

Motion Debate on “Formulating a comprehensive rural development policy”

Progress Report

Background

At the sitting of the Legislative Council (LegCo) of 24 March 2021, the motion on “Formulating a comprehensive rural development policy” moved by Hon Kenneth LAU as amended by Hon Steven HO was passed (full text of the passed motion at [Annex](#)). This report sets out the follow-up actions taken by the Administration in respect of the motion.

Latest Progress

Enhancing infrastructure of rural areas

2. On water supply, the Government will continue to regularly review the situations of the villages that do not have treated water supply, and will consider proceeding with water supply schemes to these villages in accordance with the prevailing principles. In particular, the Water Supplies Department (WSD) has commenced the construction works for the water supply to Mui Tsz Lam, Sha Tin, and the works are expected to be completed in the third quarter of 2021. Meanwhile, the scheme for the water supply to Tai Long, South Lantau is under design stage and the construction works are anticipated to commence in mid-2021. In addition, to meet the needs for water supply of villagers on Po Toi Island, WSD is currently conducting a study on the feasibility of using groundwater as a water supply source on the island. For those few remote villages with sparse population that still rely on natural streams or well water for domestic consumption, the Food and Environmental Hygiene Department (FEHD) regularly monitors the quality of the water. The Government will also continue to provide timely assistance to meet the needs of the villagers.

3. On electricity supply, the Government has been encouraging the two power companies to set up electricity supply facilities based on the actual needs of the community, with a view to providing reliable, stable and safe electricity services. The two power companies will continue to strive to enhance the ancillary facilities for electricity supply to support

the needs of various districts, including the New Territories and the rural areas. As a matter of fact, to cope with the electricity demand of the rural areas in Sha Tau Kok and Lai Chi Wo, CLP Power Hong Kong Limited (CLP) completed the power supply works for Mui Tsz Lam and Kop Tong in May 2019, so as to provide a reliable electricity supply to these two villages which had not been connected to the power grid for over 40 years. CLP will continue to maintain close liaison with the stakeholders of the community on electricity supply matters, and will, taking into account the long-term development of the rural areas, expand the power transmission and distribution networks in the New Territories, as well as enhance the electricity network of the rural areas.

4. On telecommunications services, the telecommunications operators subsidised by the Government continue to expand fibre networks to remote areas. Newly built fibre networks will be completed in phases from the second quarter of this year, not only benefitting those villagers but also providing backbone infrastructure for the fifth-generation (5G) mobile technology in rural areas.

5. On stormwater drainage, the Drainage Services Department (DSD) continues to formulate and review the stormwater drainage master plan for the New Territories and other major areas of the territory in phases. In addition, DSD has carried out drainage improvement works as planned in a number of rural areas in order to further reduce the flooding risks of the respective areas¹. DSD also plans and carries out design of drainage improvement works for other districts. Among them, the drainage improvement works in Tai Po, Sha Tin and Sai Kung are all in the investigation stage, which are targeted for completion in mid-2021, and then followed by detailed designs. The respective drainage improvement works are anticipated to be completed in 2023. The investigation of the drainage improvement works in Ta Kwu Ling and North District was completed and the detailed design is anticipated to be completed in 2023. Subject to the progress of the detailed design and the relevant preparatory works (such as the handling of land matters, local

¹ The commenced works projects include “118CD - Drainage Improvements in Northern New Territories - Package B (Remaining Works)”, “163CD - Drainage Improvement Works at Ngong Ping”, “184CD - Drainage Improvement in Southern Hong Kong Island - Package 2A” and “185CD - Drainage Improvement Works at Yuen Long”. Works under 118CD for New Territories North and 163CD for Ngong Ping above are anticipated to be completed in 2022. Works under 185CD for Yuen Long and 184CD for Southern Hong Kong Island are anticipated to be completed in 2023 and 2024 respectively.

consultations, etc.), DSD will seek funding approval from the LegCo in due course with a view to commencing the relevant works as soon as possible.

6. Apart from the aforementioned major drainage improvement work, DSD also conducts review of rural villages with flooding records, so as to devise appropriate drainage improvement measures. Upon request from villagers, the Home Affairs Department (HAD) will also consider carrying out small-scale construction or improvement works to the drainage facilities in the villages through the Minor Works Programme.

7. Besides, to prevent flooding due to blockage, DSD will, in collaboration with the relevant departments, strengthen the cleansing works of public channels and drains before the rainy season every year. DSD will also remind private owners to properly inspect and maintain the drainage facilities on their lands before the rainy season through distributing pamphlets. When flooding is reported, be it on private or Government land, DSD will deploy staff to the affected areas to provide emergency support, assisting the public in cleaning up blocked channels and draining the accumulated water.

8. On sewerage systems, there are currently about 1 000 villages or rural areas in Hong Kong. As of December 2020, the village sewerage programme covers about 550 villages, of which the sewerage systems for 258 villages have been completed and those of 59 are under construction. The Government will also expand and upgrade the trunk sewer systems in the respective regions to facilitate further sewerage planning to cater for more villages. Furthermore, the Environmental Protection Department (EPD) and DSD plan to seek the LegCo's funding approval of about \$600 million this year for the provision of public sewerage to nine villages in the Lantau and Lamma Island.

9. On transport, the Government has been providing the relevant infrastructure in accordance with land use planning. As the rural areas of the New Territories are extensive, there is a need to consider whether to provide new transport infrastructure or improve existing infrastructure in light of the estimated transport needs of the areas. If there are development plans in rural or nearby areas, the relevant departments will consider if there is a need to construct any new transport infrastructure or upgrade/improve the existing transport infrastructure in accordance with the planning parameters of the relevant development project. On the other hand, the current term of Government advocates the

infrastructure-led, capacity creating planning approach to unleash land development potential through transport infrastructure. If the implementation of a transport infrastructure will help unleash the development potential of the land along its alignment, thereby increasing the supply of land and housing, the Government will also consider implementing such project, an example being the Northern Link under planning.

10. However, transport infrastructure projects involve huge capital investment, and the Government has to plan in a prudent manner. If the rural areas concerned will continue to be used for rural development (such as agriculture, conservation or green belts, etc.) without any large-scale development project or development potential, there will not be sufficient transport demand to support the construction of large-scale transport infrastructure (especially railways). If the traffic of individual area exceeds the carrying capacity of the road network, the Government will, depending on the situation, carry out upgrades/improvements to the existing transport infrastructure, such as Stage 1 of Hiram's Highway Improvement Project which was opened in January this year, as well as Stage 2 of the Project under planning.

11. Besides, the Development Bureau (DEVB), through the policy initiative of Pier Improvement Programme (PIP), upgrades the structural safety and facilities of a number of existing public piers at remote areas in the New Territories and outlying islands, with a view to meeting the basic needs of some local villagers relying on boats as their main transportation mode or fishermen's operation, and facilitating public access to countryside scenic spots and natural heritage. Currently, the first phase of the PIP covering 10 public piers is being implemented in full swing. In particular, the reconstruction works for Pak Kok Pier on Lamma Island commenced in April 2020 with target completion in 2022; the reconstruction works for Kau Sai Village Pier in Sai Kung District and Lai Chi Chong Pier in Tai Po District will commence in the fourth quarter of this year with target completion in 2024; and the design work for the remaining piers are at full speed. DEVB has also advanced the kick-off of the second phase of the PIP covering 13 public piers, with the associated engineering feasibility studies to commence progressively from mid this year.

12. On the other hand, HAD continues to provide funding under the Rural Public Works (RPW) Programme for implementing minor works projects, with a view to improving rural environment and bringing benefit

to the general public. As at the end of February 2021, about 2 440 works projects with a total value exceeding \$2.5 billion were completed under the RPW Programme. Project types include construction or improvement of footpaths, access roads, drainage facilities and pavilions. The living environment and infrastructure of many rural areas have been improved under this Programme. The Chief Executive proposed in the 2019 Policy Address Supplement that the annual provision for the RPW Programme be increased progressively to \$160 million to further improve the environment of rural areas. Following the increase in funding provision for the RPW Programme from \$140 million in 2019-20 to \$150 million in 2020-21, the amount has been further increased to \$160 million in 2021-22. This brings an additional funding of \$90 million in total for the five years from 2020-21 to 2024-25, which will be sufficient for carrying out nearly 70 additional projects.

13. On construction of new public toilets, FEHD constructed five new public toilets, reprovioned a public toilet as a new one, and converted three aqua privies into flushing toilets in 2020-21. In addition, FEHD has completed refurbishment works for 31 public toilets (including the conversion of three aqua privies into flushing toilets as mentioned above) and facelifiting works for 34 public toilets. The Department will continue to enhance the facilities and services of public toilets in rural areas, and plan for the construction of new public toilets at appropriate locations having regard to the actual situation and demand, with a view to meeting the needs of residents and tourists.

Revitalising rural areas to promote economic growth and employment

14. On agriculture, the Agriculture, Fisheries and Conservation Department (AFCD) has been promoting leisure farming as an agriculture-related auxiliary activity. It has provided assistance and conducted publicity to help farmers practise leisure farming, including updating the mobile application named “Hong Kong Leisure Farms” produced by the Department, promoting some 130 local leisure farms and providing product and transport information to facilitate the public to make leisure visits to such places.

15. In addition, the Government will establish an Agricultural Park (Agri-Park) in Kwu Tung South, which will provide about 80 hectares (ha)

of farmland in total. The Agri-Park will be developed in two phases. Phase 1 covers an area of about 11 ha, of which about 7 ha of farmland will be made available. Formation works of Phase 1 have already commenced and will be completed in stages from 2021 to 2023. The works of Phase 1 will include the construction of various infrastructure such as roads and footpaths, irrigation, drainage and sewerage facilities, which is a more cost-effective approach comparing to investment on these facilities by individual farms. The Agri-Park will mainly accommodate farmers practising commercial crop farming. AFCD will provide farmers with technical support to facilitate their farm operation, as well as provide advice on their production plan, marketing trends and strategy, and relevant technology development in the Agri-Park.

16. The Government has also launched the Sustainable Agricultural Development Fund (SADF) to provide funding to projects that would enhance agricultural productivity and output, or help farmers switch to sustainable or high value-added operations so as to raise the overall competitiveness of the sector. The scope of the existing approved projects includes promotion of organic farming, brand-building of local agricultural produce and improving pig/poultry health and production etc. On the other hand, the Farm Improvement Scheme (FIS) is set up under SADF to provide direct grants to eligible individual farmers for acquisition of modernised and mechanised farming equipment and materials. The total maximum grant that an applicant may receive under FIS is capped at \$30,000.

17. On fisheries matters, AFCD has been providing technical support, financial assistance and training to assist local fishermen in developing recreational fishing. With a view to better meeting the public's demand for recreational fishing, Marine Fish Culture Licence holders can apply to AFCD for conducting recreational fishing on fish rafts as a side business, provided that the applicants conduct marine fish culture as their core business and comply with conditions imposed to safeguard the mariculture environment and public safety. Fishermen can also apply for the Sustainable Fisheries Development Fund from the Government for carrying out projects for developing business operation of sustainable recreational fishing, with a view to attracting fishermen to switch to more sustainable operation and enhancing competitiveness of the industry. Among the approved projects, several are related to the promotion of recreational fishing and pilot schemes for the development of fisheries related eco-tourism. In addition, training courses have been provided with a view to equipping interested fishermen with necessary knowledge and skills for conducting recreational fishing activities and operating

related businesses. Technical support has also been offered to assist fishermen who wish to switch to or develop recreational fishing. AFCD will continue to support the industry to develop recreational fishing projects with local characteristics through different approaches.

18. On tourism, the Tourism Commission will continue to promote green tourism and actively explore the development of new green attractions with relevant departments following the principles of nature conservation and sustainable development.

19. On guesthouses, the Countryside Conservation Office (CCO) under EPD is working with related bureaux/departments (including the Home Affairs Bureau and the Food and Health Bureau, etc.) to jointly develop a set of licensing requirements and procedural guidelines to facilitate the establishment of guesthouse and catering business in countryside areas, so as to attract related investments, help revitalise desolate villages, promote eco-tourism and provide new economic opportunities.

20. On cycle track network, DEVB has been striving to implement the cycle track network in the New Territories to provide a cycle track linking the New Territories East and West, as well as ancillary facilities such as resting stations, bicycle parking spaces, etc. along the track, so as to encourage and promote cycling recreational activities and help drive local tourism and vibrant economy along the cycle track and in the nearby areas. The cycle track network in the New Territories has a wide coverage and passes through many districts, starting at Ma On Shan and extending to Tsuen Wan via Sha Tin, Tai Po, Fanling, Sheung Shui, Yuen Long and Tuen Mun. The section from Tuen Mun to Ma On Shan of about 60 kilometres (km) long was fully open in September last year; the construction works of the Sam Mun Tsai extension in Tai Po of about 1 km long commenced in November last year with target completion in end 2022; and the remaining section between Tsuen Wan and Tuen Mun of about 22 km long is being implemented in stages.

Promoting the development of smart rural areas

21. On smart village development, the Office of the Government Chief Information Officer is working with the Heung Yee Kuk N. T. to install infrastructure at suitable rural locations to provide free Wi-Fi services. As at end April 2021, the Government has provided free Wi-Fi services at 23 village offices, including the ones in Cheung Chau, Peng

Chau, South Lantau, Ping Shan and Shap Pat Heung, etc. The Government is also making preparations for progressive installations of Wi-Fi hotspots at some other 200 village offices. Other pilot projects under the Smart Village Pilots will also be further discussed between relevant departments and stakeholders and implemented.

22. On smart monitoring, DSD applies advance technology to collect real-time hydrometric data of major drainage channels, with a view to facilitating prompt response and appropriate measures when flooding risks occur. By now, DSD has installed sensors at over 140 major flood control points to take real-time round-the-clock measurement of the water level and hydrometric information of different drainage watercourses. DSD will continue exploring appropriate locations to extend the coverage of the smart hydrometric monitoring system.

23. In addition, the Civil Engineering and Development Department (CEDD) has pioneered the novel development of the Smart Barrier System (System), applying modern information technology for all-weathered and non-stop monitoring of the condition of landslide debris-resisting barriers to detect the occurrence of landslides. CEDD is testing the performance and reliability of the System in various districts (including the rural area in Sham Tseng). When the System becomes technically mature, CEDD will consider installing the System at landslide debris-resisting barriers at other locations (including rural areas).

24. On smart recycling, to promote smart city development, EPD launched a 1-year Pilot on Smart Recycling Systems (the Pilot) in the fourth quarter of 2020, under which technical trials are conducted in EPD community recycling facilities. Since late 2020, EPD has also arranged a community smart recycling vehicle to visit certain Rural Committees to introduce smart and clean recycling to Committee members and villagers. EPD is planning to expand the Pilot to cover more technical aspects and locations including rural areas. We plan to roll out the expanded pilot in the fourth quarter of this year, for a period of two years.

25. On environmental hygiene, FEHD has been proactively deploying new technologies for mechanisation and automation to strengthen the relevant services. To enhance refuse collection service in rural areas and improve environmental hygiene, FEHD has progressively put on trial solar-powered compacting refuse bins (SCRBs), solar-powered aluminium refuse collection points (RCPs) and solar-powered mobile refuse compactors at rural sites. For RCPs with lower refuse yield in rural areas, FEHD has launched a pilot scheme on

the use of the third-generation SCRBs, with a total of 24 SCRBs installed at 12 rural sites for trial. Solar-powered aluminium RCPs were also put on trial by FEHD at 31 rural sites in phases from September 2019 to December 2020.

26. On telehealth, the Hospital Authority (HA) is currently piloting the use of “HA Go” mobile application for the provision of healthcare services at a distance. For example, allied health professionals could prescribe personalised rehabilitation training plans to remotely support patients via multimedia function of “HA Go” in the form of training videos and games, helping them conduct rehabilitation exercises systemically at home or in the community. In addition, HA is also piloting the provision of telehealth out-patient consultation services via “HA Go” for suitable patients, reducing their need to visit the clinics in person. After the Government has completed the setup of internet network and related hardware under the Smart Village Pilots, HA could provide telehealth service to suitable HA patients in remote areas accordingly.

Promoting sustainable rural development

27. On the conservation of natural and cultural resources in the countryside, the Government has earmarked \$1 billion to support the work of CCO, with Lai Chi Wo and Sha Lo Tung as the pilot areas. CCO launched the Countryside Conservation Funding Scheme (CCFS) in October 2019 to support non-profit-making organisations and villagers to organise diverse and innovative conservation activities or projects based on an interactive and co-operative approach, covering various subjects including natural environment/habitats, non-graded built heritage, cultural and historic assets, etc. These projects are expected to enhance the conservation management work in areas with high ecological value and revitalise remote countryside. They will also promote public appreciation of village culture and identify novel solutions to tackle challenges of countryside conservation/revitalisation. Since the launch of CCFS, a total of 17 projects have been approved involving a total funding support of about \$100 million. A new round of CCFS application was cut-off in end-April 2021. CCO also co-ordinates with relevant government departments to carry out minor improvement works for conservation and revitalisation at the two pilot areas in Lai Chi Wo and Sha Lo Tung, such as repair of damaged footpath and river embankment, public toilet improvement works, etc.

28. On the promotion of culture and traditional customs of the New Territories, there is a funding scheme under the Chinese Temples Fund (CTF) for supporting the work in this area. Committed to promoting traditional Chinese culture as well as the philosophies of Confucianism, Buddhism and Taoism, CTF has been providing funding for eligible traditional rituals or events under the fund itself and its funding programmes. There are two open calls each year for applications for funding under CTF, which is managed by the Chinese Temples Committee, with a maximum grant of HK\$1 million for eligible events. The first round of applications in 2021-22 ended in March. Assessment of applications is underway and expected to be completed in June. The Intangible Cultural Heritage Office of the Leisure and Cultural Services Department will continue to implement the Intangible Cultural Heritage Funding Scheme introduced in early 2019. Projects related to intangible cultural heritage in the New Territories will also continue to be covered by the scheme.

Supporting facilities affected by rural development

29. Vegetable marketing co-operative societies are legal entities set up by farmers voluntarily and registered under the Co-operative Societies Ordinance (Cap. 33). Farmers transport fresh vegetables to the Vegetable Marketing Organisation for wholesaling through these co-operative societies. If the co-operative societies need to be provided with land for relocation or reconstruction due to development, the Lands Department will handle the matter according to the established mechanism.

Development Bureau

Home Affairs Bureau

Environment Bureau

Commerce and Economic Development Bureau

Transport and Housing Bureau

Food and Health Bureau

Innovation and Technology Bureau

Council meeting of 24 March 2021

**Hon Kenneth LAU's motion on
“Formulating a comprehensive rural development policy”**

Motion as amended by Hon Steven HO

That the Government lacks a long-term and comprehensive rural development policy in the process of developing the New Territories, rural areas have failed to strike a balance between development and conservation, resulting in ever-increasing conflicts and confrontations between urban and rural areas, rural stakeholders thus have to bear heavy costs for the development; in this connection, this Council urges the Government to formulate a comprehensive rural development policy covering such areas as rural living environment, infrastructure support, promoting the culture and traditional customs of the New Territories and boosting the economy, so as to meet the needs of people's livelihood and industries in rural areas and implement a sustainable development strategy for the New Territories, thereby achieving urban-rural symbiosis, and alleviating the impact of rural development on these stakeholders; specific proposals are as follows:

- (1) proactively allocating resources to perfect the infrastructure in rural areas, including strengthening the management of natural river courses and drainage channels in rural areas to prevent flooding; supplying fresh water, electricity and sewerage systems to remote villages; carrying out construction projects of roads and railways and enhancing public pier facilities, and building public toilets at suitable locations to increase the flow of people and goods; and facilitating agricultural rehabilitation in villages, promoting the development of home-stay lodging, leisure agriculture and fisheries and eco-tourism as well as developing sharing economy, so as to revive remote villages;

- (2) actively and expeditiously considering relaxing the frontier closed area restriction of Sha Tau Kok ('STK') Town and opening up the STK public pier to facilitate public access to STK and peripheral islands such as Kat O and Ap Chau; and at the same time studying the feasibility of allowing recreational fishing in the marine fish culture zone in STK and listening to public views on the study, with a view to promoting leisure tourism and leisure agriculture and fisheries, thereby revitalizing these districts, diversifying their economic development and improving the local economy and employment situation;
- (3) making optimal use of innovative technology to progressively promote the development of 'smart rural areas', including expediting the roll-out of fibre-based networks and rolling out 5G mobile network system in rural areas to increase Internet access speeds in villages; setting up smart recycling system pilot sites in villages to collect recyclables at designated time and locations; establishing a smart rural refuse collection system, flexibly deploying the manpower for refuse collection and making flexible use of technology to improve environmental hygiene; extending the use of intelligent monitoring systems to rural areas to detect natural disasters such as hill fires, floods, thunderstorms and landslides, and to provide instant forecasts; setting up 'smart lampposts' in villages to improve the use of single two-lane carriageways in villages; progressively developing teleconsultation so that patients in villages with stable conditions who have to attend follow-up consultations can receive appropriate treatment;
- (4) setting up a 'rural development and construction fund' comprising five parts, namely 'infrastructure development', 'cultural heritage', 'rural tourism', 'nature conservation and land development' and 'emergency support', with a view to fostering sustainable rural development in a comprehensive and orderly manner, including promoting rural infrastructure, cultural heritage, eco-tourism and conservation, conserving building clusters with rural character (such as stilt houses at Tai O), as well as providing appropriate

support should incidents affecting livelihood in rural areas occur;
and

- (5) conducting a study to amend outdated legislation and offering suitable spaces to support essential facilities affected by rural development, including relocation of vegetable depots, vegetable marketing co-operative societies and farms.