

Six West Rail property projects to be redesigned to meet new building design requirements

At a press conference today (February 24), the Secretary for Development, Mrs Carrie Lam, said that the Financial Secretary's decision to request the West Rail Property Development Limited (WRPDL) to redesign six property developments above the MTR stations along the West Rail (WR) to comply with new guidelines on controlling "inflated buildings" was a very encouraging move towards promoting a quality and sustainable built environment in Hong Kong.

She said the Development Bureau would work very closely with the MTR Corporation Limited (MTRCL), which is the agent for these WR developments, in the follow-up work, including achieving the objective to increase the supply of small and medium-sized flats at these developments.

These six WR property development projects are wholly owned by the Government through the WRPDL. They have all reached a very advanced stage which could proceed to build without being made subject to the new design requirements, which will come into effect on April 1, 2011.

Specifically, the Nam Cheong Station project has an approved Master Layout Plan (MLP) for its original design; while the other five projects, namely Tsuen Wan West Station (i.e. TW5 (Cityside), TW5 (Bayside) and TW6), Long Ping (North) at Long Ping Station and Tin Shui Wai at Tin Shui Wai Station, all have both their MLPs and Building Plans (BPs) for the original designs approved.

Elaborating on this initiative, Mrs Lam recapped that in his 2010-11 Policy Address last October, the Chief Executive announced that the Government would introduce measures to foster a quality and sustainable built environment. These measures, which included an overall cap of 10% on the gross floor area (GFA) concessions for green and amenity features, were generally welcomed by the community.

"During the Policy Address debate, some Members of the Legislative Council requested that since the WR projects are wholly owned by the Government, the Government should set a good example by requiring all these WR sites to be subject to the new rules on regulating 'inflated buildings'," said Mrs Lam.

"We have taken on board members' views in coming to this decision. Moreover, in the course of redesigning these six projects, we have also taken the opportunity to change the flat mix to increase the supply of small and medium-sized flats. While the new building design requirements and the 10% cap on GFA concessions will have a negative impact on the revenue receivable by the Government, this is justified on grounds of creating a quality living environment," Mrs Lam added.

Based on very preliminary designs prepared by MTRCL, the total number of flats in the Nam Cheong and two TW5 projects will remain more or less the same, but the proportion of small and medium-sized flats, i.e. flats with a saleable floor area of 50 square metres or below, will be more than doubled, providing about 4,000 such units. As announced by the Financial Secretary in his Budget Speech, the MTRCL will tender these three projects in the coming year subject to completion of the planning process.

"The changes to be made to the design of the projects will bring about improvements in terms of building separation and permeability, air ventilation as well as greenery coverage for the benefit of residents and the neighbourhood. We are confident that the District Councils concerned, whom we will consult on the new MLP, as well as the community who will have the opportunity to offer comments during the statutory town planning process, will welcome these improvements.

"We sincerely hope that the public consultation and planning process in respect of these redesigns can be completed efficiently to meet the public aspiration for increased private housing supply," Mrs Lam added.

The redesign of these six projects requires revamping the approved MLPs and BPs, which necessitates a new round of resubmissions to the Town Planning Board and the Building Authority for approval.

"According to current plan, the new proposed MLPs for the three projects at Nam Cheong Station, TW5 (Cityside) and TW5 (Bayside) will be ready for submission to the Town Planning Board for approval around May this year. Assuming everything proceeds according to schedule, we hope to put up the tender for the Nam Cheong Station project around summer this year, and those of the two Tsuen Wan projects by the end of the year," Mrs Lam added.

The other three projects, namely TW6, Long Ping (North) and Tin Shui Wai are still subject to redesign. As for the remaining five WR projects at Long Ping (South), Yuen Long, Kam Sheung Road, Pat Heung Maintenance Centre and Kwai Fong, they do not yet have any approved MLP or BP and would naturally have to follow the new quality and sustainable design requirements due for implementation from April 1, 2011.

The new quality and sustainable built environment requirements are detailed in the new practice notes issued by the Buildings Department on January 31, 2011. These will take effect from April 1, 2011.

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