

LCQ8: Planning of vacant school premises sites

Following is a question by the Hon Jeffrey Lam and a written reply by the Secretary for Development, Ms Bernadette Linn, in the Legislative Council today (February 28):

Question:

According to the information from the Planning Department, the Department has successively reviewed a total of 256 vacant school premises (VSP) sites as at 2022, and recommended that 191 of these sites be retained for long-term Government, Institution or Community use, 40 sites be retained for long-term residential use, and 25 sites, which are former village schools located within village areas in the New Territories, be retained for long-term village type development, rural use and open space use, etc. In this connection, will the Government inform this Council:

(1) of the districts to which the aforesaid VSP sites belong, the areas of the school premises, as well as the latest planning circumstances (set out in a table);

(2) as there are views pointing out the tight supply of housing sites in urban areas, whether the Government will consider rezoning more VSP sites with larger areas located in urban areas for residential use in order to release more "spade-ready sites"; if so, of the details; if not, the reasons for that;

(3) whether, in order to make more efficient use of land resources, the Government will consider allocating some of the VSP sites that are to be used for long-term planning purposes but are not currently used for short-term purposes for the construction of temporary housing or for leasing to merchants under short-term tenancies for purposes such as bazaars; if so, of the details; if not, the reasons for that; and

(4) in respect of the schools which will cease operation in the next five years, of the districts to which the school premises sites belong, the areas of the school premises, as well as the landowners (set out in a table); for those school premises sites on government land, whether there is already a preliminary proposed land use of such sites?

Reply:

President,

The Government established the Central Clearing House (CCH) mechanism in 2011 to ensure that vacant school premises (VSPs) would be put into suitable alternative long-term uses. Under this mechanism, if any VSP is confirmed by the Education Bureau (EDB) to be no longer required for school or other educational uses, the Planning Department (PlanD) will conduct reviews to

make recommendations on the long-term uses for the concerned sites.

Having consulted the EDB and the PlanD, my reply is as follows:

(1) According to the results of the review on VSPs released in 2023, the PlanD has reviewed a total of 256 vacant/to-be-vacant school premises. Of these, 47 sites are wholly or mostly on private land, while 209 sites are on government land (or private land to be surrendered to the Government). Of these 209 sites as at December 2023,

- 55 sites have been/will be put to long-term uses in line with the recommendation under the CCH mechanism, including uses for public housing, community health centres and social welfare facilities, etc;
- 103 sites have been put to short-term uses or have their short-term use proposals under processing before implementation of long-term uses recommended under the CCH mechanism. These short-term uses include transitional housing, Light Public Housing (LPH), and various government, institution or community (GIC) uses; and
- 51 sites are available for applications for short-term community, institutional or non-profit-making uses by the external organisations/groups before implementation of long-term uses.

The districts to which these 209 sites belong and the site areas of the school premises are set out in Annex 1.

(2) When recommending long-term uses for the VSP sites, the PlanD will take into account the planning intention of the Outline Zoning Plans, the land uses and environment in the vicinity of the sites, comments of the relevant policy bureaux and departments, etc.

Among the 256 VSP sites mentioned in the first part of the reply above, 40 will be used for residential use. Of these, 35 sites are readily available for residential development without the need of rezoning. Some sites have even been converted into public housing development and completed already, such as Yue Chun House of Yue Wan Estate in Chai Wan, Fu Fai House of Fu Shan Estate in Wong Tai Sin, Pak Tin Estate Phase 7 in Sham Shui Po, Ching Chun Court in Tsing Yi and Heng King House of Lai King Estate in Kwai Chung. Rezoning of the other five sites will be conducted upon completion of studies. The remaining sites are deemed unsuitable for residential use mainly due to their small size (nearly 80 per cent are less than 3 000 square metres in area).

(3) To optimise the use of land resources, individual VSP sites can be put to short-term uses, such as transitional housing, LPH and various GIC uses, before implementation of long-term uses. For example, among the 103 sites as mentioned in the first part of the reply above where the implementation of the long-term uses are pending, six sites in Tsuen Wan, Stanley, Tai Po, Tuen Mun, Yuen Long and North District have been converted into/constructed for transitional housing projects, while the proposed LPH projects for five sites

in Wong Tai Sin, Kwun Tong and Sheung Shui are also under processing.

Furthermore, the Government launched a \$1 billion funding scheme in 2019 to subsidise non-government organisations in carrying out restoration works on vacant government sites (including VSPs on government land) for short-term community, institutional or non-profit making uses. As at the end of February this year, 13 of the approved projects funded by the scheme involve VSP projects.

(4) Information as provided by the EDB on public sector and direct subsidy scheme schools confirmed to cease operation in the coming five school years (including schools to cease operation after merger), including whether they are on government land and their proposed land uses are set out in Annex 2.