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Panel on Housing

Meeting on 3 January 2011

Updated background brief on Public Housing Construction Programme
(as at 24 December 2010)

Purpose

This paper sets out the progress of Public Housing Construction Programme (PHCP), and gives a brief account of the views and concerns expressed by the Panel on Development (Development Panel) and Panel on Housing (Housing Panel).

Background

2. As at end March 2010, there were 129 000 applicants on the Waiting List (WL) for public rental housing (PRH), with an average of 3 000 new applications received every month. To meet the need of low-income families for subsidized rental housing, the Housing Authority (HA) maintains a rolling five-year PHCP. The forecast production of PRH from 2009-2010 to 2013-2014 is about 74 000 flats i.e. an average of around 15 000 flats per year. HA estimates that this level of production, together with recovered flats from the existing, would allow it to meet the target of maintaining the average waiting time (AWT) for PRH at around three years¹

Public Housing Construction Programme

3. Most of the projects for new flat production under PHCP for the coming

¹ The AWT pledge does not apply to non-elderly one-person PRH applicants on WL.

five years will come from the urban/extended urban areas² with the remaining from the New Territories. The flat production volume within the five-year period would not be subject to major variation as the projects concerned are either at the construction stage or advanced detailed design stage. However, most of the sites available for PRH development beyond the five-year period are still at an early planning stage. In view of the valuable land resources, HA has to optimize the development potential of all available public housing sites while promptly addressing the following issues -

- (a) ***different views from the local communities on the suitability of the sites for PRH development*** – considerable time will have to be taken in discussing with the locals in an attempt to formulate mutually acceptable solutions;
- (b) ***provision of community facilities*** – consideration may need to be given to reserving part of the sites for community facility use having regard to requests from the local community, requirements of the relevant departments and development needs of the districts concerned;
- (c) ***site availability*** – sites, even if considered suitable for PRH development, may not be immediately available for various reasons, such as rezoning of sites, land resumption and clearance, technical feasibility study, large-scale site formation works etc.; and
- (d) ***site development constraints*** – uncertainties at the planning stage, such as traffic noise, building height restrictions and urban design considerations, may need to overcome.

Otherwise, PHCP and the target of maintaining AWT at around three years may be affected.

4. To strengthen the ties with local community, district co-ordinators at Assistant Director-level have been appointed to co-ordinate all consultation matters related to PRH development projects at district level, including residents and District Councils, and liaise with the relevant government departments so that the projects can be implemented more smoothly. Meanwhile, HA has taken the following measures to ensure an adequate and steady land supply for public housing development -

² Extended urban areas include Tsuen Wan, Kwai Tsing, Shatin, Tseung Kwan O and Tung Chung

- (a) close liaison with the relevant bureaux and departments to identify suitable sites for public housing development in different parts of the territory;
- (b) retention of cleared PRH sites for public housing development as far as possible; and
- (c) optimization of the development potential of all valuable public housing sites to make more effective use of the precious land resources, irrespective of the sizes of individual sites.

Implementation of building guidelines

5. While HA construction projects are exempted from section 41 of the Buildings Ordinance (Cap. 123) (BO), HA buildings are built to standards consistent with those set out under BO for private developments. Following the various incidents involving non-compliance with building and public housing construction works, HA endorsed the implementation of 50 quality housing initiatives in April 2000 with a view to uplifting its building quality. These included the establishment of the Independent Checking Unit (ICU) to, inter alia, enforce independent administrative control on new development of HA to ensure compliance with the technical and safety standards of BO, its subsidiary legislation and codes of practices on new development of HA. According to the internal Quality Management System of HA, all new design and construction projects have to be submitted to ICU for approval. To ensure effective communication with the Development and Construction Division (DCD) of the Housing Department on building control and requirements, ICU issues “ICU Instructions” to project teams to promulgate its control mechanism and requirements, and “ICU Alerts” for updating and clarifications on a need basis. ICU conducts bi-monthly meetings with DCD project chief professionals as well as regular experience sharing forums and briefing sessions with project teams to discuss any areas for improvement. ICU also regularly reports to the Building Committee of HA on its status and achievement.

Previous deliberations

6. The progress of PHCP and the related subject of land supply for public housing development were discussed at the meetings of the Housing Panel on 7 January and 17 June 2008, 17 April 2009, as well as the joint meetings with the Panel on Development on 6 July 2009 and 10 December 2010.

7. Panel members were generally concerned about the adequacy of land supply for PRH development. Unlike the earlier days when large-scale sites were earmarked for PRH projects, nowadays only smaller and scattered sites could be identified due to shortage of land and objections from community. The situation was further aggravated when some sites originally earmarked for PRH development had been used for other purposes. They opined that HA should secure the land required for PRH development beyond the five-year period, and that the Administration should make the suitable sites for PRH production available during the planning stage. Effort should be made to avoid over-concentration of PRH in certain districts as this would put extra pressure on the provision of ancillary facilities to meet the needs of the local community.

8. On PRH production, members stressed the need to increase PRH production to expedite flat allocation to the large number of applicants on WL, which was constantly expanding with addition of new applications every month. Besides, increasing PRH production was a more effective means than recovery of existing PRH flats in upholding the pledge of maintaining AWT at around three years. While acknowledging the need for the Administration to consult District Councils (DCs) in planning of PRH development, some members opined that DCs could give views on where and how the PRH estates within their districts should be developed, but not object to the provision of PRH estates as a matter of principle. To meet the demand for public housing of low-income families, members urged the Administration to relax the Income and Asset Limits for WL applicants. Consideration should be given to re-launching the Home Ownership Scheme to help expedite the recovery of existing PRH flats. The proceeds of sales would also help finance the PRH production.

9. On ICU, members agreed to the need to ensure the quality of housing production. In view of the lapse of time since the establishment of ICU in October 2000, some members considered that a general review of the operation of ICU might be necessary.

Latest development

10. The Administration proposes to brief the Housing Panel on the details of the 2010-2015 PHCP at the meeting on 3 January 2011.

Relevant papers

Information paper provided by the Administration for the Housing Panel meeting on 7 January 2008

<http://www.legco.gov.hk/yr07-08/english/panels/hg/papers/hg0107cb1-506-3-e.pdf>

Minutes of the Housing Panel meeting on 7 January 2008

<http://www.legco.gov.hk/yr07-08/english/panels/hg/minutes/hg080107.pdf>

Information paper provided by the Administration for the Housing Panel meeting on 17 June 2008

<http://www.legco.gov.hk/yr07-08/english/panels/hg/papers/hg0617cb1-1656-4-e.pdf>

Minutes of the Housing Panel meeting on 17 June 2008

<http://www.legco.gov.hk/yr07-08/english/panels/hg/minutes/hg080617.pdf>

Information paper provided by the Administration for the Housing Panel meeting on 17 April 2009

<http://www.legco.gov.hk/yr08-09/english/panels/hg/papers/hg0417cb1-1263-3-e.pdf>

Minutes of the Housing Panel meeting on 17 April 2009

<http://www.legco.gov.hk/yr08-09/english/panels/hg/minutes/hg20090417.pdf>

Information paper provided by the Administration for the joint meeting of the Panels on Housing and Development on 6 July 2009

<http://www.legco.gov.hk/yr08-09/english/panels/hg/papers/devhg0706cb1-2072-1-e.pdf>

Minutes of joint meeting of the Panels on Housing and Development on 6 July 2009

<http://www.legco.gov.hk/yr08-09/english/panels/hg/minutes/devhg20090706.pdf>

Information papers provided by the Administration for the joint meeting of the Panels on Housing and Development on 10 December 2010

<http://www.legco.gov.hk/yr10-11/english/panels/hg/papers/devhg1210cb1-679-1-e.pdf>

<http://www.legco.gov.hk/yr10-11/english/panels/hg/papers/devhg1210cb1-727-1-e.pdf>