

LCQ16: Vetting and approval of applications for construction or redevelopment of small houses

Following is a question by the Hon Kenneth Lau and a written reply by the Secretary for Development, Mr Michael Wong, in the Legislative Council today (March 20):

Question:

Quite a number of villagers have relayed to me that the time taken for vetting and approval of their applications for construction or redevelopment of small houses, which they submitted to the Government in accordance with the New Territories Small House Policy, is rather long, taking seven to 10 years in general and in some cases even 20-odd years. As the construction costs have risen incessantly during the period when the applications are awaiting vetting and approval, the financial burden on those villagers has become increasingly heavy. In this connection, will the Government inform this Council:

(1) of the respective numbers of applications for (i) construction and (ii) redevelopment of small houses which were (a) received, (b) approved, (c) being processed and (d) rejected by various District Lands Offices of the Lands Department in each of the past five years (set out in tables of the same format as the table below);

District Lands Office: _____

Year	(a)		(b)		(c)		(d)	
	(i)	(ii)	(i)	(ii)	(i)	(ii)	(i)	(ii)
2014								
2015								
2016								
2017								
2018								

(2) of the respective average, shortest and longest time taken to vet and approve those applications which were approved in each of the past five years; if such figures are not available, of the reasons for that, and whether it will consider compiling such statistics; and

(3) whether the Government conducted in the past five years any study on streamlining the relevant vetting and approval procedure with a view to shortening the vetting and approval time needed; if so, of the outcome; if not, the reasons for that?

Reply:

President,

The Small House Policy (the Policy) has been implemented since 1972. Under the Policy, in general, a male indigenous villager aged 18 years old or above who is descended through the male line from a resident of a recognised village in the New Territories in 1898 may apply to the authority once during his lifetime for permission to build for himself a small house on a suitable site within his own village.

My reply to various parts of the question is as follows:

(1) A breakdown in the number of applications for building and for rebuilding small houses received, approved, rejected and being processed respectively by the New Territories District Lands Offices and the Rebuilding Team of the Lands Department (LandsD) in the past five years is set out at the Annex.

(2) The LandsD does not keep statistics of the time taken to process each application for building and rebuilding small houses.

As the complexity of each application varies, the processing time will depend on the nature and complexity of issues involved. For example, some cases may be met with local objections, land title or boundary problems, or there may be requirements imposed under other regulatory frameworks which will need to be satisfied first.

(3) There are established communication channels between the LandsD and Heung Yee Kuk to discuss matters concerning land administration in rural areas regularly, which includes examination of streamlining the procedures for vetting and approval of small house applications. For example, LandsD has earlier agreed to the arrangement that, starting from January 2019, applicants may be exempted from submission of survey reports if their rebuilding applications have no land boundary problems. This arrangement can speed up processing.

The LandsD will continue to engage in dialogue with Heung Yee Kuk through the existing communication channels.