

LCQ17: Progress and development procedures of public housing projects

Following is a question by the Hon Chan Han-pan and a written reply by the Secretary for Transport and Housing, Mr Frank Chan Fan, in the Legislative Council today (June 23):

Question:

On public housing projects, will the Government inform this Council:

(1) of the number of housing projects completed in the past five financial years and, in respect of each project, set out in a table by project name (i) the number of residential units, (ii) the initial expected completion date, (iii) the actual completion date, and (iv) the causes for delay (if applicable);

(2) of the number of housing projects expected to be completed in the coming five financial years and, in respect of each project, set out in a table by project name (i) the number of residential units, (ii) the initial expected completion date, (iii) the latest expected completion date, and (iv) the duration, causes and solutions for the delay (if applicable);

(3) of the total number of procedures currently involved in the conversion of a public housing site from a "primitive land" to a "spade-ready site", and forthwith in the works of a public housing project on the spade-ready site from commencement to completion, and in respect of each procedure, set out in a table in chronological order (i) the government department/organisation responsible, (ii) the time generally needed, and (iii) whether the procedure can be proceeded with in parallel with other procedures (if so, of such other procedures involved; if not, the reasons for that); the new measures in place to improve the workflow with a view to shortening the time needed for completing the various procedures; and

(4) as the Chief Executive indicated, when delivering the 2020 Policy Address last year, that she had authorized the Secretary for Development to expand the composition and remit of the "Steering Group on Streamlining Development Control" to, among others, include vetting departments other than those under the Development Bureau, with a view to reviewing more comprehensively the vetting and approval processes of development projects, and rationalizing the development-related requirements imposed by different bureaux, of the progress on and the effectiveness of such work?

Reply:

President,

Having consulted relevant departments, my reply to the question raised

by the Hon Chan Han-pan is as follows:

(1) Information regarding completed projects of the Hong Kong Housing Authority (HA) and the Hong Kong Housing Society (HKHS) in the past five years (from 2015-16 to 2019-20) is set out at Annex 1.

There were six projects which HA was not able to complete as scheduled in the above period. The main reason was that the construction progress of the contractors was slower than originally planned. During the same period, there was no public housing project which HKHS was not able to complete as scheduled.

(2) According to the forecast as at March 2021, the estimated total public housing production by HA and HKHS in the five-year period from 2020-21 to 2024-25 is about 101 900 flats, comprising about 70 600 public rental housing (PRH)/Green Form Subsidised Home Ownership Scheme (GSH) flats and about 31 300 other subsidised sale flats (SSFs). Information of these projects is set out at Annex 2 (note).

The annual public housing production is mainly subject to the land supply from the Government, and the progress of individual projects. The actual completion date of a project is affected by various factors, such as inclement weather, site constraints, progress of contractors, labour supply of the construction industry, external factors and compliance with the latest buildings requirements, etc. HA and HKHS will continue to monitor the progress of their projects and facilitate their timely completion.

(3) At present, a series of procedures is required for the Government to transform a piece of "primitive land" (i.e. land without concrete development plan) into a "spade-ready site" (i.e. land ready for commencement of works). Take the example of rezoning a single land parcel for the development of public housing, the Civil Engineering and Development Department (CEDD) will first conduct an engineering feasibility study to assess the impact on transport, environment, etc., which takes around two years. The Planning Department will then proceed with rezoning under the Town Planning Ordinance (Cap. 131) (the Ordinance) (normally requiring 11 months in accordance with the Ordinance), followed by detailed design for engineering and architectural works by CEDD (normally requiring 18 to 24 months). If private land is involved, the Lands Department (LandsD) and relevant departments will take forward the gazettal of land resumption and works area under the Lands Resumption Ordinance (Cap. 124) and other ordinances as well as handle any objections. When the detailed designs and estimated expenditures are ready, the Government will seek funding approval from the Legislative Council for the works. Upon funding approval, the LandsD will commence the land resumption procedures and arrange rehousing compensation for the affected tenants or operators, and then clear the land for CEDD to conduct site formation and infrastructural works, which would take around two to three years (depending on site conditions). The above procedures altogether take around six years or more to complete.

In order to expedite land and housing supply, quite a number of the

above-mentioned procedures are carried out concurrently. For example, the detailed design of the site formation and infrastructure works is carried out in parallel with the related statutory procedures (such as the gazettal procedures under the Lands Resumption Ordinance (Cap. 124), the Roads (Works, Use and Compensation) Ordinance (Cap. 370) and the Water Pollution Control (Sewerage) Regulation (Cap. 358AL)) and the handling of objections.

In addition, CEDD will as far as possible implement the site formation and infrastructure works in phases in order to hand over the completed parts of the site to the HA for housing development, and arrange the works of the remaining parts to be conducted in parallel with the building construction works. Recently, CEDD has also introduced the term consultancy agreement for conducting engineering feasibility studies, which will save four to five months' time as compared with the previous tendering procedures.

It takes about two years for HA to carry out preparatory work for public housing development projects, including formulating planning brief, conducting detailed design, site investigations, tender preparation, etc. In order to save time, it has been HA's practice to carry out the preparatory work concurrently during the above "land production" stage by the Government such that the construction works can commence as soon as the sites are handed over to HA by the Government.

General speaking, HA takes about four to five years to complete the piling and construction works of a public housing development project after the site is handed over to HA by the Government. However, the time required for construction varies depending on the conditions of individual sites, including the ground and geological conditions of the sites, and unforeseeable factors such as inclement weather, etc. Moreover, in line with the principle of "optimising land use" to address the keen public demand on increasing flat production and providing additional social welfare and car parking facilities, etc., many projects need to further enhance their site potential. This entails providing podiums and basements, or even increasing domestic floors exceeding 40 storeys, hence requiring the construction of refuge floors in meeting the prevailing legislation. While all the above designs will inevitably lengthen the construction time, HA will continue to liaise with relevant government departments to improve project design wherever practicable so that the construction time can be shortened as far as possible and different items in a project can be completed in phases.

According to HA's well established precast concrete construction method, for a typical domestic block with over 20 flats per floor, we can now in general complete the concrete works for a floor in six days. In addition, while ensuring site safety and construction quality, HA will continue to improve its construction technologies and workflow and facilitate the use of other innovative construction methods, such as proactively selecting suitable projects for use of the Modular Integrated Construction, with a view to further enhancing productivity.

(4) As announced by the Chief Executive in the 2020 Policy Address, the Steering Group on Streamlining Development Control under the Development

Bureau (DEVB) has expanded its composition and remit to include vetting departments other than those under DEVB, with a view to reviewing more comprehensively the development approval processes for both Government and private projects, and rationalising the development-related requirements imposed by different bureaux. Apart from the administrative vetting procedures of individual departments, DEVB is also examining whether there is any room for accelerating or streamlining the development process under respective legislation, including the town planning process and procedures related to road works. This also includes the review of the timeframe for processing development applications and the procedure for handling representations under the existing legislation, etc.

Note: The information of the public housing production forecast will be updated in the third quarter of the year.