

LCQ16: Vacant government sites managed by Lands Department

Following is a question by the Hon Chan Han-pan and a written reply by the Secretary for Development, Mr Michael Wong, in the Legislative Council today (February 26):

Question:

In April last year, the Development Bureau revealed that the Lands Department (LandsD) was managing 1 626 vacant government sites across the territory, covering a total of some 297 hectares (about 15.6 times of the size of Victoria Park). Among such sites, those located in Kowloon East were of the highest number (with a total of 83 sites covering 55.6 hectares in total area). Regarding the vacant government sites managed by LandsD, will the Government inform this Council:

(1) of the current number of those sites, and set out in Table 1 a breakdown of the number and the area of such sites by (i) the districts listed in Table 1 and (ii) the number of years for which the sites have been left vacant (as grouped in Table 1);

Table 1

Number of years for which left vacant	Kowloon East	North	Yuen Long	Tuen Mun	Sai Kung	Hong Kong West & South	Islands	Sha Tin	Hong Kong East	Tsuen Wan & Kwai Tsing	Tai Po	Kowloon West	Total number of sites
0 to 3 years													
4 to 5 years													
6 to 7 years													
8 to 10 years													
Total area													

(2) among the sites in (1), of the number of those for which long-term planning has been made (and, among such sites, the number of those zoned for residential development use), and set out in a table the (i) location, (ii) area, (iii) planned use and (iv) development timetable of each site;

(3) among the sites in (1), of the number of those suitable for transitional housing development, and set out in a table the (i) location, (ii) area, (iii) planned use and (iv) development timetable of each site;

(4) among the sites in (1), of the number of those suitable for temporary uses to be granted under short-term tenancies (STTs), and set out in a table a breakdown of the number and the area of such sites by the districts listed in Table 1;

(5) of the number of STT applications received in the past five years by the LandsD in respect of vacant government sites; among such applications, the number of those approved as well as the (i) location, (ii) area, (iii) temporary use and (iv) rent of each of the sites granted; if there were applications rejected, of the reasons for that; the average time taken for vetting and approval of an application; whether it will consider relaxing the eligibility requirements for making an application and streamlining the vetting and approval procedure, so as to avoid wasting land resources; and

(6) given that some non-governmental organisations (NGOs) have relayed that as the STTs of certain vacant sites require the tenants to bear the costs for advance works such as fire safety, repairs or slope stabilisation and it takes time to vet and approve applications for the relevant subsidies, NGOs are greatly discouraged from making applications for such STTs, whether the Government will consider completing the advance works for vacant sites before opening the sites for tenancy application by such NGOs; if so, of the details and timetable; if not, the reasons for that?

Reply:

President,

As at the end of December 2019, the Lands Department (LandsD) managed a total of 1 606 unleased government sites covering a total area of 391 hectares (ha) in Hong Kong. The majority of them were sites earmarked for long-term or permanent development; sites fenced off after land control action to prevent further unauthorised occupation; sites under processing for short-term or temporary uses; works sites returned by various works departments after completion of projects; and sites that were in transition between different uses.

As these sites have different backgrounds, coupled with the fact that some may not be suitable for or may only have a low potential for development due to their physical conditions and technical constraints (e.g. remote in location, oddly shaped, or small and piecemeal), we will not label them simply as idle sites with development potential. The LandsD compiles the above figures purely for keeping statistics on the unleased government sites managed by the department, to reflect the work of the department in their management and general maintenance.

To optimise the utilisation of land resources, the LandsD will put the unleased sites pending development or those that may not be suitable for development into temporary or short-term gainful uses where practicable, including allocation to departments for government uses (e.g. temporary works sites), grants to private organisations by short-term tenancies (STT) for commercial uses (e.g. fee-paying public carparks, etc.), or putting up for application by non-governmental organisations (NGOs) or social enterprises

for community, institutional or non-profit-making purposes.

My reply to the various parts of the Hon Chan's question is as follows:

(1) A breakdown by district of the number and area of the unleased government sites of which LandsD is responsible for management is tabulated as follows:

District Lands Office	Number of sites	Total Area (sq. m.)
Hong Kong East	50	136 334
Hong Kong West and South	143	537 678
Kowloon East	80	386 738
Kowloon West	48	122 185
Islands	103	989 592
North	324	486 862
Sai Kung	98	156 293
Sha Tin	124	153 231
Tuen Mun	83	273 890
Tai Po	81	79 788
Tsuen Wan and Kwai Tsing	119	99 642
Yuen Long	353	489 240
Total	1 606	3 911 473

Note: The LandsD does not keep statistics on the number of years for which the individual sites have been vacant.

(2) and (3) As explained above, these sites have different backgrounds, and some may not be suitable for development or may have lower development potential. Reviewing and utilising suitable unleased government land for development is an ongoing effort. At present, of the above 1 606 unleased government sites under the LandsD's management, technical assessments or other preparatory works are being conducted for about 77 sites (33 ha in total), with a view to gradually allocating suitable sites thereof for housing development in future. Upon completion of the necessary preparatory works, we will announce relevant details when appropriate and take forward the housing development.

Regarding the search of potential sites for transitional housing, we have sought the latest update from the Transport and Housing Bureau (THB). The THB has identified about 10 government sites, nine of which are among the unleased government sites under the LandsD's management as mentioned above, for assessment to implement transitional housing projects. The Task Force on Transitional Housing under the THB is proactively engaging and facilitating community organisations to carry out feasibility studies and implement transitional housing on these sites. These sites are located in areas such as

Kowloon East, Kowloon West, Tsuen Wan, Kwai Tsing, North district, Yuen Long, etc., covering a total area of about 7 ha. The THB would announce the details of individual projects when ready.

(4) District Lands Offices (DLOs) will decide whether individual sites could be considered for short-term uses having regard to factors such as their physical conditions and programme for long-term development. As short-term uses have wide-ranging types and take different forms, DLOs have to assess whether the sites are compatible with the proposed uses and duration when processing applications for short-term uses submitted by government departments or outside organisations.

For those sites considered suitable for disposal by open tender STT among the above unleased government sites managed by the LandsD, the department will follow up in a timely manner, and publish information of the sites soon to be put up for tender on its website (www.landsd.gov.hk/en/stt/forecast.htm). If individual bureaux or government departments intend to use the unleased government sites under the LandsD's management, the department will also process such applications according to the established procedures. Furthermore, the LandsD has uploaded the details of those unleased government sites under its management which are available for STT application by NGOs or social enterprises for community, institutional or non-profit-making uses (about 800 sites) onto the Government's GeoInfo Map website (www.map.gov.hk/gm/map/search/faci/_VGS?lg=en).

(5) Before 2018, the LandsD did not keep statistics on the STT applications by NGOs or social enterprises for vacant government sites for community, institutional or non-profit making purposes, and only recorded the number of grants of such STTs.

From April 2015 to the end of 2017, the LandsD granted a total of 14 STTs of vacant government sites to NGOs or social enterprises. From January 2018 to September 2019, the LandsD received a total of 62 applications, and granted 9 STTs within the same period (applications approved during the period might not have been submitted in the same period due to processing time required).

The sites granted under the aforesaid 23 STTs were located in various districts, namely Hong Kong West and South, Kowloon East, Kowloon West, North District, Sai Kung, Sha Tin, Tuen Mun, Yuen Long, as well as Tsuen Wan and Kwai Tsing, covering a total area of around 17 ha. The granted uses included recreation, organic farming, arboriculture, rebus parking spaces, storage and distribution of aiding food, etc. All such STTs were granted at nominal rent under the policy support from the relevant policy bureaux. Since the nature of the applications varied and the sites might come with various technical restrictions, the processing time required for each case could be different. The main reasons for rejecting applications included insufficient information, lack of policy support from the relevant policy bureaux, failure to fulfil the requirements of the relevant departments, etc.

In end-2017, to streamline the application procedures, the LandsD

uploaded the details of the vacant government sites available for application by NGOs or social enterprises for community, institutional, or non-profit-making purposes onto the GeoInfo Map for their easy reference. Applicants need only to fill in the application form available on the LandsD's website and submit it to the relevant DLO.

(6) The Development Bureau launched a funding scheme in February 2019 to support NGOs to take forward one-off, basic, and essential restoration works on vacant government sites/school premises fit for community, institutional, or other non-profit-making use. Such works may include slope upgrading, site formation, erection of temporary structures (e.g. those using modular integrated construction methods), provision of sewerage/drainage or pedestrian/vehicular access, renovation of dilapidated premises, installation of fire safety equipment or barrier-free facilities, etc. The costs in relation to consultancy services commissioned to determine the technical feasibility or parameters of the proposed works may also be subsidised. Currently, eight NGOs have been granted the funding, and we would submit an annual progress report on the funding scheme to the Legislative Council's Panel on Development later.