

# Sembawang GRC Town Plan

Putting the ♥ in Heartland



**Singapore Democratic Party**

新加坡民主党 • Parti Demokratik Singapura • சிங்கப்பூர் ஜனநாயகக் கட்சி

# Introduction

The SDP's Sembawang GRC Town Plan presents a bold and refreshing vision for the constituency and those within its Northern Strategy.<sup>1</sup> As Sembawang prepares for the 2025 General Election, there is a real opportunity to reimagine what it means to build a town for the people – one that puts community, connection and care back at the centre of everyday life.

This plan builds on the SDP's previous proposals for Sembawang in 2011, titled the "People's Plan" and "Re-Generation Plan" which championed a people-centric approach to economic development and environmental protection.<sup>2</sup> Principles of the SDP's 2025 Town Plan can also be adapted where appropriate, through Town Hall discussions, to the other constituencies within SDP's Northern Strategy.

Sembawang GRC is located in the northern region of Singapore and largely overlaps with the Sembawang planning area and residential town. Its population is predominantly of working age: 30.8% are aged 26-45 and 29.2% are aged 46-65. Seniors aged 65 and above make up 11.3%, while nearly 30% are under 25. Ethnically, 66% are Chinese, followed by significant Malay (21%) and Indian (10%) communities, and a small proportion (3%) of other groups.<sup>3</sup> In the 2025 election, the GRC will have 134,103 eligible voters.

## Background

Since its creation in 1988, Sembawang GRC has consistently been held by the PAP, despite being contested since the 2006 General Election. As a town largely planned and built from scratch, Sembawang reflects a top-down, technocratic approach to urban planning that lacks a people-centred approach.

From the 2006 elections, the PAP has campaigned in Sembawang with the following promises. In 2006, a major campaign strategy used by the PAP was to pass off the lift upgrading programme promised to Sembawang as part of a nationwide lift upgrading initiative as its own. The lift upgrading initiative was first introduced in 2001, and its promotion was intensified just before the 2006 polling date.<sup>4</sup>

A month before the 2011 election, then MP and Health Minister Khaw Boon Wan proposed a renewal plan for Sembawang worth SGD 500 million that included the construction of housing units, among others.<sup>5</sup> In contrast, when the SDP's contested in 2011, its plans for Sembawang presented an approach focused on creating local jobs, stimulating business activity, and promoting community development through initiatives like service-based employment, eco-tourism, and advocating for the long-delayed regional centre in Woodlands; while at the same time improving and building on the infrastructure and amenities in the area.<sup>6</sup>

In 2015, PAP continued to highlight public housing projects, including grants and the building of more flats; while mentioning, in broad but underdeveloped terms, that it will seek public consultation and build a "community hub" that will serve as a public space for the neighbourhood.<sup>7</sup> Ahead of the 2020 general election, the PAP, referring to

1 James Gomez (2025) '[Sembawang GRC: Completing SDP's Northern Strategy](#)', jamesgomez.sg.

2 farism (2011) '[SDP unveils plans to rejuvenate Sembawang GRC](#)', Yahoo! News.

3 The Straits Times (2025) '[Sembawang](#)', The Straits Times.

4 Tay Shi'an (2010) '[Lift upgrading no longer an election carrot?](#)', The New Paper.

5 meiyingt (2011) '[Sembawang GRC unveils S\\$500 million renewal plan](#)', Yahoo! News.

6 farism (2011) '[SDP unveils plans to rejuvenate Sembawang GRC](#)', Yahoo! News.

7 CNA (2015) '[Khaw Boon Wan speaks at the PAP rally in Woodlands](#)', CNA; CNA (2015) '[Ong Ye Kung speaks at PAP rally in Woodlands](#)', CNA.

the Urban Redevelopment Authority's 2019 Master Plan for Sembawang as part of the northern region, made reference to integrated projects focusing on infrastructural development.<sup>8</sup> For the 2025 election, the PAP has pointed to URA's planned development of a seafront district on the waterfront land in Sembawang that will be freed up once the Sembawang Shipyard relocates.<sup>9</sup>

What this shows is that the PAP's electoral campaigns for Sembawang have largely relied on repackaging existing national development plans as constituency-specific promises and accomplishments. This has not gone unnoticed – over the years, Singaporeans are increasingly critical of such top-down, repackaged messaging.

## Human-centric as Opposed to Urban-centric

Over the years, through national plans, Sembawang has developed into a network of spaced residential clusters. Quantifiable metrics like land use, density and economic output guide land development while human needs and a sense of community are taken out of the calculus.<sup>10</sup>

This approach reflects a technocratic model that departs from how towns can be urbanised more organically through a Human-centric Design, with less centralised control by state planners, party-linked representatives, and approved developers. This technocratic approach shapes not only the physical layout of towns like Sembawang but also estate upgrading initiatives and town council masterplans, which are derived directly from URA national plans but highlighted by the PAP during election times.

The result is an urban landscape and a PAP approach that lacks “heart” – ground-up community initiatives. Missing are the integrated amenities corridors, local businesses embedded in housing estates, green connectors and walking trails and informal civic spaces – features that support vibrant and community-oriented towns.<sup>11</sup> While there have been some movements in this area, the ground-up community element is starkly absent. Take, for example, the once vibrant neighbourhood coffee shops that have now been overshadowed by centrally managed food courts; while local businesses operate primarily within “malls” rather than within the community itself.

While official narratives emphasise community and co-creation,<sup>12</sup> public participation is often superficial, with meaningful decision-making power resting firmly with PAP and the People's Association.<sup>13</sup> Moreover, the few remaining opportunities for social interaction are often dictated by the People's Association, with events and gatherings endorsed or organised by PAP MPs. These PAP-People's Association activities create an environment where social participation is more of a top-down initiative than a genuine grassroots one.<sup>14</sup>

This model has shaped Sembawang GRC for decades – but it need not define its future. It is time to move away from this top-down, technocratic model towards an approach that places residents and communities at the centre of town planning so as to reflect the needs and aspirations of the people who live there.

8 URA (2019) 'North Region: Master Plan 2019', URA.

9 Tay Hong Yi (2025) 'Ong Ye Kung says he expects a three-way contest in Sembawang GRC', The Straits Times.

10 Donald McNeill (2019) 'Volumetric Urbanism: The Production and Extraction of Singaporean Territory', Environment and Planning A: Economy and Space 51(4).

11 Object Lessons Space (2020) 'Diana Rahim on documenting hostile architecture, questioning the arbiters of public space and the importance of spatial justice', Object Lessons Space.

12 Toh Yong Chuan (2015) 'On the campaign trail with PAP's Ong Ye Kung', The Straits Times.

13 Foong Swee Fong (2025) 'How the PAP reshapes community bonds to strengthen State control', The Online Citizen.

14 Ibid.



The SDP recognised this early on; in its 2011 plan, it offered an alternative vision. Building on that foundation, it now presents its 2025 plan – one that deepens its commitment to people-centred development and reimagines Sembawang as a vibrant, inclusive and locally empowered town – which can be extended through Town Hall discussions to the other constituencies within SDP’s Northern Strategy.

## A Plan With A Heart

The SDP reaffirms its commitment to addressing long-standing municipal concerns – such as sheltered walkways, improved drainage for areas and buildings that face ponding issues after heavy rains and better last-mile connectivity. These foundational issues remain a priority, and we will organise regular Town Hall discussions to gather feedback to implement improvements that make daily life safer and more convenient for all residents.

The SDP also supports the planned redevelopments in the Sembawang area, including the new public library at Canberra House, the former Sembawang Shipyard area and the new green spaces in the URA Master Plan.<sup>15</sup>

Beyond these essential upgrades, our plan includes people-focused initiatives that reflect the true “heart” of community-building – creating inclusive spaces where residents feel supported, connected and proud to call Sembawang GRC home. Here are our proposals on accessibility, youth support and environmental protection.



### 1) Better Bicycle Management

Sembawang is seeing a rise in cycling, particularly among young families and environmentally conscious residents, yet its current bicycle infrastructure remains inadequate – marked by disjointed lanes, limited parking and ageing bikes often left unsecured or dumped in corners under the flats and along its corridors and stairwells. To tackle these issues, the installation of secure, well-maintained bicycle parking and bicycle rejuvenation facilities at strategic points is essential. These initiatives aim to improve mobility, provide proper “homes” for bicycles, reduce bike neglect, and foster a greener, more connected community.

### 2) Community Storage Facilities

Residents have large items and other household effects that need safe storage and protection from the elements. Unable to find space within their homes, these items are sometimes stored along the common corridors and stairwells. We suggest looking into building affordable storage facilities under the blocks for easy access, safety and protection of the items stored. These facilities provide a convenient solution for residents to securely store their belongings while ensuring common spaces within the flats remain safe and accessible. The storage facilities can also incorporate automated collection lockers for online purchases, allowing residents to pick up their parcels at their convenience while keeping them safe.



<sup>15</sup> URA (2025) ‘A Vibrant Northern Gateway with Opportunities for Everyone’, URA.



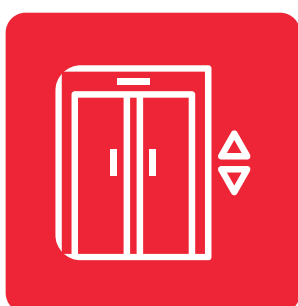
### 3) Resident Co-working Spaces

As Sembawang grows, so does the need for public spaces that support modern ways of working, studying and collaborating. Existing facilities, such as public libraries, are often limited in capacity, overly rigid in use, or not well-suited for larger group-based activities. For budding entrepreneurs, students as well as residents alike, we propose the development of a co-working

space that better support the evolving needs of the community. This space would be designed to accommodate activities ranging from quiet study and remote work to small group discussions. It would include practical features such as shared tables, easy chairs, ample power outlets, and reliable Wi-Fi, all within an air-conditioned environment. By providing a flexible and accessible space for learning, working, and connecting, this initiative aims to reflect the growing demand for inclusive public facilities that support both individual and collective development.

### 4) More Seats for the Elderly

Sembawang's elders rely on public spaces for rest and social interaction. However, the availability of seating in public areas can be increased and provided with shelter where feasible, making it easier for seniors to access comfortable spaces for rest during their outings. To this end, we propose installing more wheelchair friendly seating areas in high-traffic areas and communal spaces. This could include outdoor areas in shopping precincts or along pedestrian walkways, where elderly residents can rest in between journeys, meet their neighbours or sit and enjoy the outdoors. These seats and areas will be designed with the comfort and accessibility of elderly residents in mind, incorporating features such as armrests, backrests for added support, ramps and shelter. By improving public amenities for the elderly, we aim to promote inclusivity, accessibility and social cohesion within Sembawang.



### 5) Elevator for Overhead Bridges

Accessibility remains a key issue for many residents, particularly for seniors, people with disabilities, and parents with young children. Sembawang has a number of overhead bridges connecting key areas, but these bridges lack elevators, making them difficult to access for people with mobility challenges. Our proposal is to install elevators at all major overhead bridges to

ensure that all residents, regardless of their physical abilities, can navigate the area safely and independently.

## 6) Mindfulness and Relaxation Centres

The large Gen Z and millennial population in Sembawang faces growing pressures from school, work, and the challenges of adult life. Yet, mental health support and age-appropriate safe spaces remain limited. To bridge this gap, we propose establishing dedicated Mindfulness and Wellness Centres that prioritise the needs of young people and others seeking support. These centres will offer drop-in counselling, peer-led support groups, mental health education, and creative resilience-building workshops. More than just a service point, these spaces will serve as calm, welcoming environments where individuals can connect, reflect, and feel heard to promote a culture of mental wellness and community care.



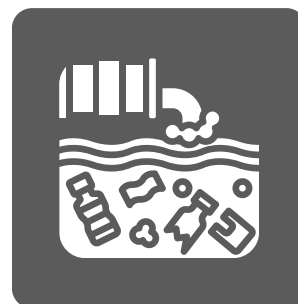
## 7) Protecting the Environment



Urban development in Sembawang risks encroaching on its precious green spaces, especially around Woodlands Waterfront and Admiralty Park — areas rich in biodiversity but poorly documented and inadequately protected. Without intentional planning, we risk losing the rustic charm and biodiversity that make Sembawang unique. Hence, we propose a community-led environmental mapping initiative, engaging volunteers to record and monitor local wildlife and plant life. This will inform public engagement sessions on sustainable development, ensuring that ecological preservation is factored into future plans and that residents and wildlife can co-exist meaningfully in shared spaces.

## 8) Tackling Sea Pollution

Sembawang Park Beach is the only mainland beach in Singapore that received a “fair” grading earlier this year,<sup>16</sup> indicating that its waters are not safe for swimming. This was attributed to pollution from nearby construction and improper waste disposal.<sup>17</sup> Meanwhile, redevelopment of the adjacent shipyard is moving forward without adequate environmental safeguards. Hence, there is an urgent need to push for regular water quality monitoring, stricter enforcement against illegal disposal practices and a review of the environmental impact of future coastal projects. In parallel, we will partner with schools, volunteers and community groups for beach clean-ups and public awareness efforts to protect marine life and restore confidence in our coastline.



<sup>16</sup> National Environment Agency (2025) [‘Advisory At Pasir Ris Beach On Swimming And Primary Contact Sports Is Lifted’](#), National Environment Agency.

<sup>17</sup> [Ibid.](#)



## 9) Caring For Cats

The presence of stray cats in Sembawang has long been a source of concern for both animal lovers and residents. While there are dedicated individuals who work tirelessly to feed and care for these cats, their efforts remain unsupported. To address this, we propose the introduction of a series of measures aimed at safeguarding the welfare of stray cats while encouraging responsible pet ownership. This includes providing microchipping services to help reunite lost cats with their owners, creating a community fund to provide cat food and medical care and launching educational campaigns on humane feeding practices and responsible pet management. We also aim to collaborate with animal welfare organisations and local authorities to build a stronger, more compassionate framework that prevents abuse and extends care to other animals, including dogs and urban wildlife like birds.

## Conclusion

SDP's Sembawang GRC Town Plan is an alternative to the long-standing technocratic model by offering a people-centred approach grounded in everyday realities and community aspirations. By addressing gaps in accessibility, environmental protection, public space, and social support, the plan reflects a deeper understanding of what it takes to build not just infrastructure, but a vibrant and inclusive town. Through Town Halls, it can form the planning basis for other constituencies in SDP's Northern Strategy.