

LCQ5: Lantau Tomorrow Vision

Following is a question by the Hon Alice Mak, and a reply by the Secretary for Development, Mr Michael Wong, in the Legislative Council today (November 14):

Question:

This year's Policy Address has put forward the "Lantau Tomorrow Vision" which proposes to progressively press ahead several development areas at Lantau Island and the coastal areas of Tuen Mun with the objective of increasing land supply and consolidating the sustainable development of Hong Kong. In this connection, will the Government inform this Council:

(1) regarding the preliminary planning of the Vision, how the Government will take on board the public views on the option of reclamation in the Central Waters set out in the report to be submitted by the Task Force on Land Supply; of the implementation timetable for the various phases and project scopes of the reclamation works, as well as the estimated costs of the first phase of reclamation and other works;

(2) as quite a number of members of the public are concerned whether the reclamation works in the Central Waters will damage the environment and whether the facilities on the artificial islands can withstand extreme weather, of the technologies and measures the Government will adopt to ensure that the various works concerned will strike a balance between development and conservation; how the Government will convince the public of the necessity of land formation by reclamation for Hong Kong; and

(3) as the Government will study the transport infrastructure facilities for linking up the artificial islands with districts such as Lantau Island, Hong Kong Island, Tuen Mun, Tsuen Wan and Kwai Tsing, whether the Government will concurrently conduct a comprehensive transport study for those districts?

Reply:

President,

Hong Kong is currently facing acute land shortage problem. As pointed out in the preliminary observations by the Task Force on Land Supply (the Task Force) in September 2018, there is a need for more land in Hong Kong (estimated shortfall of at least 1 200 hectares). We will continue adopting a multi-pronged approach to proactively increase land resources.

The construction of the artificial islands in the Central Waters that the Lantau Tomorrow Vision (the Vision) proposed to study can provide sizeable pieces of land. The proposals of forming artificial islands of about 1 000 hectares near Kau Yi Chau and the associated traffic and transport networks, if implemented, would benefit Hong Kong considerably. Apart from

the revenue arising from residential and commercial land sale, developing the artificial islands will create substantial social and economic benefits, mainly from the 105 000 to 182 000 public residential units, 200 000 diversified, high-end and high value-added job opportunities, business opportunities emanating from the third Core Business District with a scale equivalent to 80 per cent of Central, a liveable city with holistic planning, comprehensive social facilities, and land development potential to be released by a broadened transport infrastructure network. In addition, the newly-built road and railway networks will serve to enhance the overall carrying capacity of the traffic and transport system in Hong Kong while effectively relieving the existing traffic load in the North West New Territories.

My reply to various parts of the question raised by the Hon Alice Mak is as follows:

(1) As regards the implementation timetable of the artificial islands in the Central Waters, we will duly consider the final report to be submitted by the Task Force in end 2018 tentatively before firming up the details of the studies for the artificial islands in the Central Waters and consulting relevant district councils. We anticipate that funding approval will be sought from the Legislative Council (LegCo) in the first or second quarter of 2019 for commencement of the studies, which will focus on the artificial islands of about 1 000 hectares near Kau Yi Chau. Our work target is to commence the first phase of the reclamation works in 2025, with the first batch of residential units ready for intake in 2032. As for the remaining artificial islands near Hei Ling Chau, there is no concrete implementation timetable at the moment. Nevertheless, we will collect basic technical data in the above studies for future reference in long-term planning. The ultimate extent of reclamation should be subject to the results of the studies.

On construction costs, the Government does not have a formal estimate of the cost of the infrastructure, including transport infrastructure, at this stage. That said, based on an average water-depth of seven metres at Kau Yi Chau, our preliminary estimate for the reclamation cost of the artificial islands will range from \$13,000 to \$15,000 per square metre, which is comparable to the resumption cost of private agricultural land of \$14,500 per square metre. As regards the transport infrastructures, we need to conduct studies to establish a preliminary proposal, including the number of traffic lanes, alignment and the means to connect different places (e.g. bridge or tunnel). The estimated cost regarding infrastructure works is therefore not available at this stage. This is the same as the studies for the new development area projects that formal estimates on the cost of related infrastructure are not available before carrying out the respective planning and engineering studies.

Having said that, with a view to addressing public concern over the construction cost of artificial islands, we will attempt to provide relevant estimate before seeking funding approval for the studies as far as possible by reviewing and analysing relevant information. But these estimates will be based on a host of assumptions.

The Government has all along put in place a stringent audit and monitoring mechanism for the approval of funding for public works and the use of public funds. In formulating the implementation strategies, the Government will carry out detailed financial assessment by taking into account relevant factors like fiscal sustainability, and properly manage fiscal risk, to ensure that the project expenditure is fiscally affordable.

(2) The Government has taken into account the balance between development and conservation when formulating the Vision. Apart from shallower water-depth, the main reason for studying the formation of artificial islands in the Central Waters is the relatively low ecological sensitivity in the area.

In taking forward the detailed engineering studies for individual projects, we will conduct the requisite environmental impact assessments under the Environmental Impact Assessment Ordinance, and make specific proposals on respective mitigation measures, thereby ensuring all relevant statutory requirements are complied with. The prevailing reclamation techniques are effective in reducing impacts on surrounding water quality and ecology arising from the works. For instance, the use of "non-dredging methods" for reclamation and "deep cement mixing" can effectively reduce pollution caused by the removal of seabed sediments. We will explore other more advanced and environment-friendly reclamation techniques and designs in the studies with a view to further protecting the environment. In addition, we will in the studies explore to retain the existing eco-shorelines as far as possible and establish eco-shorelines at the artificial islands if situation warrants.

As always, we strive to encourage green groups and relevant stakeholders to participate in conservation initiatives. We will set up the \$1 billion Lantau Conservation Fund mentioned in this year's the Policy Address as soon as possible and continue to take forward the planning, design and implementation of various development and conservation initiatives and local improvement projects in Lantau in a coordinated and integrated manner.

In terms of addressing climate change, the Government is deeply concerned about the respective threats and set up the Steering Committee on Climate Change, which is chaired by the Chief Secretary for Administration in 2016, to steer and co-ordinate the work of government departments on climate change. As regards marine infrastructure works, the Civil Engineering and Development Department (CEDD) updated the Port Works Design Manual in early 2018, taking into account the future climate change projected in the Fifth Assessment Report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change set up under the United Nations (UN). The CEDD will pay close attention to the latest reports and timely update the design standards of port works as appropriate.

To enhance resilience against extreme weather, we will make reference to the latest design standards when designing the artificial islands in the Central Waters under the coming engineering studies, and provide higher breakwater, wave breakers and non-building buffer zones along the shorelines

as appropriate. It has been proved that structures and works (such as the Hei Ling Chau Typhoon Shelter and the Hong Kong International Airport near the artificial islands in the Central Waters), if suitably designed, could stand intact in the face of super typhoons like Mangkhut.

Since the delivery of the Policy Address, we have, on various occasions (including press briefings, interviews on radio and in other media, meeting of the LegCo Panel on Development, etc.), explained the objectives, details and implementation plans of the artificial islands in the Central Waters, while paying heed to the views and suggestions from different sectors of the society. In addition, the relevant department has also briefed the public on the Vision which mentions the artificial islands in the Central Waters by means of distribution of pamphlets and webpages.

We are aware of the public's concern about the technical assessment. We will conduct the needed site investigations, technical studies, and traffic and environmental impact assessments, etc. in the future studies and then draw up a detailed proposal. In the course of the studies, public engagement activities will be conducted to provide more comprehensive information for consulting the public and gathering their views and suggestions.

(3) According priority to transport infrastructure is one of the important policy directions for the Vision. In the future studies for the artificial islands in the Central Waters, we will conduct strategic studies on the major road and railway networks linking the proposed Kau Yi Chau artificial islands, Hong Kong Island West, North Lantau and the coastal areas of Tuen Mun. The studies will include related traffic assessments. On the whole, we believe that the new major road and railway networks can effectively relieve the existing traffic load of the North West New Territories to and from urban area.