

Kimberley Street's pre-war homes is new spot for Penang's heritage trades

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By Opalyn Mok



One of the shophouses along Kimberley Street that will be restored. — Pictures by KE Ooi

GEORGE TOWN, April 8 — A row of pre-war shophouses previously earmarked for restoration will now become a pilot project for green, heritage spaces that can be divided to accommodate more tenants.

Penang Island City Council (MBPP), in collaboration with George Town World Heritage Inc (GTWHI) and Think City rolled out this project after extensive consultation with stakeholders including local residents, Penang Heritage Trust (PHT) and Penang Apprenticeship Programmes For Artisans (PAPA).

The five units of Category II heritage shophouses along Kimberley Street were initially earmarked to house traditional trades to preserve the outstanding universal value (OUV) of the heritage zone after restoration works.

Today, the project has become the council's pilot project for Green Building Index (GBI) compliant heritage buildings that could be divided into smaller spaces.

The row that has five double-storey units and a half unit at the corner will be divided into smaller spaces to accommodate eight tenants once completed.



The layers of tiles on the floor tells the history of the pre-war shophouses along Kimberley Street.

MBPP heritage conservation department director Noorhanis Noordin said physical restoration works started in January this year.

"Each unit will be restored and extended in accordance with heritage guidelines so that we could fully utilise the space," she said in an interview with the Malay Mail Online.

Two of the shophouses will be divided into four separate spaces, where each unit will have one space downstairs and a separate space upstairs with a separate entrance.

"We will follow the original structure of these pre-war buildings as close as possible with modifications to divide up the space," Noorhanis said.

MBPP has set aside RM3 million for the restoration works of all five and a half units.



The frontage of the five shophouses along Kimberley Street.

"There are five double-storey shophouses here but the corner is unique as there is a half unit upstairs while the ground floor is an alleyway to allow access to the back lane," she said.

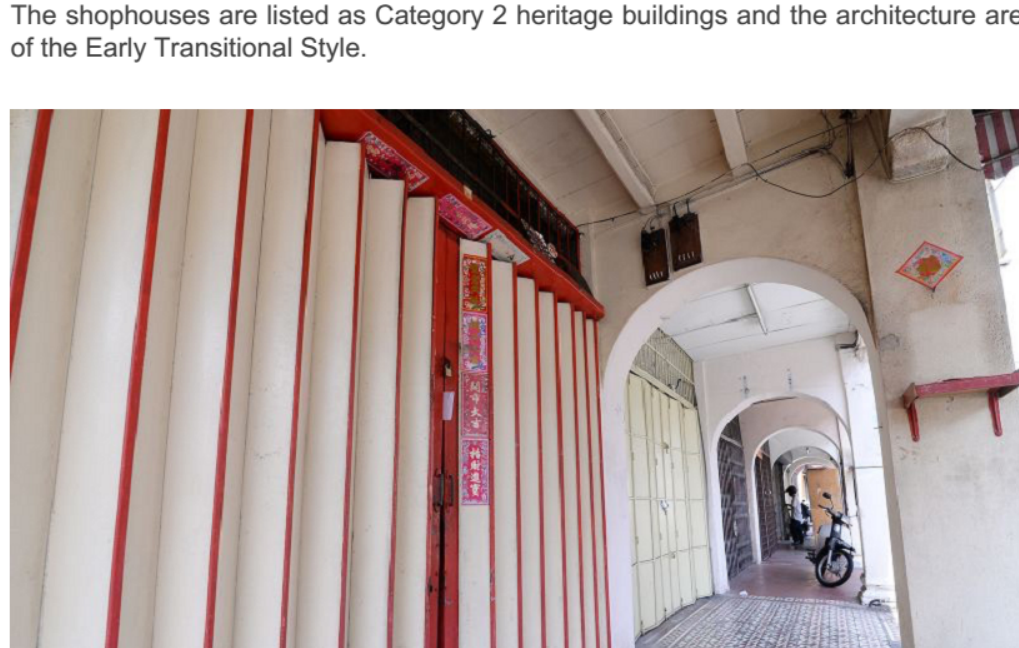
The half unit will also be used as a single space that is accessible separately from its adjoining unit. It was previously accessible through the unit next to it.

The three shophouses will be rented out to tenants who will operate their trades downstairs while they live upstairs, which was the original use of many pre-war shophouses in the heritage zone.

A site visit to the shophouses showed that extensive restoration works are underway amidst peeling walls and decaying wooden floors and staircases.

Noorhanis said the row of buildings were originally built more than 100 years ago and were not destroyed and rebuilt during World War II.

The shophouses are listed as Category 2 heritage buildings and the architecture are of the Early Transitional Style.



Eng Heong Lan Praying Materials Shop has been selling praying materials at Kimberley Street has finally closed recently when rental rates was increased.

Restoration works are expected to complete by the middle of next year and tenants will be able to move in by the end of next year.

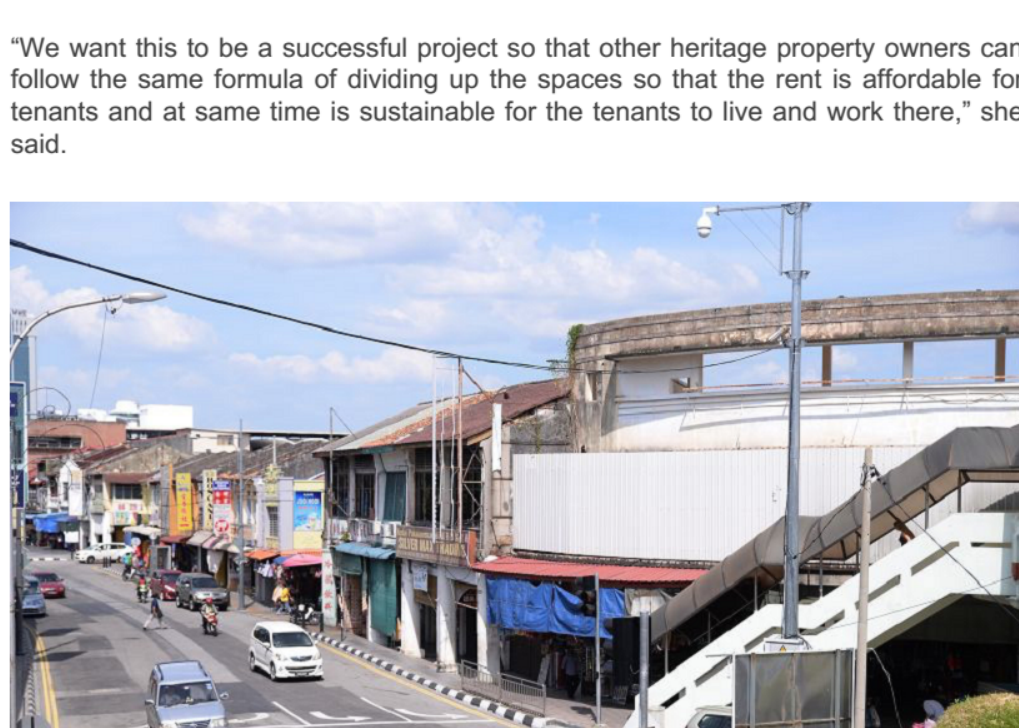
GTWHI will be working on a plan and programme to rent out the restored premises to local traditional trades and tenants.

GTWHI general manager Ang Ming Chee said they are still finalising the programmes for the shophouses.

"We are not looking at it as only a space for artisans but we want to generate a model or formula for traditional traders to work their craft and compete in the market in sustainable ways," she said.

She said they are consulting stakeholders and studying how it was done in other countries before coming up with a programme.

"We want this to be a successful project so that other heritage property owners can follow the same formula of dividing up the spaces so that the rent is affordable for tenants and at same time is sustainable for the tenants to live and work there," she said.



A stretch of 55 shophouses along Penang Road, Kimberley Street and Jalan Dr Lim Chwee Leong saw sudden rental hikes this year when the tenants renew their contracts with the owner.

She added that they have to consider factors such as maintaining the OUV of the area such as protecting living heritage and a multicultural society in planning the programmes for the shophouses.

The idea to restore the row of shophouses to later rent it to traditional trades was introduced by Penang Chief Minister Lim Guan Eng last year.

The shophouses, which belonged to the MBPP, were one of the state's solutions to protect traditional trades within the heritage zone.