

Buffer zones should be part of Mandai redevelopment, say green groups



SINGAPORE — In response to the Government's plans to redevelop Mandai, nature groups yesterday called for buffer zones to be created between any future man-made and existing forest areas and for the minimisation of any impact on the ecosystem.

BY XUE JIANYUE - SEPTEMBER 6

SINGAPORE — In response to the Government's plans to redevelop Mandai, nature groups yesterday called for buffer zones to be created between any future man-made and existing forest areas and for the minimisation of any impact on the ecosystem.

The groups also welcomed the Government's decision to seek their advice on its plans for the area, which is currently home to the Singapore Zoo, Night Safari and the River Safari.

In a joint statement yesterday, the Singapore Tourism Board and the National Parks Board (NParks) said the latter will guide the development so it is sustainable for and sensitive to the natural environment.

The statement reiterated that views from nature groups would be sought to ensure the sustainable development of the area.

It added: "The development should not encroach on the nature reserves and reservoirs. An Environmental Impact Assessment will need to be undertaken to avoid or mitigate any impact of the development on the nature reserves and reservoirs. Through sensitive design and management, the development could potentially strengthen and enhance the nature reserves."

While he noted that more details had yet to be revealed, Mr Tay Kae Fong, president of the Jane Goodall Institute (Singapore), said any redevelopment should "work with the land", which meant taking time to study the ecology of the forests that surround the new attraction and minimising the number of trees that would need to be cut.

"What I don't want to see is them bulldozing the entire place down, (leaving a) blank canvas, and then they start doing planting and manicuring the whole place because they want it to be grand. I'm hoping they would take into account what's already there," said Mr Tay.

To reduce any adverse impact on the animal wildlife there, nature groups have called for buffer zones to be set up along the forest edge to separate it from man-made infrastructure.

Nature Trekker founder Ben Lee said this was necessary, as the redevelopment would increase road traffic in Mandai significantly.

Passing traffic could kill animals such as the macaque monkeys, which dwell in the periphery of the forests, said Animal Concerns Research and Education Society (ACRES) founder Louis Ng, who had previously called for such buffers to be created in the Dairy Farm area.

He said the authorities have approached ACRES on two occasions since the start of the year and he hoped they would continue to do so.

As part of the redevelopment plans, the Jurong Bird Park could be relocated to Mandai.

Mr Ng said the bird park's relocation presented an opportunity to redesign the park and replace outdated small cages with larger enclosures. "It's moving in the right direction. A lot of new enclosures are already free-ranging for the birds, whereas the old ones are all cages. We are hopeful that as they move and develop a new bird park, they will follow and move along what they have already been doing to more free-ranging enclosures."

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