In early 2008 Nanyang Technological University established a Campus Planning Committee to begin reviewing ideas for the future development of the Yunnan Garden Campus, and the many activities and programmes it supports. The aim was to develop a planning framework able to direct the growth of the kind of physical, natural and social infrastructure that might support a leading high quality academic and research institution.

Following discussions in the United States, where campus planning expertise was generously shared by a number of renowned institutions and the appointment of the consultant team in mid-2009, work commenced on preparing a new Master Plan for the University.

Numerous stakeholders were subsequently consulted, both within and beyond the University community, establishing the parameters of the Master Plan and identifying a number of issues that were to become central to its ongoing development. Foremost among these was the need to foster an enduring identity for the University’s Campus, one able to distinguish its many positive elements from those of other institutions while also creating a close association in the minds of faculty, students and visitors alike with the University’s physical environment, and in particular with the natural environment that so clearly enriches Yunnan Garden Campus.

A productive collaboration evolved between the planning team and a variety of student, faculty, alumni and administrative representatives. Through discussion and the development of numerous conceptual designs, a planning strategy emerged in which the significance of the campus’ natural environment was to be emphasised. It is pleasing this focus has been retained throughout the Master Plan, and in large measure has determined a number of its final recommendations. Two proposals are particularly worthy of note. Firstly, the systematic restoration of the campus’ endemic vegetation, with great potential for broader environmental benefit achieved through the reinvigoration of local biodiversity. Secondly, landscaped corridors enabling the free flow of surface water throughout the campus’ natural topography will profoundly alter the visual impact of drainage infrastructure on campus, creating a system of natural water management able to closely link the campus’ ecosystem with that of the surrounding environment. Both the water corridors and the increased planting are tangible examples of the Master Plan’s broader intention to imbed sustainability practices into the future operation of the University. Furthermore, these measures will create a new physical environment on campus for a variety of social, cultural and academic uses, for example, providing new locations on campus for the display of public art, set amid reinvigorated pedestrian and cyclist networks.

As the Master Plan developed, opportunities to link the physical plan with the University’s changing pedagogical emphasis emerged, as demonstrated in the concept of a new Campus Centre. Here is an example of how the campus might be re-imagined as a vibrant, living social space, with new forms of accommodation creating flexible relationships between students, teaching spaces, and the campus’ surrounding landscape. The conceptual link between the Master Plan and the future goals of the University are also importantly expressed in the relationship established between Yunnan Garden Campus and the adjacent Clean Tech Park, where business research initiatives with a focus on clean technology will be well matched to the academic knowledge nurtured in the University. Physically and philosophically, the Master Plan
makes a seamless connection between these two institutions, to a large degree integrating the campuses so as to create a single hub for Singapore’s clean technology future.

The Master Plan that has evolved from the long process of discussion, reflection and planning should not be seen as an end in itself, but rather as the essential element in future assessment of how the campus is to be managed, developed and improved. It is through the implementation of the Master Plan that disparate development projects on campus can be integrated with the broader objectives of the University, and collectively create something new – a vibrant twenty-first century University situated in a park.

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