

## **Progress Report of the 15th Meeting of the Kowloon City District Council**

### **Purpose**

This paper aims to report on the major issues discussed at the 15th meeting of the Kowloon City District Council (KCDC) on 18 March 2010.

### **Meeting with the Director of Buildings**

2. Members welcomed the Director of Buildings to the meeting to explain the following major tasks of the Buildings Department (BD) and the follow-up actions of the building collapse incident at 45J Ma Tau Wai Road, namely:

- (a) to enforce the Buildings Ordinance, exercise regulatory control over private buildings and related building works;
- (b) to clear unauthorised structures and conduct building maintenance;
- (c) to inspect buildings aged 50 or above in Hong Kong after the incident; and
- (d) to implement Minor Works Control System.

3. In response to the views and suggestions of Members on “sub-divided units”, “water seepage”, “visual inspection” and “contract staff”, the Director said that the BD could only handle units endangering the structure of buildings or causing seepage and hence adversely affecting hygiene. With regard to the problem of water seepage in premises, the Joint Office would have to conduct thorough investigation to confirm the source of seepage before any enforcement action could be taken to curb the nuisance. The Director also explained why the investigation was time consuming. He stressed that “visual inspection” was only an initial assessment of the structural safety of buildings. Further examination would be carried out if structural problems were detected. In respect of employment of non-civil service contract (NCSC) staff, he said the ten-year enforcement programme against unauthorised building works was going to conclude at the end of March 2011 and the NCSC staff would no longer be required by then. However, he undertook to review the programme and manpower situation later and to consider the need of demolishing less hazardous structures. Lastly, the Director revealed that the report on the building collapse incident would be available in as soon as three to four weeks.

4. Apart from the above, Members proposed the following measures for the Government's consideration:

- (1) to review the existing policy on unauthorised structures, standardise the criteria for demolition, expedite the handling of structures posing immediate danger while exercising flexibility for those which did not require urgent action;
- (2) to target people's conspiracy of purchasing old buildings to solicit bribes from renovation contractors by introducing legislation to plug the loopholes and prosecute offenders;
- (3) to require minor works contractors to register and practitioners to attain adequate qualifications in carrying out minor works and to enact legislation to control maintenance works; and
- (4) to ask the BD to review manpower deployment and the plan of terminating the employment of NCSC staff.

#### **Briefing on the Progress of Redevelopment Projects at Ma Tau Wai Road / Chun Tin Street**

5. Members commended the Government and the Urban Renewal Authority (URA) for taking follow-up action and formulate the redevelopment programme speedily after the incident. While agreeing that the redevelopment blueprint featured characteristic designs, they called for the Government to include in it the even-numbered buildings at Chun Tin Street and to enlarge the scale of the project with a view to mapping out the long-term development of Kowloon City District as a whole. Besides, Members hoped that the URA would hammer out the compensation package as soon as possible and allow the households and commercial tenants affected to have the priority to purchase or rent the premises constructed in the redevelopment project.

#### **Proposals for Development, Urban Renewal and Building Inspection in Kowloon City District**

##### **Calling upon the Government to Speed up the Reconstruction of Buildings Near the Scene of Building Collapse**

##### **Request for Speeding up Reconstruction Works in Kowloon City District**

##### **Calling upon the Government to Incorporate the Tenement Buildings at 2 & 4**

**Hok Yuen Street and 2-24 Chun Tin Street into Reconstruction Projects**  
**Strongly Requesting the Government to Increase Allocation for Accelerating the**  
**Urban Renewal Process in Old Districts**  
**Request for a “Flat for Flat” and “Shop for Shop” Arrangement to Allow**  
**Current Property Owners in Old Districts to Enjoy the Benefits of**  
**Redevelopment**

6. Members actively expressed their views about redevelopment and planning in Kowloon City District and topics under discussion covered the conservation of buildings as well as the pace, scope and ways of redevelopment. They hoped that the grant under Operation Building Bright would be issued earlier by the Government to assist elderly property owners in need to maintain their buildings. Feeling anxious that elderly owner-occupiers who lacked financial means would not be able to pay for the strengthening works for buildings adjoining the collapsed building in Ma Tau Wai Road, Members requested the Government to exempt them from payment of cost on compassionate grounds. The “Flat for Flat” and “Shop for Shop” appeal of the victims in the incident was also reflected. It was hoped that the Government would allow the residents affected to have the priority to purchase the units completed and share the fruits of redevelopment. Subsequently, the motion on “Requesting the URA to incorporate the Tenement Buildings at 2 & 4 Hok Yuen Street and 2-24 Chun Tin Street into Reconstruction Projects” was passed.

7. Considering that the urban renewal and rehabilitation programme might not be adequate for solving all the problems, the Development Bureau (DB) would adopt a multi-pronged approach when dealing with the complicated issue such as encouraging property owners to maintain their flats properly, providing financial aids for carrying out renovation works (the DB was also devising ways to integrate aids or loans provided by the Government and other organizations) as well as undertaking the redevelopment work and urging private developers to assemble 90% of the ownership of buildings to achieve urban renewal. The representative of the URA also explained the power and responsibilities of the Authority and the Planning Department, the factors to be taken into account plus the constraints to overcome when implementing heritage conservation and redeveloping the site of building collapse.

**Requesting the Government to Allocate Additional Resources to Expedite**  
**Rehabilitation and Maintenance of Old Buildings**

**Request for Allocation of Additional Resources to Enhance the Maintenance Works of Old Buildings**

**Requesting the Government to Formulate Legislation for Supervising Building Renovation Works**

8. The building collapse incident aroused much concern of the people in the district over the importance and urgency of removing unauthorised structures in old buildings, conducting maintenance and supervising renovation works. Members made the following suggestions for the consideration of the Government and various departments concerned:

- (1) to amend the legislation to allow the Government to take enforcement action against unauthorised structures and then recover the cost of demolition from the owners who refused to carry out the works;
- (2) to establish an inter-departmental authority to enhance the effectiveness of building maintenance work and prevent the embezzlement of maintenance funds by consultants in collaboration with contractors, to have the BD mandate owners or tenants to give notice before starting large-scale renovation and deploy staff to perform inspection to ensure the safety of building structure;
- (3) to introduce a licensing system, make it compulsory for decoration workers to receive training, enact legislation to forbid sub-division of units, set up a telephone hotline and step up publicity to encourage citizens to report any violations;
- (4) to relax the eligibility of criteria for applying grants under Operation Building Bright to cover buildings with more than 400 residential units; and
- (5) to award grants under Operation Building Bright within the shortest possible time.

**Concern over the Public Being Forced to Pay High Prices for Domestic Liquefied Petroleum Gas As a result of the Quick-in-raising and Slow-in-reducing Practice**

9. Given that domestic liquefied petroleum gas (LPG) was a livelihood issue of great concern to the community, Members opined that the Government should:

- (1) regulate petroleum companies by legislation so as to enhance the transparency of the prices of LPG;
- (2) ask the Consumer Council to publish information about prices of domestic LPG on web pages for comparison purposes; and
- (3) open up the fuel market to create competition.

Besides, it was pointed out that the prices of LPG, which could be calculated on the basis of the oil cost information provided by the Census and Statistics Department, was on the high side. Room for price reduction was believed to be available as oil companies would cut prices when encountering criticisms. Queries were also raised as to the efficiency of the monitoring mechanism of the Hong Kong Housing Authority in maintaining the fuel prices paid by users in public housing estates at a reasonable level. And as the contract lasted for ten years long and lacked flexibility, it was hoped that the Government would shorten the contract period to bring in competition.

Kowloon City District Office  
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