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LEGALLY SPEAKING



SALLEH BUANG

REDEVELOPMENT

# HAVE URBAN RENEWAL LAW

The proposed redevelopment of Kampung Melayu Majidee is a stark reminder of the absence of a modern and comprehensive urban renewal law in our country

**A** FORMER colleague, a senior academician at a Johor-based university, surprised me with a question recently. We were having a coffee break on the second day of a national conference on construction and property development.

He asked me if I was aware of the proposed redevelopment of Kampung Melayu Majidee in Johor Baru. The plan to redevelop this old village, which has existed since the 15th century, was recently announced by Johor Baru Mayor Datuk Amran Abdul Rahman.

I came across the news recently but had not paid serious attention to it. I said it was about time the relevant authorities in Johor did something about the village, after the neighbouring army camp was closed down in January 2014 and all the military personnel relocated to a newly constructed camp in Batu Pahat. The sudden and totally unexpected closure of the camp was viewed by the residents as akin to a death knell for their village.

According to the mayor, this ambitious plan to upgrade the village was contained in the draft of the Johor Baru Special Area Plan 2030 (RKK 2030). He explained that RKK 2030 was a large-scale development plan to rejuvenate the village, currently having a population of 30,000.

As a "tourist attraction", the redeveloped village will contain "traditional houses with Limas elements" and an auditorium that will offer the villagers (and tourists) cultural activities, such as theatre, orchestra and traditional Malay dance performances. Incentives will be given to the owners of the traditional homes to beautify the landscape and carry out conservation efforts to attract tourists.

The proposed development of



Kampung Melayu Majidee has been earmarked for redevelopment into a tourist attraction.

Kampung Melayu Majidee is a stark reminder of the absence of a modern and comprehensive urban renewal law in our country. Undeniably, the drafting (and gazetting) of a Special Area Plan (RKK 2030), as announced by the Johor Baru mayor, is in line with our present town planning legislation — to wit, section 16B (Special Area Plan) of the Town and Country Planning Act 1976 (Act 172).

According to the mayor, RKK 2030 covers not only Kampung Melayu Majidee, but several other zones — Bandar Baru Uda, Larkin, Kebun Teh, Wadi Hana, Taman Pelangi, Stulang and Bakar Batu. He added that the local authority will upgrade all historic buildings within the planned development area and recreational areas such as the riverside, landscaping it with murals and graffiti, and generally beautifying the place. RKK 2030 is currently on public display until May 30. Johor Baru residents are welcome to submit their "suggestions or disagreements" online to the local authority's website, [www.mbjb.gov.my](http://www.mbjb.gov.my).

On April 8, Federal Territories Minister Khalid Abdul Samad

told the Dewan Rakyat that Malaysia does not have a specific law for urban redevelopment. Currently, redevelopment is carried out "using only guidelines under the Town and Country Planning Act 1976".

These guidelines involve four categories — urban redevelopment, rehabilitation, preservation and revitalisation.

"Therefore, to ensure urban redevelopment is more effective, a new legislation is needed," he said. The minister did not indicate any timeline for the new law to be tabled in Parliament.

However, as I read closely the context of his speech in Parliament on that day, I realised that what the minister was referring to was a modern urban renewal law affecting old strata schemes (updating section 57 of the Strata Titles Act 1985), but not covering the wider issues of urban redevelopment affecting old settlements within city limits like Kampung Melayu Majidee.

We should remind ourselves that under the National Urbanisation Policy, urban development must give priority to renewal through, *inter alia*, redevelopment programmes for brownfield

areas and rehabilitating polluted areas.

According to Azmizam Abdul Rashid of the Federal Department of Town and Country Planning, Kuala Lumpur City Hall had in the past identified 35 sites for urban renewal, most of which are privately owned land comprising a total of 548 hectares.

Its approach to urban regeneration had taken three forms — one, total redevelopment (as in Sentul Raya); two, revitalisation (as in Brickfields) and three, conservation and preservation (as in the Central Market).

In the case of Kampung Melayu Majidee, the old Malay village is given a second life via revitalisation and rebirth as a heritage city cum tourist attraction.

Looking at our current urban redevelopment landscape, it is unlikely that we will have a comprehensive Urban Renewal Act (like those in force in other jurisdictions such as Ireland, Taiwan and Australia) anytime soon.

The writer formerly served the Attorney-General's Chambers before he left for private practice, the corporate sector and academia.

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