

# The importance of green space in cities

BY **ETHEL KHOO**  
city.country@bizedge.com

**G**reen areas or parks play an important role in creating a more sustainable and healthy environment in cities and also provide social and economic benefits, says ZerIn Properties research executive Choong Shuet Ee in a report entitled “Parks & Your City — Kuala Lumpur”.

“Due to rapid urbanisation, we can expect the city area to be a ‘pollution hot spot’. Plants and greenery can serve as natural air purifiers by removing pollutants and other harmful particles from the air. They are also able to reduce the urban heat island effect,” she writes.

A research report by the Forestry Commission of England and Scotland says investments in green space have a positive impact on constituent components, such as job creation, new business start-ups and private investment. As green space also serves as a tourism hot spot, it attracts visitors to the city and aids in the growth of the economy.

However, the Economic Transformation Programme 2014 report shows that Kuala Lumpur’s green space per capita dropped from 13 sq m in 2010 to 8.5 sq m in 2014, which is less than the World Health Organisation’s requirement of 9 sq m.

Choong points out that in 2014, the Kuala Lumpur City Hall (DBKL) alienated 47.4% of the 25-acre Taman Rimba Kiara to Yayasan Persekutan Wilayah, a foundation under its jurisdiction, and some 12.5 acres of the area have been allocated for high-rise developments.

Similarly, some 8.47ha of Taman Metropolitan Kepong were allegedly degazetted in 2015 for a mixed-use development.

“Land may be scarce in Kuala Lumpur but these green lungs must not be sacrificed. The Kuala Lumpur Structure Plan 2020 must be gazetted as soon as possible to preserve these green areas and, at the same time, increase public trust in the planning of land use by the city hall,” Choong observes in her report.

According to DBKL’s website, the plan aims to make positive changes to the physical environment in Kuala Lumpur without compromising the local environment and its ecology by 2020. It also targets to transform Kuala Lumpur into a liveable and attractive place for residents, businesses and tourists.

Choong, however, warns that while the government should look into creating more functional



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Central Park, New York (left) and the Singapore Botanic Gardens



parcs and not surrender green areas for development, increasing the number of parks will be a waste of resources if they are not frequented.

## What makes a park functional?

A survey of 669 people at five urban parks in Kuala Lumpur shows that only 9.9% visit the park daily, 41.3% visit once or twice a week and 41.4% once or twice a month. The survey was conducted by M Sreetheran of Universiti Putra Malaysia for a research journal from October 2012 to March 2013.

“There are many reasons why some parks are visited more than others. Parks that are visited more are usually functional and inspiring,” says Choong, adding that a successful park must be well planned and take into consideration the needs of all users, regardless of age and socioeconomic background.

A key factor is accessibility and road connectivity. “It is vital for parks to be located in areas that are accessible to private vehicles and public transport to ensure seamless connectivity,” Choong observes.

To attract people, parks must be well maintained with well-designed landscaping and sufficient facilities, such as parking space, toilets, picnic tables and washing areas. Choong also sees the need to increase interactive activities in parks, such as events, plays, concerts and other large-scale performances.

A major concern about parks is public safe-

ty and security. “If people don’t feel safe about going to parks, no matter how well planned or beautiful they are, people will stay away,” Choong says. She opines that the government should implement safety measures, such as assigning more enforcement officers, hiring more security guards, installing more CCTVs and having more police patrol the parks.

It is a fact that Malaysia’s tropical climate hinders people from visiting and enjoying parks. “We cannot change the weather but we can make it more bearable with proper landscaping and planting more trees to provide shade and shelter. Another way is to build more hardscape in the parks so that people will still visit on sunny or rainy days,” says Choong.

It is crucial for the government to come up with proper strategies to ensure that the existing and upcoming public parks in Kuala Lumpur are on a par with renowned international parks, such as the Singapore Botanic Gardens, Lumpini Parks in Bangkok, Hibiya Park in Tokyo, Central Park in New York and Hyde Park in London, Choong opines.

“Adopting and gazetted the Kuala Lumpur Structure Plan 2020 as soon as possible will be instrumental in establishing well-planned land usage in the city and also winning the trust of the public. The government must work hand in hand with the people to preserve a greener Malaysia for the future generations,” she concludes. ■

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**PAULSON LOH**  
(REN 01059)  
CITY REAL PROPERTIES

+6012 2045 168

[paulsonloh@gmail.com](mailto:paulsonloh@gmail.com)

B-2-10, Kuchai Exchange,  
No. 43, Kuchai Maju 13,  
58200 Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia.