

Dh5bn plan for Khalifa City A approved

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ABU DHABI // A Dh5 billion project to expand and redevelop Khalifa City A was approved yesterday by the Urban Planning Council, allowing construction to begin.

The district will grow from its current 7,000 residents to some 53,000 by 2030, with more than 4,500 new villas and around 100 apartment blocks. The plans also include 30 schools and 30 public parks, as well as shops, hotels and a medical compound.

There will be a network of shaded pathways, and a tram route linking Khalifa City A to the capital centre and Abu Dhabi island.

Work was due to begin last year, but the UPC requested some changes including more shaded paths and smaller apartment blocks, to bring the 2,100-hectare development in line with its overall plan for Abu Dhabi.

Uwe Nienstedt, the project development director for KEO International, a consulting firm, said yesterday that “all the changes are now finished” and that the municipality was keen to start building. “The planning phase is over,” he said, adding that the council would turn the project over to the municipality in the next couple of weeks.

Mohammed Abdul Hakim, the assistant to the municipality’s executive director for town planning, Falah al Farrajh, would not say when construction will begin exactly.

Mr Nienstedt said that some “final, final, final comments” from the planning council’s general manager, Falah al Ahbabi, would be addressed this week.

To relieve traffic congestion, the design calls for more exits to the motorway and more entrances to the district. “That goes hand in hand with the public transport plans,” Mr Nienstedt said.

“There’s a tram route planned that would run through Raha Beach, Raha Gardens and pass through Khalifa City A, on into the capital centre.”

Mr Nienstedt said the schedule was now in the municipality’s hands.

Some elements will depend on the completion of other infrastructure projects; parks, for example, might not be developed until adequate irrigation is in place.

“My understanding is that the irrigation for Khalifa City A is the main irrigation network,” he said. “There’s no point in finishing a park until the irrigation is finished.”

Mr Nienstedt said the district could accommodate as many as 53,000 residents when work is complete.

Residents of Khalifa City A, 30 kilometres from downtown Abu Dhabi, have long complained about the lack of basic facilities such as parks, cash machines and supermarkets.

Mr Nienstedt said the alterations to the original plan would address those concerns and improve quality of life. Developers were already linked to around 40 per cent of the available plot of land, he said.

“The modifications were all to do with bringing the plan in line with the 2030 spirit,” he said, referring to Abu Dhabi Municipality’s long-term development plans.

“It has to do with walkability and densification of the residential areas – so proper distribution of green spaces, of mosques, of retail areas.”

The amended plans will come as good news to residents. “Parks are a great idea,” said Helen Monaghan Green. “It’s not particularly safe to go cycling with the kids, or walk the dogs because there are no sidewalks here.” She moved to the district with her husband and two children two years ago for the “peace and quiet and spacious houses”.

“It would be nice to have landscaping to really make the city come to life,” she added.

At the moment, Khalifa City A is a cluster of homes with basic amenities, such as a primary clinic and a handful of convenience stores. But residents feel much can still be done to make the suburb “come to life”.

“We like living here but you have to be very organised with your time.

“I try to run all my errands, especially bank and post-office runs and our weekly grocery shopping, in the city before coming home.”

Lama Tahboub, a resident and mother of three said she runs errands in the city because there is no alternative.

“You really feel like you’re living in the desert here. Before you start allowing people to build here, it would have been nice if they added greenery and facilities to the area,” Mrs Tahboub said.

“We really need restaurants here, and there should be entertainment facilities.

“We don’t even have walking areas or gardens in the area.”

Mrs Tahboub also finds the lack of public transport stressful, especially for her younger children, aged 14 and 17, who rely on her for the 20-minute commute to school.

However, she added: “We can’t really complain a lot. It’s nice and quiet here, and we don’t have the parking problems they have in the city.”