

7th Sept 2010

Secretary for Food and Health
19/F Murray Building
Garden Road
Hong Kong

Dear Sir,

Public Consultation on Review of Columbarium Policy

I write in response to your above Consultation.

Firstly, I agree with the Government that the shortage of niches is a serious problem. My relative who died three years ago had to wait for almost two years before he was allocated a niche in a public columbarium. As our population is ageing, the demand for niches will aggravate rapidly in the next 10 to 20 years, as the age of post-war babies will reach 70 by 2015. The baby boom started in 1945 right after the Second World War.

Secondly, we all know that private niches are an extremely lucrative business. This is in fact good news because it means that private funding is readily available and it can help solve some of our problems provided ways and means of tapping the resources are identified for a more open market.

The Government sold the land for a funeral parlour in Sha Tin in 198? and allowed a private land to change its use at handsome land premia to permit a private columbarium which has been developed into what is now Po Fook Shan. Since the Government had sold land for funeral parlour and allowed a land exchange for columbarium uses before, I see no reason not to identify land for such purposes to be disposed of by open competition, even on

design. In this way, private funds can happily participate in the provision of niches thus supplementing public niches. Just think of this as a housing problem, not for the living but for the dead.

Private niches sell design and services whilst public niches are basic, neat and tidy.

Turning to your specific questions, I would comment as follows:

- (1) I don't agree as it is not a 7-11 facility. The visit is just occasional. If the Government can not even develop columbarium on land which had already been through the planning procedure and zoned for that purpose(which I don't think is correct), then it should zone land for such purposes on those town plans yet to be implemented or use some derelict land near the border e.g. Hung Lung Hang for columbarium.
- (2) Agreed and some of the land should be sold for this purpose.
- (3) Agreed.
- (4) No alternative suggestion as it touches on cultural change which takes time to change.
- (5) No, the existing practice should continue. The price may include the capitalized management fee.
- (6) Agreed
- (7) No, I don't.
- (8) Yes.
- (9) Regularize it.

The sale price of private niches has clearly demonstrated the lucrative nature of the business, the potential of which has yet to be developed. By publishing this review, the Government has demonstrated her will to open up the trade through regulation and making more land available for that purpose. I believe that private funding can play a greater role in the provision of niches and it is up to the Government's determination to make it happen, to which I wish its every success.