

Opening remarks by SDEV on planning and lands policy areas at LegCo Finance Committee special meeting

Following are the opening remarks (English translation) by the Secretary for Development, Ms Bernadette Linn, on planning and lands policy areas at the special meeting of the Legislative Council (LegCo) Finance Committee today (April 17):

Chairman and Honourable Members,

In 2024-25, the priority tasks on the Planning and Lands portfolio under the purview of the Development Bureau (DEVB) will continue to be carried out following the principle of enhancing quantity, speed, efficiency and quality.

Enhancing speed and efficiency in increasing land supply

On land supply, we will continue to press ahead with the Northern Metropolis (NM) and other major land creation projects. In doing so, we will strike a good balance among different aspects in ensuring sufficient land supply to meet the needs of Hong Kong's development and improve the quality of life of the public. We also hope to build up a land reserve in the long run, so as to enhance the Government's capability of spearheading development and responding to unforeseen changes. As regards how and when the developable land is to be put to the market, we will take into account the sustainability of public finance and the market's capability of absorbing the new land.

The NM is an important source of supply of spade-ready sites and housing for the next decade as well as the new engine for Hong Kong's development. This year will see the commencement of site formation and infrastructure works in several New Development Areas, among which the funding applications for the works under the Second Phase of Hung Shui Kiu/Ha Tsuen and the Remaining Phase of Kwu Tung North/Fanling North are being scrutinised by the LegCo. We also plan to submit the funding application for the first stage of site formation and infrastructure works in the San Tin Technopole in the second half of this year. We look forward to Members' support to allow the early commencement of the works. The land use proposals for other major areas in the NM including Ngau Tam Mei, Ma Tso Lung and New Territories North will be rolled out progressively as scheduled in the second half of this year for consultation.

We offer opportunities for landowners to jointly develop the NM by means of the in-situ land exchange arrangements that have been improved at the end of last year, with a view to leveraging market forces to expedite the development of the NM. We are also proactively exploring the adoption of the mode of "large-scale land disposal" to improve cash flow and expedite development. In addition, as announced in this year's Budget, the

Government's bond issuance of about \$95 billion to \$135 billion per annum in the next five years will be beneficial to the NM development.

"Industry-driven" is one of the themes for the NM development. We launched the tender under the two-envelope approach in mid-March for the first site designated for developing Multi-storey Buildings for Modern Industries (MSBs) in Yuen Long for modern logistics or vehicle maintenance and servicing purposes, with a view to promoting development of industries as well as requiring the provision of part of the gross floor area to accommodate brownfield operations displaced by government development clearance. If feedback is positive, we would expedite in rolling out similar MSBs sites using the same approach. With the commencement of the relevant works, sites for other industries including the innovation and technology sites in the San Tin Technopole, and the commercial and logistics sites in Hung Shui Kiu will be rolled out progressively.

As for private housing land supply, as I have introduced at the Land Sale Programme press conference in end-February, taking into account the eight residential sites in the 2024-25 Land Sale Programme and other market sources, private housing land supply in 2024-25 is estimated to have a capacity to produce more than 15 000 flats.

To enhance speed and efficiency, we will continue our efforts to streamline administrative procedures and will present a briefing to the Panel on Development later this year. With standardisation being one of the key directions, we will keep in view the implementation of the land premium standard rates for industrial buildings and agricultural land in the New Territories just announced this month. We will also do our best to assist the LegCo to expedite the scrutiny of the bill in relation to lease extension.

Urban renewal

"Enhancing quality" is one of our major work, among which urban renewal and ensuring building safety are our key priorities. Our strategy in this regard is a dual-track approach of building maintenance and redevelopment. In respect of building maintenance and safety, the incidents of spalling concrete from the external walls of numerous buildings and the cases of large-scale unauthorised building works (UBWs) happened last year as well as the recent fire incident of an old building in Jordan reflect that owners have not taken government directives seriously, and that the Government's enforcement efforts are inadequate. In the face of this situation, we have to vigorously enhance the effectiveness of law enforcement in an effort to urge owners to fulfil their responsibilities, while at the same time strengthening the provision of appropriate assistance to owners in need of help.

Review of the Buildings Ordinance

Legislative review is an important part in this aspect, and we are pressing ahead with the review of the Buildings Ordinance. Targeting the non-complied notices under the Mandatory Building Inspection Scheme (MBIS) and Mandatory Window Inspection Scheme as well as illegal building works such as

UBWs, we aim to streamline prosecution procedures, lower the prosecution threshold, and increase the penalties, so as to more effectively combat contraventions. In respect of construction safety, we seek to increase the penalties through this legislative review in parallel and impose stricter regulation on contractors through the registration and disciplinary systems. We will put forward proposals within this year to gauge the views of the public and the industry, with a view to initiating the legislative amendment exercise as soon as possible.

Proper handling of building maintenance cases

Regarding the handling of building maintenance cases, we briefed the Panel on Development in February this year on our efforts to enhance building safety and maintenance, including the Buildings Department (BD)'s annual inspection of the external walls of 360 buildings with higher risk, and carrying out the emergency works for high-risk external walls first if needed and seeking to recover the cost from owners concerned afterwards. In addition, the BD will identify high-risk buildings in a more precise manner for issuance of MBIS notices; and the Urban Renewal Authority (URA) provides assistance to the owners participating in the Operation Building Bright 2.0 to accelerate the pace for inspection and repairs of their buildings, including introducing arrangements to assist them in tendering.

Fire safety in buildings

In the wake of the fire incident in Jordan, we will step up fire safety enforcement and prosecution on various fronts, including allocating more manpower through internal redeployment to step up prosecution, and reprioritising enforcement and focus resources for handling high risk buildings such as single-staircase buildings, those with more guesthouses or subdivided units, and those with non-complied MBIS notices and have yet to appoint a registered inspector. The Fire Services Department (FSD) will join the collaboration platform established by the DEVB last year. The platform is led by the DEVB and its members include the BD, the Home Affairs Department, the URA, and now the FSD. With the aim to assist owners' corporations and owners in complying with Fire Safety Directions by strengthening co-ordination among all parties in case management and enhancing public education on the district level.

Redevelopment of old buildings

I just mentioned that another important aspect of "enhancing quality" is the redevelopment of old buildings. In respect of dilapidated buildings, redevelopment is indeed more cost effective. To further encourage redevelopment through private initiatives, we have introduced a bill into the LegCo to update and streamline the legislation on compulsory sale. We will endeavour to co-operate with the Bills Committee in its ongoing scrutiny work, so as to expedite the redevelopment of old and dilapidated buildings with good use of private market forces while at the same time safeguarding the interests of minority owners.

We will continue to support the URA in taking forward redevelopment projects, among which the urban renewal master plans and restructuring proposals in relation to the planning studies for Tsuen Wan and Sham Shui Po will be ready by phases from the second half of the year at the earliest for consulting the public.

Building a liveable city

On harbourfront development, this year's Budget mentioned that we will introduce commercial facilities such as food and beverages, retail and entertainment on a pilot basis at the Victoria harbourfront. As we aim to expedite the implementation of the initiative, the first new attempt is to set up smart specialty vending facilities at the Wan Chai and Cha Kwo Ling promenades progressively from mid-2024 onwards, providing food and beverages while attracting visitors to take pictures. In addition, there are other initiatives which have been mentioned in our replies, and I am not going to repeat them one by one here.

In addition, the DEVB will also continue to develop and enhance the Common Spatial Data Infrastructure in an effort to facilitate the development of digital economy.

The above is a brief report. I apologise for taking up more time as the scope of the projects is extensive. We will be happy to respond to any further questions that Members may wish to raise during today's meeting. Thank you.