

# 11 dwellings

HARMONIOUS LIVING AT ITS BEST

The Evolution Issue  
Celebrating 60 Years of Housing a Nation





**a**word  
about this issue



## 60 Years of HDB

In laid-back Queenstown, the futuristic SkyVille @ Dawson stands head and shoulders above the surrounding blocks, the juxtaposition serving as a striking reminder of how much the public housing landscape in Singapore has transformed.

This year marks HDB's 60th anniversary. Through the decades, HDB has sought to build well-designed homes that are better than the last, to meet Singaporeans' evolving aspirations and lifestyle needs. This issue of *Dwellings* explores HDB's multifaceted efforts in housing a nation — from fulfilling home ownership dreams through design and policies, to weaving greenery into public housing estates both new and mature, so as to enable better living.

Home ownership rates in Singapore are among the highest in the world. As the largest housing provider, HDB has played a key role by offering a range of housing options, policies, and schemes to suit the tastes and needs of a diverse and changing customer base.

Beyond the brick and mortar, a strong sense of community and togetherness forms the heart of HDB living. Fung Chun Chang, who dedicates his time to mentoring less privileged students in Kembangan-Chai Chee, embodies this spirit. His befriending efforts have inspired more volunteers to come forward, an experience that they have found immensely rewarding.

This year celebrates the start of a new decade, and a brand new chapter for public housing. Exciting plans are on the horizon as HDB endeavours to continually fulfil home ownership dreams, build quality homes, and create close communities for generations of Singaporeans to come.

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## About *Dwellings*

*Dwellings* is published by the Housing & Development Board (HDB), Singapore's public housing authority and a statutory board under the Ministry of National Development. For 60 years, HDB has provided quality and affordable public housing for generations of Singaporeans. Currently, more than 8 in 10 resident households in Singapore call an HDB flat their home. Through *Dwellings*, we want to share how we create the kind of public housing that is uniquely different, and also uniquely Singapore.

# Housing a Nation

For 60 years, HDB has focused its attention on building quality homes for Singaporeans. A willingness to experiment and embrace change has created a distinctive brand of public housing that has pride of place in the lives of its residents.

(Right) Generations of Singaporean families call HDB flats home





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The HDB story began on 1 February 1960 with a modest yet critical goal — to tackle severe housing shortage and provide better homes for a young nation. Against a backdrop of rapid population growth and high unemployment levels of a developing country, unhygienic and overcrowded living arrangements were prevalent, making the mandate anything but simple. Nevertheless, within 5 years, HDB had built close to 55,000 flats, and by the end of the 1960s, Singapore's housing crisis was largely resolved.

### Early Housing

To address the critical housing shortage and provide basic and functional low-cost housing, the first blocks were built as simple long slabs with flats lined along a common corridor, enabling construction to proceed quickly and easily. Within each flat, the kitchen, dining area, and service yard were placed in a single combined space. While these early homes might have been basic, residents wholly enjoyed modern conveniences, such as piped water, electricity, gas, and proper sanitation.

Ching Gok Wah remembers the moment he first stepped into his family's 3-room flat in Toa Payoh, after moving from a small shophouse in Dawson estate. "I was in awe. The bedroom, living room, and kitchen were all separated by concrete walls — unlike the wooden self-made partitions in our old shophouse," he recalls.

"Back then, most of the buildings were low-rise. So these tall HDB flats, which looked as though they were almost touching the sky, were like nothing we've ever seen before," he adds.

Once HDB resolved the housing crisis, its focus shifted to developing towns that support a quality lifestyle. Satellite towns were planned and built to be self-sufficient, with amenities such as transport nodes and malls at the town centre, while neighbourhoods had their own food outlets, provision shops, and facilities to meet residents' daily needs within a stone's throw. Toa Payoh, whose development started in the 1960s, was the first showcase of HDB's comprehensive town planning.

Fast-forward to today, Singapore's public housing landscape is strikingly different from its early iterations. HDB has kept in step with the evolving aspirations and lifestyle needs of Singaporeans over the years to continually create homes that remain relevant for its residents.

Reflecting on his town's growth over the years, Gok Wah says, "The new flats in Toa Payoh are very modern-looking. They definitely breathe new life into our town."

01 Toa Payoh town being developed in the 1960s



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### Realising a Vision

There is no bigger driver of this evolution than HDB's 'Roadmap to Better Living', a blueprint introduced in 2011 to guide the development of homes that are well-designed, sustainable and smart, and community-centric.

"In shaping the new generation of public housing, good design is the key to creating functional, efficient, and quality developments in sustainable and comfortable living environments," says HDB Chief Executive Officer, Dr Cheong Koon Hean.

Well aware of Singaporeans' rising aspirations for quality homes, HDB builds well-designed homes within distinctive towns that capitalise on the area's heritage and character. Town Design Guides are being progressively developed for each of HDB's 24 towns to guide developments — from street furniture to urban and landscape design — based on a unified vision.

02 Toa Payoh town today, where old and new developments stand side by side



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### Building for the Future

As the largest developer of housing in Singapore, HDB plays a significant role in advancing sustainable development and green living. Its Sustainable Development Framework seeks to address challenges such as climate change, while creating a cleaner and more comfortable living environment for residents.

Greening efforts have intensified over the years with a myriad of landscaped spaces incorporated throughout every housing development in increasingly holistic and innovative ways. New indicators and approaches have also been introduced to guide greenery provisions in our housing estates.

From 2016, all new HDB developments have to meet a minimum Green Plot Ratio of 4.5, which means the total leaf area will have to be at least 4.5 times the site area. HDB has also adopted a 45-60% estimated green cover provision in our housing projects,



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which measures green cover as seen from the sky. As a result, residents get to enjoy abundant greenery right at their doorstep. Masturah Khalid, a resident of Dawson estate that first piloted the enhanced greenery provisions in 2016, observes: "I really love the lush greenery and nature in my estate. I am spoiled for choice as I can head to the roof garden, community living rooms, or nearby park for a breath of fresh air and to calm my mind."



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The integration of Singapore's public housing with nature was further enhanced with HDB's Biophilic Town Framework. Punggol Northshore, hailed as HDB's first smart and sustainable district in Punggol Eco-Town, will also be HDB's first biophilic district when the flats there are progressively completed from end of 2020. Among the biophilic features adopted is the placement of Green Corridors, which feature dragonfly ponds, bird sanctuaries, and butterfly gardens, to attract biodiversity and connect residents with nature.

Beyond green living, HDB leverages smart technologies to create a more liveable, sustainable, and safe environment, such as using advanced modelling tools to plan the placement and orientation of buildings for optimal thermal comfort. This 'smart vision' will also be realised through the development of Tengah, HDB's newest town,

which is being planned with town-wide smart technologies from the onset, so as to facilitate novel ideas like Centralised Cooling Systems for greater energy efficiency. Flats that can support the adoption of smart technologies are also being built.

HDB has also made bold strides in harnessing solar energy. Since solar photovoltaic (PV) systems were installed in HDB estates more than a decade ago, solar energy has powered common services, such as lifts, water pumps and corridor lights, with clean energy. Further ramping up its solar efforts, HDB leverages advances in solar PV technology to develop innovative solutions, such as rooftop solar panels and floating solar systems.

HDB also drives the growth of Singapore's solar industry under its SolarNova programme, which aggregates demand across public agencies — for a more sustainable and greener Singapore. Under SolarNova, HDB is targeting to install solar panels on about 10,000 HDB blocks, where feasible, to help reduce Singapore's carbon footprint.

03-04 Residents of SkyVille @ Dawson can head up to the roof garden on the 47th floor for respite and some fresh air

05 Residents of Punggol Northshore can look forward to living closer to nature



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Under the Remaking Our Heartland programme, Pasir Ris town centre will be transformed into a vibrant hub

### Enhancing Existing Homes

This enhanced version of public housing is not confined to newer towns. Older homes and towns have also enjoyed a new lease of life through a suite of upgrading and redevelopment programmes.

The Home Improvement Programme (HIP) and Enhancement for Active Seniors (EASE) programme focus on improvements within the flat to help residents deal with common maintenance problems and make homes safer for a rapidly greying population, while the Neighbourhood Renewal Programme (NRP) focuses on improvements at the precinct and block levels. Older blocks underwent the Lift Upgrading Programme (LUP), which provided direct lift accessibility to more than half a million flats.

Following the first two series of the Remaking Our Heartland programme, another three towns — Pasir Ris, Toa Payoh, and Woodlands — were also identified to be comprehensively rejuvenated.

In older estates like Teck Ghee and Yuhua, the HDB Greenprint has brought the vision of sustainable and green living to life by equipping these precincts with modern amenities, such as an automated waste collection system, smart lighting, and rooftop solar panels.



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Older estates like Yuhua have been rejuvenated with the addition of modern amenities and lush greenery



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### 'Hardware' and 'Heartware'

With majority of Singapore's resident population living in HDB flats, public housing plays a crucial role in promoting social harmony in our multi-racial, multi-cultural, and multi-religious society.

Building strong and active communities has thus been an ongoing mission since the beginning. Within each town are precincts of about 600 to 800 units, clustered around common facilities, such as children's playgrounds, fitness corners, landscaped and community gardens, and precinct pavilions.

"Good design can foster interactions. With residents sharing these spaces, we hope friendships will develop between those who live close by, thereby inculcating a stronger sense of belonging in the neighbourhood," explains Dr Cheong.

Beyond the hardware, well-considered home allocation policies and community-building programmes also help to build 'heartware' in the towns. Guided by the community-centric priority of the Roadmap, HDB has stepped up efforts over the years to engage with residents, such as

providing home owners-to-be a platform to get to know their neighbours through the MyNiceHome roadshows, and giving students the opportunity to pick up and share tips on gracious living with residents through the 'Friends of Our Heartlands' volunteer programme.

There is also an increasing emphasis on resident participation and empowerment, especially in the last few years. For instance, residents got a chance to create Singapore's first community-built playground in Canberra. Through the Lively Places Programme, HDB provides funding and plays the role of facilitator to better support community-led efforts to enliven Singapore's public spaces. Residents now get a larger say in how they envision their community and living environment to be.

08 Common facilities enable residents to come together, build relationships, and forge connections



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### Looking Beyond 60

It has been 60 years since HDB first started out with a mission to solve the nation's housing shortage. Today, it has fulfilled the housing aspirations of generations of Singaporeans, and made HDB living a shared experience that has bound together a nation. Another testimony of its success is the one million flats that shape the country's physical landscape — proof of the longevity and continued relevance of HDB's work.

In the upcoming chapter of public housing, challenges, such as land and labour constraints, will accompany exciting opportunities, including exploration of uncharted digital territories.

To take public housing to the next stage, HDB will continue to experiment and embrace change. Only then can it create the best possible living environment for the next generation of Singaporeans to make memories, raise families, and enjoy a lifestyle that fulfils their needs. [d](#)

09 Tengah, HDB's newest town, marks an exciting milestone in Singapore's public housing journey. It is the first of its kind to be planned with town-wide smart technologies from the onset, and will be fully integrated with the environs

*All perspectives used in this article are artists' impressions only; actual developments may differ*

# A Singaporean Dream

Across global cities, where inflation and high cost of living have made home ownership out of reach for many, Singapore stands out as a nation of home owners, supported by a range of housing options and policies that cater to various needs.

(Right) Home ownership is a cornerstone of Singapore's public housing programme, with more than 90% of HDB residents owning the flats they live in



“Will you apply for a Build-to-Order (BTO) flat with me?” is a uniquely Singaporean marriage proposal, and a testament to the purchase of a public housing flat as a significant relationship milestone among dating couples.

Aloysius Foo was walking past a BTO construction site with his girlfriend, Woo Kai Wen, when the topic of buying a flat

came up. “I told her that I wanted to become a home owner, and for her to co-own it with me. She found the ‘proposal’ less than romantic, but thankfully she agreed,” Aloysius shares.

Aloysius did eventually pop the question — after they had selected a 5-room flat in Sembawang. “Kai Wen probably said yes so as to not let the flat deposit go to waste,” he laughs.

To make home ownership accessible to generations of Singaporeans, HDB has over the years introduced new home offerings and policies to cater to a diverse customer base, while refining existing provisions to suit changing circumstances and needs.

Today, owning a dream home is now within easy reach of many young Singaporeans like Aloysius and Kai Wen. Home ownership continues to be a cornerstone of the public housing programme, offering Singaporeans a concrete stake in the country.

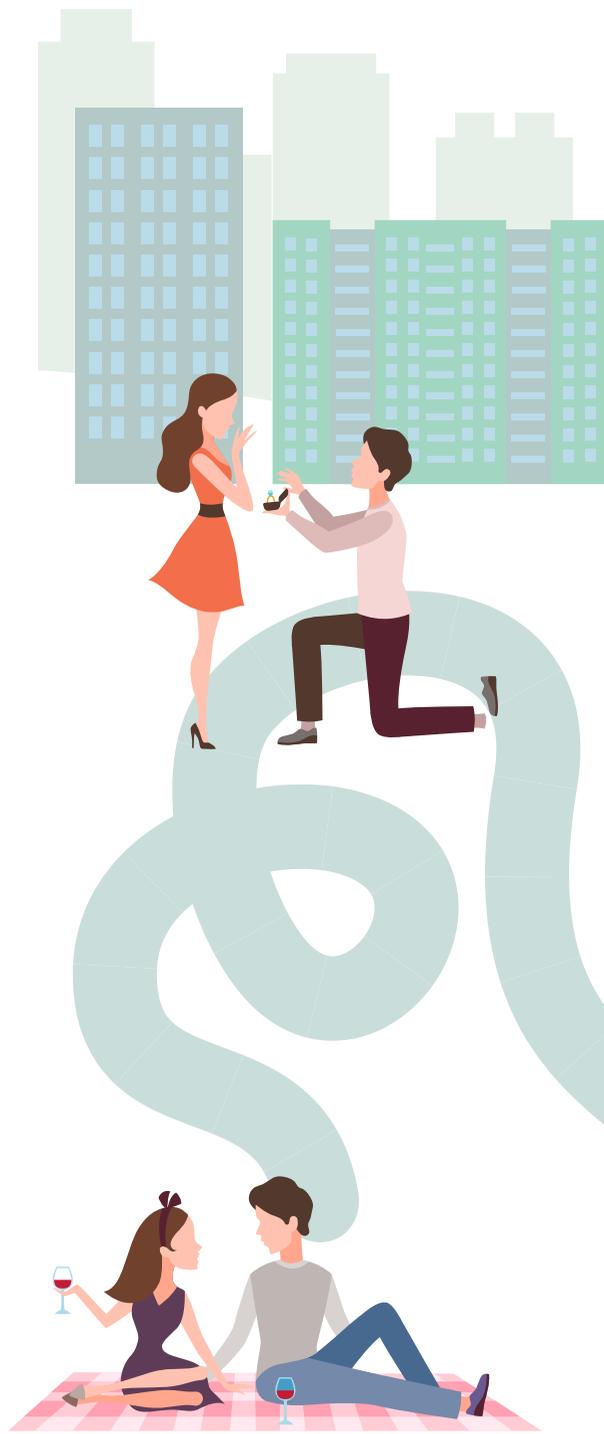
### Affordable Homes

New flats are priced with significant discounts, and generous housing grants are offered to eligible first-timers to help them own their first home. When Aloysius and Kai Wen purchased their flat in 2014, they enjoyed a total housing grant of \$40,000. “The grant definitely helped to ease some of our financial worries, especially since Kai Wen had just started working and I was still a student. The money we saved from the grants could also go towards our wedding and home renovation,” Aloysius says.

In ensuring housing affordability for all Singaporeans, HDB regularly reviews its policies. For example, the income ceiling to buy a flat has been increased, grant amounts have been raised, and new grants, such as the Proximity Housing Grant to help resale flat buyers live with or near their parents or child, were introduced. In 2019, the Enhanced CPF Housing Grant (EHG) replaced the now-defunct Additional CPF Housing Grant and the Special CPF Housing Grant, to help more Singaporeans buy their first new or resale flat, with no restrictions on their choice of flat type and location.

Having selected their 4-room flat in Punggol from the September 2019 BTO exercise, couple Muhamad Hariz and Siti Hanaa were happy to hear about the new EHG. “The EHG will definitely help to increase the affordability of the flat,” Hariz shares. “It also streamlines what were previously two grants for first-time home buyers into a single grant now. It’s simpler and more seamless.”

(Left) Different stages of a uniquely Singaporean relationship include dating, BTO and proposal, marriage, and a new home in an HDB flat





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### Additional Support for Second-Timer Families

While making home ownership easier for first-timers, there are also measures in place to support second-timer lower-income families in their flat purchase. These include initiatives such as the Step-Up CPF Housing Grant to help eligible second-timer lower-income families buy 2- or 3-room flats in a non-mature estate; and the Fresh Start Housing Scheme to help second-timer families with young children, who are staying in public rental housing, buy a home of their own.

A newly established Home ownership Support Team (HST) is also on hand to provide comprehensive guidance and personalised assistance for rental families

who are ready to own a flat but unsure how to get started. HST works with these families on their housing budget and options, explaining to them the available grants and schemes, and guiding them through the flat-buying process. To reach out to the families and provide the necessary support, the team works closely with various social service agencies and providers, including the Ministry of Social and Family Development, Ministry of Manpower, Community Link, and Family Service Centres.

01 Generous housing grants are offered to young couples like Hariz and Hanaa to help them own their first home



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### Quality Homes

From new 2-room Flexi flats to 3Gen flats, homes of different sizes and layouts are available to cater to the different budgets and lifestyle needs of home buyers.

Keeping up with the evolving lifestyle needs of home owners, HDB has introduced the provision of open kitchen concepts that offer home buyers greater choice and flexibility when designing a living space that best suits their needs — a piece of news that Hariz and Hanaa have eagerly welcomed.

“We want a cosy and creatively designed home, and plan to use cupboards and shelves to define the kitchen, dining, and living room spaces,” the couple says.

When completed, Hariz and Hanaa’s flat will also come with the sleeker and more modern fittings announced in 2019, which include glazed porcelain tiles, steel entrance gates with thumb-turn knobs, and laminated timber main doors. The new gates will come without key inserts — residents will no longer need to use a key to unlock the gates from the inside, while the new main doors are more scratch-resistant and durable. The flat will also be equipped with water-efficient fittings, such as dual and low-flush toilets to suit eco-friendly lifestyles.

02-04 As the tastes, aspirations, and lifestyle needs of home owners are continuously evolving, HDB will continue to create homes that remain relevant for its residents



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### Beyond the Four Walls

Beyond building homes, HDB works to maintain a stable public residential market. Determining the right housing supply is a balancing act, and in its planning, HDB studies societal trends — including the housing preferences of newlyweds.

To address strong housing demand, HDB ramped up its building programmes from 2011 to 2014. Newer towns like Punggol rapidly took shape, with homes and supporting facilities, such as schools and

malls, sprouting along its meandering waterway. With each quarterly sales launch, flat application rates gradually declined and reached a steady state from its peak.

HDB's strategies, together with the various cooling measures that were introduced between 2010 and 2013, including capping the mortgage servicing ratio and tightening rules for renting out of flats, helped moderate a skyrocketing resale market.

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Home buyers have more options to choose from, as new flats are also built in mature estates like Clementi

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EASE makes flats more elder-friendly and comfortable for elderly residents

To inject vibrancy into mature towns and give Singaporeans a chance to live near their parents, HDB released new flats in areas such as Ang Mo Kio and Clementi, and even opened up new areas within existing towns, such as Bidadari in Toa Payoh.

### A Home for Life

Buying a home is a long-term commitment, and HDB's upgrading programmes facilitate flats being a home for life. The popular Home Improvement Programme (HIP) addresses maintenance issues in older flats and is heavily subsidised. HIP consists of 3 components, one of which is the Enhancement for Active Seniors (EASE) improvements that focus on making flats more elder-friendly. Currently residing at Farrer Road, 87-year-old Safiah Yaakub is a resident who has benefited from the programme.

"My flat underwent EASE in October 2019," Safiah recalls. "A total of 8 grab bars were installed, and they have helped to increase my mobility within the flat. The grab bars provide the support I need — especially at night, when I'm walking in the dark from my bedroom to the bathroom. I would also occasionally use the grab bar in my bedroom to exercise by doing some simple stretches!"

In caring for residents in their golden years, HDB has also implemented the Lease Buyback Scheme (LBS), first conceived to provide lower-income seniors an added option to monetise their flat for retirement. From January 2019, LBS was extended to all flat types, helping more seniors unlock the value of their flat.

As our nation and people progress, and aspirations for homes and housing evolve, HDB remains steadfast in its mission to provide affordable homes of quality and value for Singaporeans, making each generation's dreams of owning a roof over their heads a reality. **d**



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# The World Beyond Walls

Beyond four walls, an HDB home extends into the wider precinct and town, where thoughtful greening and landscaping concepts have been put in place to drive green and sustainable living for the future.

(Left) Residents of Alkaff Lakeview in Bidadari can enjoy living within a park, with lush gardens just minutes from their doorstep

A black-naped oriole perches on a tree branch, pausing for just a second, before flying away in search of yet another resting place. It would not be hard-pressed for choice, given the ribbons of greenery that HDB has consciously woven into its towns and estates.

Guided by the Roadmap to Better Living in HDB Towns, HDB adopts a holistic approach to the provision of green spaces and urban greenery — from planning to implementation — to create a quality living environment for residents.

### Painting the Towns Green

The seeds of greenery were sown from the early days of public housing, with simple tree planting in the 1960s and 1970s to provide natural shade. Thematic neighbourhood parks and common greens were later introduced in the 1990s to boost green spaces between precincts, while offering residents shared recreational facilities and rest areas.

However, it was only in the last decade that innovative landscaping really

took flight. Elevated gardens became commonplace, injecting new layers of greenery into sky bridges, within residential blocks, and atop car park roofs. Often integrated with communal areas such as playgrounds and fitness corners, these landscaped spaces not only beautify and offer visual relief, but also serve as focal points for the community to meet and interact.

In 2013, HDB developed a Biophilic Town Framework to guide the enhancement of existing natural assets and the development of neighbourhood landscapes to promote a greater sense of place, better well-being, and an enhanced quality of life for residents.

The Framework was first applied at Punggol Northshore in 2015, and subsequently rolled out to newly launched housing projects from July 2018. Upon its completion, Punggol Northshore will see nature incorporated as an integral part of the neighbourhood, providing greater environmental health and human well-being, with plenty of opportunities for residents to reconnect with nature and enjoy its intrinsic benefits.

An enhanced greenery indicator is Green Plot Ratio (GnPR), a 3-dimensional measurement of the development's 'green density', calculated by using the total leaf area of the plants provided, divided by the site area. From 2016, all new HDB developments have to meet the minimum GnPR of 4.5, which means the total leaf area of the greenery will have to be at least 4.5 times the size of the housing estate.

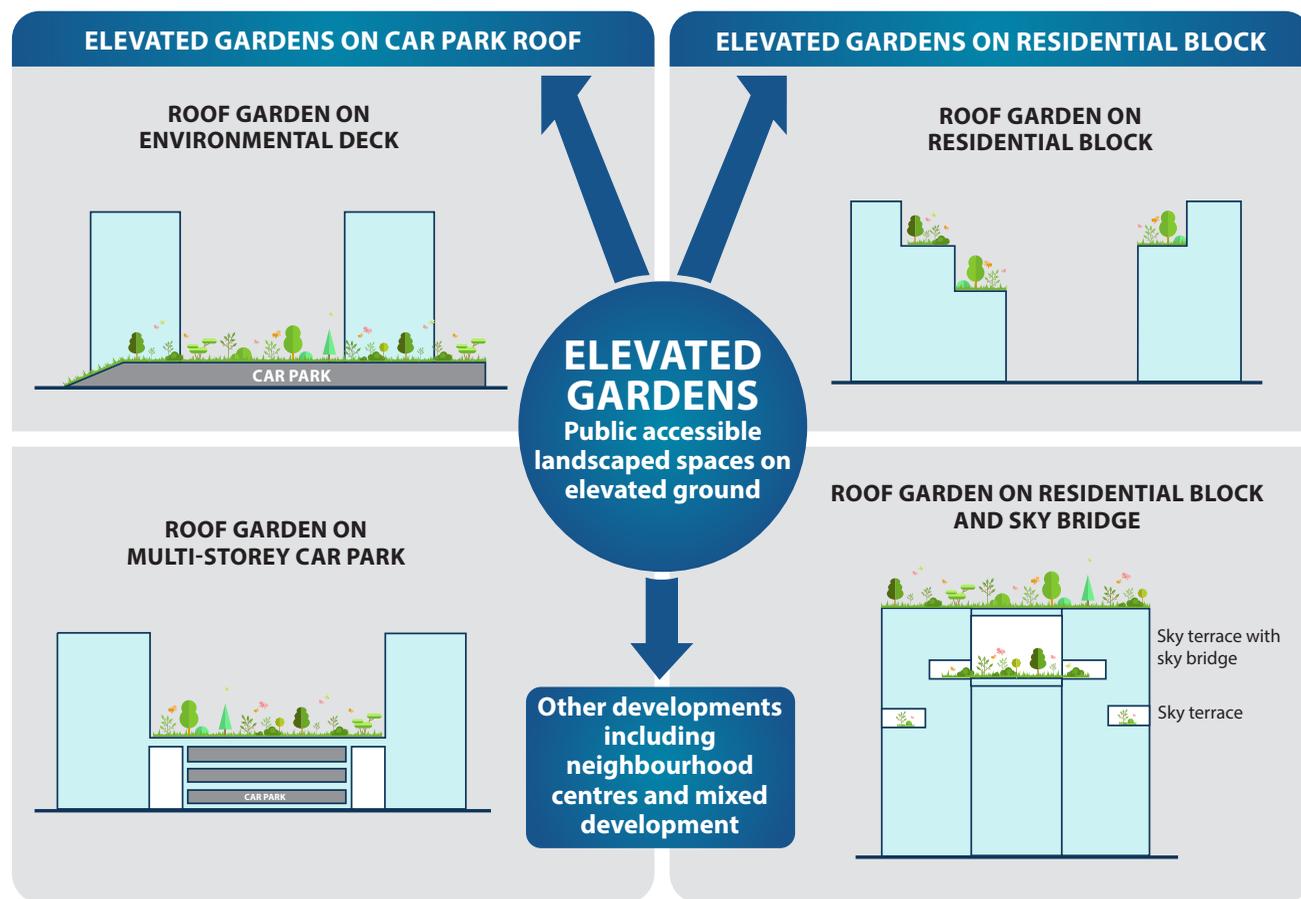
GnPR will help guide consultants in planning and choosing plants to effectively replace or increase greenery. It can also estimate the semi-mature greenery that will be achieved after planting, and serves as a check to ensure that adequate greenery is provided in the development.

Another indicator, Green Cover Provision, measures the percentage of land area covered by greenery as seen from the sky. It includes canopies of trees over paved areas, shrubs, and turf planting areas. From 2016, new housing developments have implemented an estimated green cover of 45-60% to improve thermal comfort for residents.

Over 80 projects across Singapore have adopted the higher greenery provisions, including Tampines GreenView, Bedok North Woods, West Plains @ Bukit Batok, and Anchorvale Plains.

### Raising the Bar

Today, plans are afoot to make HDB towns and estates even greener, with higher greenery provisions introduced for all new HDB projects designed from 2016. Greenery is incorporated into housing designs from the planning stage, so residents get to enjoy quality greenery from the onset of moving in.



(Above) The various types of elevated gardens found at HDB housing projects

## Housing-in-a-Park Realised

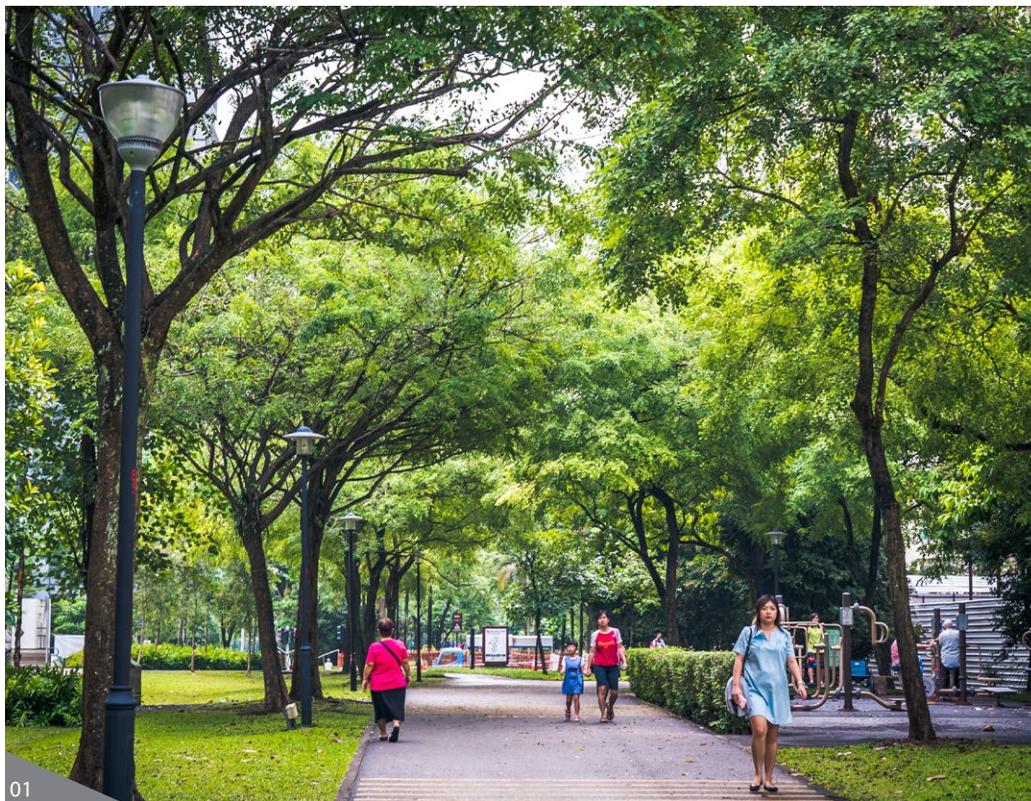
Apart from providing visual relief and shade, landscaping and greenery is leveraged to shape endearing and distinctive town identities.

In Dawson, ground-level and elevated gardens as well as lush landscaping will integrate seamlessly into the 7 new housing projects, bringing to life HDB's 'Housing-in-a-Park' vision, where residents live in a scenic park-like environment.

They can also look forward to a 200-metre long Dawson Eco-Corridor, a shaded pedestrianised street within SkyParc @ Dawson that connects to the precinct garden of SkyVille @ Dawson.

During Dawson's development, much care went into maintaining its rich biodiversity — about 80 mature trees were conserved, while more than 4,300 new trees from over 70 species will be planted in the estate. When fully completed, the Dawson developments will achieve a GnPR of more than 4.5 and an average of more than 50% green cover.

- 01 Mature trees are retained in Dawson to strengthen the estate's identity and provide residents with comfortable shaded areas as they use the parks
- 02 Lush greenery stacks surround SkyTerrace @ Dawson



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### Shaping an Urban Oasis

Inspired by the rolling greens and undulating topography, Bidadari will be transformed into a tranquil urban oasis, where residents can relax in a garden-like setting.

To be completed progressively by 2022, the 10-hectare Bidadari Park is a multi-agency collaboration between HDB, National Parks Board, PUB, Singapore's National Water Agency, and National Heritage Board. Situated in the heart of Bidadari estate, the park will adopt Bidadari's wooded and rustic nature, and create a unique park experience. Aside from experiential trails, the park will feature a new Alkaff Lake that aims to recreate the sense of tranquillity of the former Alkaff Lake Gardens, which was built in the area in 1929, and to double up as a stormwater retention pond.

Flanking Bidadari Park is the Bidadari Greenway, a 1.6-kilometre green spine traversing the full length of the housing estate from Bartley Road to Upper Serangoon Road. Facilities and amenities, such as rest stops, will line the Greenway, creating opportunities for interactions in lush landscapes. Pedestrian and cycling paths running through the Greenway will enable residents to walk and cycle seamlessly in the estate.

To bring back the rich heritage and memories of Bidadari, the former Upper Aljunied Road was expunged and will be transformed into a 700-metre Heritage Walk to safeguard the beautiful mature rain trees lining it. The Heritage Walk, which will cut across the park and link Woodleigh MRT station to a new Memorial Garden, will recount the history and stories of Bidadari through a series of storyboards.

### Gardens of Tengah

The masterplan for the 'forest town', Tengah, was unveiled in 2016, to much excitement, as the first HDB town to be sensitively integrated with the ecosystems surrounding it. One of the major features is the creation of a forest corridor, which will form part of the larger network of greenery that connects the Western Catchment Area and the Central Catchment Nature Reserve.

In Garden District, one of Tengah's 5 housing districts, a 900-metre Garden Farmway is planned as an organic and meandering common green, traversing several housing districts within the town. It will provide opportunities for social interaction among the Tengah community through shared recreational activities, such as hobby farming and gardening.

With designs inspired by nature or motifs such as flowers and garden creatures, 6 thematic playgrounds along the Garden Farmway will further strengthen the visual identity of the Garden District and inspire

imaginative play. The Farmway will also connect residents to two key recreational features in the town: the Tengah Pond, where residents will be able to take a stroll along the waterfront promenade; and the Central Park, an extensive 20-hectare green lung, where residents can enjoy a variety of recreational activities.



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03 Bidadari Greenway connects the housing precincts and the town's recreational facilities

04-05 Tengah residents at the Garden District can enjoy easy access to green spaces around home and within the town

*All perspectives used in this article are artists' impressions only; actual developments may differ*



## Landscapes of Keat Hong

Over in Choa Chu Kang, green spaces in Keat Hong Neighbourhood 8 are treated as a single landscape entity. Seamless connections between the landscaping and residential blocks take the form of paths, gentle ramps, and elevated link bridges, providing residents access to extensive greenery right at their doorstep.

Lush rooftop gardens built at the housing projects help to soften the urban edges and reduce heat gain. They can also be converted for gardening and farming use, creating opportunities for community bonding and interaction.

60 years on, HDB has progressed beyond providing basic brick-and-mortar flats to homes that immerse one in nature. Verdant landscapes are now integrated with high-rise buildings, strengthening the connection between the built environment and nature, and forming a mantle of greenery across all towns. [d](#)



# The Heartland Hero of Chai Chee

Behind the neat, ordered facades of HDB blocks is a living compendium of lives, people and stories; some more colourful than others, but all unique and interesting in their own special way. To ensure less privileged students in Kembangan-Chai Chee are able to enjoy opportunities and new experiences, Fung Chun Chang dedicates his time to mentoring them and creating a community where they can belong.

The friendship between 27-year-old Fung Chun Chang and 13-year old Azry seems like an unlikely one. Their paths crossed 4 years ago when Azry first attended a mentoring session helmed by volunteers, at the multi-purpose hall near his HDB block in Kembangan.

"I felt slightly out of place at first, but Chun Chang quickly made me feel welcomed," Azry recalls. "Having benefited from the mentorship, I now help out at events and befriend children in the neighbourhood. It makes me feel like an older brother to them!" he laughs.

Despite his full-time job as a business development manager, Chun Chang is committed to expanding the reach of KidzCare@Kembangan-Chai Chee. With both his home and workplace located within the Ubi neighbourhood, Chun Chang highlights how the ease of travel between Ubi and Chai Chee has allowed him to dedicate more time to his volunteering efforts.

We sat down with Chun Chang and Azry to find out more about their volunteering experience.

**Hello Chun Chang, tell us more about your mentoring programme.**

At first glance, some may mistake us for a tuition centre but we are more than that. Depending on the activities, we operate at varying locations, including Sunlove Study Spot and community centres located within the vicinity. We are volunteers who help students with their homework, and play sports or simply chat with them. We want to create a space where students can hang out and study at the same time.



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I started this programme in 2013 when I was in National Service. We only had a handful of students at the beginning, and the sessions were conducted at the void decks and pavilions beside basketball courts using makeshift tables and chairs. The location was not only easily accessed by children within the neighbourhood, but it also helped keep the sessions cosy and informal.

The programme was inspired by my first volunteer experience. I was accompanying a group of primary school students on an excursion to the Science Centre when they suddenly asked if they were overseas. It dawned on me that these children had spent most of their time within their own neighbourhood and had never visited the western part of Singapore. New experiences are a luxury to them.

01 Chun Chang (right) with his mentee Azry (left)

02-03 As part of the programme, Chun Chang and his fellow volunteers conduct tuition sessions as well as organise a variety of activities to provide the students with new experiences

We also noticed students who would hang around the neighbourhood aimlessly, sometimes late into the night. This was when we decided to reach out to this particular group of children to see how we can help.

**The programme looks very successful!**

Word got around over the years, and we now have about 180 participants. Some of our activities are held at community centres or multi-purpose halls. The programme has also become more structured. For example, the Homework Club is held every Thursday and Sunday evening. Students who require more academic help can attend tuition sessions conducted by teacher volunteers.



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We try to organise a variety of interesting and fun events to provide students with new experiences, such as baking sessions. With the help of our partners, we even managed to bring the students to Universal Studios Singapore! Another memorable event was attending the movie screening of *Captain America: Civil War*.

### What keeps you going as a volunteer?

I hold a full-time job, so juggling work and volunteering is definitely a challenge! However, the experience of watching the children grow and mature is very rewarding. Some of them even invite me to their Prize Giving day in school or Edusave Awards ceremony — it makes me proud to see how far they have come.

It's also heart-warming when the families keep me updated on their lives — some of our previous mentees and their family members, such as Azry and his mother, have even become volunteers!

Our volunteers come from all walks of life, but we share a common goal of wanting to provide children from less advantaged backgrounds with opportunities. Looking at how the programme has become what it is today makes the journey worthwhile. [d](#)

*This article first appeared on HDB's MyNiceHome, [www.mynicehome.sg](http://www.mynicehome.sg)*

04

Chun Chang and Azry have formed a strong bond over the years

# 1 1 dwellings

HARMONIOUS LIVING AT ITS BEST

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