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21 October 2013

Clerk to the Panel on Development
Legislative Council Secretariat
Legislative Council Complex
1 Legislative Council Road
Central, Hong Kong
(Attn: Ms Sharon CHUNG)

Dear Ms Chung,

Panel on Development

Motion on the agenda item

“North East New Territories New Development Areas Planning and Engineering Study”

Thank you for your letter of 29 July in respect of the motion passed at the meeting of the Panel on Development on 22 July 2013 on the agenda item “North East New Territories New Development Areas Planning and Engineering Study” that:

“The planning of the North East New Territories development areas will affect many local residents with their homes and farmland destroyed, and some of the villages will even be demolished. This Panel considers that damage to the homes of local residents and their way of living should be avoided in the course of land development and the provision of housing. This Panel urges the Government to include the Fanling golf course and the site of the Chief Executive’s Fanling Lodge in the planning of the North East New Territories development areas and conduct consultation afresh thereafter.”

Our reply is given below.

The initiative of developing North East New Territories (NENT) to meet the future development needs of Hong Kong was put forward in the Territorial Development Strategy Review in the early 1990s. The planning for the development of NENT New Development Areas (NDAs) project, announced in July this year, was resumed in 2008. Three stages of public engagement, together with detailed planning and technical assessments, have been conducted before coming up with the current proposals. The two NDAs in Kwu Tung North (KTN) and Fanling North (FLN) will be one of the main sources of land and housing supply for Hong Kong from 2022/23 onwards. From the overall perspectives of Hong Kong, there are many existing cottages, squatters, structures and/or various conforming or non-conforming uses on the developable land. Hence, in developing rural areas in NENT, it is inevitable that some existing users of land and residents will be affected.

In planning the NENT NDAs, we have endeavoured to minimise impacts on residents of existing villages and farmers. Two indigenous villages, Yin Kong and Ho Sheung Heung, will be retained. The wetland in Long Valley, with a total area of 37 hectares (ha), will be conserved as a "Nature Park" where agricultural activities, in particular wet agriculture, will be allowed to continue. Besides, a total of about 58 ha of agriculture land, including two large agricultural areas of about 45 ha to the north and south of Long Valley, will also be preserved. With a total area of 614 ha, the two NDAs in KTN and FLN will provide 333 ha of developable land. About 236 ha of land will, however, be retained for conservation, agriculture, open space and green belt uses. According to the consultants' estimate, a total of about 1 000 households and farmers will be affected by the development of the two NDAs.

Located in close vicinity to the existing Fanling/Sheung Shui New Town, it would be comparatively easier to plan the development of the transport and infrastructure for the KTN and FLN NDAs. Therefore from the planning perspective, it would be difficult to develop the NDAs without affecting any particular areas. For instance, as reservations have already been made for the Kwu Tung railway station on the Lok Ma Chau Spur Line, location of the station and underground structures have been fixed.

It is thus logical from the planning perspective to plan the area around the railway station for high-density residential and commercial developments. While FLN is just separated from the Fanling/Sheung Shui New Town by a local road, developing it into a riverside NDA will not only provide housing, but also create a community with comfortable living environment for the Fanling/Sheung Shui New Town. As such, it would be practically infeasible to retain the existing cottages, squatters, structures and agriculture in the area.

Concerns of the residents affected by the development of the NDAs are well appreciated. Special arrangements have been made for their compensation and rehousing, including provision of special ex-gratia compensation package, for eligible households affected by the project. Under the special package, a special ex-gratia cash allowance would be offered to households meeting the eligibility criteria. For households not fully meeting the criteria, the Secretary for Development may exercise his discretion to consider, taking into account the specific circumstances of each case. In order to preserve the existing communities, local rehousing will be offered to the affected residents who are eligible for public housing. Public housing units within the existing Fanling/Sheung Shui New Town will also be considered for rehousing. For details of the special package and the rehousing arrangement, please refer to the paper submitted to the Legislative Council Panel on Development [LC Paper No. CB(1)1461/12-13(01)]. The intention is to alleviate impacts on the affected residents through the provision of ex-gratia assistance and to meet their rehousing needs.

Regarding the proposed development of the Fanling Golf Course and its surrounding areas, this was put forward by individual non-governmental organisation in the latter half of last year near the end of the Stage Three Public Engagement exercise for the NENT NDAs. After consideration, it is decided to include them in the planning study of New Territories North to commence early next year. Similar to the NENT NDAs, it would require a planning and engineering study to explore the development of the site with over 170 ha in area. Together with the requirement to conduct public engagement and technical assessments, it would take years before completion of the study. Thus even though it may take shorter time for land resumption and clearance, its development

could not be completed before the NENT NDAs. It is also difficult to determine at this stage whether the development of the site is technically easier, as suggested by some organisations.

The planning of KTN and FLN has already taken into account the existing and planned transport and infrastructures in the surroundings areas. In ten years, they will also become a main source of land and housing supply. To give up their development now might not be desirable. On the other hand, with an area of 170 ha, the Fanling Golf Course may not be able to provide the same development potential as compared with the KTN and FLN NDAs, which have a total area of 614 ha and are able to provide 333 ha developable land. While no planning study and technical assessments have been conducted, the feasibility of the development proposals cannot be ascertained at this stage. In view of the above, the development of the Fanling Golf Course cannot serve as a replacement for the NDAs.

The golf course and other private recreational leases have their role in the policy for the development of sports. In view of the shortage of land, we need to review on their uses to ensure that they are put to their optimal use. In this regard, the Home Affairs Bureau has indicated that they would conduct a review of the policy on private recreational leases. We will also take part in the review from land use planning and utilisation point of view.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'Michael Chan', written in a cursive style with a large loop at the beginning.

(Michael CHAN)
for Secretary for Development