

LCQ6: Redevelopment of old areas

Following is a question by the Hon Chan Han-pan, and a reply by the Secretary for Development, Mr Michael Wong, in the Legislative Council today (April 3):

Question:

It is learnt that quite a number of old areas in the New Territories (such as Tsuen Wan) are satellite towns developed in the early days. Many buildings in those areas are aged over 50 years, and quite a number of buildings suspected to have been constructed with the use of salt water are seriously dilapidated. As the plot ratios for the sites concerned have been fully utilised, such buildings lack redevelopment potential, and their conditions will only deteriorate further. In this connection, will the Government inform this Council:

(1) whether it has plans to relax the plot ratios of the old areas in the New Territories so as to enhance the redevelopment potential of the sites concerned; if so, of the details; if not, the reasons for that;

(2) in respect of the old areas in the New Territories which lack redevelopment potential, whether the Government will offer financial incentives to the Urban Renewal Authority or developers, with a view to expediting the pace of redevelopment of such areas; if so, of the details; if not, the reasons for that; and

(3) whether it has any specific plans to redevelop the old areas in Tsuen Wan in order to improve the environment; if so, of the details; if not, the reasons for that?

Reply:

President,

The revised Urban Renewal Strategy (URS) promulgated by the Development Bureau (DEVB) in 2011 provides a clear policy blueprint for addressing the problem of urban decay. Under the URS, the Urban Renewal Authority (URA) plays an important role in undertaking urban renewal, and will focus its resources on redevelopment and rehabilitation. The URS also states that the implementation of the URS should be undertaken by the URA, as well as all the other stakeholders/participants. The Government will continue to adopt the "People First, District-Based and Public Participatory" approach to tackle urban decay and improve the living environment of residents in old districts through undertaking, encouraging, promoting and facilitating urban renewal in Hong Kong.

My reply to the three-part question is as follows:

(1) Tsuen Wan, Tuen Mun and Sha Tin are the first generation new towns

developed since 1970s. To provide better living environment, the plot ratio stipulated for these new towns back then were generally lower when compared with that of the urban area. Take Tsuen Wan as an example, in 2003 the Planning Department has reviewed whether it would be appropriate to further increase the maximum permissible plot ratio of Tsuen Wan from 5; in view of the traffic and infrastructural capacity and other factors, nonetheless, it was considered appropriate to keep the maximum domestic plot ratio at 5.

In fact, the Government from time to time undertakes review on the policy of domestic plot ratio and the feasible options for increasing the development intensity. We promulgated in 2014 that in several regions of metro area and the older areas of new town, individual proposals on private residential development seeking an increase in the intensity of redevelopment can apply to the Town Planning Board (TPB) for increasing the maximum domestic plot ratio by up to 20 per cent, where planning terms permit (including adequate traffic and infrastructural capacity to accommodate the increased demand from redevelopment, compatibility of the scale of redevelopment with the district characteristic, etc.). In the case of Tsuen Wan, the maximum domestic plot ratio could hence be increased from 5 to 6. In December 2018, the Executive Council further enhanced the above planning policy to allow increase of the maximum domestic plot ratio of public housing sites upon confirmation of technical feasibility and approval from TPB by up to 30 per cent, i.e. from 5 to 6.5.

As with the established practice, the Government will continue to review and adjust the development intensity in a timely manner, having regard to the changing circumstances of developments and the need of society, while taking full account of various factors such as the district's traffic and infrastructural capacity, district characteristic and existing development intensity, so as to ensure that any upward adjustment to development intensity would not bring adverse impact to the district.

(2) and (3) As aforementioned, the URA plays an important role in urban redevelopment. In making a decision on the commencement of any redevelopment project, the URA will cautiously handle the matter and set priorities in accordance with the URS, taking into account a host of different factors such as building conditions, living environment, land resources available in the district for relocating affected residents, planning gains the redevelopment project can bring about to the entire community, as well as the financial and manpower resources of URA.

Having regard to the difficulty in increasing the development density or the lack of residual developable plot ratio in some districts, we need to undertake urban renewal on a district-based rather than a piecemeal approach. To this end, URA commenced in May 2017 a district planning study on a pilot basis for Yau Ma Tei and Mong Kok, which have a high concentration of old buildings. This is a strategic study and the findings will serve as the basis for the URA to identify more effective and efficient ways for urban renewal as well as practical and feasible ideas and modus operandi for adoption in other districts including Tsuen Wan. The study is expected to be completed by end-2019/early 2020.

Timely maintenance and repairs could effectively slow down urban decay. The DEVB has made concerted efforts with the Buildings Department, the URA and the Hong Kong Housing Society over the years to roll out various schemes to provide financial and technical assistance to owners, assisting them to carry out repairs works for their buildings. In this regard, the URA has assisted about 4 200 buildings (around 400 of which were located in Tsuen Wan) to undertake repair works through different schemes since 2004. The latest building repair assistance scheme is "Operation Building Bright 2.0" (OBB 2.0). At a cost of \$3 billion, OBB 2.0 provides substantial financial assistance to owner-occupiers residing in aged buildings with rateable values not exceeding a prescribed limit primarily for undertaking inspection and repairs works required under the Mandatory Building Inspection Scheme for their buildings. In the first round applications, the URA had received some 600 valid applications wherein about 20 came from Tsuen Wan. URA will contact the building owners who have succeeded in their applications according to the priority and assist them in carrying out the required inspections and repair works.

Separately, the Government also encourages community renewal through changing the planned use of land, for example by rezoning "Industrial" sites to other uses such as "Commercial" or "Comprehensive Development". Besides, the Chief Executive's 2018 Policy Agenda has stated that the Government will pursue more vigorously the "single site, multiple uses" model in multi-storey development on government land in order to consolidate and provide more "Government, Institution or Community" (G/IC) facilities, make optimal use of limited land resources and improve community environment through redevelopment of government facilities. Subsequently, the Government has earmarked \$22 billion in the Budget for implementing the first batch of "single site, multiple uses" development projects, including the consolidation of several G/IC sites in Tsuen Wan town centre for comprehensive planning purpose. The Tsuen Wan town centre project includes the Tsuen Wan Town Hall and former Tsuen Wan Magistrates' Courts sites, the Princess Alexandra Community Centre site, the Lady Trench General Out-patient Clinic and Luen Yan Street Cooked Food Hawker Bazaar sites. We are studying how the facilities and sites concerned can be consolidated for providing more community facilities and releasing land to meet other social needs, so as to drive the revitalisation of the community, while promoting active participation of private developers in redeveloping the adjacent areas.

Thank you, President.