

Health project is nursed

By Ly An

Investors in Vietnam's first hi-tech healthcare park are working to revise public opinion about the project's progress.

It follows complaints that the park site has seen no changes since breaking-ground over a year ago.

The Hoa Lam-Shangri-La Healthcare Park in Ho Chi Minh City is a \$400-million joint venture between Vietnam's Hoa Lam Service Co Ltd and Singapore's Shangri-La Healthcare Investment Pte Ltd.

The 37.5 hectare park was licenced in July, 2008 and marked its ground-breaking ceremony in October, 2008. The project's site, however, has seen no sign of construction as of October, 2009.

In response, the project's investors stated that the lack of visible signs of progress was not an indicator of the project's overall health.

Lai Voon Hon, general director of Hoa Lam-Shangri-La Healthcare, said at a press

briefing last week in Ho Chi Minh City that "the project's ground-breaking in late 2008 was not to start construction work but to just celebrate receiving the investment licence."

He said: "We [the developer] obtained land use rights [LURs] for the entire project in April 2009, just six months ago, so we have only recently got the State Bank permission to put money into the project. We are also waiting for the construction licence from the Ministry of Construction before launching the project's first phase."

The first phase will consist of a 250-bed hospital, a medical training centre, a kindergarten, an international school and a staff residential area.

Hon said investors would usually only put in money after receiving LURs. However, with the support shown by the leaders of Ho Chi Minh City and the central government, "we had the confidence to begin putting in our money and begin designing the hospital first. That is why we're

able to submit the construction drawings only five months after we received the LURs and the land demarcation," he stressed.

He said VND250 billion (\$14 million) had been disbursed into project's administrative and licencing approval.

"We are working hard to get the project moving forward in line with our promises made to the Vietnamese government and the people of

Ho Chi Minh City." He stated that if all went well the first phase might be put into construction in early 2010, with an opening in 2011.

Nguyen Van Hiep, vice director of Ho Chi Minh City's Department of Construction, said the project was of great government importance and flow of administrative procedures took a bit more time than usual. However, the investor's cooperation to the project had made its

progress go quickly compared with other projects, particularly in this difficult economic climate.

"The project's delay is also attributed to it being long planned by the city's government. When Hoa Lam-Shangri-la came in, it took time adjustments to be made to planning and market research," Hiep added. The park's development will span five phases over a period of nine years and will address

the current shortage of world-class, comprehensive healthcare services and facilities in Ho Chi Minh City.

The project's aim is to feature a world-class healthcare environment for medical professionals and patients, including private tertiary care and teaching hospitals, research centres, medical institutes, commercial and retail components, supporting service residences and other community facilities.