

BFAC appreciates Tourism Commission and MPFA's committed efforts in outlining long-term development for Hong Kong's tourism industry and operating eMPF Platform

The following is issued on behalf of the Business Facilitation Advisory Committee Secretariat:

The Business Facilitation Advisory Committee held its 56th meeting today (March 19). At the meeting, the Tourism Commission briefed members on the Development Blueprint for Hong Kong's Tourism Industry 2.0 (Blueprint 2.0) promulgated at the end of last year. The Mandatory Provident Fund Schemes Authority (MPFA) and eMPF Outreach Team also briefed members on the eMPF Platform.

Blueprint 2.0 proposes four positions, four development strategies and 133 measures for Hong Kong's tourism development in the coming five years. The four positions of Hong Kong's tourism industry are (i) reinforcing the role of an international tourism hub and a core demonstration zone for multi-destination tourism; (ii) highlighting the unique elements of Hong Kong's local cultural characteristics that are irreplaceable and unrepeatable and making good use of its positioning as the East-meets-West centre for international cultural exchange, with a view to achieving "shaping tourism with cultural activities and promoting culture through tourism"; (iii) upholding Hong Kong's positioning as a city with high-quality tourism experiences; and (iv) stressing the importance of quality over quantity in development to build Hong Kong into a demonstration point for sustainable tourism.

Based on the four positions, Blueprint 2.0 proposes four development strategies of Hong Kong's tourism industry, namely (i) nurture and develop tourism products – to nurture and develop tourism products and initiatives with local and international characteristics; (ii) visitors from all parts of the world gather in Hong Kong – to develop a diversified portfolio of visitor source markets for Hong Kong, with a focus on attracting high value-added overnight visitors; (iii) intelligent and convenient travel to Hong Kong – to promote smart tourism; and (iv) quality services for visitors – to enhance the service quality and support of the tourism industry on all fronts and to cultivate talent.

The Committee appreciated the Commission's committed efforts in outlining a visionary plan for the future development of Hong Kong's tourism industry in the long term to further advocate the healthy and sustainable development of tourism-related industries, thereby promoting economic development.

The eMPF Platform was launched in June 2024 to centralise the administrative tasks dispersed across various trustees' platforms by providing one-stop services, and facilitate the standardisation, streamlining and automation of the Mandatory Provident Fund (MPF) scheme administration processes, thereby enhancing operational efficiency of the MPF System and reducing administration costs. The MPFA anticipated that all MPF trustees will complete onboarding the Platform by 2025.

The Committee appreciated the MPFA's ongoing efforts in building and operating the eMPF Platform to reshape the administrative ecosystem of the MPF System through innovative digital solutions.

The Committee also received the work reports of its three task forces:

Wholesale and Retail Task Force (WRTF)

- The MPFA and eMPF Outreach Team briefed the WRTF on the eMPF Platform. The WRTF welcomed the eMPF Platform, and appreciated the MPFA and the eMPF Outreach Team in providing support measures through various channels to facilitate stakeholders in using the eMPF Platform.
- The Hong Kong Productivity Council briefed the WRTF on E-commerce Easy under the Dedicated Fund on Branding, Upgrading and Domestic Sales (BUD Fund). The Government launched E-commerce Easy on July 15, 2024, with a view to assisting enterprises in opening up the Mainland market through developing electronic commerce (e-commerce) business. Following the announcements in the 2024 Policy Address and the 2025-26 Budget, a total of \$1.75 billion will be injected into the BUD Fund, and the geographical scope of E-commerce Easy will be expanded to the 10 countries of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations. The WRTF welcomed E-commerce Easy and considered it conducive to assisting small and medium-sized enterprises in entering the Mainland market through digitalisation.

Food Business and Related Services Task Force (FRSTF)

- The Food and Environmental Hygiene Department (FEHD) briefed the FRSTF on the initiative of Recommendation on Food Manufacturer Registration (Applicable to Export of the Specified 18 Categories of Food Products to the Mainland), introduced under the General Administration of Customs of the People's Republic of China Decree No. 248 "Regulations of the People's Republic of China on the Registration and Administration of Overseas Manufacturers of Imported Food" and the Advance Release Arrangement for Hong Kong-manufactured food products entering the Mainland market, under the framework of the Cooperation Agreement on the Supervision of Safety and Facilitation of Customs Clearance of Food

Products Manufactured in Hong Kong Exported to the Mainland. The FRSTF welcomed the facilitation measures.

- The FEHD also briefed the FRSTF on e-services of Food Business Licences and Permits, including digitally transmitting and processing licence application information with 11 bureaux/departments, issuance of electronic licences/permits, and accepting electronic applications for alteration to the approved plan of licensed food premises, licence amendments, transfer and cancellation as well as electronic payment of application fees. The FRSTF welcomed the e-services provided by the FEHD and suggested the FEHD enhance the user-friendliness of its website to encourage more trades to use the e-service.

Task Force on Business Liaison Groups (BLGTF)

- The Labour Department (LD) briefed the BLGTF on the abolition of using the accrued benefits of employers' mandatory contributions under the Mandatory Provident Fund (MPF) System to offset severance payment (SP) and long service payment (LSP) payable to employees, and the Subsidy Scheme for Abolition of MPF Offsetting Arrangement (SSA), which would share employers' SP/LSP expenses after the abolition to help employers adapt to the policy change. The abolition of the offsetting arrangement and the SSA will be effective on May 1, 2025. The BLGTF thanked the LD for briefing on the above initiatives, and suggested the LD simplify the content of the promotional materials of the abolition of the offsetting arrangement to facilitate publicity and education to micro, small and medium-sized enterprises. The LD undertook to consider the suggestion.

The Committee also expressed appreciation of the commitment and achievements of the bureaux and departments in continuously implementing the business facilitation measures under the Be the Smart Regulator Programme to enhance their business licensing services.

Papers for the Committee meeting are available at www.gov.hk/en/business/supportenterprises/bf/advisory/index.htm for public access.

LCQ9: Urban renewal

Following is a question by Dr the Hon Starry Lee and a written reply by the Secretary for Development, Ms Bernadette Linn, in the Legislative Council today (March 19):

Question:

It is learnt that recently, under the influence of various factors such as high interest rates, uncertainties in the global economy and adjustments in the local property market, private developers' wish to participate in urban renewal has significantly diminished, resulting in impediment to the progress of a number of redevelopment projects, including the "13 Streets" and "5 Streets" projects in To Kwa Wan. There are views that the Urban Renewal Authority (URA), as the primary organisation to drive urban renewal, must ensure that its redevelopment work will not be stalled by changes in the economic environment, so as to avoid any impact on the pressing demand of residents of dilapidated buildings for improvement in their living conditions. In this connection, will the Government inform this Council if it knows:

(1) whether the URA has assessed the specific impact of the current weak property market on urban renewal projects, including details of the delayed projects and the number of residents affected;

(2) whether the URA will actively consider fully unleashing the development potential of land in old districts by means of establishment of street consolidation areas, cross-district transfer of plot ratios, greater planning flexibility or introduction of other innovative approaches; if so, of the details; if not, the reasons for that;

(3) whether the URA will consider deploying various means, such as increasing the proportion of self-developed residential projects, leveraging the "single site, multiple use" model, and exploring introduction of more commercial, retail and other uses in its development projects, so as to enhance the feasibility and beneficial effects of its projects; if so, of the details; if not, the reasons for that; and

(4) whether, in the long run, the URA will review the existing redevelopment strategy to ensure continuous progress of urban renewal even in the face of fluctuations in the economic environment, so as to meet public expectation for improvement in their living conditions?

Reply:

President,

In consultation with the Urban Renewal Authority (URA), my reply to the various parts of the question is as follows:

(1) Under the Urban Renewal Authority Ordinance (Cap. 563), the URA is required to exercise due care and diligence in handling its finances, thereby maintaining a sound and healthy financial position in the long run. Given its business nature, the URA's annual financial position will be affected by the fluctuations in the property market and the progress of commenced projects. To cope with the challenges posed by the economic environment and property market situations on sustaining urban renewal, the URA will adopt a dynamic management approach to review, from time to time, the commenced and/or to be

commenced redevelopment projects. It will also appropriately adjust the planning and the pace of implementation of different projects in the light of market situations and building conditions, so as to strike a balance between maintaining its financial stability, effectively promoting the regeneration of old districts and addressing the expectations of the local community in its mission to carry out urban renewal in a sustainable and orderly manner.

Meanwhile, the Development Bureau (DEVB) will continue to provide various forms of financial support to the URA, and will work with the URA and relevant departments for the wider application of innovative planning tools to enhance the commercial viability of redevelopment. The DEVB will also enable the URA to take forward redevelopment projects in a sustainable manner through policy measures, the details of which are set out below:

(2) and (3) In recent years, the URA has started to apply the new planning tools proposed in its District Study for Yau Ma Tei and Mong Kok (YMDS) (Note) in suitable redevelopment projects. For example, the URA has adopted a more flexible interchangeable domestic/non-domestic plot ratio for the Shantung Street/Thistle Street Development Scheme in Mong Kok to be tendered this month by relaxing the maximum residential plot ratio from 7.5 to 8.5 without exceeding the current permitted gross floor area, so as to increase the flexibility in planning and to attract the participation of private developers. Separately, the Sai Yee Street/Flower Market Road Development Scheme in Mong Kok announced by the URA in March 2024 will, through the transfer of plot ratio, consolidate and transfer the redevelopment potential of several small, scattered sites to a larger site for mixed development to enhance planning gains and commercial viability of the project. With the Government's support, the URA has introduced the "single site, multiple use" model to consolidate different government and community services in the same building to provide convenience to the public, release government land and enhance development potential of redevelopment projects. The URA has also utilised the above new planning tools in other suitable projects, including the Nga Tsin Wai Road/Carpenter Road Development Scheme. In the district planning studies for Tsuen Wan and Sham Shui Po underway, the Government will explore with the URA the feasibility of other tools to expedite the pace of urban renewal.

Self-developed residential projects are one of the development options. As the URA has to pay the construction costs for residential projects upfront, it has to take into account the resulting cash-flow pressure. Therefore, the URA's redevelopment strategy will continue to primarily focus on joint venture with developers, leveraging market forces to carry out redevelopment through land tendering. To this end, the URA has piloted the Development Facilitation Services at the end of last year to gather developers' views on relevant projects before commencing the tender process. This serves as a basis for refining the project parameters and tender terms, thereby enhancing developers' interest and confidence in tendering.

(4) As the URA is the Government's important partner in urban renewal, the Government will ensure that the URA has adequate resources to fulfill its statutory mission as well as to carry out the tasks entrusted by the

Government. Apart from the \$10 billion capital injection upon the URA's establishment, the Government has also provided additional funding in the form of land premium waivers for redevelopment projects of the URA, with the cumulative amount of land premium waived reaching \$25.3 billion as of March 31, 2024. The Government will also continue to support the URA in suitable redevelopment projects to consolidate the "Government, Institution or Community" sites in the vicinity to re-provision and upgrade relevant facilities. This will increase the overall development potential of the redevelopment projects through releasing and granting government land to the URA, which is also a form of financial support rendered to the URA by the Government. Moreover, the Government approved in mid-2023 to uplift the borrowing limit of the URA from \$6 billion to \$25 billion to enable the URA to cope with the financing need arising from a number of large-scale redevelopment projects in the coming few years. If necessary, the Government will also consider rendering other forms of support as appropriate.

Moreover, the Government has embarked on a policy study to explore the use of newly developed land to create more favourable conditions for future URA and private redevelopment projects in old districts, so as to facilitate sustainable urban renewal. Among other things, we will consider allocating land in new development areas (NDAs) for the construction of rehousing estates to provide decanting space for redevelopment of old districts. We will also study the feasibility of cross-district transfer of plot ratios, with the objective of transferring the residual plot ratios of redevelopment projects in old districts for use in NDAs, so as to incentivise market participation in redevelopment and transform densely-developed old districts at the same time, thereby thinning out the urban population and renewing old districts to make them more livable in the long run. Our target is to put forward preliminary proposals in the first half of 2025.

Redevelopment of old districts cannot be taken up solely by the URA. Private market forces are also needed. The Land (Compulsory Sale for Redevelopment) (Amendment) Ordinance 2024 just implemented in December 2024 is one of the Government's measures to encourage developers to participate in redevelopment by lowering the compulsory sale application thresholds and facilitating multiple adjoining-lot compulsory sale applications.

Lastly, our urban renewal strategy is a dual-track approach of building rehabilitation and redevelopment. Regarding building rehabilitation, the Government launched a public consultation on the proposed amendments to the Buildings Ordinance (BO) (Cap. 123) in December 2024, and listened to the views of various sectors, including their suggestions on expediting building inspection and repair, during the consultation period ended in late February this year. The views collected so far generally support the Government's carrot and stick approach (i.e. with both support and a punitive system) to urge owners to comply with the statutory orders and notices under the BO. The Government will take into account the views collated when finalising the proposals and proceed with the law drafting work to amend the BO with the target of introducing the amendment bill into the Legislative Council in the first half of 2026. Implementation of proposals on expediting building inspection and repair will help owners to better maintain their properties,

thereby decelerating the building ageing process and slowing down the need for urban renewal.

Note: The URA completed the YMDS in 2021, proposing recommendations and new planning tools such as transfer of plot ratio, permitting interchangeability of domestic/non-domestic plot ratio in the Yau Mong districts, and removing the plot ratio restriction of the commercial zone along Nathan Road.

Phishing instant messages related to Industrial and Commercial Bank of China (Asia) Limited

The following is issued on behalf of the Hong Kong Monetary Authority:

The Hong Kong Monetary Authority (HKMA) wishes to alert members of the public to a press release issued by Industrial and Commercial Bank of China (Asia) Limited relating to phishing instant messages, which have been reported to the HKMA. A hyperlink to the press release is available on the [HKMA website](#).

The HKMA wishes to remind the public that banks will not send SMS or emails with embedded hyperlinks which direct them to the banks' websites to carry out transactions. They will not ask customers for sensitive personal information, such as login passwords or one-time password, by phone, email or SMS (including via embedded hyperlinks).

Anyone who has provided his or her personal information, or who has conducted any financial transactions, through or in response to the instant messages concerned, should contact the bank using the contact information provided in the press release, and report the matter to the Police by contacting the Crime Wing Information Centre of the Hong Kong Police Force at 2860 5012.

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Fraudulent websites and internet banking login screens related to Chong Hing Bank Limited

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