HeadlineTwo townships with green heartsDate06 Jun 2011MediaTitleNew Straits TimesSectionSupplementJournalistN/AFrequencyDailyCirc / Read136,530 / 330,000

LanguageEnglishPage No6Article Size786 cm²ColorFull ColorADValue23,250PRValue69,750





Two townships with green hearts

Elmina East

Sime Darby Property's (SDP) latest township Elmina East is unusual to say the least. The 100-acre township is the maiden development within the Vision Valley Malaysia master development plan, a multi-billion ringgit integrated property development plan that spans 80,000-acres across the states of Selangor and Negri Sembilan.

Located in Shah Alam, Elmina is SDP's prototype green township and is one of five townships selected by the Green Building Index to help establish the baseline for green township systems. The planning framework for Elmina East is based on the Building Research Establishment Sustainable Development Excellence Framework, a tool that enables a township to be developed with the components of a sustainable community.

SDP is applying as many green technology concepts as are reasonably viable in Elmina. In line with the Malaysian government's environmental plans, SDP has decided to try to reduce carbon emissions in its new townships by 40 per cent from numbers recorded in existing townships, and is starting out with Elmina. SDP is working with the Forest Research Institute of Malaysia to determine the future poten-

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tial carbon emissions in Elmina, with the goal of addressing gaps in local guidelines and parameters by creating a benchmark in sustainability. The fastest way to reduce

carbon emissions is taking cars off the roads. SDP has planned for this by measuring walking distances between the residences and the commercial areas, ensuring that all shopping can be reached by a five-minute walk, removing the need to drive. Dedicated pedestrian pathways are being built in the form of 'green trails' so

that people are kept safe from road traffic; the greenery along the trails also shields people from the heat and dust of the day. There will be a dedicated cycling network, and the developers have made lower provisions for privately owned vehicles to encourage the use of public transport, cycling or walking.

Reservoirs are being constructed to retain water runoff from the abundant tropical rainfall. This water will be used for irrigating common areas and parks. SDP is currently carrying out an audit of animal trails in the Elmina East area. The plan here is to construct the built environment around the existing 'residents' of the area, allowing them to continue living with as little human disturbance as possible.

The most novel thing about Elmina is that it will be a high density mixed development with a combination of low cost, medium cost and high end housing. Because they will inevitably suffer losses, developers typically locate the low cost housing in the least attractive part of the development, where access to the commercial areas is difficult, and there is likely limited or no access to public transport. Logically, this is undesirable as the residents in this area would be the ones to have most need of public transport.

SDP are basically getting real by not expecting maintenance fees from the low cost housing. Combining different types of housing in one township means that the building and maintenance costs of the medium and high-end residences will be able to offset that of the low cost housing. This enables the latter

to be built in a more accessible and suitable location. It is almost an experiment on social integration, but this model has been successfully proven to work in models in New York.

Most people feel that highdensity means a concrete jungle, and that an expansive development with lots of greenery is more sustainable. Being a high-density development with mixed residences, but with less than 100 houses in each neighbourhood, Elmina is actually more economically sustainable than a sprawling low-density township. Highdensity here means one acre of housing, be it bungalows, terraced, semi-detached houses or condominiums, next to one acre of parkland. Compared to the typical 500-acre development with a five-acre park (which makes a mere five per cent of the development), the system being used in Elmina is more viable. It is again a paradigm shift to conservation of space instead of wastage - a change from believing that because there is still much undeveloped

land in our country we have unlimited space to use when really it is finite.

The Glades

Sime Darby Property's township The Glades is located in the final parcel of land owned by the developer in Putra Heights. Since the Elite Highway was constructed, with an interchange leading directly to the township, property prices there have escalated significantly.

This 60-acre gated community is where SDP wanted to do something different. Built with the 4Ps of SDP's 2020 Sustainability Roadmap in mind (People, Planet, Profit, Pneuma), The Glades is certainly a modern, even futuristic township.

Just before the entrance to The Glades is a commercial precinct built to service the township. Here, SDP is conducting another one of its social and economic sustainability 'experiments' — instead of selling off commercial lots to make a quick profit, the developer is retaining them and using the rental collected to offset maintenance costs — as the Profit part of the roadmap.

Inside the gates is a clubhouse where residents can gather for community events. SDP has built the area up while preserving as much of the natural lay of the land as possible. This has enabled it to build a man-made lake at the highest point and construct waterways that meander through the development, creating opportunities for homes to be built adjacent to naturally flowing water.

As with most of its new development projects, roads in The Glades are built with lower provisions for vehicles, in this case a little narrower than usual to encourage more pedestrian traffic.

The Glades has several unique points that make it

innovative. SDP has designed and installed an automated garbage collection system. Within 150 metres from each residence will be a common garbage chute that runs on a vacuum system (like the ones normally seen in high-rise condominiums). The garbage is put into the chute and goes underground to a collection area. Residents will be encouraged to separate their garbage to facilitate recycling.

There will also be a centralised water collection system where rainwater and grey water — water from wash basins and showers — will be collected and run through a centralised water filtration system. The water will be reused for flushing toilets and irrigating common green areas. SDP has estimated that these systems will reduce water consumption to up to 64 litres per day for each occupant.

The question here is how these systems will be maintained. The costs will be high. But SDP is adamant that it wants to keep the lifestyle the township can offer intact (the People part of the 4Ps) and it wants to do its bit to sustain the environment by reducing consumption and the need for landfills (Planet). The developer will be using the rent from its commercial lots to offset these costs. Some of these commercial lots are being fitted with photovoltaic cells as well; once the government decides on the feed-in tariff, the amount made selling power back to the grid can also go towards maintenance costs.

By constructing a township

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along these lines, SDP has stayed true to the last P — Pneuma, the soul or spirit. In giving people a place to live where they can have a lifestyle intertwined with nature, SDP is also doing its part to educate them about the importance of sustainability.



Elmina East