

SDEV speaks to the media

Following is the transcript of remarks at a media session by the Secretary for Development, Mr Michael Wong, after attending a radio programme this morning (February 23):

Reporter: Mr Wong, can you tell us the reason why the Government is not developing the remaining 140 hectares of the Fanling Golf Course? On the other end of the spectrum, how do you respond to that "it is a populist decision"?

Secretary for Development: It is not an easy decision. It is a decision made by the Chief Executive in Council after having very carefully balanced different views. On one hand, the 32 hectares of land to the east of Fan Kam Road can give us land supply mainly for public housing within a short to medium term. We all know about the housing shortage faced by Hong Kong. On the other hand, if you look at the Fanling Golf Course in particular, if you look at the outcome of the review done by the Home Affairs Bureau, the Fanling Golf Course has been making major contribution to sports development, golf development, in Hong Kong. In terms of the extent of its openness, it is actually rather high. At the moment, you can say that it is up to 40 per cent open to individual members of the public. Also, I think it is the best place for hosting major international golf tournaments in Hong Kong. So, having balanced all the factors, the decision is to take back the 32 hectares of land upon the expiry of the current lease in August 2020. Then there will be a hold over agreement for three years for the 32 hectares of land. As regards the 140 hectares of land, the Government will not at this stage seek to change the land use. In other words, it will continue to be used as a golf course. The Home Affairs Bureau in its paper has also announced the decision that the lease for the 140 hectares will be renewed up to the end of June 2027.

You asked about the different spectrums. I think we respect that. We do understand that, in particular, if the Government takes a decision that represents a balancing of the interests of different parties in the community, there will still be individual parties at either end of the spectrum who will not be satisfied. If you talk about the possibility of the Fanling Golf Course being used as a hosting venue for major international golf tournaments, I think right now, given that the decision has been made, the important point is to look ahead and see what pragmatic issues need to be dealt with for the 140 hectares of the remaining land and the 40 something holes to be used in this regard. I understand that the Secretary for Home Affairs, Mr Lau Kong-wah, has already started his dialogue with stakeholders to see if there are obstacles and challenges that need to be overcome. If the Government can provide assistance, we are happy to do so.

Reporter: Given the controversial nature of the reclamation, can you tell us how are you going to convince the public over the plan when you don't even have a rough budget on it? How are you going to convince the District Council?

Secretary for Development: I think even if we have the figures now, it will also be controversial. We are working on those preliminary figures, and hope to have them ready before we make our submission to the Panel on Development of the Legislative Council. But at the moment, the overall position remains very clear that if you look at the figures, the income side in particular, Hong Kong is able to afford this project. This remains very clear. We do not have any doubt on that.

(Please also refer to the Chinese portion of the transcript.)