

## 32 more Potong Pasir households to get lift upgrading, says Sitoh

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More Potong Pasir households will be eligible for the Lift Upgrading Programme (LUP), said incumbent Member of Parliament Sitoh Yih Pin, whose ward looks set for a multi-cornered fight.

Thirty-two households across blocks 123, 124, 125, 127, 128, 129, 130 and 132 in Potong Pasir will be included in the exercise.

Announcing this to reporters on the sidelines of a walkabout in his ward yesterday, Mr Sitoh said these eight blocks did not qualify for the programme previously.

“I have been working very hard on this,” said Mr Sitoh, who won his seat in the 2011 General Election (GE), beating Singapore People’s Party’s (SPP) Lina Chiam.

“Following residents’ feedback, we held many rounds of discussions with HDB and appealed to HDB.”

Concluding last year, the S\$5.5 billion LUP offers residents of HDB blocks built before 1990 lift access at every level. Last month, Senior Minister of State (National Development) Lee Yi Shyan said in Parliament that the programme was unfeasible for about 200 Housing and Development Board (HDB) blocks islandwide, owing to technical constraints or high costs.

The programme was a point of contention in previous elections, with opposition parties crying foul over what they said was the politicising of upgrading works by People’s Action Party (PAP) candidates. Two months before the 2001 GE, then-National Development Minister Mah Bow Tan declared: “It’s only fair that we give those constituencies that have given us support, higher priority.”

But in 2009, Potong Pasir and Hougang were selected for the programme, sooner than expected.

In response to media queries as to why it approved Mr Sitoh’s request, the HDB said it recognises the urgency to provide barrier-free access to more residents.

“We will exercise greater flexibility and extend LUP to more blocks where the current range of solutions can be applied. HDB is committed to providing barrier-free accessibility for our residents and will continue to explore alternatives,” the agency said.

Commenting on the move, Dr Gillian Koh, a senior research fellow at the Institute of Policy Studies, said: “With past elections, the People’s Action Party (PAP) has always been explicit in telling people what they can expect in terms of enhancements to their estates. It’s the same (now), as the PAP knows people expect it.”

The opposition parties will find it difficult to match these offers, and may have to build their campaign around other things beyond hardware, she added.

Singapore Management University Associate Professor of Law Eugene Tan said the improvements granted to Potong Pasir this time appeared to be “unconditional”, but it still “sweetens the deal” for voting for the PAP.

“It has the effect of Mr Sitoh saying, ‘With me as your MP, I have been able to achieve all these sorts of benefits for you’,” he said.

A Potong Pasir resident who will benefit, who gave his name as Mr Lim, welcomed the good news. “We’ve been waiting for this for quite some time ... This is a good thing that comes out of the change in MP; if this (didn’t) happen, I think there may be no point in supporting if nothing changes around here,” said Mr Lim, who is in his 60s, and has lived in the estate for more than 20 years.

The SPP was also at Potong Pasir yesterday to engage residents, crossing paths with Mr Sitoh at one point.

Speaking to the media, Mrs Chiam, who has already declared her intention to run in Potong Pasir — the seat Mr Chiam See Tong, her husband, held for 27 years — said the SPP is open to fielding a joint team in some constituencies the coming GE.

Of the meeting of opposition parties tonight, she said: “It is a chance for us to get together and understand one another. This is what alliance is about. (We’re) hoping that we have an alliance in certain areas to field the best candidates.”