SUMMARY

Since the inception of the Housing Development Board (HDB) in 1960, it has emerged from a provider of basic housing fit for human habitation to an agency which seeks to build quality and affordable housing for which homeowners would be proud of. With residents of HDB flats becoming more demanding and vocal, public housing is no longer just providing for the lower income people, it is also concerned with meeting the housing needs of a more affluent society.

In the continual quest to meet the rising expectations of Singaporeans, HDB has implemented new housing concepts throughout the past few years, such as the Studio Apartments for the Elderly and Executive Condominium for those who desire to own private housing but could not afford. The most recent innovation is the White Flats housing concept, which was introduced in 1999. The objective is to give flat owners greater choices and flexibility to change the layout of their flats over time, to suit their changing needs. This is achieved by providing White Flats that are ‘wall-less’ except for the internal partitions of the toilet and the household shelters (storeroom) which are required by regulations.
Purchasers of public housing are accustomed to public housing that are constructed with internal wall partitions. With the implementation of White Flats housing concept, buyers have the flexibility to customise the flats according to their preferences.

The focus of this study is to examine the concept and rationale of White Flats, to evaluate consumer preferences, responses to the concept and examine the possible responses from providers’ viewpoint on the concerns raised about White Flats. The scope of this study covers the White Flats recently introduced and other flexible housing forms.

The survey shows that the concept of White Flats is quite well received with 64% (192) of the respondents supporting it. They welcome the flexibility given but also suggested that HDB could further improve by providing some customisation similar to those provided by the private sector in their recent developments. Those who did not support the concept commented that the extent of flexibility given is limited by the small floor area of the flat, their lack of knowledge in designing the internal layout of the flats, extensive renovation works would be too troublesome and the price discount given is not sufficient to cover high renovation costs due to additional works.
The study concluded that the concept of White Flats could be further improved by adopting certain features provided in overseas flexible housing or those in the local private market.

(420 words)