

Core Area guideline revision to boost street vibrancy

By Carol Lim

Business operators in the Chinatown, Little India and Kampong Glam Historic Districts have good reason to cheer. On 26 September 2005, in response to public feedback and changing market needs, URA revised its conservation guidelines for the core areas in these districts while continuing to protect Singapore's built heritage.



HAVE YOU EVER noticed that trades such as car showrooms and workshops cannot be found in Chinatown, Little India and Kampong Glam? These uses are deemed as pollutive or incompatible with the character of these heritage areas. Indeed, conservation guidelines have been put in place to maintain the ambience of these areas.

But business models and economic cycles have changed over the past decade. To ensure the guidelines remain relevant, URA consulted stakeholders such as Citizens' Consultative Committees and Business Associations of the respective districts, as well as the Singapore Tourism Board and the Singapore Heritage Society. These groups provided valuable feedback and supported the proposed modifications of the core area boundaries and change of use guidelines.

Service shops allowed on all storeys

Under the revised guidelines, all service shops will now be allowed on all storeys of buildings in the core areas. This will benefit both residents and visitors. Previously, guidelines did not allow service shops on the first storey in

Shops along Pagoda Street, within Chinatown's core area



Traditional Chinese calligraphy writing enhances the character of Chinatown

former Istana Kampong Glam, as well as Haji Lane.

Dr Ameen Talib, Chairman of Kampong Gelam Business Association said: "We are delighted. Not only has URA taken into consideration our views and needs, it has also agreed to our recommendation to exclude bars, pubs and nightclubs from Haji Lane as well. Haji Lane is an important part of Kampong Glam and keeping its character is key to preserving the character of Kampong Glam."

Telok Ayer excluded as a core area

In recent years, the uses of the shophouses in the Telok Ayer core area have evolved towards small businesses and office set-ups, largely because of the area's proximity to the Central Business District and the newer commercial node of China Square. As such, Telok Ayer is now excluded as a core area under the revised core area boundary. With this, there is better focus in consolidating traditional activities by having one core area each in Chinatown, Kampong Glam and Little India.

The review of the Core Areas is part of URA's efforts to maintain a fine balance between conservation and economic viability. By involving stakeholders, conservation guidelines can be made more relevant while achieving the objectives of conservation. 

the core areas, with the exception of retail shops and eating establishments to promote vibrant street life. However, the operations of some service shops, such as travel agencies, banks and traditional medical clinics, have changed over the years and they may now sport active, transparent and vibrant shopfronts that will contribute to street vibrancy and could also be compatible with the setting.

Guidelines for Chinatown (Kreta Ayer) and Little India

Previous guidelines did not allow bars, pubs and health centres in the core areas as they tend to have shopfronts which are generally closed off from the street. However, we recognise that if they were allowed to operate within the core areas, they can bring vibrancy in the evenings. Taking into account the stakeholders' feedback, we have adopted a set of differentiated guidelines for these establishments in Chinatown and Little India.

Under the revised guidelines, health centres are now allowed on the upper storeys of Chinatown (Kreta Ayer) and Little India core areas.

Bars and pubs are now allowed on the upper storeys of the Chinatown (Kreta Ayer) core area on a temporary basis. Chairman of Chinatown Business Association, Mr Wong Chi Keong, enthused:

"This is a good move. It will draw more people and younger people to Chinatown, particularly at night, and make the area livelier at night. Our shops can open for longer hours, and tie in with the Chinatown night market."

Keeping the character of Kampong Glam core area

In reviewing the guidelines, URA is mindful that the changes will not result in the erosion of the character and ambience of these areas. In fact, some guidelines have to be tightened to preserve these traditional ethnic areas.

For example, health centres will continue to be excluded from the Kampong Glam core area. Bars, pubs and nightclubs are still not allowed in the Kampong Glam core area in view of its proximity to Sultan Mosque. Under the revised guidelines, the exclusion boundary area is extended to Sultan Gate, Kandahar Street, Baghdad Street, Pahang Street, Aliwal Street due to their proximity to Malay Heritage Centre which is located at the

What are core areas?

Chinatown, Kampong Glam and Little India Historic Districts - the traditional hearts of the Chinese, Malay and Indian communities in Singapore - were gazetted as conservation areas in 1989. Certain streets located within the Historic Districts were designated as core areas. These are areas where the ethnic trades and activities unique to the districts used to be concentrated. Originally, there were four designated core areas. With the exclusion of Telok Ayer core area after the guideline revision, there are now three designated core areas found in the Historic Districts, namely Chinatown (Kreta Ayer), Kampong Glam and Little India.