DARK, quiet and dirty back lanes are places many would avoid as they fear coming across rodents or falling victim to crime.

As such, Shah Alam mayor Datuk Mohd Jaafar Mohd Atan has initiated a pilot project to turn back lanes into welcoming spaces through art.

"We need to change people's perception of back lanes but it is not easy. People are scared of backlanes and we wanted to do something about it," said Mohd Jaafar.

The project started in December last year as a Shah Alam City Council (MBSA) initiative thorough the Selangor's Clean Zone campaign. Mohd Jaafar chose a back alley in Section 2 for the pilot project.

"Changing how the younger generation sees our back lanes is important; we must make these streets clean and safe for people," he said.

They sought assistance from students of Universiti Teknologi Mara (UiTM) and Universiti Selangor (Unisel) to create street art at the spot.

The stretch was divided into sections, allowing more students to participate and share their ideas for the space. The work was completed in less than a month.
The students’ paintings reflect not only their memories of the area as young children but also the types of businesses operating there.

MBSA has closed the road to vehicles, which would usually load their goods or park in the back lane, and has asked restaurants not to wash dishes there.

Since the alley in Section 2 was reopened to the public, the area has become a hit among buskers, art students, film makers, couples taking their wedding photographs and even local musicians filming music videos.

Sharifah Amalia Azman, who lives in Section 2, said she was glad the council found a unique way of turning the dirty back lane into a new hangout for students.

“Instead of just cleaning and issuing summonses to the shops for not keeping the lane clean, this is a great idea to encourage more people to use the lane and for shopowners to maintain the place,” she said.

Grocery shopowner Abdul Rahman Mohammed said business has improved since the makeover.

Mohd Jaafar revealed the council had identified another spot in Section 7 for refurbishment.

The ‘L’ shaped back lane is between Jalan Plumbum R7/R and Jalan Plumbum Q7/Q. Most of the restaurants and boutiques currently occupying the shoplots there have agreed to the project.

For Section 7; the art space will incorporate floor art, 3D art and modern artistic furniture to complement the area.

According to MBSA community development officer Shahrul Nizam Salim, who is coordinating the project with a group of young designers from Khazanah Studio, the new site will allow more artists to show off their skills.

The council will be organising an Urban Art Competition, with prizes awarded.

Judges are looking for ideas that incorporate the use of recycled materials and works reflecting Shah Alam to increase the number of tourists in the city.

There are also plans to add roofs to the back lanes and misting fans to lower the temperature.

Mohd Jaafar is confident the RM1.5mil invested in the project would generate positive returns in the future.

‘Take a look at streets in Singapore and Australia, they are clean and youth want to be seen there.

“They can read a book or have a picnic with friends on weekends,” he said, adding there were plans to invite buskers and push-cart businesses to be part of the project.
1. A mixed-medium art of an old style camera on the wall behind two rows of shoplots.

2. A mural depicting students of SMK Sultan Abdul Aziz Shah in Section 2 getting off the bus and running towards their school.

3. With the beautification of the lane, several shops have also opened their back door for customers.

4. The lanes used to be dark and dirty where lorries used to park and load their goods. The council has since closed the lane to vehicles to allow more people to utilise the lane.

5. A mural of the Sultan Salahuddin Abdul Aziz Mosque, or more commonly known as the blue mosque, which is one of Shah Alam’s icons.

— Photos by SAM THAM