planning Intention of “R(C)5” and its Building Height Restriction
- 2.3 Redevelopment Constraints

3. PROPOSED SCHEME AND MINOR RELAXATION

- 3.1 Proposed Single Tower Scheme

4. PLANNING MERITS AND JUSTIFICATIONS

- 4.1 Incompatible “R(C)5” in “R(B)”
- 4.2 Visionary Urban Renewal
- 4.3 Not an Undesirable Precedent
- 4.4 Improved Micro Climate
- 4.5 Insignificant Visual Impact
- 4.6 No Significant Adverse Impacts Anticipated

5. CONCLUSIONS

LIST OF PLANS

- Plan 1 Extract OZP reveals “R(C)5” surrounded by “R(B)” zone
- Plan 2 Cross Section Perspective of the Area

LIST OF DIAGRAMS

- Diagram 1 Nearest tall buildings surrounding subject site
- Diagram 2 Strategic View Points as per Ch. 11 Urban Design Guidelines
- Diagram 3 Elevated Strategic View Point at VP1

LIST OF TABLES

- Table 1 Comparison between Approved GBP and Application Proposal

LIST OF APPENDIXES

- Appendix 1 MLP set
- Appendix 2 Transport Review Report (TRR)
- Appendix 3 Wall Effect of Approved GBP to Woodland Gardens

Executive Summary

This application is to seek planning approval from the Town Planning Board (TPB) for the proposed minor relaxation to building height (BH) in Inland Lot 942 in Mid-level West in the approved Mid-Levels West Outline Zoning Plan No. S/H11/15 (OZP).

The height relaxation in the current statutory planning context warrants revisit since current tight restriction would create a ‘sore-thumb’ effect if not taking the right action now. On the other hand, the proposed height relaxation will lead to a good planning intention/vision for urban renewal in the area. Without such vision and incentive for redevelopment, chance of urban renewal in the area is very limited as the area ‘engulfed’ by surrounding tall buildings. After taking the initiative, the subject building height at 215mPD is comparable with those tall buildings (ranging from 180mPD to 272mPD) and allows better spatial space in the subject community.

Government has made clear that private views should not be a constraint whereas an opportunity created for urban renewal in the old district should be encouraged. The proposed one tower will allow maximum spatial distant among buildings. The relaxation could achieve such visionary scenario only if the building height could be changed to 215mPD. It is not intended to get more GFA due to the relaxation of height but offers an opportunity for regeneration of the area. To avoid any doubt, the same GFA will be implemented according to the previously approved GBP. The justifications for relaxation are summarized as follows:

- Incompatible “R(C)5” in “R(B)”;
- Visionary Urban Renewal;
- Not an Undesirable Precedent;
- Improved Micro Climate;
- Insignificant Visual Impact; and
- Insignificant Adverse Impact anticipated.

In view of the above and as detailed in this planning statement, Members of the TPB are requested to give favourable consideration to this Application.

行政摘要

本申請旨在就已獲批准的西半山分區計畫大綱圖編號 S/H11/15 (OZP)，尋求城市規劃委員會批准在中西半山內陸路段第 942 號建議放寬建築高度。

目前法定規劃背景下的高度放寬值得重新審視，因為如果現在不採取正確的行動，當前的嚴格限制將產生「與周圍格格不入，顯得刺眼」效應。另一方面，擬議的高度放鬆將為該地區的舊區重建帶來良好的規劃意圖/願景。如果沒有這樣的重建願景和鼓勵，該地區舊區重建的機會非常有限，因為該地區被周圍的高層建築「吞噬」。採取主動後，擬議的215mPD建築高度與該地區高層建築相當（180mPD至272mPD），並為當區提供了更多的空間距離。

政府已明確表示不應限制私人景觀，而應鼓勵舊區重建的機會。擬議的一棟塔樓將在周圍建築物之間留出最大的空間距離。只有將建築高度改為215mPD，放鬆才能實現這樣的願景。它的目的並不是因為放寬高度而獲得更多的建築面積，而是為該地區的舊區重建提供了機會。為避免疑義，相同的建築面積將按照先前批准的整體建築平面圖。放寬的理由總結如下：

- “R(C)5”不相容於“R(B)”中；
- 富有遠見的都市更新；
- 並非不良先例；
- 改善微氣候；
- 景觀影響微乎其微； 和
- 預計不會產生重大不利影響。

鑑於上述情況及本規劃聲明所詳述，懇請城規會會員批准本申請。

1 INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 This Planning Statement is submitted by the Applicant, Sino Noble Enterprises Limited, sole owner of Nos. 105 Robinson Road in Mid-Level West, Hong Kong, in support of s.16 Application for minor relaxation of building height restriction for a permitted residential redevelopment. The application site is zoned “Residential (Group C) 5” (“R(C)5”) on the Approved Mid-Levels West Outline Zoning Plan No. S/H11/15.
- 1.2 The height relaxation in the current statutory planning context (only “R(C)5” amid in “R(B)” zones) warrants support since current tight restriction would produce ‘sore-thumb’ effect if not taking the right action. On the other hand, the height relaxation will support a good planning intention/vision for urban renewal in the area. Without such vision and incentive for redevelopment, chance of urban renewal in the area is very limited. After taking the initiative, the subject building height at 215mPD is still comparable with those tall buildings in close proximity (ranging from 191mPD to 272mPD) surrounding the subject site. The future residents will have a better living environment.
- 1.3 Approval of this application will not be an undesirable precedent as this is the only “R(C)5” zone and only 2 old buildings left over not redeveloped in this prevailing OZP.

2 PLANNING CONTEXT

2.1 *Local Planning Context*

- 2.1.1 The application site lies within the “R(C)5” zone in the Approved Mid-Levels West Outline Zoning Plan No. S/H11/15. The application site has no plot ratio limitation but a maximum building height of 161mPD. The planning context is evolving in terms of building heights as more tall buildings built-up in the surrounding “R(B)” zone. This makes the “R(C)5” redevelopment disadvantage or discouraging. In summary the adjoining nearest tall buildings in four directions shown in the **Diagram 1** below:



Diagram 1: Nearest tall buildings surrounding subject site

2.1.2 OZP Explanatory Statement has made clear a set of planning criteria for minor relaxation in building height (OZP Explanatory Statement, s.7.6). Relevant criteria have been taken into consideration:

- amalgamating smaller sites (amalgamating 2 shorter buildings) for achieving better urban design and local area improvements;
- providing separation between buildings (combining two towers into one) to enhance air and visual permeability; and
- other factors such as site constraints, need for tree preservation, innovative building design and planning merits (incentive for urban renewal) that would bring about improvements to townscape and amenity of the locality and would not cause adverse landscape and visual impacts.

2.2 *Outdated Planning Intention of “R(C)5” and its Building Height Restriction*

2.2.1 The planning intention for building height restriction (161mPD) in the OZP is to encourage and maintain a step down in building heights from south to north. This intention cannot stand at this location as reflected in the **Diagram 1** above. The current restricted 161mPD is not related to the preserve views to the ridgelines of the Peak from public vantage points at Tsim Sha Tsui and the West Kowloon Reclamation Area, or the views of Victoria Harbour from the Lion Pavilion at the Peak. This planning intention for the “R(C)5” step height and visual impact warrant revisit since its planning context has completely changed over time.

2.3 *Redevelopment Constraints*

2.3.1 Mid-level urban renewal is subject to various site constraints such as height restriction, geotechnical excavation limit, restrictive road access and traffic impact. The application site area is about 2,557.62m² located at a prominent frontage on Robinson Road near its intersection with Park Road with an upper terrace at 120.4mPD. It is only accessible via a vehicular ramp branching off from Robinson Road and shared by Richmond Court and Imperial Court. The access road reaches to the upper terrace and it is the G/F of the residential tower. The terrace level cannot be lowered as the gradient of the access road is not allowed.

2.3.2 The Application Site is located within the Mid-Levels Scheduled Area No. 1 so it is subject to the Bulk Excavation Limit (BEL) which prescribes the bottom level of any bulk excavation. Other than pilings, no building works with excavation can be built below the BEL. The level of Robinson Road fronting the application site is 108.3mPD. The BEL contours across the application site is from 104mPD to 118mPD. This means the proposed residential towers have to be above Robinson Road and the BEL. The building structure therefore cannot go deeper to allow more ceiling height and even car parks cannot be built below ground level.

3 PROPOSED SCHEME AND MINOR RELAXATION

3.1 *Proposed Single Tower Scheme*

- 3.1.1 The proposed single tower adopts the same development parameters asper approved GBP which produces 217 units (full set of MLP and sections in **Appendix 1**). There will be one E&M/F, car parking on LG1 and LG2, then club house and residential entrance lobby on G/F, and flats on 1/F to 28/F. A comparison of the development parameters between the approved GBP and the Application Scheme is shown in **Table 1**

Table 1: Comparison between Approved GBP and Application Proposal

	Approved GBP oo 17.3.2023 (a)	Application Scheme of 3.15m ceiling height (b)	Changes (b)-(a)
Site Area	2557.62m ²	2557.62m ²	Nil
Plot Ratio	4.99	4.99	Nil
Domestic GFA	12762.52m ²	12762.52m ²	Nil
No. of Towers	2	1	-1
No. of domestic storeys	17	32	+15
Building Height (mean roof level)	51.87m/ +161mPD	215mPD	+54m (max)
Site Coverage	About 35%	About 19%	-16%
Green Coverage	About 20%	About 35%	+15%
No. of Flats	217	217	Nil
Floor to floor height	Domestic 2.9m	Domestic 3.15m	0.25
No. of Car Parks	14	38	+24
- Private Cars	- 14	- 33	- +19
- Visitor	- N/A	- 5	- +5
Motorcycle Spaces	2	2	Nil
Loading/Unloading Bay	2	1	-1

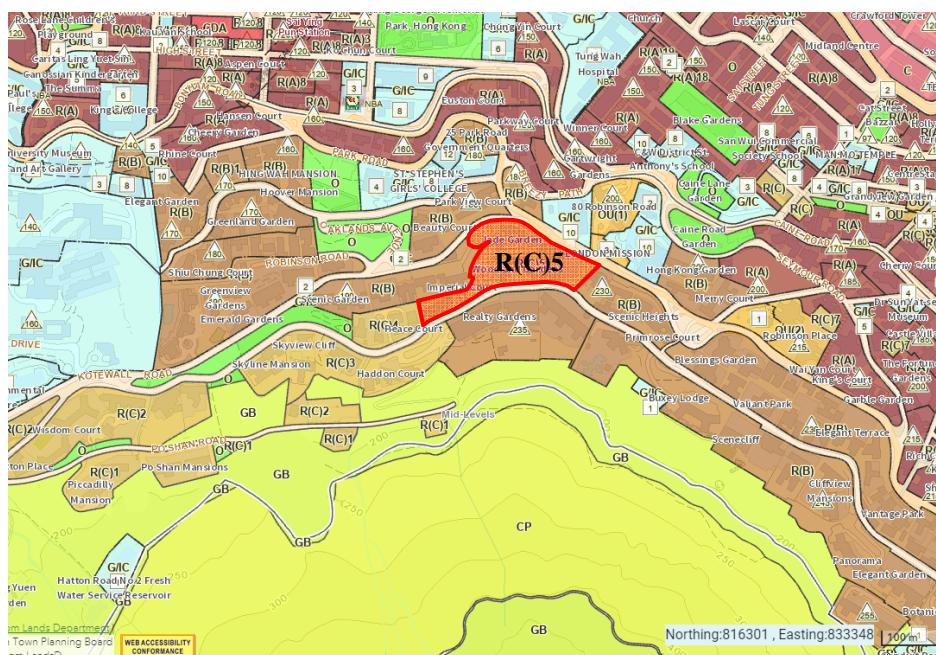
- 3.1.2 The greening/landscaping areas of 895m² (about 35% of the total site area). It is noteworthy that there is little local public open space or amenity area zoned along Robinson Road, in the vicinity of the Application Site. The proposed taller building has a very small site coverage of 19% which could substantially help to relieve the sense of crowdedness (**Appendix 3**). Reduced site coverage will certainly improve the visual permeability in the neighbourhood.

- 3.1.3 Due to the site constraints, most of the ancillary car parking spaces and E&M facilities will have to be provided on 3 lower ground levels. The coverage of these three lower ground levels will strictly follow the BEL. Base on HKPSG, a total of 38 car parking spaces and a loading/unloading bay will be provided in the proposed development scheme. The proposed 3.15m headroom on each residential floor, which has generally been adopted in formulating the BH restrictions on various statutory town plans), promotes cross ventilation and sustainable living environment.

4 PLANNING MERITS AND JUSTIFICATIONS

4.1 *Incompatible “R(C)5” in “R(B)”*

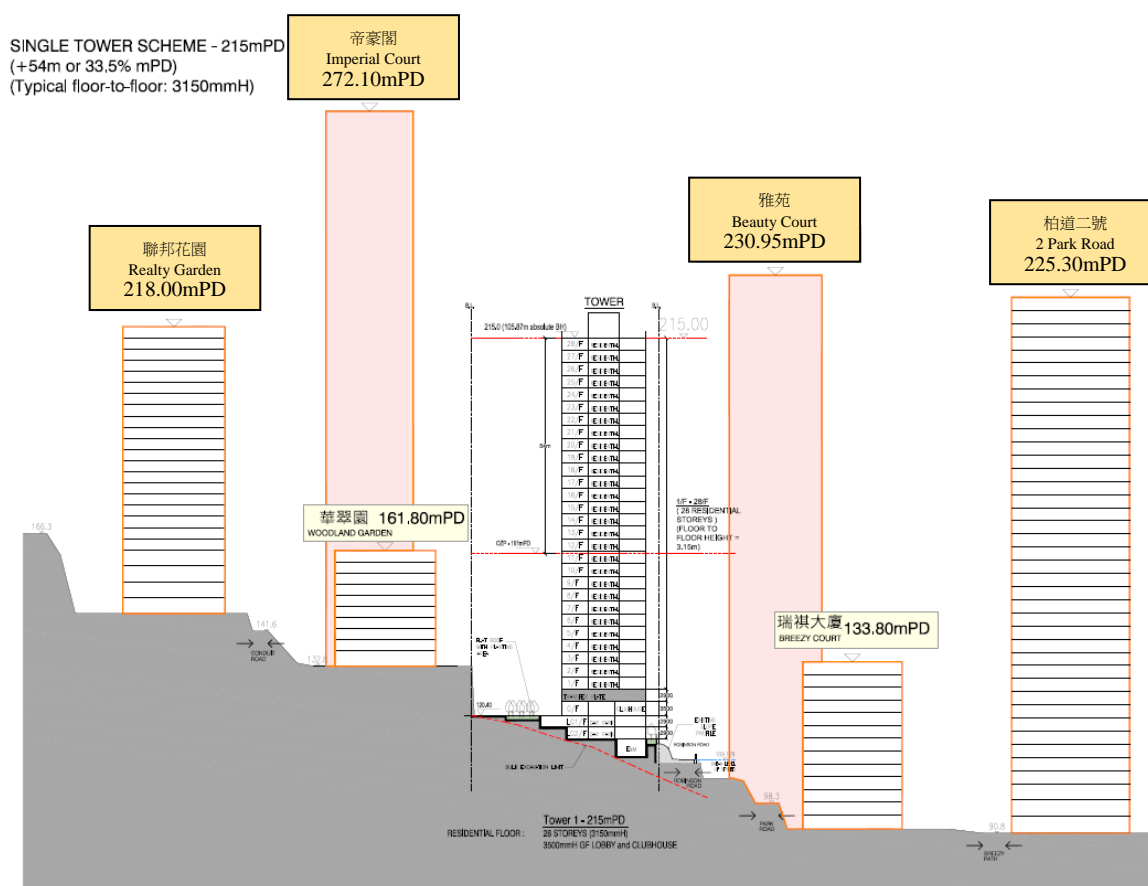
- 4.1.1 It is very obvious that the demand for quality housing in Mid-level due to its prime location to the Central for the business executives and in proximity to HKU for its academic workers (also emphasized in 2023 Policy Address). However, it is a bad situation for urban renewal of the properties in the subject “R(C)5” zone as it is totally surrounded by tall buildings. The **Diagram 1** has demonstrated that section of Robinson Road and Conduit Road as shown in **Plans 1** and **2** with a proposed height restriction at 215mPD is blending in the community cluster.



Plan 1: Extract OZP reveals “R(C)5” surrounded by “R(B)” zone

4.2 *Visionary Urban Renewal*

- 4.2.1 In addition to a comparable building height in this location, the future residents would not suffer from too restrictive openness. The wall effect of the approved GBP to the Woodland Gardens and surrounding can be avoided and allow spatial improvement (**Appendix 3**). This is a key planning merit, so as to provide an opportunity for the future urban renewal at this location if a single tower with rich landscape could be approved. It will certainly provide an incentive to Woodland Gardens to redevelop otherwise it just being engulfed by surrounding tall buildings (**Plan 2**).



Plan 2: Cross Section Perspective of the Area

4.2.2 The increase in height sought under this Application is 215mPD, compared to the OZP height limit of 161mPD with the additional 54m (33.54% increase). However, there will not incur any additional GFA as per the previously approved GBP (**Table 1**).

4.3 *Not an Undesirable Precedent*

4.3.1 Referring to the Government Special Control Area report para. 4.9.2,

“The rationale for control is to maintain an appropriate level of traffic restraint. As preservation of public views cannot be uniformly applied across the SCA, it is proposed to delete this from the rationale for control.”

it specified that protection of views are not essential but the traffic is critical for the redevelopment in the area.

4.3.2 Approval of the height relaxation will not set an undesirable precedent as this is the last 2 old housing estates (over 50 years old) in the subject “R(C)5” zone and also amid in the “R(B)”. Conversely, relaxing building heights on the application site could provide an incentive for the last only old estate (Woodland Gardens) to be redeveloped.

4.4 *Improved Micro Climate*

4.4.1 More people concern the local air and visual permeability in this area. One residential tower has 19% site coverage could improve the micro climate in the local area as the spatial distance among residential blocks increased.

4.5 Insignificant Visual Impact

- 4.5.1 The height increase will not cause adverse visual impact locally or intrude upon key ridgelines and harbour view corridors as the Realty Gardens' building height is already at 218mPD as shown in Diagram 3 from elevated view.



Diagram 2: Strategic View Points as per Ch. 11 Urban Design Guidelines



Diagram 3: Elevated Strategic View Point at VP1 (Diagram 2)

- 4.5.2 The building height bands adopted for the Mid-Levels West OZP are intended to encourage a step down in building heights from southern (upper levels) to north areas (lower levels). Approval to the height relaxation for the application scheme from 161mPD to 215mPD will not undermine this statutory intent, given the physical proximity of taller buildings south of Conduit Road as seen in the above **Plan 2** and **Diagram 3**; and it will avoid the future 'sore-thumb' effect if such height relaxation approved. The relaxation in building height will obviously not impinge on views to the Peak Ridgeline or Victor Harbour form major public vantage points (**Diagram 2**).
- 4.5.3 Even though this single tower approach will require a taller building height profile at 215mPD, the proposed building height is still lower than its backdrop, Realty Gardens (218mPD). Given this responsive building profile, the proposed residential building will be fully integrated with the surrounding building clusters and harmonizes with the Mid-Level West skyline in distant views.

- 4.5.4 According to TPB PG-NO. 41, para 4.5, it stated that “In the highly developed context of Hong Kong, it is not practical to protect private views without stifling development opportunity and balancing other relevant considerations.” Nevertheless, the Applicant has tried the effort to minimize the obstructing the existing view from the neighbourhood behind.

4.6 *Insignificant Adverse Impacts Anticipated*

- 4.6.1 To ascertain the traffic impact, a traffic report review (TRR) has been incorporated in **Appendix 2**. It is confirmed that the proposed development would not cause insurmountable problems on traffic.
- 4.6.2 Since the GBP has already been approved via central processing mechanism, no significant Sewerage and Drainage impact anticipated as there is no change of proposed population.

5 CONCLUSIONS

- 5.1 The proposed relaxation of building height would not be solely assessed on the basis of the absolute increase or in increase percentages, but on the consequent impact, implication and merit it has on the surrounding areas. Such principle has been well recorded in the TPB papers on 19.9.2008 and 4.11.2011 with respect to Applications No. A/K1/218 and A/K7/105 respectively.
- 5.2 The present proposal would present the visionary urban renewal planning merit for which warrants the TPB to take into consideration. The unique planning contest of the last redevelopment in the “R(C)5” zone. The proposed disposition will no doubt contribute substantial benefits to its neighbourhood (in terms of both visual amenity, air ventilation and general aesthetic improvement); and no adverse impact is anticipated.
- 5.3 Planning should be proactive so that the potential urban renewal could be considered in advance. Therefore proposed increase in building height is necessary. This proactive planning should be welcome in order to improve the ‘livability’ of the old Mid-level district.