

CE details multi-pronged approach to boost housing and land supply

In her Policy Address today (November 25), the Chief Executive, Mrs Carrie Lam, underlined her commitment to meeting the housing needs of the people, calling it "the crux of the many problems" faced by Hong Kong.

Describing some of her administration's housing and land supply reform measures as "a breakthrough in government thinking", Mrs Lam said: "As the Chief Executive, sometimes I need to stand firm in the face of different opinions for a cause in which I believe: meeting Hong Kong people's housing needs is a goal too important to forsake!"

The Chief Executive said that 330 hectares of land has been identified, which could provide 316,000 public housing units to meet the demand for about 301,000 public housing units in the coming 10 years.

Mrs Lam used her Policy Address to set out an innovative, multi-pronged approach to tackle the challenges, ranging from development of transitional housing to the launch of an "unprecedented" cash allowance scheme.

"The current-term Government is committed to promoting the development of transitional housing. By making better use of vacant land and premises, we aim to provide short-term accommodation for people with pressing housing needs," said Mrs Lam.

"Led by the Task Force on Transitional Housing, we have identified land for the provision of 13,200 units in total for the coming three years," Mrs Lam said, adding that the Government also proposes to inject an additional \$3.3 billion into the relevant funding scheme, increasing the total government commitment to \$8.3 billion.

In addition, a pilot scheme subsidising non-governmental organisations to rent suitable rooms from hotels and guesthouses hard-hit by the COVID-19 pandemic will be implemented.

The Government's multi-pronged approach to increasing housing supply is also visible in the creation of a new Cash Allowance Trial Scheme. Under the scheme, a cash allowance will be given to families who are not living in public housing, not receiving Comprehensive Social Security Assistance and have been waiting on public rental housing for more than three years without a first flat offer. About 90,000 General Applicant households will benefit from the scheme, which is expected to start receiving applications in mid-2021.

Mrs Lam said that the Hong Kong Housing Authority had launched its Home Ownership Scheme 2020, with applications closing early last month, to provide around 7,000 flats selling at 60 per cent of market prices. She also noted that the 3,700 flats in the Green Form Subsidised Home Ownership Scheme 2019

was at the flat-selection stage.

Boosting land supply, a top priority of the current-term Government, is bearing fruit, said Mrs Lam.

Regarding the large-scale Lantau Tomorrow Vision, the Chief Executive said there should be no further delay. Its many advantages, she emphasised, include creating new land, increasing housing supply with a proportion of 70 per cent for public housing and developing a livable and carbon-neutral community while boosting the commercial development potential of North Lantau.

As for the project's financing, the Chief Executive said "the project is practicable and will bring enormous economic benefits to Hong Kong".

Mrs Lam expressed her hope that funding will be approved by the Legislative Council, while pledging that her Government "will continue to listen to the views of various sectors of the community and proactively explore new financing options for the project."

The Chief Executive said that the Outline Zoning Plan for the MTR Corporation Limited's Siu Ho Wan Depot Site had been completed and that the site is expected to provide some 20,000 residential units in the medium to long term, around 50 per cent of which will be subsidised units. This "topside development of railway facilities", she said, was another example of her Government's "determination in expanding public housing supply". (99)

Moreover, there are studies on redeveloping three urban squatter areas into high-density public housing. Mrs Lam noted that, "If things go smoothly, it is expected that site formation and infrastructure works will start in phases in early 2025." The projects will provide some 6,300 public housing units.

"In addition to making all-out efforts to identify and produce land, we must also expedite the land development process," she emphasized.

She said that the Steering Group on Streamlining Development Control, which comprises the Development Bureau (DEVB), and the Planning Department, Lands Department and Buildings Department under it, would expand its composition and remit while continuing its work on consolidating and rationalising the standards and definitions used by the departments in scrutinising private development projects.

The DEVB would also set up the Development Projects Facilitation Office (DPFO) to facilitate the processing of planning, leasing modification and other development approval applications for larger -scale private residential sites leading up to the commencement of works.

The DPFO will co-ordinate with departments involved to expedite the approval process and help resolve issues, including early escalation of unresolved issues to higher levels for steer, she said.

"I will personally steer the internal co-ordination to increase land

supply to ensure that all the bureaux and departments concerned will take increasing and expediting housing supply as the foremost and priority objective and make their best endeavours to overcome all difficulties to achieve the objective in an innovative, bold and accountable manner," Mrs Lam said.