

(Translation)

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.