

香港特別行政區政府
政務司司長辦公室



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CHIEF SECRETARY
FOR ADMINISTRATION'S OFFICE
Government of the Hong Kong
Special Administrative Region

(Translation)

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21 November 2006

The Hon Miriam Lau
Legislative Council Building
8 Jackson Road
Central

Dear Miriam,

Thank you for your letter of 7 November, conveying the concerns and views of members of the Legislative Council and Heung Yee Kuk (HYK) about development of rural areas.

The Administration has always been attaching great importance to the development of the New Territories. On land use planning, we have been reviewing, at various levels, planning for the rural New Territories so as to guide development, improve the environment and put the rural areas into better use.

The Administration completed the review of the development strategies for the North-east, North-west, South-east and South-west New Territories in 2001, with a view to providing a planning framework to match the development needs and characteristics of the four sub-regions and achieving their coordinated developments. Taking the North-west New Territories as an example, the main planning themes are conserving the high quality natural environment while optimizing the use of the new railway network to develop new areas for accommodating population growth, serving as a gateway to the Mainland and contributing to the economic development

of Hong Kong. The rail-based development strategy is being further examined under the ongoing HK2030 : Planning Vision and Strategy study.

On rural upgrading, the Planning Department (PlanD) completed a 'Review of Rural Land Uses in Northern New Territories' in 2001, which recommended the introduction of the "Other Specified Uses" annotated "Rural Use" ("OU(RU)") zoning. The planning intention of the new zoning is primarily for the preservation of the character of the rural area. Uses or developments compatible with the rural landscape, such as a selected range of rural and recreational uses, are encouraged, with a view to upgrading or improving the area or providing support to the local communities. This new zoning was subsequently endorsed by the Town Planning Board and suitable sites were rezoned for such use.

Leveraging on the planning proposals for the rural areas, The Tourism Commission will work together with the Hong Kong Tourism Board and the tourism trade to promote green tourism under the principles of nature conservation and sustainable development, and to provide or enhance supporting facilities. Apart from diversifying our tourist attractions, promotion of green tourism will help raise public awareness of conservation and promote development of the economy of local communities.

Separately, the Home Affairs Department (HAD) introduced in 1999 the Rural Public Works (RPW) Programme, with a view to upgrading the infrastructure and improving the living environment of rural areas in the New Territories. The objective of the programme is to improve the local environment and resolve the related issues in a swift and flexible manner in order to meet local needs. The contractors of HAD will carry out works projects not exceeding \$3 million. For larger scale projects not exceeding \$15 million, HAD will entrust the planning and construction work to relevant works departments. The types of RPW projects include construction / improvement of footpaths, drainage facilities, rainshelters, pavilions and vehicle access roads etc. Since the implementation of the RPW Programme in 1999, HAD has completed over 1,030 RPW projects at a total cost of around \$777 million. With the implementation of this programme, the living environment and infrastructure of rural areas have been improved.

You mentioned in your letter that some projects could not be implemented due to the absence of owners' consent. According to HAD, the number of these projects is only of a small proportion. If HAD cannot obtain consent from land owners, they would consider revising the scope of projects to enable the projects to proceed. In fact, the majority of works projects proposed by the local communities could be implemented successfully. To improve the environment in rural areas, HAD would review the existing arrangements from time to time with a view to facilitating the implementation of projects involving private land.

In addition, one of the proposals arising from the District Council (DC) review completed recently is to set up a new dedicated capital works block vote for DCs to initiate and implement district minor works projects. The new block vote will be set up in the 2007-08 financial year with an initial provision of \$20 million for four pilot districts. The provision will be increased to \$300 million upon full implementation in all 18 districts in the 2008-09 financial year. The disbursement of funds under the new block vote will be determined by the DCs. DCs may decide to initiate and implement projects in the rural areas, including road and leisure facilities.

The Administration has always attached great importance to communication with HYK. On planning and land matters, the Secretary for Housing, Planning and Lands (SHPL) chairs the SHPL-HYK Liaison Committee for exchanging views on related policy matters. In addition, PlanD has established the PlanD-HYK Liaison Working Meeting. Communication with the HYK on land use planning matters pertinent to the rural New Territories has been strengthened through this standing mechanism. In May 2006, the Home Affairs Bureau (HAB) established the HAB-HYK Liaison Committee. Through regular meetings of the Liaison Committee, the relevant bureaux and departments exchange views with the HYK on rural matters, and discuss issues of mutual concern with a view to working out improvement measures.

(Rafael S.Y. HUI)
Chief Secretary for Administration

c.c. Secretary for Housing; Planning and Lands
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