

Phase One of the project involves a landscaped park, open spaces and an 18-storey plaza to be known as Birch The Plaza



AMBITIOUS PROJECT: A model of the proposed Penang Times Square to be built on the 5.3ha site of Escoy Smelting at Jalan Datuk Keramat in George Town.

Penang's Times Square

Urban village plan for George Town

BY SIOW YUEN CHING

PENANG: A prestigious RM400mil tourism-themed residential and commercial project in the heart of George Town will mark Penang's entry into the "world of Times Squares."

Located barely 100m from Komtar, the Penang Times Square would be the largest, in terms of built-up area, after New York's Times Square.

The new city landmark would sit on the 5.3ha site of what was once the country's second-largest tin smelting plant in Jalan Datuk Keramat - Escoy Smelting - which produced the world-famous Straits Refined Tin from 1898 until its closure in 1998.

The ambitious project, undertaken by Penang-based Ivory Properties Group, has generated much interest since canary-yellow zinc fencings were erected around the site recently, with buntings announcing the project.

Ivory Properties Group

managing director Low Eng Hock said the project, to be completed by 2010, is envisioned as an urban village within the city.

"Be it the New York Times Square, Hong Kong Times Square, Shanghai Times Square or the Kuala Lumpur Berjaya Times Square, they are all synonymous as an event place," he said in an interview here yesterday.

"We want to bring life to George Town. We want people to stay in the inner city and this is one of the last pieces of freehold property that could promote urban living here."

Low said Phase One of the project would involve a landscaped park, open spaces and the construction of an 18-storey plaza - to be known as Birch The Plaza, named after the original Birch House that was used as the administration office of the smelting company.

He said the plaza would have 308 service suites, about 100 commercial lots, car parks and recreational facilities. A monorail station has

been proposed there as well.

Low said they were still waiting for the authorities' approval for Phase One but hoped the construction could start by the end of next year and be completed by end of 2008.

He said restoration works on the 1908 Birch House started since June and were scheduled to be completed by the year's end.

It would be transformed into the company's corporate office and visitors' centre of the Penang Times Square, he added.

On the ensuing phases, Low said the plans had yet to be finalised but they would include a hotel, offices, a museum and studios to promote traditional crafts.

The century-old tin smelting plant first started as Seng Kee Smelter, run by miner Lee Chin Ho, but changed hands many times over the years.

It took on the name of Eastern Smelting in 1908, became Datuk Keramat Smelting in 1975 and finally Escoy Smelting in 1993.