

## LCQ8: Heritage conservation work

Following is a question by the Hon Tony Tse and a written reply by the Secretary for Development, Mr Michael Wong, in the Legislative Council today (January 20):

Question:

Earlier on, the Government decided, on grounds of safety, to demolish a disused underground cistern at Bishop Hill in Sham Shui Po. When the demolition works were in progress last month, some residents discovered that the cistern had distinctive architectural features, including an array of Romanesque stone pillars and red-brick arches inside the cistern. Subsequently, the Water Supplies Department (WSD) halted the demolition works, and confirmed that the cistern had been completed as early as in 1904. Later on, the Government admitted that the WSD had consulted the Antiquities and Monuments Office (AMO) in 2017 on the proposed demolition works, but the latter had decided, on the understanding that the cistern was an ordinary water tank, that no grading exercise was required, thus leaving this heritage structure on the brink of complete destruction. In this connection, will the Government inform this Council:

- (1) whether the WSD, in consulting the AMO on the cistern in 2017, furnished the AMO with information such as relevant building plans, photos, the year of construction and historical records;
- (2) as a number of waterworks installations have been declared monuments, and the Red Brick Building (a pumping station in Yau Ma Tei which, same as the cistern, previously formed part of the water supply system of Kowloon) has also been accorded Grade 1 historic building status, why the AMO, without making in-depth verification and conducting a site inspection, came to the understanding in 2017 that the cistern was an ordinary water tank;
- (3) given that four stone pillars and part of the upper structure of the cistern have been demolished, whether the authorities have gathered and retained all the demolished materials for use in the restoration works as necessary;
- (4) as the Secretary for Development has earlier on stated that experts will be arranged within three months to assess the historic value of the cistern so that the Antiquities Advisory Board may give a grading to the cistern in March this year, whether the relevant work can be expedited;
- (5) whether it will conduct public consultation on the long-term conservation options for the cistern, and invite related professional bodies to give views on matters such as revitalisation of the cistern and utilisation of the space;
- (6) whether it will consider opening up the cistern, upon completion of the

necessary strengthening and maintenance works and before the implementation of the conservation option, with restrictions for visit by members of the public and tourists who have made appointments;

(7) as the WSD has, in response to media enquiries, advised that the two fresh water service reservoirs located at Magazine Gap Road in the Mid-level and Hatton Road at the Peak, both with a history of over a century, were demolished in 2010 and 2011 one after another, of the construction history and architectural features of these two service reservoirs, together with the details of as well as the vetting and approval procedures for the relevant demolition works;

(8) whether it will ask various bureaux and government departments to draw up a list of all the pre-war buildings under their management and, for those buildings among them which are under planning for demolition and may have higher historic and architectural values, submit the relevant information expeditiously to the AMO for detailed reviews; and

(9) whether it has learnt a lesson from this incident and whether it will take improvement measures, including expanding the definition of "buildings" that need to be graded and reviewing the communication process between the AMO and other government departments?

Reply:

President,

My reply to the various parts of the Hon Tony Tse's question is as follows:

(1) Pursuant to records, the waterworks installation at Bishop Hill at Sham Shui Po was built in 1904 and decommissioned in 1970. As cracks were observed at the roof slabs of the waterworks installation, it posed a potential safety hazard. In 2013, the Water Supplies Department (WSD) engaged a reservoir safety expert to inspect and assess the condition of the waterworks installation. The expert confirmed that there was a safety problem at the roof structure. As there were records of frequent trespassing in the surrounding areas and on the roof top of the waterworks installation, to ensure public safety, the WSD planned to demolish that installation and return the site to the Lands Department for other uses. In April 2017, the WSD consulted the Antiquities and Monuments Office (AMO) on the demolition works, pointing out that the waterworks installation was not stable and provided information about its structural safety.

(2) The prevailing system for grading historic buildings is devised to assess the heritage value of usual buildings and structures. After deliberation at its meeting held in March 2017, the Antiquities Advisory Board (AAB) decided to put those items that do not fall under the usual category of buildings/structures, such as cemetery and stone tablet, into the "List of Items Not Falling Under the Usual Category of Buildings/Structures". Grading assessment would not be conducted for items falling into this list for the time being such that the AAB could focus on the study of other items. This

list includes a water tank of an earlier period which is movable and not suitable for grading assessment. Since the March 2017 meeting, the AAB and the AMO have been handling items of the same nature as those on the list in the same manner in accordance with the AAB's decision mentioned above.

In April 2017, the WSD consulted the AMO on the site works of the waterworks installation. The AMO considered at the time that no follow-up action was required on the understanding that the water facilities in the site is a water tank, based on the information provided then as well as its communication with the WSD, and in accordance with the AAB's decision in March of the same year.

(3) The WSD commenced the temporary strengthening and tidying up works for the waterworks installation on January 5. The works include sorting and protection of structural elements taken down earlier to facilitate future rehabilitation.

(4) The AMO has commenced an in-depth research on the heritage value of the waterworks installation, including carrying out the study of this item with reference to the six prevailing assessment criteria, namely historical interest, architectural merit, group value, social value and local interest, authenticity and rarity. To this end, the AMO will conduct site inspections, photographic recording and an extensive sourcing and analysis of first-hand information, drawn from local and overseas archives as well as from the WSD. It will also comprehensively review secondary sources such as the relevant researches, journal articles and publications. Upon completion of the in-depth research, the AMO will submit the appraisal to the independent Historic Buildings Assessment Panel (Assessment Panel) for examination and recommendation of a proposed grading for the waterworks installation against the aforesaid six assessment criteria. The AMO is striving submit the appraisal and the Assessment Panel's proposed grading to the AAB for consideration and grading assessment in the first quarter of 2021. When the AAB endorses the proposed grading of the waterworks installation, the relevant information and proposed grading of this item will be uploaded to the website of the AAB for a one-month public consultation. The AAB will take into account all information and views received during the public consultation before confirming the proposed grading.

(5) and (6) The Development Bureau (DEVB) will look into the options of conserving and revitalising the waterworks installation, after the WSD has completed the temporary strengthening works and tidying up works mentioned above, with a view to enabling the people of Hong Kong to enjoy this place. Before the long term conservation plan is determined, the DEVB will also explore the feasibility of restricted opening for public to visit the place, provided it is safe to do so.

(7) Pursuant to records, the Magazine Gap Road Fresh Water Service Reservoir was constructed in 1901, with a plan area of about 360 square metres (24 meters x 15 meters) and a storage capacity of about 1,800 cubic metres. The peripheral wall and the floor of the service reservoir were constructed of concrete, with the internal face of the wall lined with brickwork. The supporting columns and the arched roof were also constructed of brick. After

years of use, the service reservoir had experienced ageing and leakage, and might endanger the stability of the slopes located and buildings under the slopes. As such, the service reservoir had not been in use since 1997.

Subsequently, in order to improve the salt water supply system in Wan Chai, Causeway Bay and Happy Valley and to extend the salt water flushing to Mid-Levels areas for achieving fresh water conservation, the WSD awarded a works contract in 2010 for demolition of the disused Magazine Gap Road Fresh Water Service Reservoir and construction of a new salt water service reservoir at the same site in the same year. The WSD consulted the AMO on the project and the AMO had no objection against the project.

Regarding the old Hatton Road Fresh Water Service Reservoir, it was constructed in 1908 according to records. It had a plan area of about 540 square meters (34 meters x 16 meters) and a storage capacity of about 2,000 cubic metres. The peripheral wall and the floor of the service reservoir were also constructed of concrete, with the internal face of the wall lined with brickwork. The supporting columns and the arched roof were also constructed of brick. After years of use, the service reservoir had experienced ageing and leakage, and might endanger the stability of the adjacent slopes, making it not suitable for long-term use.

To ensure a reliable supply of fresh water to residents of Mid-Levels, the WSD awarded a works contract in 2007 to re-provision and expand the service reservoir in two stages. The first stage of the project was to construct a new service reservoir with a storage capacity 2,500 cubic meters adjacent to the old service reservoir in 2007. The new service reservoir was commissioned in 2011. The second stage of the project commenced in the same year and involved demolition of the old service reservoir and construction of a new service reservoir at the same site. The total storage capacity of two new service reservoirs was about 7,000 cubic meters.

The WSD consulted the AMO on the project. The AMO noted that the problems could not be solved by maintenance and that the WSD proposed to preserve the brickworks of two columns and the connected arch. The AMO did not object against the project.

(8) and (9) The Government understands the public concerns on the incident. The Permanent Secretary for Development (Works) is leading a working group to review the handling of the case by relevant departments, and to put forward improvement measures to avoid recurrence of similar incidents.