

2003 Policy Agenda of the Secretary for Housing, Planning and Lands

Since I assumed office last July, I have conducted a comprehensive review of the policies in the areas of housing, planning and lands under my charge. I have also re-considered the focus of our work. The ensuing paragraphs set out the policy objectives and strategies of the Housing, Planning and Lands Bureau for the coming five years.

Housing policy

2. Last November I made a statement on the SAR Government's housing policy to help rationalise the various housing targets and strategies, and clarify the role of the Government. I also announced a series of measures to help restore public confidence in the property market.

3. In the next five years, we will implement the series of measures set out in the Statement on Housing Policy, concentrating our efforts on the following major tasks:

- (a) maintaining supply of public rental housing for needy applicants within an average waiting time of three years. We will monitor closely the demand for public rental housing through a rolling housing development programme that will be adjusted annually;
- (b) continuing to provide assistance to families with special needs (including the elderly and hardship households);
- (c) adopting a more flexible mode of housing subsidies (e.g. rental allowance and loan) and reviewing the mechanism for the determination of domestic rents for public housing, subject to the outcome of the current judicial review of the Housing Authority's decision to defer review of rents; and
- (d) facilitating the smooth operation of the property market. We will conduct a comprehensive review of the Landlord and Tenant (Consolidation) Ordinance to relax tenancy control for private rental housing. We will also introduce a title registration system to give greater security to interests in land and property and simplify conveyancing.

4. Looking forward, we will implement our public housing policy under the strict principle of ensuring the effective use of our valuable housing resources. Discussions between the Government and the Housing Authority on a new set of financial arrangements are underway. In conjunction with the Government, the Housing Authority will seek to streamline its internal structure and the establishment of the Housing Department to keep pace with new circumstances. The Housing Authority will also conduct a detailed assessment of its financial position and future funding means, including the divestment options for its retail and car parking facilities for developing an implementation plan. Further opportunities for outsourcing its services will also be explored.

Planning and Lands Policies

5. The effective implementation of our housing policy would have to go hand in hand with comprehensive planning and lands policies. I wish to highlight a few major areas here.

Land supply and land use

6. Government would ensure a sufficient supply of land together with the necessary supporting infrastructure to meet market demand. In order to achieve this, we would put in place a comprehensive monitoring mechanism and an early warning system to ensure the timely provision of land for residential development. Furthermore, we would include various types of land in the Application List as appropriate to ensure that changing market needs are satisfied.

7. Moreover, I intend to review the small house policy in a comprehensive manner and identify suitable options for resolving the long standing problems associated with the policy. I will consult various stakeholders along the way and try to reach some tentative conclusions for further study and consultation with the community.

Building Safety and Maintenance

8. The Urban Renewal Authority has been playing a pivotal role in carrying out a comprehensive urban renewal programme to address the problem of urban decay. However, redevelopment alone cannot catch up with the pace of urban decay. In addition, not all old buildings have to be pulled down; many may be renovated and restored. The Urban Renewal Authority is now mapping out its rehabilitation strategy to provide appropriate support to owners in older urban areas.

9. One of my major tasks in the next few years is to promote building management and to encourage property owners to accord importance to building maintenance and safety. We will consider how to encourage property owners to provide regular maintenance to their buildings. We will also initiate discussions with the concerned professional bodies, with a view to fostering the development of one-stop services for building management and maintenance to building owners in a more comprehensive manner.

10. At the same time, we will continue to work with the Home Affairs Bureau to impress upon building owners the importance of timely maintenance through education and publicity, and to provide building owners with necessary assistance. Moreover, we plan to introduce the Buildings (Amendment) Bill into the Legislative Council this year to rationalize and improve the regulatory regime of buildings and building works as well as to strengthen statutory requirements on building safety. The Bill involves a number of proposals, including the introduction of a new category of “minor works” to enable qualified building professionals and contractors to undertake specified minor works. Such works include, for example, the erection and removal of signboards and the removal of unauthorized building works.

Planning for Hong Kong

11. In the days ahead, we will formulate a long-term, forward-looking development strategy for Hong Kong. The Planning Department has commenced a study entitled “Hong Kong 2030 – Planning Vision and Strategy” (the Study) with a view to formulating development strategies in respect of our land use, transport and environmental needs, to guide the territory’s long-term development. Under the new circumstances, there will be room for us to apply the planning standards flexibly and to re-assess the development density of the new development areas in response to the public’s aspirations for better quality of living. During each and every stage of the Study, we will widely consult the public. We hope that, by gathering and blending the aspirations and wishes of the community, the whole community will participate in the formulation of this long-term development blueprint for Hong Kong.

12. Talking about town planning moving on with the times, it is only appropriate that we also mention the development of the Victoria Harbour. In line with public expectations, the SAR Government has in the past few years greatly scaled down reclamation on both sides of the harbour. We have also set a vision for the Victoria Harbour, i.e. to make it attractive, vibrant, accessible and symbolic of Hong Kong.

13. To achieve this vision, we have set the blueprint for many new developments on both sides of the harbour. In respect of West Kowloon, we will formulate a comprehensive development package for the integrated arts, cultural and entertainment district on a prominent waterfront site in the area. This will help enhance Hong Kong's position as Asia's premiere centre of arts, culture and entertainment.

14. In respect of Southeast Kowloon, we plan to turn the former Kai Tak Airport site into a new development area. The area features not just residential developments, but also major tourism, sports and recreational facilities including a cruise terminal, a stadium and the Metropolitan Park.

15. In addition, against the background of Hong Kong's economic restructuring, Government has always been concerned about how to make better use of vacant industrial premises and industrial land, and how to improve the environment and associated facilities in old industrial areas. The restructuring of industrial buildings must be market-driven. In the course of the restructuring, the Government plays the role of a facilitator, helps simplify the procedures and enhances the flexibility for the use of industrial land. The restructuring of industrial buildings is an evolving process. We will continue to monitor market needs and reactions, listen to the views of the industry and make adjustments to our policy where appropriate.

Streamlining Procedures and Meeting Public Needs

16. Streamlining and expediting the current development planning and approval procedures will accelerate the progress of works and private development projects, and is thus beneficial to both the industry and the community at large. In this connection, we plan to introduce into the Legislative Council proposed amendments to the Town Planning Ordinance. The objectives are to streamline the statutory town planning procedures, to enhance the transparency of and public participation in the planning system. As regards the other matters covered in the Town Planning Bill which the Legislative Council considered in 2000, we will deal with them in stages because of the complex and controversial nature of the issues involved.

17. Land lease conditions, planning procedures and building requirements are there to serve the community. Planning Department, Buildings Department and Lands Department are actively studying how best to eliminate possible duplication and fast-track processing through enhanced communications and streamlined procedures. We will allow the professionals greater flexibility in their development plans under established principles, with a view to firmly anchoring the responsibility for technical details in the professionals. We aim to complete

the study as early as possible for discussion with the industry and implementation of the procedures.

Conclusion

18. Mindful of the latest developments in Hong Kong, my major task ahead will be to ensure that all available housing and lands resources are put to the best use. I will work together with relevant parties including the Housing Authority, the Housing Society and the Urban Renewal Authority to achieve a synergy of operation in order to enhance efficiency and optimization in the use of resources and expertise. I wish to call upon your support so that we may work together for the long term planning and housing development of Hong Kong.

Housing, Planning and Lands Bureau
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