

\$20b facelift for Kwun Tong

By NG KANG-CHUNG

THE squalid blocks of Kwun Tong are to be flattened in a \$20 billion project to rejuvenate the ageing district as the residential and commercial hub of eastern Kowloon.

An open-air amphitheatre and auditorium will form part of a central park to be erected on Yue Man Square - an area packed with ageing high-rises and notorious for hawkers and traffic chaos.

An underground car park for 1,400 vehicles has also been planned, according to a preliminary proposal by the Land Development Corporation.

The project covers about six hectares of land in the heart of Kwun Tong bounded by the MTR station, Hong Ning Road and Hip Wo Street.

The area between the Kwun Tong Government Offices Building and the Yuet Wah Street bus terminal will be included in the first phase of redevelopment, according to the plan.

Six commercial and residential buildings will be built on the area.

The Yuet Wah Street site and the area neighbouring the junctions of Hong Ning Road and Mut Wah Street, and Hip Wo Street and Mut Wah Street, will be the major residential area.

It is expected to accom-

modate a total of 5,000 families.

The entire project may cost up to \$20 billion - including acquiring properties - and take 10 years to complete.

The corporation's plan is to reserve enough flats for residents before it moves ahead to tear down their homes to avoid lengthy disputes over resettlement.

Property owners might be allowed to invest in the project in a new option known as "cash-sharing participants", said the corporation's senior public relations manager Holly Lau Man-mi.

Property owners choosing the option will have to fund part of the project cost

in addition to surrendering their homes to the corporation.

The option is being tried in another corporation project in Tsim Sha Tsui.

Ms Lau refused to discuss the Kwun Tong project further, saying the corporation was still discussing the phasing of the scheme and relocation of blocks with the Government.

Planning Department senior town planner Maria Siu Lai-ye, who is in charge of urban renewal, said she understood the Kwun Tong redevelopment was not the corporation's top priority, because it had several urban renewal projects in hand.

But Ms Siu said the Government hoped to conclude

the details with the corporation within this year.

About 580,000 people live in Kwun Tong.

President of the Society of Hong Kong Real Estate Agents Michael Choi Ngai-min said he believed the "New Kwun Tong" could serve the Junk Bay and Lam Tin districts as well.

"A comprehensive redevelopment is much needed in Kwun Tong. When the district was built, there was no town planning.

"Residential blocks clutter up the area and factories are only steps away from people's homes," Mr. Choi said.

He said there was good potential for Kwun Tong to become a new hub of East-

ern Kowloon after redevelopment.

Kwun Tong District Board chairman Winnie Poon Yam Wai-chun said a renewal project was badly needed but she hoped residents would be properly rehoused or compensated.

"We have to bear in mind that urban renewal is to improve people's living quality, not give people troubles," Mrs Poon said.

The corporation also presented plans to redevelop the Hanoi Road area, Tsim Sha Tsui, at the Yau Tsim Mong District Board meeting yesterday.

The project seeks to turn the 7,400-square-metre site into shopping complexes with hotels and offices.

