

LCQ1: Development of heritage 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 (May 5):

Question:

In December last year, the Government abruptly halted the demolition works for the service reservoir at Bishop Hill in Sham Shui Po (the service reservoir), enabling this century-old structure to survive. In March this year, the Antiquities Advisory Board endorsed the recommended grading (i.e. Grade 1 historic building) for the service reservoir. The Government is exploring a restricted opening of the service reservoir for visit by the public upon the completion of the temporary strengthening and tidying up works for the service reservoir. Some members of the public have suggested that the Government may, by making reference to overseas examples, invite experts to discuss the options for revitalising the service reservoir, as well as consider developing the service reservoir into a tourist attraction in Asia. Regarding the development of heritage tourism, will the Government inform this Council:

(1) whether it has drawn up a series of conservation and revitalisation programmes for the service reservoir to promote heritage tourism; if so, of the details (including an implementation timetable); if not, the reasons for that;

(2) whether it will include the service reservoir as one of the tourist attractions under the "Hong Kong Neighbourhoods – Sham Shui Po" campaign implemented by the Hong Kong Tourism Board, consolidate the tourism resources in the Sham Shui Po District, and improve the public facilities in the District, with a view to elevating visitors' travel experience without affecting the daily lives of the residents, such as using the technology of augmented reality to introduce the surrounding environment to the visitors; if so, of the details; if not, the reasons for that; and

(3) whether it has learnt a lesson from the incident of almost mistakenly demolishing the service reservoir and stepped up its efforts on conserving and revitalising monuments; whether it will formulate tourism promotional programmes for monuments worthy of viewing and enhance their ancillary facilities; if so, of the details; if not, the reasons for that?

Reply:

President,

The question raised by the Hon Yiu Si-wing involves conservation and revitalisation of the Ex-Sham Shui Po Service Reservoir, which is under the purview of the Development Bureau (DEVB). Having consulted the DEVB, I provide a consolidated reply as follows:

Since 2008, the DEVB has revitalised some distinctive government historic buildings through the "Revitalising Historic Buildings Through Partnership Scheme", and opened such buildings for visit by the public and visitors. For example, the Old Tai O Police Station has been revitalised into the Tai O Heritage Hotel, and the former Lai Chi Kok Hospital has been revitalised into the Jao Tsung-I Academy. Through the "Conserving Central" initiative, the DEVB has also revitalised the former Police Married Quarters on Hollywood Road into a creative hub, the PMQ, and also the Central Police Station Compound into the "Tai Kwun - Centre for Heritage and Arts", which have become tourist attractions with historical, creative and artistic elements.

In parallel, the Tourism Commission (TC) has all along been promoting various tourism projects in different districts, covering projects with historical and heritage themes. These include the revitalisation of Dr Sun Yat-sen Historical Trail with the theme of "art across time" leading visitors to trace the history of 16 spots through walking along the Trail; the organisation of the "Yim Tin Tsai Arts Festival" over three years which provides participants with a new experience that integrates arts, religion, culture, heritage and green elements through a variety of artworks in different forms; and the launch of the "City in Time" which presents the historical panoramic images of individual landmarks of Hong Kong by using augmented reality and creative multimedia technology, enabling visitors to understand the historical landscape and community culture through smartphones.

Since 2018, the TC, in collaboration with the Agriculture, Fisheries and Conservation Department, has also been enhancing the tourism supporting facilities of some hiking trails within country parks by phases which are popular and with tourism potential, with a view to enhancing their appeal as heritage and green tourism attractions, including some military relics and spots of historic value, such as the Pinewood Battery Heritage Trail along Peak Trail and the Wong Nai Chung Gap Trail.

The reply to the three parts of the question by the Hon Yiu Si-wing is as follows:

(1) Regarding the Ex-Sham Shui Po Service Reservoir, the Government has clearly indicated that it will not be demolished. In March 2021, the Antiquities Advisory Board (AAB) endorsed the proposed Grade 1 historic building status of the service reservoir. AAB has conducted public consultation on the proposed grading of the service reservoir and will confirm its grading later having regard to the results. The Water Supplies Department has earlier launched a virtual tour of the service reservoir. The service reservoir was originally a confined space. Although part of the roof has been removed, necessary works including the provision of internal lighting and ventilation facilities have to be carried out. With rainy and tropical cyclone season approaching, waterproof and drainage facilities will be installed to prevent flooding. After completing the above strengthening and improvement works, and ensuring the structural safety of the service reservoir, the Government targets to allow restricted opening of the service reservoir within this year. In parallel, the DEVB will look into the long-term options for conserving and revitalising the service reservoir.

(2) In the long run, when the service reservoir can be fully opened for public visit after completion of conservation and revitalisation works by the DEVB, the Hong Kong Tourism Board will help roll out related promotion, including through the "Hong Kong Neighbourhood – Sham Shui Po" campaign, to further enhance visitors' experience in the area.

As regards the use of augmented reality technology to introduce the neighbourhood to visitors, the "City in Time" launched by the TC is exactly the project that deploys related technology to bring back to life the history of individual landmarks of Hong Kong through mobile application. At present, there are six locations in Sham Shui Po featuring the "City in Time". When the Ex-Sham Shui Po Service Reservoir is developed into a tourist attraction, the TC will consider featuring the place in the "City in Time".

(3) The Government fully understands public concerns regarding the Ex-Sham Shui Po Service Reservoir incident. The DEVB is leading a working group to review the handling of the case by relevant departments, and to put forward improvement measures to avoid recurrence of similar incidents.

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