HDB flats in the city for SMU students

By Jane Ng

THREE blocks of vacant HDB flats near Singapore Management University (SMU) will be converted into hostels for its students by July next year.

Renovation work on Blocks 2, 3 and 7 — located between Short Street and Prinsep Street — will start by the end of the year. They are a 10-minute walk from the nearest campus building — the school of economics and social sciences.

Occupying a total area of 4,500 sq m, the four-storey buildings can accommodate up to 274 students.

The Education Ministry is funding the refurbishment of the three blocks, but SMU did not reveal how much money will be spent as the tender has not yet been issued.

The university is also speaking to various agencies as part of its plan to build more student hostels in the city.

SMU president Howard Hunter told The Straits Times he hopes every undergraduate will live on campus for at least some time to “help build esprit de corps and a strong university community”.

“Hostel life completes the picture of a holistic university education. Living within a university community, develops lifelong friendships,” he said.

Foreign students will get priority for hostel places, and a maximum of 17 per cent will go to Singaporeans.

The blocks will have four apartments — each the size of a three-room flat — per floor. There will be a total of 84 single rooms, 94 double rooms and two rooms for handicapped students, all of which will be air-conditioned.

Apart from a common reading room, the blocks will also share a courtyard with alfresco seating and barbecue pits.

The flats, which were built in 1952, were vacated in 2002 when residents relocated to new flats.

Rental rates have not been fixed but an SMU spokesman said they will be comparable to prices in the area. Property agents estimate a three-room HDB apartment there costs $1,000 a month to rent.

SMU’s 600 or so foreign students, who make up 17 per cent of the student population, stay mostly in privately run student hostels, such as the ones in Mount Sophia and near Novena.