

LCQ9: Supply of niches of public columbaria

Following is a question by the Hon Shiu Ka-fai and a written reply by the Secretary for Food and Health, Professor Sophia Chan, in the Legislative Council today (June 16):

Question:

Regarding the supply of niches of public columbaria, will the Government inform this Council:

(1) as the Government plans to develop a columbarium at a site with an area of 9 300 square metres at Siu Ho Wan on Lantau Island for the provision of about 33 500 niches, of the following information about the project:

(i) the permitted plot ratio of the site concerned;

(ii) whether the plot ratio of the proposed building will reach the permitted plot ratio of the site; if not, of the reasons for that, and whether it will consider increasing the floor area of the building until its plot ratio has reached the permitted plot ratio of the site, so as to provide more niches; if so, of the details; if not, the reasons for that; and

(iii) the distance of the proposed building from residential areas and livelihood facilities;

(2) whether it will explore the feasibility of increasing the number of niches to be provided under the project mentioned in (1); if so, of the details; if not, the reasons for that;

(3) whether it has assessed if the supply of public niches in the coming two decades will be sufficient to meet the demand; if it has assessed and the outcome is in the negative, of the proposals to resolve the problem; and

(4) of the following information about the various public columbaria across the territory at present (set out in a table):

(i) location,

(ii) the number of niches provided,

(iii) the permitted plot ratio of the site concerned, and

(iv) whether the plot ratio of the building concerned has reached the permitted plot ratio of the site concerned; if not, of the number of niches that have been forgone due to the plot ratio not being fully utilised?

Reply:

President,

(1) Under the Siu Ho Wan Outline Zoning Plan No. S/I-SHW/2, no plot ratio is applicable to the proposed columbarium site. Same as the public columbarium projects in general, the Government conducted various preliminary studies and assessments on the proposed site before pursuing this columbarium project, including those relating to topography, compatibility with adjacent land uses, landscape and visual impacts on surrounding neighbourhoods, supporting infrastructure as well as traffic and environmental impacts. The number of niches to be provided will inevitably hinge upon the above factors, and is also subject to land space and height restrictions. The Government has all along sought to provide the optimum number of public niches as far as practicable.

At present, there is no residence in the vicinity of the proposed columbarium. Adjacent facilities include the North Lantau Refuse Transfer Station, the Sham Shui Kok Chlorine Loading and Unloading Area, and site offices. Slightly farther away at Cheung Tung Road near Sham Fung Road to the south of North Lantau Highway, there are bus depots, the Siu Ho Wan Police Vehicle Pound and the O · PARK. There will be a topside development at the Siu Ho Wan depot site, which is about 1.5 kilometres away from the proposed columbarium.

(2) According to the traffic impact assessment (TIA) conducted during 2019-2021, given the constraints of existing land space, ancillary transport facilities and road network, and especially in light of the expected increase in traffic and pedestrian volume during Ching Ming Festival and Double Ninth Festival and on ordinary days, it is estimated that 33 500 niches can be provided on the site.

If future TIA shows that there is room to increase the number of niches, the Government will actively consider the feasibility of doing so. In the course of construction planning and design, the Architectural Services Department will factor in flexibility as far as possible in order to leave space for the possible additional number of niches that may be added when feasible.

(3) The Government implements a district-based columbarium development scheme for the medium and long-term supply of public niches. Between 2011 and the end of 2020, the Government consulted the relevant District Councils on public columbarium projects at 14 sites, which would altogether provide around 600 000 new public niches. Among them, the projects at Diamond Hill in Wong Tai Sin, Cheung Chau, Wong Nai Chung Road in Wan Chai, Lai Chi Yuen in Mui Wo, Tsang Tsui in Tuen Mun and Wo Hop Shek Phase I have been completed, providing around 210 000 niches. The projects at Cape Collinson Road in Eastern District and Shek Mun in Sha Tin are underway for completion in 2022 and 2024, providing 25 000 and 40 000 niches respectively. With new columbarium projects being completed one after another, new public niches will become available.

To cope with the demand and to make the most of public niches, the Food and Environmental Hygiene Department (FEHD) has relaxed the arrangement of placing additional cremated ashes into public niches (including relaxation of the definition of "close relative" and cancellation of the limit on the number of sets of ashes that can be placed in each niche). It introduced in April 2019 an extendable arrangement for public niches with an initial interment period of 20 years, which can be extended at 10-yearly intervals thereafter. Also, in recent years, the Government has stepped up its promotion efforts on green burial to encourage citizens to scatter remains at sea and in Gardens of Remembrance, and has established the Green Burial Central Register to enable citizens to register their wish for green burial.

(4) No plot ratio is applicable to public columbarium sites. The Government has all along sought to provide the optimum number of public niches as far as practicable. The number of niches provided at various public columbaria managed by the FEHD across the territory is tabulated below:

Name of public columbarium	Number of niches
Cape Collinson Columbarium, Chai Wan	61 615
Diamond Hill Columbarium	63 351
Fu Shan Columbarium, Tai Wai	9 625
Kwai Chung Columbarium	9 276
Tsang Tsui Columbarium, Tuen Mun	163 320
Wo Hop Shek Columbarium, Fanling	110 100
Wong Nai Chung Road Columbarium, Wan Chai	855
Cheung Chau Columbarium	4 585
Lai Chi Yuen Columbarium, Mui Wo	790
Lamma Columbarium	490
Peng Chau Columbarium	850
Total:	424 857