

## 400,000 extra homes needed, says expert

The long-term solution to the housing shortage lies in the provision of more land in the New Territories for residential purposes with the necessary supporting infrastructure, a seminar was told yesterday.

The president of the Building Contractors Association, Mr Ho Sai-chu, said there is a need for between 350,000 to 400,000 housing units rather than the figure of 250,000 worked out by the Government.

He added that the scarcity of available building land in the urban areas has prompted the need for redevelopment of old buildings.

"It will continue to be necessary to demolish old buildings and even relatively new ones to maximise the efficient use of the land," he said.

At present, he told the seminar on "Private Housing Development" organised by the Hongkong Council of Social Service, there are about 700 old buildings which have not been demolished.

The director of the Centre for Urban Studies and Urban Planning of the University of Hongkong, Professor Kwok Yin-wang, said that of the four more-obvious components for planning consideration in urban redevelopment, the more tangible components such as land and environment

tend to be given greater importance.

"Urban redevelopment generates higher land income and greater diversity in land uses and improves the building and physical environment."

But it is "far less definite" with the intangible costs and benefits which are associated with the other two components — community and services, Prof Kwok said.

"Urban redevelopment from these view points changes and frequently damages the old community and creates special problems for the new community," he said.

The council's director, Mr Hui Yin-fat, said it becomes obvious that redevelopment is not merely a matter of "stones and steel" but of the lives of people including those with various disabilities.

And he urged that existing voluntary or governmental planning resources should be supplemented for each redevelopment project.

A Chinese University lecturer in sociology, Dr Y.K. Chan, said: "The new buildings might symbolise an improvement in the physical environment," but he questioned the resultant social environment brought about by redevelopment.

Relocation not only brings along problems like long commuting time and higher transportation expenses but also uproots neighbourhoods that were once well developed, he said.

Dr Chan added that better arrangements should be made for the displaced tenants before a redevelopment scheme is started.

Detailed social surveys must be conducted in areas likely to be redeveloped, he added.

On the legal aspect of redevelopment, Professor Peter Willoughby of the Hongkong University's School of Law said the legislation is complicated, old and needs some rationalisation.

He said that the Reviews Committee has recommended that tenants of post-war buildings should be given the right to a minimum amount of compensation.

At the moment, they are often paid ex-gratia only.