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## Reins tightened on major developments

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DEVELOPERS planning to build new townships containing more than 10,000 residents will now have to get "binding advice" from the newly established National Physical Planning Council (NPPC) before they can start work.

Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad will chair the NPPC which comes under the purview of the Ministry of Housing and Local Government's Town and Country Planning Department.

Developments that are considered sensitive to the environment as well as big infrastructure projects would also have to go to the council for binding advice before work can begin.

"This is a Federal Government initiative that has taken three years, during which we revamped the Town and Country Planning Act," said Housing and Local Government Minister Datuk Seri Ong Ka Ting early this week after the launch of Country Heights Holding Bhd's Exclusive Homes 2003 property exhibition.

"The deputy chairman of the council is the Deputy Prime Minister, while all the chief ministers are made compulsory members."

The exhibition, will be held from Oct 16 to 19.

Ong said the NPPC has a working committee headed by the Housing Ministry's secretary-general and will be in charge of ensuring the implementation of all guidelines set by the council.

He said the advice given is to be taken seriously as it is "binding". The working committee will meet once every month while the NPPC, which met for the first time three weeks ago, will follow up with a meeting every four months.

"Environmentally sensitive projects are those that involve water catchment areas, the cutting of hills, the leveling of rivers and so on. We believe that flood and landslide problems, for example, can be alleviated by having such control measures," Ong said.

"What is happening now is that certain state and local authorities approve developments without taking into consideration how the projects will impact neighbouring areas or states."

Ong added that a study by the Town and Country Planning Department to put the entire physical development of West Malaysia into one master plan would be ready by the end of this year.

"With this plan, we want to identify the areas that have been over-developed, areas that have potential for development and those that should be left untouched, for example, forest reserves.

"This is in line with the Government's serious effort of achieving a sustainable and balanced development, without subjecting the natural environment to any further harm."

At the launch of Exclusive Homes 2003, Country Heights managing director Tan Sri Lee Kim Yew said the exhibition is not limited to high-end properties alone.

"It is open to developers with innovative offerings, for example in terms of house designs and ICT features," he said.

Lee said CHHB would also unveil a plan at the exhibition to help young members of the workforce with stable incomes to own houses at a lower entry cost.

"For example, for a RM88,000 unit, I am trying to come up with a plan where purchasers would only have to put a downpayment of RM8,000 and pay instalments of less than RM600 for about 25 years.

"Then, in the 28th year, apart from owning the house, they would get back the purchase price they paid for the house," he said.