



Budding Town: Punggol

By [PEARL LIM](#)

Some 200 years ago, when Sir Stamford Raffles first landed on Singapore it was a sleepy fishing island. Punggol, too, was a place where farming and fishing activities flourish. One of the oldest settlements, it is there where the infamous 1942 Punggol Beach Massacre occurred. Fast-forward to the 1990s, and Punggol is considered the backwater in modern Singapore, that is famed for its seafood restaurants.

But, in August 1996, Punggol was awakened from its slumber when then-Prime Minister Goh Chok Toh revealed plans to develop it into a waterfront town consisting of private and public housings, alongside water recreational facilities. The smooth development of the project, Punggol 21, however was stalled by the outbreak of the Asian financial crisis in 1997. Furthermore in 2003, financial crisis hit the construction industry, leaving beleaguered construction companies unable to complete HDB flats in a timely fashion. Indeed, some 560 flat buyers had to look for alternative housing after their flats could not be completed on schedule.

Coordination problems also beset the development of Punggol. The Punggol LRT which was completed in 2004 (Ng), has its western loop, consisting of seven stations, remains unopened till today because a low population density in its vicinity - the upshot of the slow housing development there.

Despite the hiccup in development, the Government continues to push forward in its



development plans. In 2007, PM Lee Hsien Loong, launched the Punggol 21-Plus plan to build more housings and facilities there. The centrepiece was the 4.2km-long Punggol Waterway, known as My Waterway@Punggol, which he inaugurated in October 2011. The \$225- million waterway boosts a Kelong bridge, eco-friendly features among other recreational amenities. Users get to enjoy a range of recreational activities, like cycling and kayaking, while immersing themselves in lush greenery and beautiful water features. For all these, some have proclaimed the waterway the 'Venice of Punggol'. Its unique features and innovative designs have garnered it two international awards this year: the “Grand Prize for Excellence in Environmental Engineering” and the “Global Superior Achievement Award”, presented by the American Academy of Environmental Engineers (AAEE) and the International Water Association, respectively. This makes Singapore the first Asian country to clinch these awards.



Source: “HDB’s Punggol Waterway Clinches its First International Award for Environmental Sustainability”



Within a year, the Housing and Development Board (HDB) unveiled the second phase of development for Punggol in October 2012. National Development Minister Khaw Boon Wan announced plans to create seven distinctive housing districts (Waterway East, Waterway West, Northshore District, Matilda District, Punggol Point District, Crescent District, and Canal District) there and to increase the number of apartments from the current 26,000 to 100,000. Developments for Waterway East and Waterway West are currently under way, while that for Northshore District and Matilda District will start within the next five years. Plans are also made to increase the educational, commercial and communities facilities there. Current green spaces are to be enhanced, with new ones to be added. (“HDB Embarks on Second Phase of Development for Punggol Town”).

Notwithstanding the comprehensive plans, Punggol still has some way to go before it can be a well-established waterfront town to rival Pasir Ris and Bedok. Both Pasir Ris and Bedok are self-contained towns where residents can not only call the place home, but also enjoy ample employment opportunities and recreational activities there (Lee). For Punggol, however, there is a clear imbalance between employment opportunities and residents population. In the next five years, the number of completed private homes are expected to soar from the current 114 units to 6,618; while HDB flats will jump from the present 18,000 to 35,000. But the supply of jobs is not expected to keep pace. Apart from the lack of jobs, Punggol also has a shortage of retail amenity. So far, Punggol Plaza remains the only shopping mall in the area. But this is set to change in 2015 when a new shopping mall (Waterway Point) springs up next to Punggol MRT.

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