

LCQ9: Redevelopment projects of Urban Renewal Authority

Following is a question by the Hon Chan Han-pan and a written reply by the Secretary for Development, Ms Bernadette Linn, in the Legislative Council today (February 21):

Question:

The Urban Renewal Authority (URA) plans to introduce the concept of "vertical city" development and the "arrangement of floating planning parameters" in the Kwun Tong Town Centre redevelopment project. Regarding URA's redevelopment projects, will the Government inform this Council:

(1) whether it knows the current number of URA's proposed redevelopment projects that have adopted the concept of "vertical city" development, as well as the estimated (i) increase in the plot ratios and floor areas of such projects (set out in a table) and (ii) economic benefits that may be brought to the districts concerned after adopting the concept;

(2) as it has been reported that the domestic plot ratio of the old district of Tsuen Wan is only five, whether it knows if the URA will consider adopting the "arrangement of floating planning parameters" in the redevelopment projects in the old district of Tsuen Wan; if it will, of the details and timetable; if not, the reasons for that;

(3) whether it knows if the URA has plans to improve the ancillary facilities (including transport and healthcare facilities) in the old district of Tsuen Wan through the redevelopment projects in that district, so as to cope with the growth in the population and logistics flow of the district; if it has, of the details and timetable; if not, the reasons for that; and

(4) whether it knows the current number of URA's proposed redevelopment projects that have adopted the "arrangement of floating planning parameters", as well as the increase in the proportion of URA's redevelopment projects that have received tenders and the increase in tender success rate after adopting the arrangement (set out in a table); whether there are cases in which the developers of URA's redevelopment projects allocate development floor space for different planning uses under such arrangement?

Reply:

President,

"Floating planning parameters" refers to the flexibility in allocating floor space for different permitted uses in a development, subject to no change in total developable floor space and, often, compliance with the maximum total floor area as allowed for individual permitted use. The

development concept of "vertical city" refers to accommodating a range of mixed and compatible uses, including residential, commercial, office and community facilities, in a high-density vertical building. Having consulted the Urban Renewal Authority (URA), my reply to the various parts of the question is as follows:

(1) and (4) The Kwun Tong Town Centre Development Areas 4 and 5 Project, which was originally planned for a comprehensive commercial development, including office, hotel and shopping arcade, is the first redevelopment project by the URA adopting the "floating planning parameters" mechanism. It provides the successful bidder with greater flexibility in allocating floor space for the above permitted commercial uses, subject to no change in total developable floor space.

Following the unsuccessful tender of the Project early last year, the URA has reviewed the development mode of the Project. Considering the sizable site area and strategic location of the Project, which is in close proximity to the Kwun Tong MTR Station and a large-scale public transport interchange, the URA considers it possible to increase the building height of the project so as to enhance development capacity, and has pioneered the adoption of the "vertical city" planning concept. The URA has proposed to adopt a mixed-use development mode by adding residential use, thus allowing a mixed use of residential, commercial, office and hotel in the development, and increase the provision of public facilities. The proposed amendment scheme retains the "floating planning parameters" mechanism, which would provide the future successful bidder with greater flexibility in allocating both domestic and non-domestic floor space for different uses within the stipulated maximum levels, so as to maximise the redevelopment potential of the land, and to enhance the resilience to cope with the changing market.

According to the latest proposed amendment scheme, the maximum total gross floor area (GFA) of the Project is proposed to be increased from 201 220 square metres to 251 100 sq m (i.e. increased by about 25 per cent as compared with the original scheme). The total plot ratio of the Project is equivalent to about 12. A comparison of the major development parameters between the scheme put to tender last year and the proposed amendment scheme is as follows:

	Proposed amendment scheme	Original scheme	Difference
Total GFA (sq m)	251 100	201 220	+49 880 (+about 25%)
Commercial (sq m)	Max. 153 700	192 619	-38 919 (-about 20%)
Residential (sq m)	Max. 110 100	—	+110 100

Government, Institution or Community (GIC) facilities (sq m)	17 200 (Note)	8 601	+8 599 (+100%)
No. of flats	1 750	0	+1 750
At-grade public open space (sq m)	Not less than 7 200	About 7 200	–
Above-ground outdoor communal space (sq m)	Not less than 4 000	3 230	+770 (+about 24%)

The proposed amendment scheme increases the variety in land use mix. The floor areas for both domestic and non-domestic use, being capped at their respective maximum levels, can be interchanged flexibly which would bring design flexibility to the future development. It is believed that such arrangement can enhance the attractiveness of the Project and expedite the redevelopment. The Project will also provide more planning gains to the community, including more GIC facilities and public open space.

The Project is so far the only project of the URA which adopts the "floating planning parameters" and "vertical city" concept. As the amendment scheme is still subject to the completion of statutory town planning process before the Project is re-tendered at suitable juncture, it is unknown at this stage whether the future developer will adjust the floor space for different permitted uses.

(2) and (3) In considering the local context and infrastructure capacity, the domestic plot ratio in the Tsuen Wan old area has been generally maintained at not more than five. In order to better utilise the land resources and promote urban renewal, the URA has commissioned the Tsuen Wan District Study (Tsuen Wan Study). The URA has just completed the Stage 1 "Baseline Review" at the end of 2023, and the Stage 2 "Identification of Urban Restructuring Key Issues, Constraints and Opportunities" has since been commenced. The URA is currently examining the latest infrastructure condition to assess the feasibility of increasing the development capacity of the area, as well as the associated impact on infrastructure and support facilities. The findings, together with other key planning issues including planning vision, population density, traffic planning, and the provision of public facilities (including medical and social welfare facilities, and communal space) etc, and views gauged in local consultations, will be holistically reviewed and considered in Stage 3 "Planning and Urban Design Framework" and the "Master Urban Renewal Plans" in formulating optimal planning parameters and development modes for the long-term development of Tsuen Wan. In this regard, the URA will consider the applicability of "floating planning parameters" in individual land parcels under the Tsuen Wan Study.

Note: Exempted from GFA calculation.

Hong Kong Customs and Marine Police detect smuggling case involving speedboat with goods worth about \$1.6 million in joint operation (with photo)

Hong Kong Customs and the Marine Police yesterday (February 20) mounted a joint operation and detected a suspected smuggling case involving a speedboat in Sai Kung. A total of 15 carton boxes of suspected smuggled goods, including tablet computers and skin care products with an estimated value of around \$1.6 million, were seized.

Customs and police officers conducted an anti-smuggling operation in Sai Kung and spotted several suspicious men moving a number of carton boxes from a private vehicle to a speedboat at a seashore last night. The men were suspected of participating in smuggling activities. Law enforcement officers swiftly took action and the men concerned jumped onto the speedboat and fled immediately.

During the operation, Customs officers detained the private vehicle involved with the case. The batch of suspected smuggled goods was seized from the vehicle and at the seashore.

An investigation is ongoing.

Smuggling is a serious offence. Under the Import and Export Ordinance, any person found guilty of importing or exporting unmanifested cargo is liable to a maximum fine of \$2 million and imprisonment for seven years.

Members of the public may report any suspected smuggling activities to Customs' 24-hour hotline 2545 6182 or its dedicated crime-reporting email account (crimereport@customs.gov.hk) or online form (eform.cefs.gov.hk/form/ced002).



Inspection of aquatic products imported from Japan

In response to the Japanese Government's plan to discharge nuclear-contaminated water at the Fukushima Nuclear Power Station, the Director of Food and Environmental Hygiene issued a Food Safety Order which prohibits all aquatic products, sea salt and seaweeds originating from the 10 metropolis/prefectures, namely Tokyo, Fukushima, Ibaraki, Miyagi, Chiba, Gunma, Tochigi, Niigata, Nagano and Saitama, from being imported into and supplied in Hong Kong.

For other Japanese aquatic products, sea salt and seaweeds that are not prohibited from being imported into Hong Kong, the Centre for Food Safety (CFS) of the Food and Environmental Hygiene Department will conduct comprehensive radiological tests to verify that the radiation levels of these products do not exceed the guideline levels before they are allowed to be supplied in the market.

As the discharge of nuclear-contaminated water is unprecedented and will continue for 30 years or more, the Government will closely monitor and step up the testing arrangements. Should anomalies be detected, the Government does not preclude further tightening the scope of the import ban.

From noon on February 20 to noon today (February 21), the CFS conducted tests on the radiological levels of 176 food samples imported from Japan, which were of the "aquatic and related products, seaweeds and sea salt" category. No sample was found to have exceeded the safety limit. Details can be found on the CFS's thematic website titled "Control Measures on Foods Imported from Japan" (www.cfs.gov.hk/english/programme/programme_rafs/programme_rafs_fc_01_30_Nuclear_Event_and_Food_Safety.html).

The Agriculture, Fisheries and Conservation Department (AFCD) has also tested 50 samples of local catch for radiological levels. All the samples passed the tests. Details can be found on the AFCD's website (www.afcd.gov.hk/english/fisheries/Radiological_testing/Radiological_Test.html).

The Hong Kong Observatory (HKO) has also enhanced the environmental monitoring of the local waters. No anomaly has been detected so far. For details, please refer to the HKO's website (www.hko.gov.hk/en/radiation/monitoring/seawater.html).

From August 24 to noon today, the CFS and the AFCD have conducted tests on the radiological levels of 31 662 samples of food imported from Japan (including 21 244 samples of aquatic and related products, seaweeds and sea salt) and 8 922 samples of local catch respectively. All the samples passed the tests.

Director of Hong Kong and Macao Work Office of CPC Central Committee and Hong Kong and Macao Affairs Office of State Council Mr Xia Baolong to visit Hong Kong for inspection

The Director of the Hong Kong and Macao Work Office of the Communist Party of China Central Committee and the Hong Kong and Macao Affairs Office of the State Council, Mr Xia Baolong, will visit Hong Kong for inspection from February 22 to 28, to gain a better understanding of Hong Kong's latest situations, including economic developments and district governance.

â€‹

The Chief Executive, Mr John Lee, extended his warmest welcome to Mr Xia for visiting Hong Kong again for inspection. Mr Lee also expressed gratitude to the Central Government for its care and concern for Hong Kong. The Hong Kong Special Administrative Region Government is pressing ahead with various preparatory work to ensure the smooth conduct of the visit.

Three illegal workers jailed

Three Indonesian illegal workers were jailed by the Shatin Magistrates' Courts yesterday (February 20).

During an anti-illegal worker operation conducted on February 18, Immigration Department (ImmD) investigators raided a restaurant in Chai Wan. Three Indonesian women, aged 34 to 41, were arrested while working as dishwashing workers. Upon identity checking, one Indonesian woman produced for inspection a recognisance form issued by the ImmD, which prohibits her from taking employment. Further investigation revealed that she was a non-refoulement claimant.

The illegal workers were charged at the Shatin Magistrates' Courts on February 20 with taking employment while being a person in respect of whom a removal order or deportation order was in force or being a person who, having been given permission to land in Hong Kong, had remained in Hong Kong in breach of their limit of stay imposed in relation to the permission. They pleaded guilty to the charge and were sentenced to 15 months' imprisonment. Meanwhile, two of them were also charged with one count of overstaying in Hong Kong and were sentenced to 12 and 16 days' imprisonment respectively. All sentences are to run concurrently, making for a total of 15 months' imprisonment.

The ImmD spokesman warned that, as stipulated in section 38AA of the Immigration Ordinance, an illegal immigrant, a person who is the subject of a removal order or a deportation order, an overstayer or a person who was refused permission to land is prohibited from taking any employment, whether paid or unpaid, or establishing or joining in any business. Offenders are liable upon conviction to a maximum fine of \$50,000 and up to three years' imprisonment. Under the prevailing laws, it is an offence to use or possess a forged Hong Kong identity card or a Hong Kong identity card related to another person. Offenders are liable to prosecution and upon conviction face a maximum penalty of a \$100,000 fine and up to 10 years' imprisonment.

The spokesman reiterated that it is a serious offence to employ people who are not lawfully employable. Under the Immigration Ordinance, the maximum penalty for an employer employing a person who is not lawfully employable, i.e. an illegal immigrant, a person who is the subject of a removal order or a deportation order, an overstayer or a person who was refused permission to land, has been significantly increased from a fine of \$350,000 and three years' imprisonment to a fine of \$500,000 and 10 years' imprisonment to reflect the gravity of such offences. The director, manager, secretary, partner, etc, of the company concerned may also bear criminal liability. The High Court has laid down sentencing guidelines that the employer of an illegal worker should be given an immediate custodial sentence.

According to the court sentencing, employers must take all practicable steps to determine whether a person is lawfully employable prior to

employment. Apart from inspecting a prospective employee's identity card, the employer has the explicit duty to make enquiries regarding the person and ensure that the answers would not cast any reasonable doubt concerning the lawful employability of the person. The court will not accept failure to do so as a defence in proceedings. It is also an offence if an employer fails to inspect the job seeker's valid travel document if the job seeker does not have a Hong Kong permanent identity card. Offenders are liable upon conviction to a maximum fine of \$150,000 and to imprisonment for one year. In that connection, the spokesman would like to remind all employers not to defy the law by employing illegal workers. The ImmD will continue to take resolute enforcement action to combat such offences.

Under the existing mechanism, the ImmD will, as a standard procedure, conduct an initial screening of vulnerable persons, including illegal workers, illegal immigrants, sex workers and foreign domestic helpers, who are arrested during any operation with a view to ascertaining whether they are trafficking in persons (TIP) victims. When any TIP indicator is revealed in the initial screening, the officers will conduct a full debriefing and identification by using a standardised checklist to ascertain the presence of TIP elements, such as threats and coercion in the recruitment phase and the nature of exploitation. Identified TIP victims will be provided with various forms of support and assistance, including urgent intervention, medical services, counselling, shelter, temporary accommodation and other supporting services. The ImmD calls on TIP victims to report crimes to the relevant departments immediately.