

## PA reaches out to WP wards with 17 projects

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From sheltered walkways to fitness corners, Workers' Party (WP) wards will soon see several improvement projects carried out in their neighbourhoods.

The citizens' consultative committees (CCCs) in Aljunied GRC, Hougang and Punggol East yesterday announced that they had selected 17 community-improvement projects for their areas. This came after consultation with the WP's town council and residents.

The collaborative approach appears to mark a change in the once-fraught relationship between the opposition party and People's Association (PA), the apex body for grassroots groups such as CCCs.

Such improvement projects are funded by the Community Improvement Projects Committee, which comes under the National Development Ministry. But it is up to CCCs to select projects for approval and disburse funding.

The CCCs yesterday declined to state how much the 17 projects will cost, as they intend to issue a public tender.

A total of 90 project proposals were collected from residents and the Aljunied-Hougang-Punggol East Town Council (AHPETC) from July to October last year.

The CCCs focused on projects that would provide new facilities. Mr Ong Ye Kung, adviser to Kaki Bukit grassroots organisations, said they took into account costs and benefits to residents, the urgency and need for the projects, and how the projects would benefit residents tangibly.

So, sheltered walkways, fitness corners and barrier-free access features are among those that made the list. Those that did not make the cut were more maintenance-type in nature, such as upgraded bicycle racks and improved lift lobbies.

Asked what this move means for PA's relationship with the WP, Mr Ong said: "If we bear in mind that this is for the welfare of residents, then we should do whatever makes sense to achieve that objective."

The AHPETC did not comment yesterday.

Political observer Gillian Koh said the move is "noteworthy".

"Time has passed and they have found a way to work together. It is important that the PA reinforces the notion that it is a national institution, serving community interest across the nation and beyond partisan lines."

In 2011, shortly after the general election that saw the WP winning Aljunied GRC, both sides skirmished over the use of PA-leased public spaces and the transfer of 26 sites in Aljunied from the town council to the PA.

The Government also declared in the early 1990s that opposition wards would be put at the back of the upgrading queue. But it has shifted its stance quietly over the years. After the 2011 election, it continued or started various upgrading projects in Aljunied GRC. Months after the Hougang by-election in 2012, three projects were rolled out in the WP stronghold.