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GEORGE TOWN: The much-anticipated George Town World Heritage Special Area Plan (SAP) will finally be gazetted on Aug 1.

The announcement was made by state Housing, Town and Country Planning Committee chairman Jagdeep Singh Deo in Komtar here yesterday.

He said the SAP had been approved by the State Planning Committee on March 14, 2013, on Aug 28 last year and on May 27 this year.

"It was submitted to the state executive council on June 15 and the state government agreed to gazette the SAP," he said.

He said with George Town listed as an Unesco World Heritage Site in 2008, the Federal Government was required to prepare a management plan to ensure sustainability and preservation of the heritage sites.

"The conservation management plan is part of the general requirements of the World Heritage Committee.

"The SAP is to ensure that the guidelines and recommendations on conservation are implemented and enforced under the law."

Jagdeep said the SAP would allow the National Heritage Department to monitor the George Town World Heritage Site to ensure its sustainability as per the World Heritage's conditions.

"The Penang Island City Council will also use the plans to regulate planning works, fix and impose development charges, enforce purchase and acquisition notices and also declare development areas."

The state government has come under fire over the last few years for failing to expedite the George Town World Heritage SAP.

At the same press conference, State Local Government Committee chairman Chow Kon Yeow urged unlicensed hotel operators in the heritage area to apply for licences.

He said those who applied before the George Town World Heritage SAP was gazetted would have to adhere to the Penang Island Municipal Council Development Guidelines 1996, while those who applied after that would have to comply with the guidelines set by the SAP.

"For unlicensed hotels outside the heritage zone, they need to apply for their licences and follow the 1996 guidelines," he said.

Heritage activist Khoo Salma Natution said it was good that the state government was finally gazetting the SAP, which had been pending since 2011, when the first draft was approved.

"I will study the plan to see what changes have been made as compared with the first draft."