

The project got the green signal from the SEIAA when it agreed to scale down the number of saleable flats

# BHENDI BAZAAR SET TO REDEVELOP DESPITE HURDLES

The successful redevelopment of Bhendi Bazaar, can offer several lessons to similar clusters all over Mumbai, says **GAJANAN KHERGAMKER**

**T**he Rs 1,500 crore ambitious Bhendi Bazaar redevelopment project is finally moving ahead. Having procured the environmental pre-requisites, the project is far from having tackled all past hurdles though and developers, Saifee Burhani Upliftment Trust (SBUT) may still not be in for smooth sailing.

Touted as the most ambitious redevelopment project, aimed to change the face of a teeming residential-cum-commercial zone and provide better housing and business space, the project took a couple of years just to take off. It was only in September last year that the project kicked-off with the demolition of two buildings.

One of the problems has been the fear amongst residents and shopkeepers concerning the allotment of houses. Member-residents of communities other than Bohras, felt that the project would be a gated community project for Bohras. Since a majority of people living in the area belong to the Dawoodi Bohra Community, other communities feared that 'their' religious structures would be demolished and interests, compromised.

At the beginning of this year, the SBUT assured sections of Muslims and other communities that the project will be beneficial to Hindus too, and Muslims other than Bohras. The trust assured members of non-Bohra communities that their religious structures would be protected and their interests, taken care of as well.

After all the hiccups, the makeover project got a major boost when a state level expert panel decided to recommend the project for environmental clearance in January 2013. The State Expert Appraisal Committee's (SEAC) work is to screen proposals for construction projects spread over 20,000 sq mtrs and recommend them for clearance, to the State Environment



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Impact Assessment Authority (SEIAA). At that time, the SEAC had reportedly said that since this is the first major cluster redevelopment project in the city, they wanted it to be ideal. Looking at the proposal, the panel agreed that the project seemed 'well-planned'.

However, when the project finally reached the SEIAA, it said that the SBUT would have to cut down on the number of saleable flats. The SEIAA reportedly said the redevelopment plan, instead of making the living conditions better in Bhendi Bazaar, may result in even greater congestion in the 14 acre-plus south Mumbai zone, unless the SBUT scaled down the number of flats. The authority mentioned that the redevelopment proposal presented by the SBUT envisaged construction that is 11 times the plot area. So, the SEIAA asked the trust to 'reduce the quantum of sale tenements and the construction area significantly', for the sake of better public amenities such as wider roads and footpaths in the busy area. The authority also observed, 'after the proposed redevelopment, the tenement density on the plot will become extremely high, very adversely affecting the quality of life'. This would have defeated the whole purpose of the project which aims at bettering the life of residents and businessmen in the area. In its report, the SEIAA also mentioned, on a plot area of 6.6 lakh

sq ft, the number of redevelopment tenements would be 3,514 and sale tenements 1,759, according to the current plan. In addition, there would be 88 rooms, 1,379 redeveloped shops and five new shops. After including everything - from existing tenements, sale flats and shops, the tenement density would have notched 1,004.6 per hectare.

It was only in March, that the project finally got the green signal from SEIAA when it agreed to scale down the number of saleable flats in the redevelopment project. The SEIAA committee also mentioned that the Trust has 'used most efficient designs to reduce construction areas to the minimum'. However, keeping in mind the ever-increasing vehicular traffic, the authority suggested that some roads be further widened, especially where there are schools, shops and religious structures. They also asked the Trust to increase parking spaces near religious zones. These changes are expected to reduce the construction area by 17,331 sq mtrs.

Even though the project has received the green signal, there are still several hurdles it will have to cross. For instance, the clause that makes it mandatory for the developer to get the mandatory twin 70 per cent consent of tenants/100 per cent consent of landlords, is proving difficult for developers. They have reportedly written to the chief minister regarding this problem. Then there are problems with space allotment of shop owners who want premises only on the ground floor. The Trust will have to look into the matter and address the shop-owners' problem as soon as possible if it wants the project to move ahead smoothly.