

17 Dec. 1988

\$2b land boost for New Territories hits drawing board

By **Tonny Chan**

ABOUT \$2 billion will be spent over 10 years in the New Territories as part of a Government effort to control the aimless development of rural land.

A working group comprising experts from several departments is busily drawing up a comprehensive New Territories-wide strategy for public consultation early next year.

A senior official said the operation would put civil engineering structures like sewage and drainage systems, roads and community facilities like clinics in every rural corner.

Departments involved will include the civil engineering services, territorial development, water supplies, agriculture and fisheries, highways and environmental protection.

They are working on three major areas: the laying out of a rural development policy, the identification of areas where agriculture should have priority and the co-ordination of improvement programmes.

Although thousands of people move to rural new towns each year, the Government estimates about 320,000 indigenous inhabitants still live in more than a hundred remote villages.

The principal assistant secretary of the City and New Territories Administration, Mr Mike Waters, said the strategy would be a guidebook for future developments in the New Territories.

"Initial estimates show about \$200 million a year is needed. A

major part of the money will be used for building roads and civil engineering structures," Mr Waters said.

"But we anticipate this will be a difficult task. As the Governor has said, much of the land is privately owned and there will be problems of access and acquisition."

Mr Waters said the environment of the New Territories was vulnerable to a proliferation of uncontrolled changes of land use on some of the private land.

"More farmland is being used for storing containers. The weight of containers can damage the soil drainage, which is sometimes responsible for flooding," he said.

He said the working group, chaired by the Secretary for Lands and Works, was identifying the needs of the rural New Territories and would categorise places accordingly.

In particular, spots for open storage would be designated so the Government could provide infrastructure for these areas, Mr Waters said.

"May I stress it has never been the intention of the Government to prohibit landowners from using their land. What we are doing is to introduce orderly use," he said.

But it was agreed questions of compensation would become a major concern.

He said a wide-ranging consultation, likely to take six months, would follow the announcement of the strategy.