

**For discussion
on 2 July 2024**

Legislative Council Panel on Security

Implementation Progress of the Second Phase of the Sha Tau Kok Opening-up Plan

Purpose

This paper briefs Members on the implementation progress of the second phase of the Sha Tau Kok (“STK”)(excluding Chung Ying Street) opening-up plan and the next steps.

Background

2. According to the Northern Metropolis Development Strategy, STK, endowed with abundant natural resources, is part of the Blue and Green Recreation, Tourism and Conservation Circle. It is currently the only rural township remaining within the Frontier Closed Area (“FCA”) in Hong Kong, which bears great historical significance and uniqueness as well as potential for recreation and tourism development. In line with this development direction, since 2022, the Security Bureau (“SB”) has, together with relevant policy bureaux and departments, formulated specific measures to gradually open up the STK FCA in accordance with the principle of gradual and orderly progress, and fully consulted the views of the local community during the process to ensure that the opening-up plan would not affect the existing way of life of some 4 000 residents in STK currently.

First Phase “STK Pier opening up scheme”

3. The “STK Pier Opening Up scheme” of the first phase was launched in June 2022 to open up the STK Pier for use by designated tour groups taking ferry trips to neighbouring attractions like Lai Chi Wo and Kat O on Saturdays, Sundays and public holidays. The first phase of the opening-up plan ran smoothly without affecting local residents and was well received by visitors and the tourism industry.

4. The 2022 Policy Address mentions that the Government will “gradually open up Sha Tau Kok (excluding Chung Ying Street) in 2024 for

cultural and eco-tourism activities”. To take forward this policy direction, we consulted the Sha Tau Kok District Rural Committee and the Committee on Social Affairs of the North District Council on the proposed specific measures of the second phase of the STK (excluding Chung Ying Street) opening-up plan (“second phase opening-up of STK”) and successfully gained their support in January and February 2023 respectively. The SB and relevant policy bureaux and departments actively carried out various preparatory works in 2023 in order to achieve the objective of “gradually opening up Sha Tau Kok (except Chung Ying Street) from January 2024”, with the effectiveness of the project to be reviewed and the visitor quota adjusted in the first half of 2024 as mentioned in the 2023 Policy Address.

Second Phase of the Opening-up Plan

5. We have launched the second phase opening-up of STK since 1 January this year, and the coverage of which was extended to the entire STK FCA except Chung Ying Street with the aim of promoting cultural and eco-tourism of STK and nearby outlying islands. Local and overseas visitors may simply apply for an electronic Closed Area Permit (“CAP”) via the online platform of the Hong Kong Police Force (“HKPF”) three working days in advance to enter STK for sightseeing from 7:00 a.m. to 9:00 p.m. on the day of their choice¹.

6. The second phase opening-up of STK covers four key areas of work, namely (1) maintaining boundary security, (2) enhancing local attractions, (3) providing tourism supporting facilities and (4) garnering residents’ support. The aim is to provide new impetus for the cultural and eco-tourism development of STK and create new development opportunities in the district. The specific measures are summarised as follows:

- (1) Maintaining boundary security**
 - (a) put in place additional fences/glass barriers and set up additional Police posts and closed circuit television systems in strategic locations to address increased security risks.

¹ Visitors can apply for a CAP for any day of the current or next month via the online electronic CAP application platform of the HKPF to enter STK for sightseeing. Visitors are required to fill in and submit relevant information for the HKPF to process the application.

- (b) reprovision Chung Ying Street Checkpoint to upgrade facilities and improve inspection efficiency.

(2) Enhancing local attractions

- (c) set up the **Fish Lantern Square** on the waterfront of STK to introduce to citizens the fish-lantern dance, a national intangible cultural heritage; construct a **Chung Ying Street Garden** near Chung Ying Street Checkpoint which features a **viewing deck** overlooking Chung Ying Street for photo-taking and a life-size **retro locomotive model** in an old railway station setting; refurbish the **old STK fire station**, etc.

(3) Providing tourism supporting facilities

- (d) improve **public transport service** by increasing the frequency of the public transport connecting STK to Sheung Shui and Fanling.
- (e) introduce **circular kaito ferry routes to outlying islands** which ply between STK Pier and nearby Hong Kong Geopark attractions, including Lai Chi Wo, Kat O and Ap Chau so as to enable itineraries to be more diversified.
- (f) step up **promotion and publicity** to proactively showcase the unique attractiveness of STK. In collaboration with Sha Tau Kok District Rural Committee, the SB has developed for STK the “top 10 attractions”, “top 10 delicacies”, “top 10 cultural attractions”, etc. In addition, the Hong Kong Tourism Board has provided, through initiatives such as launching a **dedicated webpage** and publishing posts on social media platforms, tourism information about the scenic spots, delicacies, cultural attractions and other recommended activities in STK, transport arrangements, CAP application procedures and so on to facilitate visitors in planning their itinerary.

(4) Garnering residents’ support

- (g) in consideration of the concern of STK residents over the potential pressure posed by a large number of visitors in the district, we have set

the daily **visitor quota** at 1 000 (including 700 tour group visitors² and 300 individual visitors) in the initial stage to avoid the flocking of a large number of visitors to STK which may cause nuisance to the residents, and, at the same time, give local residents and commercial stalls time to adapt, thereby ensuring an orderly opening up. Where necessary, we may also adjust the visitor quotas.

- (h) **prohibit visitors from driving to the FCA** and require them to take public transport in order to avoid causing traffic congestion in the district.
- (i) provide an additional number of **100 parking places** for **STK residents** to ease the shortage of parking places in the district.
- (j) **enhance district management**, such as stepping up police patrols, enhancing the cleansing of streets, public toilets, etc. by relevant departments, to safeguard public order and environmental hygiene.
- (k) require tour guides not to use loudhailers in the FCA through the Travel Industry Council of Hong Kong to avoid causing nuisance to residents.

Preliminary Review

7. Following the initiative of adjusting the visitor quotas according to needs stated in paragraph 6(4)(g) above, we offered an additional 1 000 individual visitor quotas (totalling 1 300 individual visitor quotas) to cater for public demand on the Sha Tau Kok Lantern Festival Fun Day held by the North District Office on 24 February 2024. On that day, a total of 1 862 CAPs, including 1 292 and 570 individual and group quotas respectively, were issued to visitors for entering STK, and good order was observed. The success of the event has demonstrated that there is room for increasing the daily quota for individual visitors. For the daily quota of 700 for tour group visitors, implementation of the opening-up plan in the first two months has revealed a relatively low utilisation rate on weekdays³

² The SB has engaged the Travel Industry Council of Hong Kong with the allocation of quotas for tour groups on Saturdays, Sundays and public holidays to interested travel agents in order to facilitate travel agents in forming tour groups after obtaining the quotas.

³ The average utilisation rates on weekdays for the months of January and February 2024 are 3.5% and 11.6% respectively, i.e. the respective numbers of CAPs issued on weekdays in January and February are 537 and 1 537.

and it is certain that such number of tour groups on weekdays will not adversely affect the local community.

Progress

Visitor quota

8. We consulted local representatives on the findings of our review of the implementation of the opening-up plan in the first two months and the proposed improvements (i.e. items (i) and (ii) below) through the newly established District Consultative Committee⁴, and secured their support for **launching the following enhancement measures starting from April this year:**

- (i) **increasing the daily quota for individual visitors by 300 to 600** to meet demand; and
- (ii) **removing the quota for tour groups from Mondays to Fridays (excluding Public Holidays)**. This could make travel agents more at ease when recruiting tour group members as they no longer have to worry about failing to secure quotas for their tour group members after forming the groups.

9. After increasing the daily quota for individual visitors to 600 since April this year, the highest numbers of **CAPs for individual visitors**⁵ recorded for the months of April and May were **660 (on 21 April)** and **726 (on 1 May)** respectively. *(Note: As a usual practice, unused group quotas on weekends and public holidays will be switched to individual quotas. Therefore, the number of individual visitors may exceed 600 on condition that the total number of visitors per day should not exceed 1 300.)* These figures show that there is still room for increasing the individual quotas to meet demand. In accordance with the principle of gradual and orderly progress, we recently piloted the **increase of the daily quota for individual visitors to a maximum of 2 300**⁶ on Tuen Ng Festival

⁴ The District Consultative Committee is set up by the SB to collect local views on the implementation of the second phase opening-up of STK. The Committee is chaired by the Under Secretary for Security and comprises representatives from relevant Government departments and the local community, including the representatives from Sha Tau Kok District Rural Committee, North District Council members and village representatives.

⁵ Refers to the number of CAPs issued

⁶ Taking into account the daily quota of 700 for tour group visitors, the total number of visitors is capped at 3 000.

(10 June) and Father's Day (16 June) to assess visitors' feedback and the carrying capacity of the district. The numbers of CAPs for individual visitors issued on the two days, i.e. 10 June and 16 June, were 330 and 337 respectively.

10. As for tour group visitors, the highest numbers of CAPs for group visitors recorded for the months of April and May were **630** (on **Saturday, 20 April**) and **602** (on **Sunday, 5 May**) respectively. The numbers recorded during weekends and public holidays are consistently below the ceiling of 700 per day. Starting from April, tour groups organised on weekdays were no longer subject to quota restriction. The highest numbers of CAPs for group visitors on weekdays recorded for the months of April and May were 563 (on Friday, 26 April) and 355 (on Friday, 24 May) respectively, and the operation on weekdays were smooth.

Attractions and tourism supporting facilities

11. The Transport Department adjusted the kaito ferry service for island-hopping tours through streamlining the routings, frequencies and other improvement measures to provide more convenience to visitors and residents in April this year. The Transport Department will also continue to enhance land transport services.

12. In addition, internal renovation of the old STK Fire Station was completed in April this year. It is currently used as the Emergency Monitoring and Support Centre of the SB. On Saturdays and Sundays, guided tours are organised in the fire station to introduce to citizens the history of STK through the exhibition panels on the STK opening-up plan, a replica of an old fire-fighting hand cart, old pictures of STK, etc. on display.

Mid-term Review

13. In collaboration with relevant policy bureaux and departments, the SB has been closely monitoring the implementation of the second phase opening-up of STK and maintained close liaison with relevant stakeholders to ensure timely response to the concerns raised and orderly implementation of the opening-up plan. Since its implementation, the opening-up plan has been running smoothly with positive feedback from the tourism industry, visitors and residents. No adverse impacts have been caused to the public order, traffic and environment of the district.

14. As at 15 June this year, there were over 82 000 applications for CAPs to enter STK for sightseeing. The opening-up plan has effectively kick-started the cultural and eco-tourism development of STK, introducing to local and overseas visitors the local culture and unique scenery of STK. We are aware that there were schools organising tours to STK. Their itineraries have incorporated elements including exploration of Chinese heritage and rural customs, and visits to the Hong Kong Sha Tau Kok Anti-Japanese War Memorial Hall where students may gain an understanding of the history of the War of Resistance. Through these tours to STK, not only can students learn about the history and rural culture of Hong Kong, their sense of patriotism and national identity can also be strengthened.

Next Step

15. The SB will, together with relevant policy bureaux and departments, continue to take forward the second phase opening-up of STK in the following three aspects to ensure its effective implementation. They include: (1) constant review and timely adjustment of visitor quotas; (2) improvement of facilities; and (3) promotion of tourism development.

(a) Constant review and timely adjustment of visitor quotas

16. Considering that the number of visitors has remained steady, we plan to pilot the special arrangement of increasing the daily quota for individual visitors to 2 300 throughout the whole July this year⁷. We will monitor the implementation, the number of visitors, etc. so as to formulate long-term arrangements based on actual experience and review findings, and consult the District Consultative Committee accordingly. We will also maintain communication with the North District Office on the planned district-based activities in STK and adjacent locations in order to suitably increase the quotas for individual visitors on the event days according to needs. Besides, we will consistently monitor the operation of tour groups during weekends.

⁷ The tour group quota on weekdays is removed, and the relevant quota during weekends and public holidays is 700 per day.

(b) Improvement of facilities

Provision of parking places for visitors

17. The STK Boundary Control Point adjacent to STK Town has ceased operation pending redevelopment. We consider that the Vehicle Holding Area inside the Control Point can be utilised as a short-term tenancy car park before the redevelopment work begins so as to provide parking places for visitors entering STK and thus enhance the ease of travel.

18. We have gained the support of the local community for this measure. The Lands Department is drawing up the tender documents as well as the terms and conditions relating to the short-term tenancy car park in accordance with the established procedures. The target is to complete the tender procedures and commence the operation of the car park within this year. It is anticipated that no fewer than 100 parking spaces for private cars will be available to individual visitors upon reservation, and 14 coach parking spaces and some other parking spaces will be available for use by tour groups entering STK as well as STK residents.

Reprovision of Chung Ying Street Checkpoint

19. The existing Chung Ying Street Checkpoint is a temporary structure made up of marquees. Reprovision of the Checkpoint in the adjoining vacant site is now underway to provide a more well-equipped permanent facility for Police and Customs officers to perform inspection duties. The reprovisioning work is expected to be completed by end-August this year.

Pilot scheme on facial recognition technology

20. Currently, a person must show a CAP to the police officer on duty at the Checkpoint when accessing Chung Ying Street. To facilitate passenger flow and enhance the handling capability of the Checkpoint, we will launch a “facial recognition” pilot scheme in the fourth quarter of 2024. It is envisaged that holders of valid CAPs for access to Chung Ying Street may, upon prior enrolment, pass through the Checkpoint via a “contactless channel” without having to stop and produce their CAPs. In adopting the facial recognition pilot scheme, we intend to phase out the current mode of manual inspection through applying innovative technology and yet be able to maintain boundary security and, at the

same time, facilitate passenger flow at the Checkpoint to enhance efficiency. We have commissioned a technology company to develop the relevant system.

(c) Promotion of tourism development

21. In the 2023 Policy Address, the Chief Executive proposed to explore with the Shenzhen Municipal Government the establishment of an STK Cultural Tourism Zone. In this connection, a Working Group for Sha Tau Kok Co-operation Zone has been formed under the Task Force for Collaboration on the Northern Metropolis Development Strategy set up according to the Hong Kong-Shenzhen co-operation mechanism. The Culture, Sports and Tourism Bureau will, with full support from the SB, coordinate with relevant policy bureaux and departments to examine the related issues with the Shenzhen side. The first meeting of the Working Group was held successfully on 24 May 2024.

22. The Tourism Commission will, together with relevant policy bureaux and departments, formulate an action plan within 2024 for fostering the establishment of the STK Cultural Tourism Zone under the principle of “low density, high quality” and through enriching its historical and cultural elements. While continuing to promote the tourism development in STK, crowd control arrangements will be maintained in the meantime to reduce the impact on the local community of around 4 000 residents. Preliminary ideas include introducing, under the Design District Hong Kong (#ddHK) project scheduled between December this year and February next year, more creative tourism elements in STK (such as outdoor art installations and activities incorporating local characteristics), integrating STK’s history and culture into the creation of more itineraries and tourism products, as well as stepping up publicity and promotion efforts in source markets in due course. In addition, the Tourism Commission will continue to promote the two “signature itineraries” relating to tourism resources in STK under the respective theme of “Great Green Escapes” and “Journey Through National History” selected from the “Deeper into Hong Kong: Creative Itinerary Design Competition”, so as to highlight the tourism characteristics of STK to visitors.

23. We will continue to maintain close liaison with district stakeholders in implementing the above measures.

Advice Sought

24. Members are invited to give their views on the implementation arrangements of the second phase opening-up of STK.

Security Bureau
June 2024