

LCQ9: Integrated development of urban greening and urban farming

Following is a question by the Hon Steven Ho and a written reply by the Secretary for Environment and Ecology, Mr Tse Chin-wan, in the Legislative Council today (July 10):

Question:

The Blueprint for the Sustainable Development of Agriculture and Fisheries (Blueprint) has proposed to introduce urban farming elements into the planning stage of New Development Areas (NDAs). It is learnt that many cities both within and outside the country have integrated urban greening with urban farming. For example, the Sports Park in Jinnan District, Tianjin City uses idle green space to cultivate more than 300 plant species, including herbs, rice, fruits and vegetables. Regarding the integrated development of urban greening and urban farming, will the Government inform this Council:

(1) of the current respective areas of urban green space in various districts; the average total expenditure on the management and maintenance of such space in each of the past three years and a breakdown of such expenditure;

(2) of the respective areas of planned green space in projects currently under planning or construction in NDAs and various districts (e.g. the Global Innovation Centre of the University of Hong Kong and the Government Chinese Medicines Testing Institute), as well as the total expenditure earmarked for greening and a breakdown of such expenditure; and

(3) as the Blueprint has proposed the establishment of a Modernised Techno-Agricultural Park led by an agricultural organisation within part of Agri-Park Phase 2, and it has been reported that the authorities also plan to entrust the fishermen with the management of the fish ponds of the proposed Sam Po Shue Wetland Conservation Park to maintain the conservation and production functions concurrently, and there are views that this is sufficient proof of the feasibility of the Government's collaboration with the industry, whether the authorities will draw reference from the mode of green space management in other cities to enhance the functions of urban green space in NDAs; whether the authorities will explore the possibility of allocating some green space to farmers or agricultural bodies for management to promote agricultural production, reduce the maintenance costs of greening, and enhance the economic benefits of green space; if it will, of the details; if not, the reasons for that?

Reply:

President,

The Government has all along attached great importance to the development of local agriculture and fisheries industries, and published in end-2023 the Blueprint for the Sustainable Development of Agriculture and Fisheries, formulated hand in hand with the industries. The Blueprint sets out specific measures on various areas of development, including promoting diversification of industries and strengthening the functions of trade organisations. To take forward the relevant work, the Government is actively assisting the industry in developing urban farming so that local agriculture can move towards sustainable development in the midst of urban development. Meanwhile, the Government will also foster the development of trade organisations, strengthen their functions, and provide opportunities for them to participate in project management and joint promotion of policies.

Having co-ordinated information provided by the Development Bureau, we provide our reply to the question raised by the Hon Steven Ho on the integrated development of urban greening and urban farming as follows:

(1) "Green space" may refer to areas zoned "Green Belt" in statutory zoning plans (which covers a land area of around 17 000 hectares), and land of other zonings that are vegetated (including different categories of land and facilities, such as parks, gardens, as well as landscaped areas along roads or within public and private developments). Information on the greening area on different categories of land is not readily available. For example, there are over 1 600 parks and gardens under the management of Leisure and Cultural Services Department (LCSD), while the area of land with which the LCSD provides horticultural maintenance service is around 1 300 hectares. Since the "green space" mentioned in the question includes both government land and private land, and that managing and maintaining government land and facilities are part and parcel of the regular duties of various departments, which are discharged with their overall resources, the relevant management and maintenance expenditure is not readily available.

(2) Not only will urban greening beautify the environment, but also help moderate temperature and improve air quality, rendering Hong Kong a more liveable city.

In terms of urban planning, greening-related planning guidelines have been stipulated under the Hong Kong Planning Standards and Guidelines, including the overall target of attaining 30 per cent green coverage for public housing developments. Besides, in order to develop a green and liveable Northern Metropolis, when planning New Development Areas (NDAs), the Government has adopted a higher standard of 3.5 square metres per person (as compared to 2.5 square metres per person in the past) when reserving land for open space.

As for public works projects, apart from the implementation of the Greening Master Plans, these projects are also required to incorporate greening elements in planning and development stages. For example, new government building projects should include greening measures on 20 per cent to 30 per cent of the site area (including roof greening and vertical

greening), new at-grade road projects should allow for space for quality greening and landscape works and soft landscape provisions should be integrated in the highway structure projects to enhance street landscape.

To encourage private development projects to include greening elements, for projects with site area of 1 000 square metres or more, if there is at least 20 per cent to 30 per cent site coverage of greenery for the project and that other requirements are met, gross floor area concessions for certain facilities and equipment can be granted.

(3) The overall concept of urban farming is to integrate commercial agriculture into the city. Not only can this produce high quality and fresh agricultural produce with reduced carbon footprints to the public, but also provide green landscapes and modernised farming experience to the communities while expanding the capacity and increasing the output, thereby improving the quality and liveability of urban life.

To promote the development of urban farming, the Government has sought consent from the Town Planning Board for amending the Definition of Terms used in statutory plan for "Open Space" to include "urban farm", so as to allow the setting up of urban farms to be operated on a commercial basis in "Open Space" areas (such as parks and outdoor public open space in urban areas and NDAs), thereby making good use of precious land resources and contributing to the integrated development of commercial agriculture and urban areas.

Moreover, the Agriculture, Fisheries and Conservation Department (AFCD) is working with relevant organisations to explore setting urban farming as one of the indicators of green buildings, such as incorporating into the assessment scheme of the Building Environment Assessment Method Plus, so as to encourage business enterprises to integrate elements of urban farming when planning property development projects, blending commercial farming into urban life.

Regarding the collaboration with the trade, the AFCD has launched a pilot project on modernised urban farming in Ma On Shan Sai Sha Road Garden, where part of the site will be made available for the trade to set up and operate a modernised crop farm, with technical support being provided. The project is expected to commence operation in the fourth quarter of 2024. To promote the concept of "harvest-to-sale", the Government will also set up modernised hydroponic farms-cum-stalls on suitable rooftops of government buildings and public markets, including the Tin Shui Wai Public Market under construction and the Kwu Tung North Public Market, for operation by the trade upon application.

We will continue to launch pilot projects on modernised urban farming at other suitable locations, and will make good use of urban spaces in Northern Metropolis and other NDAs, with a view to developing urban farming through a multi-pronged approach. With the experience gained in implementing the pilot projects, we will explore the possibility of allocating green space to agricultural organisations for management in due course.