

LCQ19: Public markets and their sites

Following is a question by the Hon Tony Tse and a written reply by the Secretary for Food and Health, Professor Sophia Chan, in the Legislative Council today (May 5):

Question:

As at April this year, the Food and Environmental Hygiene Department (FEHD) managed and operated 97 public markets (markets). There were 18 markets with a stall vacancy rate of over 20 per cent and six of them had a vacancy rate as high as 40 per cent or above. Besides, among the six markets which have been closed, one has been demolished and the long-term uses of the remaining five have not been determined. The Government has left the Mong Kok Market idle for over a decade and not until recently has it decided to put it to a temporary use. Some members of the public have criticised that the Government has failed to properly manage the markets and the relevant sites, which is a waste of precious land resources. In this connection, will the Government inform this Council:

(1) given that the FEHD has planned to close the Choi Hung Road Market (CHR Market) in March next year, and the relevant government departments have commenced a study on the overall planning and long-term development of the site of the Choi Hung Road Playground and Sports Centre (including the CHR Market), of the preliminary planned uses of the site and the implementation timetable; whether it will put the market to temporary uses before the implementation of its long-term uses;

(2) whether the FEHD will consider closing more markets with utilisation rates on the low side; for those markets which need to be retained, whether the FEHD will, pursuant to the principle of "single site, multiple uses", group the existing stalls together so as to release some storeys or floor areas for other uses; if so, of the relevant plan and timetable; if not, the reasons for that; and

(3) regarding those markets that have been or will be closed, whether it will set respective target time limits (e.g. three years and five years) for (i) leaving them vacant and (ii) studying their long-term uses, and in respect of those cases not meeting the targets, explain to this Council and the public why such targets have not been met?

Reply:

President,

When a market is closed or consolidated and the premises or floor(s) are no longer required by the Food and Environmental Hygiene Department (FEHD), the vacated building or floor(s) will be handled in accordance with the established procedures of the Government. Based on the circumstances, the

FEHD will seek views from the relevant Government departments, including the Government Property Agency, the Planning Department or the Lands Department, to formulate proposals for putting the premises to gainful long-term uses. The time required for formulating the proposal for long-term use of individual market may be longer due to various factors, such as judicial review lodged by members of the public on the zoning of land use, the time required for the Government to consult the stakeholders (including the relevant Government departments and local groups, etc.) on the proposed long-term use, etc.

In consultation with the relevant departments, I provide a reply to the various parts of the question as follows:

(1) The FEHD plans to close the Choi Hung Road Market (CHR Market) in 2021-22, and collected the forms for confirmation of intention from all tenants in November 2020. The CHR Market is expected to be closed in March 2022.

The Development Bureau commenced a study on the overall planning and long-term development of the Choi Hung Road Playground and Sports Centre (including the CHR Market) site in 2020, and is currently exploring options of land uses and facilities in collaboration with relevant departments under the principle of "single site, multiple use". The next step will be to analyse and evaluate the options. The study is expected to be completed in the first quarter of 2022.

(2) and (3) The Government is conducting a comprehensive review of the utilisation and development potential of existing markets, with a view to formulating appropriate development plans for meeting the policy objectives of optimising land uses, benefitting the public and promoting district development. When considering whether an under-utilised market is to be closed or consolidated, the FEHD will take into account various factors, including the vacancy rate, room for improvement, availability of fresh provision shops in the vicinity, possible cost-effectiveness of upgrading works and views of the relevant local community.

As stated above, when a market is closed or consolidated, the FEHD will formulate proposals for putting the premises to gainful long-term uses in accordance with the established procedures of the Government.

The FEHD tentatively plans to take forward the preparatory and consultation work for closure of another six markets. Views from other departments have been sought in accordance with established procedures to formulate proposals for putting the premises to gainful long-term uses. Details will be announced upon completion of the preparatory work.