

Legislative Council Panel on Home Affairs
Meeting on 14 February 2000

Planning, Development & Improvement of Rural Areas

Purpose

This paper informs members on the framework of the planning, development and improvement of rural areas and the roles of different government departments.

The planning, development and improvement framework in the New Territories

2. There are basically two tiers of planning in Hong Kong. The long term development generally follows a Territorial Development Strategy, while in the short term, more detailed statutory Outline Zoning Plans (OZP) and administrative Outline Development Plans (ODP) are prepared to provide a landuse framework for the purpose of development control and to facilitate the development of infrastructure and Government/Institution Community (G/IC) facilities.

3. The Town Planning Board (TPB) is established to prepare, consider and approve Outline Zoning Plans (OZP) throughout Hong Kong. The Planning Department (PlanD) is the executive arm of the TPB responsible for formulating, monitoring and reviewing town plans, planning policies, and monitoring whether developments are in accordance with the plans approved by the TPB. All developments, whether by government or by private developer, must either conform with the TPB approved plans or have received prior permission for development by the TPB.

4. The Territory Development Department (TDD) oversees the engineering design and construction works for land formation and infrastructure of new towns. It co-ordinates government departments and utility companies to ensure all essential infrastructure and facilities

are in place for the population intake.

5. TDD is also the works department for the Major Works projects under the Rural Planning and Improvement Strategy (RPIS), a ten-year programme endorsed by the Executive Council in 1989 for infrastructural development and environmental improvement in rural areas. The Home Affairs Department (HAD) implements the RPIS Minor Works projects, which are those projects costing less than \$15 million. As the RPIS programme formally will end on 31 March 2000, a Rural Public Works (RPW) Programme has been initiated in 1999 to carry on minor environmental and infrastructural improvements in the rural areas.

6. PlanD ensures that all improvement projects would conform with the provisions under the Town Planning Ordinance, and layout plans would be prepared, taking into consideration the needs of the local area, in order to provide a planned framework for the implementation of improvement projects. Usually, the proposed improvement works are permitted as of right and thus permission from the TPB is not required. For individual development projects, if the project is in accordance with the OZP, building plans for schemes with proper road access will be submitted direct to the Buildings Department for their approval whereas Certificates of Exemption for NT exempted buildings will be sought from the Lands Department (LD). If the project is not in accordance with the OZP, the developer will need to gain approval, with or without conditions, from the TPB. Reference will be made to LD where either government land is needed for a private development or private land is needed for a public development. In addition, LD may need to modify the existing lease for TPB approved developments where there is a change in the lease-permitted use. However, some rural community leaders feel that the possible adverse impacts on the rural areas (caused by the construction of a large number of new residential buildings at sites adjacent to existing villages) are not fully dealt with.

7. The following paragraphs provide examples in Tuen Mun to demonstrate how certain community concerns over the impact of developments on the rural environment have been addressed.

Government development projects

8. A housing site has been planned in Area 54, Tuen Mun. This will be developed by TDD to provide land on which there would eventually be about 13,700 flats in 33 towers housing about 44,000 people. Five villages fall within the boundary of the proposed housing development site, namely Tsz Tin Tsuen, Po Tong Ha Tsuen, Siu Hang Tsuen, Kei Lun Wai and Kwong Shan Tsuen, while San Hing Tsuen lies immediately north of the project site.

9. In Area 54, Tuen Mun, some locations are flooding black spots. Under the RPIS programme, it is planned to carry out improvement to the downstream sections of the two existing stream courses as an interim measure to alleviate the flooding problem. The complete improvement to the drainage system will form part of the Area 54 housing development proposals managed by TDD. As part of a wider package to alleviate the flooding problem, the development proposals will include longer term improvement works. That is, the development proposals when completed will substantively improve the situation. The development proposals will also include the construction of a new dual two lane carriageway to the north of the existing villages. Inevitably, this new road will cut across some of the existing accesses. The affected accesses will be properly connected to the new road at chosen junction points. For traffic safety reasons, it is not possible to provide road junctions at each local access cut across by the new road. Improvement, if needed, to local village roads away from the main roads could be carried out under the Rural Public Works Programme. TDD and PD first consulted the Tuen Mun Provisional District Board (TMPDB) and the Tuen Mun Rural Committee (TMRC) on the proposed development in December 1998 and January 1999 respectively. As the rural community felt that more information was required on the impact the development of the housing site might have on the surrounding villages during and after the construction stage, in terms of, amongst others, traffic and flooding problems, the Tuen Mun District Office called further meetings for the departments to provide more information

and to address the locals' concerns. After listening to the views of the members, the Area 54 Master Layout Plan was amended and presented to the TMRC and TMPDB on 11 August 1999 and 13 August 1999 respectively. At these meetings, members did not raise further objection to the access road and drainage proposals.

Private development projects

10. The situation with the private development projects with regard to Botania Villa (Lam Tei) and Poseidon Coast (Siu Lam) is roughly similar to the Tuen Mun development at Area 54, Tuen Mun. The developers initially focussed only on their developments and it appeared that they were not aware of the adverse impact of their projects on the surrounding rural areas until the affected villagers took their case to the developers.

Conclusion

11. The Administration attaches great importance to rural planning, development and improvement. It will continue its endeavours to enhance living standards in both new and existing developments of rural areas, taking into account the concerns of the community.

Home Affairs Department
10 February 2000