Bid to make S'pore more green will also see developers getting more options to replace lost greenery

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There could be more urban farms, rooftop gardens and solar panels sprouting up across Singapore, as city planners seek new ways to make the city more green.

There are some 2.5 billion square metres – which refers to the sizes of covering/building exteriors – island-wide. This is equivalent to more than 200 football fields.

The target is to double this by 2030, as part of the Sustainable Singapore Blueprint two years ago.

To get there, developers will be given more options to replace greenery lost at the site during the development process, announced the Urban Redevelopment Authority (URA) yesterday.

Now, they can do so only through landscaping options within the building or by creating sky terraces and gardens on rooftops. Going forward, new features such as urban farms and communal gardens on rooftops will contribute towards the landscape replacement requirements.

Said second Minister for National Development Desmond Lee: "Such features have been gaining popularity in our urban landscape as many Singaporeans have a keen interest in farming and gardening."

Speaking at the opening ceremony of GreenUrbanExpo Asia, a three-day conference on landscape and design, he said the Government had set the 2030 target to make the urban landscape more attractive and support richer urban biodiversity. He added that "an appreciation and love for greenery is now core to Singapore's national identity".

The enhancements aim to encourage landscaping on walls and rooftops that not only beautifies buildings, but also provide visual relief to passers-by and cools the ambient temperature, said a URA statement yesterday.

The changes come under the Landscaping for Urban Spaces and High-Rise (Lush) programme, which was launched in 2015 to incentivise developers and building owners to incorporate more greenery.

Yesterday, Mr Lee, who also Minister for Social and Family Development, cited a joint study by the National Parks Board (NParks) and the National University of Singapore, to illustrate how high-rise greenery has a role to play in housing wildlife.

The study looked at biodiversity in rooftop gardens here from May 2014 to December 2015, and recorded 63 bird species and 37 butterfly species in over 30 study sites.

"This joint study suggests that with careful design planning, urban rooftop gardens can play host to a diverse range of wildlife, and play a key role in improving the biodiversity of the built environment," he said.

According to the study, which is the first of its kind in Asia, rooftop gardens that attract the most wildlife are those with high and low gardenools, which have a larger planted area of more than 1,200 sq m, have flower- and fruit-bearing plants.

"The study provided very strong evidence to give confidence to developers to make more responsible, more informed decisions on rooftop gardens," said Mr Peter Chow, chief executive of NParks' Centre for Urban Greenery and Ecology.

As greener methods of using rooftop areas will require developers to relocate mechanical and electrical equipment, URA will arrange the move by granting green floor space where the relocated equipment is placed. These exemptions could represent significant cost savings for developers and building owners.

To standardise the assessment of these green plans for buildings, URA will adopt a new Green Floor Ratio (GFR) framework as a requirement for developers, where denser greenery is required of buildings that are more intense use.

GFR, which will consider vertical greenery coverage, is an improvement over the current standard which calculates horizontal planted areas into considerations.

Today, there are 100 developments in the Lush scheme. Two out of three new residential developments have applied for at least one Lush incentive, while over half of new malls, offices and hotels have done the same, said URA.

The enhancements will encourage more developers to get on board, said URA.

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