

LCQ4: Development of green tourism

Following is a question by the Hon Yiu Si-wing and a reply by the Secretary for Commerce and Economic Development, Mr Edward Yau, in the Legislative Council today (November 29):

Question:

In the Policy Address she delivered recently, the Chief Executive has proposed to develop and explore tourism products and projects with local and international characteristics, including cultural tourism, heritage tourism, green tourism and creative tourism. Furthermore, she has proposed to enhance the conservation of the natural ecology and cultural resources of remote countryside areas, and to revitalise the architectural environment of the villages concerned, thereby not only bringing new life to the remote countryside, but also promoting eco-tourism. To this end, the Government will establish a Countryside Conservation Office to co-ordinate countryside conservation projects, and has earmarked \$1 billion for such efforts and revitalisation works. However, some comments have pointed out that quite a number of popular green tourism attractions currently lack supporting facilities, thus affecting tourists' experience. In this connection, will the Government inform this Council:

(1) whether it has conducted a study to identify the countryside areas which currently have the potential to be developed into popular green tourism attractions for tourists but lack adequate supporting facilities; if so, of the findings; if not, whether it will expeditiously conduct such study;

(2) whether the Countryside Conservation Office will accord priority to the tourism development planning for the countryside areas mentioned in (1), and use the earmarked fund to carry out conservation efforts and revitalisation works for such areas; if so, of the details, including the countryside areas to be covered; if not, the reasons for that; and

(3) as quite a number of local residents and tourists wish to have accommodation in the vicinity of green tourism attractions so as to experience rural life, whether the authorities will, on the premise of compliance with the relevant fire and structural safety requirements, consider developing countryside home-stay lodgings with unique

characteristics so as to promote green tourism; if so, of the details; if not, the reasons for that?

Reply:

President,

Thanks the Hon Yiu Si-wing for the question. The Chief Executive has set in her first Policy Address a clear vision and mission for the tourism industry, which is to press ahead with the development of Hong Kong into a world-class premier tourism destination with a view to ensuring the balanced, healthy and sustainable development of the industry. Accordingly, four strategies have been mapped out as the backbone of the development blueprint. Based on these four strategies, we have formulated 13 implementation goals, in accordance with which we will formulate and implement various short-, medium- to long-term measures in a holistic and orderly manner. As for green tourism, which the Hon Yiu Si-wing mentioned, we will consider developing different green tourism attractions and collaborate with local districts to promote the development of sustainable green tourism, and examine ways to improve their supporting arrangements.

The Financial Secretary convened a high-level tourism co-ordinating meeting in October this year, directing bureaux and departments to drive the implementation of various tourism-related measures (covering those related to green tourism) in the areas of tourist support and management, planning of tourism facilities and transport support, and tourism diversification through closer co-operation and co-ordination.

The subjects raised are being looked after by the relevant bureaux and departments. While the Commerce and Economic Development Bureau is responsible for promotion of tourism, the Environmental Protection Department under the Environment Bureau and the Countryside Conservation Office to be established co-ordinate matters on the conservation of remote countryside. As the Hon Yiu Si-wing has just mentioned, the Home Affairs Department is responsible for the licensing for hotels and guesthouses, including home-stay like guesthouses in rural areas.

My reply to the three-part question raised by the Hon Yiu is as follows:

(1) To improve the supporting transport arrangements and supporting facilities, the

Tourism Commission, in collaboration with the related departments, including the Transport Department, the Environment Bureau, the Home Affairs Department, the Agriculture, Fisheries and Conservation Department, the Development Bureau, the Civil Engineering and Development Department, etc. are conducting a review to consider developing green attraction with good tourism potential, improving the related supporting transport arrangements, e.g. land transport services and kaito services; enhancing the supporting facilities, including directional signs, mapboards, information boards, mobile toilets, drinking machines, etc., and enriching the content of the website and mobile app for hiking for the convenience of the public and the visitors to enjoy our natural scenery.

In addition, the Government implemented the Pier Improvement Programme (the Programme) this year. Apart from enhancing the structural safety of a number of existing public piers at remote areas, the Programme will improve their existing facilities, including tourism supporting facilities. The first phase of the Programme will cover 10 public piers, including those within the Hong Kong UNESCO Global Geopark, i.e. Tung Ping Chau, Lai Chi Wo, Sham Chung, Lai Chi Chong and High Island. Relevant departments have pursued in stages the consultancy studies for the engineering investigation and design of the first phase of the programme, with a view to commencing construction works in 2019.

The Tourism Commission will work closely with the relevant departments to examine the feasibility of the various measures to improve the overall supporting traffic arrangements and the supporting facilities as early as possible and implement the proposals in phases with a view to further promoting a sustainable development of green tourism.

(2) In the 2017 Policy Address, the Chief Executive announced that a Countryside Conservation Office (CCO) would be established under the Environmental Protection Department to co-ordinate conservation projects that promote sustainable development of remote countryside. A sum of \$1 billion has been earmarked for CCO and other institutions such as non-governmental organisations (NGOs) to carry out relevant minor improvement works and sustain their preservation and revitalisation efforts.

For minor improvement works, CCO will consider the implementation of suitable improvement works for public facilities, such as providing or improving roads, street lightings, public toilets, sewage collection and treatment facilities, as

well as waste recycling and treatment facilities. Existing architectural environment like representative village houses in the countryside will also be rehabilitated.

On the preservation and revitalisation fronts, CCO will co-ordinate the efforts of the departments concerned, and provide an integrated yet dedicated mechanism with resources for the conservation and sustainable development of the countryside in the long run. The objectives are to support NGOs and villagers in organising diversified and innovative conservation activities on an interactive and collaborative basis, and to develop eco-tourism and other sustainable economic activities where appropriate.

As a priority, CCO will, in collaboration with NGOs on an interactive basis, organise diversified and innovative activities, including taking forward the planning of enhanced effort on countryside revitalisation in Lai Chi Wo, and implementing an ecological conservation project in Sha Lo Tung. Depending on the effectiveness of these two projects and views of the stakeholders, the Government will consider extending the initiative progressively to other remote areas with conservation value.

(3) The operation of hotels and guesthouses in Hong Kong is regulated by the Hotel and Guesthouse Accommodation Ordinance (Cap. 349) (the Ordinance). Any premises which provide short-term sleeping accommodation, including homestay-like guesthouses in rural areas, if their mode of operation falls within the meaning of "hotels" and "guesthouses", that is, any premises whose occupier, proprietor or tenant holds out that, to the extent of his available accommodation, he will provide sleeping accommodation at a fee for any person presenting himself at the premises, should apply for and obtain a licence provided that the period for each letting is less than 28 days.

Under the existing regulatory regime, village-type houses in the New Territories can all along apply for and obtain a licence under the Ordinance to operate homestay-like guesthouses. The Office of Licensing Authority (OLA) under the Home Affairs Department (HAD) promulgated a guideline ("A Guide to Licence Applications for Holiday Flat") in 2014, which sets out the fire and building safety requirements for holiday flats. Such requirements are in general more relaxed than those for general guesthouses. The OLA will, upon receipt of each application, conduct site inspection, and will, without compromising the building and fire safety, adopt a flexible and pragmatic approach in determining the relevant requirements that

the premises need to comply with. The OLA will consider alternative proposals if necessary. As of September 30, 2017, there are more than 140 village-type houses that have obtained Guesthouse (Holiday Flat) licences for lawful operation.

Thank you.

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