

Tengah could be model for future estates, say experts

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One of five Tengah public housing districts, Park District will contain Tengah's car-free town centre. PHOTO: HOUSING AND DEVELOPMENT BOARD

The green town of Tengah may point the way to Singapore's future housing estates.

Urban planning experts as well as nature enthusiasts welcomed unique features such as its car-free town centre and a forest corridor, and said the town could serve as a model for future estates.

Roads will run beneath the car-free town centre of the 700ha new town, the first Housing Board town to have such a feature.

Every road in the upcoming development will also feature dedicated walking and cycling paths on both sides of it.

Associate Professor Cheah Kok Ming, from the department of architecture at the National University of Singapore (NUS), said: "It is a fantastic idea to relegate cars to the basement level, which will improve air quality, make the town more walkable and safer for pedestrians as well."

He pointed out that, while it may be difficult to incorporate such features in existing residential estates, Tengah could serve as a guide for future estates.

The sentiment was echoed by members of the nature community, who lauded the green features planned for Tengah, envisioned as Singapore's first "forest town" surrounded by lush greenery.

The forest corridor will be approximately 100m wide and 5km long, and established in collaboration with the National Parks Board (NParks). The corridor will form part of the larger network of greenery that connects the Western Catchment Area and Central Catchment Nature Reserve.

The HDB said the existing concrete canal will be replaced with a natural stream and water body. NParks will study how to retain the existing greenery within the forest corridor and how to enhance it by introducing more native forest species.

The forest corridor could help animals such as birds and insects cross between both green belts, said NUS bird researcher David Tan who had, in a recent study, discovered that the Tengah forest was an important corridor for birds such as the striped tit-babbler.

Dr Ho Hua Chew, vice-chairman of the Nature Society's (Singapore) conservation committee, also lauded the concept of the forest corridor and the overall plan that would help wildlife connectivity.

Nine species of birds threatened with extinction have been spotted in the secondary forests of Tengah, including the changeable hawk eagle and the red-wattled lapwing.

Dr Ho said: "It is very nice to know of our Government's desire to create a forest city." Instead of creating greenery by planting trees, it is better to integrate buildings into an existing natural forest, said Dr Ho.

"Let's have more of the natural forest, which is already plentiful there," he added, calling for a nature park at the eastern corner of the development, instead of in its centre as is the plan by the HDB. This is because the vegetation there is denser and more birds have been spotted along the canal there.

But there were some reservations as to how things will pan out.

Mr Tan of NUS said that while he is glad the HDB had planned for a forest corridor, it remains to be seen if it will work in such an urban setting.

He wondered how vector control operations, such as mosquito fogging, would affect wildlife using the corridor, and whether the wildlife in the green belt would be buffered from residential areas.

Butterfly enthusiast Steven Chong, 59, who lives near the Tengah area, said the development was a good compromise between development and conservation.

"I've noticed fewer species of butterflies around the area as the surroundings are developed. The development of Tengah with the forest corridor is the best that I can hope for," he added.