

LCQ2: Special Scheme on Privately Owned Sites for Welfare Uses

Following is a question by the Hon Andrew Lam and a reply by the Secretary for Labour and Welfare, Mr Chris Sun, in the Legislative Council today (March 27):

Question:

The Labour and Welfare Bureau and the Social Welfare Department launched the Special Scheme on Privately Owned Sites for Welfare Uses (the Special Sites Scheme) in September 2013 to encourage non-governmental organisations to better utilise their own sites, through expansion, redevelopment or new development, to provide or increase those welfare facilities considered by the Government as being in acute demand. However, in the reply to a question raised by a Member of this Council on March 29 last year, the Government indicated that as at early March last year, only six projects under the Special Sites Scheme had been completed and put into service, representing a completion rate of just about 8 per cent. In this connection, will the Government inform this Council:

- (1) of the latest progress of various projects under the Special Sites Scheme; whether it has set specific targets for expediting the progress of the projects; if so, of the details; if not, whether it will set relevant targets;
- (2) whether it will set up a regular collaboration and co-ordination mechanism among the government departments involved in the processing of applications for the Special Sites Scheme, as well as actively promote the Special Sites Scheme and take the initiative to provide assistance for applicant organisations; and
- (3) whether it has considered, after the submission of applications by organisations expressing an interest in taking part in the Special Sites Scheme, providing them with basic information about the sites concerned (e.g. land lease conditions, site planning, as well as traffic and noise restrictions) as early as possible, so as to assist them in commencing planning expeditiously and providing the most appropriate welfare facilities; if so, of the details?

Reply:

President,

The Government has all along been adopting a multi-pronged approach with long, medium and short-term strategies to identify suitable sites or premises for the provision of welfare services to meet their acute demand.

As a long-term strategy, the Government has incorporated the population-based planning ratios in the Hong Kong Planning Standards and Guidelines in

respect of subvented elderly service facilities, child care facilities and rehabilitation facilities, with a view to reserving necessary sites and space for these facilities early in the planning process of new and redeveloped areas.

As regards the medium-term strategy, the Social Welfare Department (SWD) has been maintaining close contact with relevant government departments to identify suitable sites in the development or redevelopment of public housing estates and urban renewal projects for providing welfare facilities. The Government also endeavours to increase the provision of welfare facilities as appropriate through the Land Sale Programmes and the Special Scheme on Privately Owned Sites for Welfare Uses (the Scheme). In addition, we will make the best use of available government accommodation including vacant school premises and explore whether they are suitable for conversion into welfare facilities.

As a short-term strategy, the SWD, with the assistance of the Government Property Agency, has been striving to identify suitable premises for purchase through different channels for the provision of welfare facilities.

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

(1) The Government implemented Phase One and Phase Two of the Scheme in September 2013 and April 2019 respectively, with a view to encouraging non-governmental organisations (NGOs) to make better use of their sites through expansion, redevelopment or new development to provide or increase welfare facilities in acute demand. Out of the 88 project proposals received under Phase One and Phase Two of the Scheme, 23 proposals, which could not proceed further due to various reasons (including site constraints), had been withdrawn by the applicant organisations or removed from the Scheme. As at end-February 2024, six projects had been completed and commenced service, two projects had entered the construction stage, 10 projects were at the stage of detailed design, and 22 projects were at the stage of technical feasibility study (TFS). The remaining 25 projects are still at project formulation and preliminary planning stage, and the SWD will consider supporting the respective NGOs to proceed with TFS having regard to the actual progress of individual projects.

The implementation of projects under the Scheme by the NGOs would be affected by various factors, including the restrictions of the surrounding environment of the sites concerned, the provision of communal and transport facilities, requirements prescribed in the land lease, restrictions stipulated in the outline zoning plan (OZP), outcome of local consultations, etc. The development progress also depends on whether the applicant organisations will revise the project proposals during the process or require more time to prepare the relevant documents and the requisite information for submission. As the NGOs are generally not specialised in development projects, they may need more time to complete the relevant procedures in the planning process. In view that the time needed to take forward individual projects may vary due to planning and development restrictions of the sites, technical problems, NGOs' own factors, etc, we do not consider it appropriate

to set targets for the projects under the Scheme.

(2) To facilitate and coordinate the implementation of projects under the Scheme, the SWD has been providing one-stop assistance to the applicant organisations throughout the planning and development process, and has devised various guidelines and templates on the preparation of funding applications and tender documents for NGOs' reference. The SWD has been maintaining close contact with relevant government departments, including the Architectural Services Department, Lands Department (LandsD), Planning Department (PlanD) and Buildings Department (BD) to provide assistance and co-ordination to the NGOs regarding issues involved in individual projects, including amendment to OZP, obtaining planning permission and lease modification. To further assist the applicant organisations in pressing ahead with their projects, the SWD has proactively invited each of the NGOs participating in the Scheme for a meeting between December 2022 and May 2023 to review and discuss the progress of their projects. In addition, the Director of Social Welfare has convened an inter-departmental meeting in September 2023 with representatives from various departments specialising in planning, land administration, traffic and environment matters, etc to strengthen the co-ordination among government departments and the NGOs and to facilitate the applicant organisations in tackling technical problems of their individual projects during the planning stage. The SWD will continue to take the initiative to arrange for the NGOs to meet with the government departments concerned having regard to the circumstances of individual projects so as to expedite their implementation.

(3) To enable the applicant organisations to take note of the potential restrictions of their project proposals as early as possible, the SWD will invite relevant government departments, including the PlanD, the LandsD, the BD, the Transport Department, the Environmental Protection Department, etc, to provide initial comments on the project proposals after reaching a consensus with the NGOs on project details such as development parameters, type of services and number of service places to be provided. The comments from the departments (including restrictions on land lease, land use planning, traffic, etc) will be consolidated and conveyed to the NGOs for reference. The consultants engaged by the NGOs will then conduct TFS on the projects and submit various technical assessments (including traffic, noise, drainage impact assessments, etc) to relevant government departments for approval. The consultants will also assist the NGOs in dealing with technical and other relevant issues, including amendment to OZP, obtaining planning permission and lease modification, in order to take forward the projects.