URBAN REDEVELOPMENT AUTHORITY

Summary of Response to Feedback on Environmental Impact Study for Springleaf

I. Overview: Approach to planning and greenery

The Government takes a holistic and long-term approach to planning as it allows us to judiciously steward Singapore's limited land resources and guide sustainable development, while achieving social, economic and environmental outcomes, and meet the aspirations and needs of Singaporeans. This means continuing to carefully balance demand for land to meet a variety of needs, such as housing, green spaces, workplaces, schools and recreational spaces.

Even as we develop to meet our land use needs, the Government is committed to stewarding and protecting our green spaces. When there is a need to develop greenfield, vegetated sites or sites in close proximity to sensitive nature areas, we will carry out environmental studies to better understand the topography, hydrology, flora and fauna of the area. This allows us to take a science-based approach towards greenery and wildlife management, and inform our planning and development strategy for the area. This process will help to improve how we co-exist with nature and wildlife, and integrate greenery into our urban landscape. Any decision to proceed is made only after studying the trade-offs and alternatives, including undertaking an environmental study when required.

Currently, we continue to see strong demand for housing across the island, with good connection to transport networks, amenities, and services. To meet these demands and aspirations, the Government continues to strive towards providing accessible homes by expanding our transport network, and by developing and rejuvenating sites along transport networks. With the opening of Springleaf MRT station in 2021, this area provides an opportunity to plan housing developments where future residents can leverage on improved accessibility to transport networks, as well as enjoy the rich biodiversity of nearby Springleaf Forest.

A science-based approach was adopted in developing the plans for Springleaf, to balance the retention of nature areas and meeting housing needs.

II. Site context and milestones

Bounded by the Seletar Expressway, Mandai Road, and Upper Thomson Road, the 33-hectare Springleaf estate has been zoned for mixed commercial and residential, park, and reserve site in URA's Master Plan since 2014. The plan is to provide about 2,000 new housing units and more nature-based recreation opportunities to the public, leveraging on improved accessibility in this area after the opening of Springleaf MRT station in 2021.

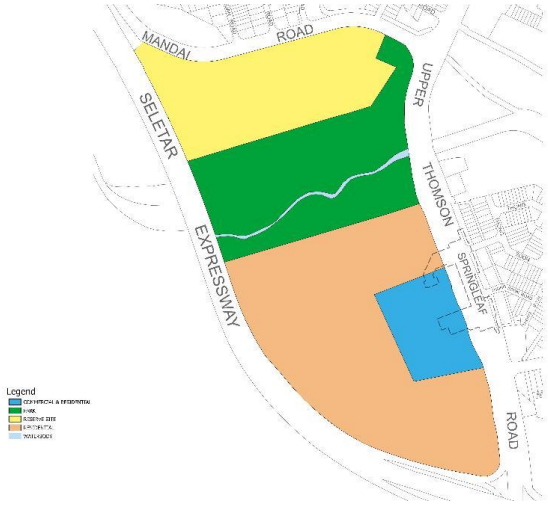

Figure 1: Zoning of Springleaf in the Master Plan 2019, with Springleaf MRT on the eastern boundary

The Springleaf precinct is located between the Central Catchment Nature Reserve (CCNR) and Upper Seletar Reservoir to the west, and Springleaf Nature Park and Lower Seletar Reservoir to the east. Today, the precinct is predominantly a forested zone with a low-rise urbanized edge along Upper Thomson Road, where the new Springleaf MRT Station, cleared land surrounding the MRT station and buildings of heritage significance like the former Seletar Institute and the former Nee Soon Post Office are situated.

Figure 2: Springleaf and its surroundings

The forested portions of the precinct, also known as Springleaf Forest, is characterised by lush vegetation and is home to a rich variety of native flora and fauna, including threatened and endangered plant and animal species. It is also ecologically connected to the CCNR and NSSF, with Sungei Seletar as the sole hydrological outlet from both the Upper Seletar Reservoir and the NSSF into the Lower Seletar Reservoir downstream.

Given the sensitivity of the precinct, URA commissioned an environmental baseline study from 2018 to 2020 to better understand the types of landscapes and habitats, as well as flora and fauna species within Springleaf Forest.

The environmental baseline study revealed that the core area of the freshwater swamp is home to a variety of flora and fauna species. In particular, several flora species such as *Aglaia yzermannii* are found only within Springleaf and the immediate surrounding forests, and not anywhere else in Singapore. Areas that are ecologically most sensitive were identified and classified as Significant Conservation Areas (SCAs) within which no development should take place to protect the biodiversity.

Based on these conceptual ideas, the consultancy team conducted an EIA in 2020 to better understand the potential environmental impacts. An Environmental Management and Monitoring Plan (EMMP) detailing recommended mitigation measures and a broad framework to guide future EMMPs that are specific to development proposals was also prepared as part of the report.

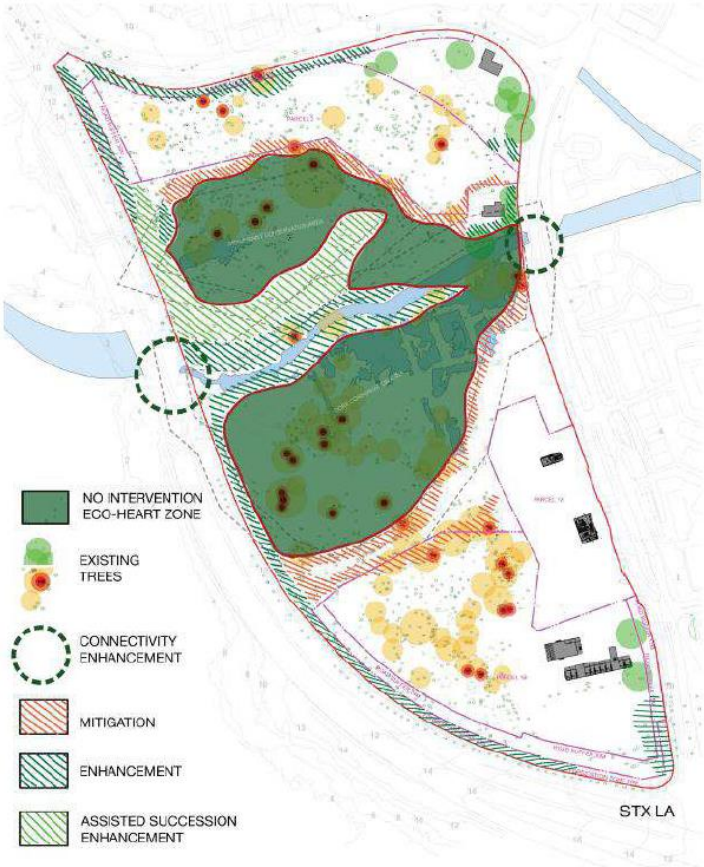

Figure 3: Designating SCAs and immediate areas as 'No-Go Zones' and targeted tree planting within habitats (Source: STX Landscape Architects)

NParks also undertook an Ecological Profiling Exercise (EPE) to study the movement of animals across Singapore which identified an ecological corridor (i.e. Khatib Nature Corridor) comprising forested sites at Springleaf, Springleaf Nature Park, Tagore, Miltonia Close and along Lower Seletar Reservoir, to connect source populations of native biodiversity at Central Catchment Nature Reserve and Khatib Bongsu Nature Park.

III. Engagement with stakeholders

URA had engaged industry experts, academics, nature and heritage expert groups on a regular basis to take in feedback and suggestions for sensitive development in Springleaf. In the last three years, five separate engagement sessions were carried out as part of the consultancy study. Feedback and ideas from these sessions, such as habitat enhancement within core areas in Springleaf through targeted tree planting and reducing the number of Tree Cottages, have been incorporated by the consultants into their conceptual design and its impacts studied in the EIA.

The EIA report was also published online for public feedback from 6 June 2022 – 4 July 2022. In total, 28 responses were received.

IV. Feedback received

We value the feedback from our partners and members of the public, and have reviewed all the suggestions.

Most of the feedback received were about general concerns on the loss of greenery, the importance of Springleaf forest and its role in providing ecosystems services, as well as the impact of high-density development on the surroundings. Some also provided suggestions on how development can be carried out sensitively and ways to better manage human and wildlife interactions in the new development, recognising that humans play an important role in ensuring that humans and nature can live harmoniously in close proximity to one another.

We also noted some feedback on the need for amenities in this area to serve both existing and future residents, as well as suggestions on the type of desired facilities.

We are deeply appreciative.

V. Response to feedback

We are mindful of the need to develop sensitively and factor in environmental considerations in all phases of our plans.

Taking into consideration the feedback received, the EIA findings, and the findings from NParks' EPE, we have adopted several strategies and measures to address them:

A. **Designate a new park at the Springleaf site:** The majority of forested land in Springleaf, comprising significant conservation areas and their immediate surroundings, will be designated as a Nature Park to serve as biodiversity refugia and ecological connectivity as part of the newly established Khatib Nature Corridor between the Central Catchment Nature Reserve and Khatib Bongsu Nature Park. This

will be known as Nee Soon Nature Park, an extension of the Nee Soon Swamp Forest in the Central Catchment Nature Reserve.

B. **Concentrate developments on less sensitive grounds and existing cleared and developed land to protect core biodiversity areas:** After careful consideration of feedback received, and after relooking plans in close consultation with our agency partners, additional forested areas will be safeguarded to bolster ecological resilience due to importance of the site. URA will also not be pursuing the Tree Cottages shown in the EIA report as they will involve significant impact on forests. Instead, developments will be concentrated on less sensitive grounds and existing cleared and developed land as far as possible, such as the land around Springleaf MRT station and the former Seletar Institute.

Figure 4: Conceptual plan of Springleaf

C. **Biophilic design of future developments:** Agencies are studying all recommendations and suggestions to reduce the impact of buildings through innovative building design strategies. Greenery will feature prominently in the developments in Springleaf, and careful thought will be given to introducing guidelines and requirements to mitigate the environmental impact. Some examples include treating building facades to reduce bird strikes, encouraging native planting palettes where appropriate to reduce the risk of invasive species entering adjacent forests, and having lush and native landscaping to attract birds and butterflies.

D. **Forested edges for wildlife connectivity along site boundaries:** In response to feedback and suggestions to develop sensitively while ensuring that ecological connections are not compromised, agencies will safeguard additional stretches of greenery along development boundaries where possible, and further study ways to enhance ecological connectivity beyond Springleaf.

E. **Management of human-wildlife interactions:** URA is working closely with agencies to consider how public education, community stewardship, wildlife population ecology and management initiatives can be applied to Springleaf, to create an environment where residents can co-exist with nature.

F. **Implementation of Environmental Monitoring and Management Plan (EMMP):** Developers will be required to engage a specialist EMMP consultant to develop an EMMP to mitigate and manage any potential environmental impact throughout the construction phase.

G. **Phased development approach:** In response to feedback on the potential impact of construction and development on the retained forested areas, URA will take on a phased development approach for monitoring of environmental impact and implementing the necessary environmental mitigation measures.

As with all land use and development plans, the Government will continue to conduct regular reviews and engage stakeholders to ensure that plans remain relevant to the changing needs of Singaporeans.