

**Measures to promote green burials
and enhance public supply of niches**

Green Burials

Green burials, which include scattering of human ashes in gardens of remembrance (“GoRs”) or at sea and paying tribute to the deceased through internet memorial service (“IMS”), is a more sustainable and environmentally friendly way of disposal of ashes.

2. There are currently thirteen GoRs, with eleven operated by the Food and Environmental Hygiene Department (“FEHD”), one by the Board of Management of the Chinese Permanent Cemeteries (“BMCPC”) and one by the Hong Kong Chinese Christian Church Union. FEHD and BMCPC have been encouraging the public to scatter ashes in GoRs. To encourage wider use of GoRs and allow more choices –

- (a) new and bigger GoRs have been constructed by FEHD. GoRs have been or will be planned for future public columbarium sites, wherever feasible (large enough and free of physical constraints); and
- (b) BMCPC, in consultation with FHB, has been actively taking forward the “Silent Teacher” and “Silent Mentor” Ashes Scattering Programmes under the Chinese University of Hong Kong and the University of Hong Kong respectively in its GoR.

3. To encourage the scattering of ashes at sea, FEHD has streamlined the application procedures and provided free ferry service for the public. Since January 2012, FEHD has further enhanced the free ferry service by employing a bigger vessel which can accommodate over 300 passengers per sail. As the free ferry service for scattering ashes at sea has become popular, since January 2013, FEHD has further increased the number of sails to four times per month. To enable users to pay tribute at any time and from anywhere, FEHD has launched the memorial website since June 2010 and the mobile version of the IMS website since September 2012.

4. FEHD has also stepped up publicity and educational programmes to enhance public awareness and acceptance of sustainable alternatives of handling ashes as well as paying tribute to the deceased. Major publicity efforts include participation at the annual Hong Kong Senior Fair, cooperation with government departments and non-government organisations, publication of handbooks and promotion materials on green burials and production of announcements in the public interest, etc.

Public Supply of Niches

Latest Position

5. The Government has identified 24 potential sites across the 18 districts for columbarium development. Whether these 24 potential sites could eventually be used for developing columbarium facilities will depend on the results of the technical feasibility studies or traffic impact assessments or engineering feasibility studies (where applicable). Upon completion of the relevant studies, we will consult the relevant District Councils (“DCs”) before going firm on developing the sites for columbarium use.

6. The feasibility studies are by large either completed or at an advanced stage by now, and we have been consulting the respective DCs since the second quarter of 2012. So far, the outcome of consultation with DCs is set out below –

- (a) supported
 - (i) Wong Tai Sin DC: the Diamond Hill project;
 - (ii) Islands DC: the Cheung Chau project;
 - (iii) Kwai Tsing DC: the Tsing Tsuen Road project;
- (b) supported in principle, with requests calling upon the Government to explore enhancement in road infrastructure works before seeking funding support from the Legislative Council (“LegCo”)
 - (iv) North DC: support undertaking detailed design and

site investigation works of the site formation and associated infrastructural works for the Sandy Ridge project. Some Members have asked us to explore enhancement of road links from Liantang/Heung Yuen Wai;

(v) North DC:

- support Phase 1 of the Wo Hop Shek project, subject to widening of the footbridge at Fanling Station. Some Members have suggested that the footbridge should be widened by the time niches are made available for allocation
- note Phases 2 and 3 of the Wo Hop Shek project. Some Members have asked us to explore complementary road improvement works; and

(vi) Tuen Mun DC: support proceeding with zoning of the Tsang Tsui site for columbarium development (even to a larger scale), subject to widening of the Lung Kwu Tan Road and, in particular, enhancement of Nim Wan Road up to Lau Fau Shan in Yuen Long.

We have required the design consultants to explore the possibility of and justifications for the enhancement of road links mentioned in (iv), and are following up the footbridge widening project mentioned in the first item under (v), a feasibility study on road widening roads for Phases 2 and 3 development mentioned in the second item under (v), and the first road widening project mentioned in (vi). As regards the second road project mentioned in (vi), it is, strictly speaking, more related to the overall development in the North West New Territories. As the Environment Bureau / Environmental Protection Department are involved in a number of strategic projects in this area and have indeed established a liaison working group with Tuen Mun DC for the purpose, they have agreed to take on a study to examine this road project.

(c) Uncertain as to whether support is forthcoming

- (vii) Shatin DC: the possibility of securing the support of Shatin DC for the Shek Mun site remains uncertain.

We plan to consult a number of DCs in 2014.

7. The new public columbarium facilities at Wo Hop Shek Columbarium (outside the 24 potential sites) and Diamond Hill Columbarium (one of the 24 potential sites), which provide about 43 710 and 1 540 new niches respectively, have been completed and are opened for allocation in three phases. The first and second phases of the allocation exercise have been completed. The third phase is expected to start soon, providing about 24 000 new niches. Furthermore, the construction of 1 000 new niches at the Cheung Chau Cemetery has been completed by end 2013.

8. Columbaria developed by private cemeteries help meet some of the public demand. BMCPC is expected to provide 35 600 new niches in the three years between 2013 and 2015, while there are around 28 400 unallocated niches in private cemeteries operated by religious groups including the Catholics, Christians and Buddhists. The Chinese Christian Cemetery and the Buddhist Cemetery are expected to provide 47 000 and 3 200 new niches respectively in the coming two to three years.

9. Subject to the support of DCs and LegCo for the projects currently under planning, the supply of new niches will cumulatively increase to hundreds of thousands by 2031.

New Measures to be explored

10. While the Government is making every effort to increase columbarium facilities, we are also mindful of the numerous challenges we face in seeking to build columbaria in individual districts, including topographical conditions, land use compatibility, infrastructural support, traffic and environmental implications, and last but not least, the concern and objection of residents in the vicinity of the proposed sites. We need to be realistic about the long term prospects of identifying yet more land for building public columbaria. We feel that sooner or later the community as a whole must come to terms with the need to even out the traffic impact that may be brought by columbarium developments during the two peak seasons in grave sweeping. New measures such as

designating different worship periods for different blocks of niches, limiting access during one or both of the grave sweeping seasons etc. will need to be actively explored. To relieve the shortage and increase the supply, we may need to consider time-limited occupation of new niches, with post-occupation re-use through renewal or re-allocation.