

LCQ8: Tapping into private agricultural land reserve in New Territories

Following is a question by the Hon Andrew Wan and a written reply by the Secretary for Development, Mr Michael Wong, in the Legislative Council today (June 13):

Question:

The Task Force on Land Supply (Task Force) launched in April this year a five-month public consultation on 18 land supply options. One of the options is the "tapping into the private agricultural land reserve in the New Territories", which involves about 1 000 hectares of agricultural lands held by various major developers. The Task Force has recommended that the said agricultural lands be better utilised, through public-private partnership (PPP), to increase housing supply. In this connection, will the Government inform this Council:

(1) of the number of agricultural lands currently held by various developers and, in respect of each land, the (i) area, (ii) location and (iii) name of the owner (set out such information by District Council (DC) district and mark on a map the location of each land);

(2) among the agricultural lands held by the various developers, of the respective areas and percentages of those with the planned uses as follows: agriculture, green belt, conservation area, country park and site of special scientific interest; the area and percentage of such agricultural lands which overlap with brownfield sites (set out such information by DC district);

(3) whether the Government will recommend, during consideration of the planning applications for housing development on the said agricultural lands by the Town Planning Board, the imposition of height restrictions on buildings on such lands; if so, of the details;

(4) as it has been reported that the Government has planned to earmark 1 000 hectares of agricultural lands for designation as "Agriculture Priority Areas" to implement a New Agriculture Policy, but there are currently 3 700 hectares of abandoned agricultural lands, whether the Government has put in place measures to ensure that the agricultural lands not currently held by developers will be used for agricultural development; and

(5) whether the Government will conduct a freezing survey on the agricultural lands currently held by developers so as to prevent developers from hoarding more agricultural lands for developing such lands through PPP?

Reply:

President,

The Task Force on Land Supply (Task Force) is conducting a five-month public engagement exercise to lead a discussion in the community on the pros and cons and relative priority of, and making a compromise on, 18 land supply options, with a view to achieving the broadest consensus in the community concerning the land supply options and the strategy. One of the short-to-medium term options put forward by the Task Force is tapping into the potential of private agricultural land reserve in the New Territories (NT) through public-private partnership.

My reply to various parts of the question is as follows:

(1) and (2) According to information available in the public domain provided by individual developers and the industry, it is estimated that major developers are holding no less than 1 000 hectares of agricultural land in the NT. The Government has no detailed information about these agricultural land, including the actual number, site area, distribution, planned uses, ownership, etc. It is believed that certain portion of the relevant land overlaps with various New Development Areas or brownfields.

(3) According to the existing statutory town planning procedures, if the proposed land use of the planning application is consistent with that stipulated in the outline zoning plans, the relevant development has to comply with the development restrictions imposed by the plans on these sites, including height restrictions (if applicable). If the planning application concerns rezoning (such as rezoning for residential development), the Town Planning Board (TPB) when processing the application will give due considerations to a host of factors including (i) whether the proposed use and development parameters would be in harmony with the surrounding areas, (ii) whether there will be adverse impact on the surrounding environment, traffic, visual and other relevant infrastructure, and (iii) public views, etc. Upon consideration, the TPB will make decision on the planning application in accordance with the Town Planning Ordinance (Cap. 131). If the application is approved by the TPB in full or in part, the future development will be confined by the development parameters (including gross floor area and number of storeys) as set out in the application.

Regardless of whether individual development projects would be taken forward through public-private partnership, the aforementioned town planning procedures will continue to apply.

(4) Regarding the land currently designated as egarding the land on statutory town plans, if it is privately owned, whether the land is indeed used for agricultural purpose is a decision of the landowner.

To promote modernisation and sustainable development of local agriculture, the Government has been implementing the New Agriculture Policy since 2016. This includes, among other initiatives, commissioning a consultancy study on Agricultural Priority Areas (APAs) jointly overseen by

the Food and Health Bureau and the Development Bureau. The study will identify relatively large areas of quality agricultural land and examine the feasibility of designating them as APAs. It will also recommend suitable policies and measures to provide incentives for putting fallow agricultural land into long-term agricultural use thereby supporting the development of local agriculture. The study area will include active and fallow agricultural land, whether it is government land or privately owned. The tendering of consultancy is currently underway and the study is expected to begin in the second half of 2018. Before the commencement of the study, it is difficult at this stage to estimate the area of land to be designated as APAs in future.

(5) The right of private ownership of property is a right protected under Articles 6 and 105 of the Basic Law. In respect of privately owned agricultural land, as long as the use of the relevant land complies with the applicable regulations and land lease conditions, the Government has no grounds to restrict the use of such land through the "freezing surveys" suggested in the question.

The Task Force proposes public-private partnership as an option so as to explore a possible way out through unleashing the development potential of agricultural land in the short-to-medium term. The Task Force is of the view that the relevant discussion must be premised on the understanding that the Government would set up a fair, open and transparent mechanism in future. The Government will continue to listen carefully to the views of the community.

LCQ7: Bus-only lane and designated bus gate

Following is a question by the Hon Frankie Yick and a written reply by the Secretary for Transport and Housing, Mr Frank Chan Fan, in the Legislative Council today (June 13):

Question:

In order to optimise the use of limited road resources, the Transport Department has all along been implementing measures which give priority to public transport modes over road use. Among them, the most commonly adopted measure is the designation of "bus-only lanes". However, some members of the public have relayed to me that during busy traffic hours, while the volumes of bus traffic on certain bus-only lanes are considerably low, the adjacent traffic lanes are extremely congested, thus causing a wastage of road resources. In this connection, will the Government inform this Council:

(1) of the details of each bus-only lane in Hong Kong at present, including (i) the District Council district to which the lane belongs, (ii) the names

of the road and road section on which the lane is located, (iii) the daily operating time, (iv) the length of the lane, (v) the daily average volume of bus traffic and vehicle speed, and (vi) how such average traffic volume and vehicle speed compare with the corresponding figures of the adjacent traffic lane(s) (set out in a table);

(2) whether the authorities cancelled in the past five years the designation of a certain bus-only lane on the ground that the volume of bus traffic on the lane was below a certain level; if so, of the details;

(3) as the last-term Government made an undertaking to me that it would study the conversion of bus-only lanes into "public transport-only lanes", so that the traffic lanes concerned would be open for use by other public service vehicles such as taxis and public light buses, whether the current-term Government has followed up such task; if so, of the results of the study; if not, the reasons for that; and

(4) whether it has studied arrangements in overseas countries for and usage of public transport-only lanes; if so, of the details; if not, whether it will consider conducting the relevant study?

Reply:

President,

Hong Kong residents mainly commute by public transport, which accounts for about 90 per cent of the total passenger trips each day. To support the priority use of roads by public transport services so to benefit the public at large, the Transport Department (TD) has been introducing bus-only lanes (Note 1) and designating bus gates (Note 2) on appropriate roads. In pursuing such bus priority measures, the TD will consider the actual road situation and traffic conditions, including the design of roads and junctions, the number of traffic lanes, the number of bus routes and bus service frequencies, the traffic volume of other types of vehicles, availability of alternative routes, the impact on the flow of other vehicles, etc., and will carefully assess the feasibility of such measures in order to strike a proper balance. The TD will continue to keep in view the operation of bus-only lanes and designated bus gates after implementation, and review and enhance the arrangements of these facilities in a timely manner.

My reply to the various parts of the Hon Frankie Yick's question is as follows:

(1) Information on bus-only lanes and designated bus gates, viz. the District Council districts, locations and sections of the roads, restriction days and hours, applicable vehicle types and length, is set out in Annex 1 and Annex 2 respectively. The TD has not compiled any statistics on the daily average volume of bus traffic and vehicle speed in respect of each bus-only lane and designated bus gate, and the average traffic volume and vehicle speed of the adjacent traffic lane(s).

(2) The TD reviews from time to time traffic facilities on different road sections. Also, there are suggestions from the community (including individual District Council members) on the addition of bus-only lanes at various locations. In the past three years (from 2015 to 2017), the TD extended the operation hours of six bus-only lanes and introduced a new bus-only lane, the details of which are in Annex 3. The TD did not cancel any bus-only lane or designated bus gate in the past five years.

(3) and (4) Buses are road-based public transport mass carriers with the highest carrying capacity and can efficiently carry people to their destinations. To provide maximum convenience to bus passengers, the Government introduces bus-only lanes and designates bus gates so to reduce the chance of bus service schedules being affected by traffic congestions. For other public transport modes, the Government has also been designating taxi pick-up/drop-off points and, where traffic situations permit, relaxing some no-stopping restrictions for taxis and green minibuses to facilitate their operation and enhancement of service quality.

As regards the proposal of designating "public transport-only lanes" on busy roads for buses to share the use of such lanes with other public transport modes such as taxis and public light buses, the TD will follow up and study the proposal, including making reference to the overseas experience. The study will also consider possible reduction of bus operation efficiencies on such lanes vis-à-vis the original bus lanes caused by additional traffic flow from, and picking up/dropping off activities of, other public transport vehicles. Furthermore, if "public transport only-lanes" are to be set up, the number of traffic lanes on the concerned road sections for use by other vehicles (e.g. goods vehicles and private cars) will be reduced, potentially affecting the traffic condition. Hence, the TD has to study the proposal in detail and consult various stakeholders.

Note 1: Bus-only lane is a traffic lane designated for use by "franchised bus" or "franchised and non-franchised bus" only. Other vehicles have to make use of other traffic lanes next to the bus-only lane or other alternative routes.

Note 2: Designated bus gate generally refers to a short section of bus-only lane that, while the road capacity is normally not affected, facilitates buses to access their destinations or change to other travelling routes more directly.

Lido Beach and Casam Beach temporarily closed

Attention TV/radio announcers:

Please broadcast the following as soon as possible:

Here is an item of interest to swimmers.

The Leisure and Cultural Services Department announced today (June 13) that Lido Beach and Casam Beach in Tsuen Wan District are temporarily closed until further notice for maintenance of shark prevention nets. Red flags have been hoisted at the beaches. Beach-goers are advised not to swim at the beaches.

LCQ3: Pedestrian-friendly measures

Following is a question by the Hon Hui Chi-fung and a reply by the Secretary for Transport and Housing, Mr Frank Chan Fan, in the Legislative Council today (June 13):

Question:

In order to improve the pedestrian environment, the Transport Department (TD) has set up pedestrian precincts in a number of districts since 2000. In recent years, some researchers and planners have proposed to set up a pedestrian and tram precinct or an open space in a section of Des Voeux Road Central. Meanwhile, some members of the public have criticised the government departments concerned for the unclear delineation of powers and responsibilities in managing pedestrian precincts, which has given rise to environmental hygiene and noise problems in some pedestrian precincts, such as the Mong Kok Pedestrian Precinct. Regarding measures to improve the pedestrian and street environment, will the Government inform this Council:

(1) whether the Transport and Housing Bureau (THB) can coordinate the efforts of the Development Bureau, TD, Highways Department and the Police to enhance the management of pedestrian precincts, so as to avoid the bureaux/departments each administering its own way or the emergence of a situation that "comes within nobody's jurisdiction";

(2) given the commissioning of both the MTR Shatin to Central Link and the Central-Wan Chai Bypass as well as the implementation of the Electronic Road Pricing Pilot Scheme in Central and its adjacent areas in the next two to three years, whether the THB will, in the light of those new situations, commence a feasibility study on setting up a pedestrian and tram precinct in a section of Des Voeux Road Central; and

(3) given that the Transport for London of the United Kingdom has launched the Transport Strategy of Healthy Streets Approach, under which elements will be incorporated into pedestrian precincts to cope with climate change, reduce carbon emission, encourage walking and improve public health, whether the THB can break out of the established policy framework to implement a long-term

policy on healthy streets with an audaciously innovative attitude?

Reply:

President,

The Government has been striving to create a pedestrian-friendly environment. We have introduced a host of measures over the years to foster Hong Kong as a walkable city. As announced in "The Chief Executive's 2017 Policy Address" last October, the Government will continue to take forward "Walk in HK" by launching a series of measures to encourage citizens to walk more. Our policy objective is to enhance the overall walkability of our city to facilitate citizens to commute, connect and enjoy, making walking an integral element of Hong Kong's sustainable development.

My consolidated reply to the various parts of the Hon Hui Chi-fung's question is as follows:

Since 2000, the Transport Department (TD) has progressively implemented pedestrian environment improvement schemes in Causeway Bay, Central, Wan Chai, Mong Kok, Tsim Sha Tsui, Jordon, Sham Shui Po, Stanley, Yuen Long and Shek Wu Hui. Under the schemes, full-time or part-time pedestrian streets (commonly known as pedestrian precincts) are implemented to improve pedestrian environment. Relevant government departments regulate the activities and conditions of these pedestrian precincts in accordance with the respective powers conferred on them by the law. For instance, the TD is responsible for formulating suitable traffic management measures with regard to the pedestrian and vehicular traffic of the relevant streets; the Police is responsible for maintaining public safety and public order, and deploying staff to the scene upon receipt of noise complaints concerning pedestrian precincts; the Food and Environmental Hygiene Department is responsible for handling issues related to environmental hygiene, street cleansing, hawking activities, etc.; the Home Affairs Department conveys the views of local residents and the District Councils, and co-ordinates the joint efforts of relevant departments in addressing the issues concerned. Various departments have been maintaining close collaboration, and jointly manage, regulate and monitor pedestrian precincts.

The TD has been monitoring the traffic situation in Central and its vicinity, including Des Voeux Road Central. It will also pay close attention to the traffic situation after the commissioning of the Central-Wan Chai Bypass and the cross-harbour section of the MTR Shatin to Central Link, including the changes in routes, frequencies and patronage of public transport services. Furthermore, the TD is conducting a feasibility study on the Electronic Road Pricing Pilot Scheme in Central and will map out the details and implementation strategy in due course for public consultation. The Pilot Scheme will further improve the traffic situations in Central and its vicinity.

With regard to the creation of a pedestrian-friendly environment, the Government welcomes proposals from all sectors to improve the walking environment. When considering various proposals, the Government will take

into account the demands of the local community and businesses, local characteristics, street management and impact on traffic.

In the past, some organisations proposed to set up a pedestrian and tram precinct in Des Voeux Road Central. Some community organisations filed an application in 2015 under the Town Planning Ordinance requesting to rezone Des Voeux Road Central as a pedestrian and tram precinct. The proposal had implications on the traffic and public transport of the nearby road sections, demand for loading/ unloading of goods and passengers, operation of emergency access and traffic arrangements during redevelopment or maintenance of buildings, etc. Relevant departments provided views to the Town Planning Board under their respective purviews. The organisations concerned withdrew the rezoning request in 2016. Should there be other feasible study or proposal in future regarding the setting up of a pedestrian and tram precinct in Des Voeux Road Central, relevant departments are prepared to provide views.

As mentioned above, the Transport and Housing Bureau and the TD are actively taking forward the "Walk in HK" policy to enhance the overall walkability of Hong Kong. This is not only a transport policy, but also an integral part of the Government's various policies to tackle climate change, encourage a healthy lifestyle, strengthen community interaction and build an age-friendly environment. We are also aware of the Healthy Streets Approach launched by the Transport for London to encourage the public to reduce the use of private cars and to walk, cycle and use public transport more as the major means of commuting. The Healthy Streets Approach is in line with the "Walk in HK" policy in many ways.

We will continue to adopt a comprehensive strategy by consolidating past efforts to foster a pedestrian-friendly environment. We encourage the public to walk more and reduce the use of mechanised transport for short-distance commuting. This will help alleviate traffic congestion, improve air quality and enhance public health. Specific measures include: (i) "Make it smart" by providing user-friendly information, for which we enable citizens to use the TD's "Hong Kong eTransport" mobile application for planning and searching for the best walking routes; (ii) "Make it connected" by enhancing our pedestrian networks, for which we are currently exploring ways to enhance connectivity between Wan Chai and Sheung Wan; (iii) "Make it enjoyable" by making walking a pleasant experience, for which we will continue to provide covers on certain walkways connecting to public transport facilities; and (iv) "Make it safe" by providing a safe and quality pedestrian environment, for which we will review and update existing planning standards and design in relation to pedestrian environment and facilities.

LCQ4: Boosting development of industries that enjoy advantages in process of Hong Kong's re-industrialisation

Following is a question by the Hon Wu Chi-wai and a reply by the Secretary for Innovation and Technology, Mr Nicholas W Yang, in the Legislative Council today (June 13):

Question:

The Policy Address published in January last year stated that industries enjoying advantages in the process of Hong Kong's re-industrialisation (advantageous industries) included biotechnology. It is learnt that quite a number of Mainland and overseas cities have implemented various concessionary measures in respect of land, capital and taxation to attract innovation and technology enterprises to establish their bases there. However, Hong Kong has not implemented similar measures, nor did it provide with concessions in taxation, housing, etc to attract innovation and technology talents to come to Hong Kong for career development. On the other hand, some academics have pointed out that Hong Kong should leverage its strength in higher education by establishing a higher education institution that aims to nurture students' business start-up capability so as to boost the development of advantageous industries. In this connection, will the Government inform this Council:

(1) whether it will, by making reference to the practices of Mainland and overseas cities, formulate more competitive measures to attract enterprises in advantageous industries to establish their bases in Hong Kong, and to attract relevant talents to come to Hong Kong for career development; if so, of the details; if not, the reasons for that;

(2) whether it has examined if Hong Kong's existing policies on land and taxation, infrastructure facilities, pool of talents, etc are sufficient to meet the needs of biomedicine enterprises in terms of factory sites and scientific research talents; if so, of the details; if not, the reasons for that; and

(3) whether it will consider allocating lands in the Lok Ma Chau Loop or other suitable locations for the construction of a superb scientific research base that will bring together the scientific research strengths of various universities in Hong Kong, and for the construction of a business start-up institution to boost the development of advantageous industries; if so, of the details; if not, the reasons for that?

Reply:

President,

Innovation and technology (I&T) is the driving force of economic development in the new era. Promoting re-industrialisation is an important part of the Government's I&T policy. Over the past few years, an atmosphere favourable to I&T development has gradually built up in Hong Kong, with internationally renowned research institutions settling herein one by one. We will continue to focus on promoting the development of targeted technology areas, including: biotechnology, artificial intelligence (AI), robotics, smart city etc.

Our reply to the various parts of the question is as follows:

(1) and (2) With an independent judicial system and intellectual property protection system, a world-class financial centre, a level-playing field and comprehensive infrastructure, as well as the unique edges under "one country, two systems" and the huge opportunities brought about by the development of the Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Bay Area, Hong Kong is among the first choices of business destinations for Mainland and multinational companies.

Using the examples of healthcare technologies, AI and robotics technologies, the Government is working on the establishment of the research clusters on healthcare technologies and on AI and robotics technologies in the Hong Kong Science Park (Science Park). We have set aside \$10 billion to provide financial support to non-profit-making research centres or laboratories operating at the two clusters.

Separately, the Government will allocate \$10 billion to the Hong Kong Science and Technology Parks Corporation (HKSTPC) for constructing research-related infrastructure and facilities for common use to strengthen Hong Kong's research and development (R&D) capabilities, and for enhancing support for the HKSTPC's tenants and incubatees, which includes expanding its Corporate Venture Fund and Incubation Programme, as well as attracting international technology enterprises to set up bases in the Science Park through providing incentives.

As regards healthcare technologies, the Biomedical Technology Support Centre in the Science Park is now providing more than 80 types of ready-to-use life science experimental instruments for use by tenants or incubatees. The HKSTPC will make use of the allocation to construct specialised facilities for healthcare technologies, including pilot batch production facilities, animal research and drug testing facilities, and bio bank and medical informatics, etc. Also, there are 23 pharmaceutical plants in the three Industrial Estates (IEs) managed by the HKSTPC, occupying an area of more than 200 000 square metres. To tie in with the development of the upstream, midstream and downstream industrial chain of healthcare technologies, the Government will explore with the HKSTPC to identify suitable premises in the IEs of Tai Po or Yuen Long for developing healthcare technology industry upon conversion and remodelling.

Stage 1 of the Science Park Expansion Programme is now underway. Upon

expansion, some floors will be set aside for laboratory and research work spaces for healthcare and AI/robotics technologies. The HKSTPC will also convert a building in the Science Park for healthcare research laboratory.

In recent years, the Government has invested a large sum of resources to improve the I&T ecosystem in Hong Kong through various targeting measures, with a view to attracting to Hong Kong top research institutions and technology enterprises as well as technology talents from the Mainland and overseas. Relevant measures include –

(i) On land and infrastructure, the Government actively identifies land to dovetail with I&T development, and is developing the Hong Kong-Shenzhen Innovation and Technology Park (the Park) in the Lok Ma Chau Loop, thereby facilitating the sustainable development of I&T and re-industrialisation in Hong Kong.

(ii) On funding support, to encourage enterprises to carry out more R&D projects locally, we will provide enhanced tax deduction for the qualifying local R&D expenditure incurred by enterprises. The relevant Amendment Bill was introduced to the Legislative Council on May 2, 2018 for scrutiny.

(iii) On pooling talent, we have announced the introduction of the pilot Technology Talent Admission Scheme to facilitate the admission of overseas and Mainland technology talent to work in Hong Kong by tenants and incubatees of the HKSTPC and Cyberport that are engaged in certain technology areas. We will also launch the pilot Technology Talent Scheme to nurture local technology talent in the third quarter of this year. Besides, the InnoCell will provide residential units and ancillary facilities to target tenants, incubatees and overseas/Mainland visitors in the Science Park starting from 2021.

The Government will from time to time review existing policies and measures, and make enhancement as and when appropriate, having regard to the need arising from I&T development, thereby maintaining Hong Kong's competitiveness.

The Innovation and Technology Bureau will collaborate with the Invest Hong Kong and the Economic and Trade Offices in overseas and Mainland to promote Hong Kong's latest I&T situation and opportunities, thereby attracting international R&D institutions and technology enterprises to Hong Kong.

(3) In accordance with the Memorandum of Understanding on Jointly Developing the Lok Ma Chau Loop by Hong Kong and Shenzhen, both sides have agreed to set up an integrated advanced training platform in the Park, with a focus on the provision of postgraduate programmes and professional training courses on new or advanced technology, aiming to nurture talents, and engender synergy and clustering effects with the facilities in the Park. We encourage the world's top higher education institutions to set up I&T related branches or facilities in the Park. With reference to the overall development plan of the Park, the Education Bureau will commence discussion and study on the details

of establishing higher education facilities in the Park in due course.

Regarding the setting up of a superior scientific research base, the Government has proposed to establish two research clusters with an aim to attract top-notch local, Mainland and overseas research institutions. We will consider whether to expand the scale of the two clusters and whether to establish new clusters having regard to the experience of the implementation of the two research clusters and the global technology development, etc.