

LCQ12: Country parks

Following is a question by the Hon Vincent Cheng and a written reply by the Secretary for the Environment, Mr Wong Kam-sing, in the Legislative Council today (September 8):

Question:

The Financial Secretary has indicated in the Budget of this financial year that the Government would earmark \$500 million for enhancing the facilities in some country parks, such as providing treetop adventure and repairing wartime relics to turn them into open museums, and will separately earmark \$55 million for taking forward the "Enhancement of Hiking Trails – Phase II" in the coming five years for 10 popular hiking trails in country parks that have potential for tourism. On the other hand, it has been reported that the inappropriate activities of some countryside visitors have made some mountains that used to be verdant barren. In this connection, will the Government inform this Council:

- (1) as the Government indicated in April this year that the various programmes on improving the facilities in country parks would commence this year, of the latest progress of the relevant work (including site identification, design and detailed assessment);
- (2) of the details of and timetable for the feasibility studies and consultation exercises needed to be conducted for providing treetop adventure and repairing wartime relics to turn them into open museums;
- (3) of the details and latest progress of the "Enhancement of Hiking Trails – Phase I", as well as the implementation timetable for phase II of the enhancement; and
- (4) whether it has surveyed the loss in the past two years of vegetation coverage in mountains; if so, of the area involved (with a breakdown by name of country parks) and the causes therefor; if not, the reasons for that?

Reply:

President,

To enrich visitors' experience in the country park, the Government has set aside \$500 million to carry out enhancement works on facilities in some country parks. These enhancement works are being carried out in phases in accordance with plan and will be rolled out gradually for public enjoyment.

Our reply to the question raised by the Hon Cheng is as follows:

- (1) The Agriculture, Fisheries and Conservation Department (AFCD) has proceeded with the enhancement works on facilities in country parks and has initially identified suitable sites for enhancement of facilities, which

include improvement works for the public toilets at Bride's Pool and Tai Tam Tuk and construction of a new public toilet at Pak Kung Au on Lantau Island. The new facilities will adopt low-carbon and green design that integrates with the natural surroundings, having regard to the needs of people of different ages and physical abilities. After completion of the first stage design and technical assessments, the new facilities are expected to be rolled out gradually in the next two to three years for public enjoyment.

The AFCD will also set up a new viewing platform overlooking Po Pin Chau in the Sai Kung East Country Park. The AFCD and the Architectural Services Department have organised related design competition with an emphasis on simplicity and coherence with the natural setting of the area with a view to inducing visitors' respect for nature. Results of the competition are expected to be announced later this year.

(2) Treetop adventure and revitalising wartime relics for open museum are enhancement projects of larger scale. The AFCD will carry out feasibility studies on site selection, design, mode of operation and operation requirements, etc. and gather views of relevant stakeholders and the public through public engagement activities. The AFCD is undertaking preparatory works for commissioning consultants to conduct the feasibility studies. It is anticipated that relevant studies will commence gradually early next year.

(3) To promote green tourism, the Tourism Commission (TC) has been collaborating with the AFCD in taking forward the "Enhancement of Hiking Trails – Phase I" from 2018-19 to 2022-23 to enhance the tourism supporting facilities of 10 popular hiking trails with tourism appeal within country parks. Progress of enhancement is as follows:

Hiking Trail	Progress
(1) MacLehose Trail Section 1 (Sai Kung East Country Park)	Completed
(2) Peak Trail (Pok Fu Lam Country Park and Lung Fu Shan Country Park)	
(3) Double Haven Country Trail (Plover Cove Country Park)	
(4) Dragon's Back (Shek O Country Park)	Near completion
(5) Shing Mun Reservoir Walk (Shing Mun Country Park)	
(6) Lantau Trail Section 2 (Lantau South Country Park)	In progress
(7) MacLehose Trail Section 4 (Ma On Shan Country Park)	
(8) Wilson Trail Section 2 (Tai Tam Country Park and Tai Tam Country Park (Quarry Bay Extension))	
(9) Sharp Island, Sai Kung (Kiu Tsui Country Park)	

(10) Lau Shui Heung to Hok Tau Reservoir (Pat Sin Leng Country Park)
--

To commence in end-2021

In addition, the TC has been collaborating with the AFCD in implementing the "Enhancement of Hiking Trails – Phase II" from 2021-22 to 2025-26 to further enrich green tourism resources. The AFCD is now undertaking preparatory works for the Phase II enhancement.

(4) The AFCD is aware of the increasing popularity of hiking activities and also increasing number of members of the public hiking at country parks during the pandemic, which result in expedited deterioration of hiking trails and loss of vegetation cover and soil erosion. In addition, some bad habits among hikers, such as arbitrary opening of new paths and trampling on vegetation along trails, etc., have caused varying degrees of impact on the natural environment and vegetation nearby hiking trails.

The AFCD conducts regular inspection and monitoring on the environmental conditions of country parks (including the deterioration of hiking trails) but does not have statistics on the area of vegetation loss. The AFCD will arrange rehabilitation works in accordance with the inspection result. If severe deterioration occurs, the affected areas will be fenced off followed by replanting. The AFCD will also strengthen publicity and education efforts to raise public awareness of conserving the natural environment.