

LCQ5: Topside property development project at railway station

Following is a question by the Hon Mrs Regina Ip and a reply by the Secretary for Transport and Housing, Mr Frank Chan Fan, in the Legislative Council today (July 21):

Question:

The MTR Corporation Limited (MTRCL) and a real estate developer are jointly developing The Pavilia Farm, a topside property development project at MTR Tai Wai Station. On the 8th of this month, the developer announced its decision to demolish and rebuild two buildings under construction in Phase III of the project because the concrete of the wall bases of those buildings had not met the requirements of the approved design in the strength tests. In this connection, will the Government inform this Council:

(1) given that the Secretary for Transport and Housing is a member of the Board of Directors of MTRCL, whether the Transport and Housing Bureau will conduct an investigation into the aforesaid incident, and submit the relevant report to this Council; if not, of the reasons for that;

(2) whether it has assessed if MTRCL, being one of the developers of the project, has the responsibility for monitoring whether the construction works are carried out in compliance with the requirements; if it has assessed and the outcome is in the affirmative, of the details of the monitoring mechanism; if the assessment outcome is in the negative, the reasons for that; and

(3) whether it knows the course of events leading to the exposure of this blunder in works implementation, and which units and personnel are to be held responsible for the blunder; what measures the Government will put in place to prevent occurrence of similar incidents in the future?

Reply:

President,

The Government is highly concerned about the incident of concrete strength of some reinforced concrete structures in the Pavilia Farm Phase III (the development project), a private development project on top of MTR Tai Wai Station, being found to be lower than the specified grade strength as shown on the building plans approved by the Buildings Department (BD). Relevant departments and the MTR Corporation Limited (MTRCL) have launched investigation and followed up on the incident.

Having consulted the Development Bureau (DEVB) and the MTRCL, our consolidated reply to the various parts of the Hon Mrs Regina Ip's question

is as follows.

The MTRCL is the owner of the development project. It is responsible for the planning of the entire project as well as the management of interfacing issues regarding the operating railways. The MTRCL awarded the property development project to New World Development Company Limited (the Developer) through an open tender. According to the MTRCL, based on the agreement entered into between the Developer and the MTRCL, the Developer is responsible for designing, constructing, co-ordinating and supervising the entire project to ensure that all the construction works fully comply with relevant legal requirements. As the development project is situated next to railway premises, the MTRCL, as the railway operator, has been closely monitoring the possible impact brought by the construction works on the structure of railway facilities, including regular monitoring of track conditions, and the relative height and distance between the tracks, platforms and overhead lines, in accordance with its repair and maintenance management system in order to ensure railway safety.

As regards to this incident where some concrete strength was found subpar in the development project, the MTRCL has urged the Developer to conduct a full investigation and implement proper remedial measures as soon as possible to ensure that the relevant buildings meet the requirements of the approved design. Meanwhile, the MTRCL has also requested the Developer to ascertain the construction quality of the remaining buildings of the development project.

The Government attaches great importance to the safety and quality of building works. In so far as private development projects are concerned, the BD, by virtue of the Buildings Ordinance (BO) (Cap. 123), requires the registered building professionals and registered contractors responsible for the building works to properly supervise the building works to ensure that the works are carried out in accordance with the BO and its subsidiary regulations, approved plans of the works concerned and any orders made or conditions imposed by the Building Authority under the aforementioned legislation, including compliance with the required standards. Furthermore, the Site Monitoring Section of BD carries out site inspections and surprise checks to monitor the building works in construction sites, so as to ensure public safety and quality of works.

On June 18, 2021, BD received notification from the registered structural engineer (RSE) of the development project that according to the results of the compressive strength test of the core samples taken from two reinforced concrete columns between the 7th floor and 8th floor of Tower 8, the strength of the concrete used was lower than the specified grade strength as shown on the plans approved by BD. The RSE has taken the initiative to suspend the superstructure works of that tower. Subsequently, BD again received notification on July 6 stating that similar situations were found in the reinforced concrete loadbearing walls of Tower 8 and some of the reinforced concrete columns and loadbearing walls of Tower 1. The RSE suspended the superstructure works for Tower 1 immediately.

Upon receipt of both of the two notifications, BD has immediately sent staff to carry out inspections and has been following up the incident closely, including requesting the relevant registered building professionals to submit further information and remedial works proposal, as well as to investigate the cause of the incident. BD also demanded that the superstructure works concerned must continue to be suspended to ensure public safety. As of now, BD has confirmed upon inspections that the overall structure of all seven residential buildings of the development project have no obvious danger. BD has requested the relevant registered building professionals to submit a comprehensive report of the incident before July 30, and is reviewing the preliminary results of additional tests conducted by the relevant registered building professionals in July for the remaining five buildings of the project. Furthermore, BD is conducting an investigation as to whether the incident involved violations of the B0.

Regarding the demolition and reconstruction works of the two buildings involved, BD has requested the relevant RSE to submit demolition plan, which must cover the procedures, details, safety and precautionary measures etc. of the demolition works, so as to ensure compliance with regulatory requirements. BD will consult the MTRCL on the relevant demolition works. The registered specialist contractor appointed can only commence the demolition works after obtaining the approval and the Consent to Commence Works issued by the BD. The Transport and Housing Bureau has also instructed the MTRCL to ensure that railway services and safety would not be affected during the demolition and reconstruction process of the buildings by the Developer. The MTRCL will examine the risk assessment and construction methods submitted by the Developer to ensure that all the necessary railway safety protection and control measures are fully implemented. It will also set up a task force to review the demolition and reconstruction plan as well as the protective measures of the contractor, and monitor the demolition and reconstruction process continuously and stringently through on-site inspections and real-time detection systems to ensure that railway services and safety will not be affected.

Thank you, President.