

Fury at state of 'slum', block in city

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Gripes over rats, stench, crime

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RODENT infestation, overcrowding and illicit activities around Morester building, believed to be owned and managed by the government, has infuriated neighbours in Arcadia, east of the city.

The building, on the corner of Beckett and Pretorius streets, looks like a slum, and residents and owners of other properties complained that its state of disrepair has led to a spike in crime.

"There are people sleeping outside and using the pavement as a toilet... the area stinks. Because it already looks bad people are using the Pretorius Street entrance as a dumping ground," the managers of the nearby Beckett Condors wrote in a letter to the City.

They said dustbins were not always emptied because residents did not put them outside.

"Two of the bins cannot be moved as the wheels are broken. As a result the rubbish just stays there and rats and stinks," they said.

Neighbours said the vagrants who used one side of the building as "home" were a menace, and they contributed to the rise in criminal activities.

The accumulation of trash attracted rodents, and in particu-

lar rats. "We see rats running in the 'garden' in the evening," a neighbour said, adding that the problem of rodents only added to the pest problem.

They said pipes connecting flats and underground plumbing created passageways for the pests.

The City yesterday said it was not responsible for the upkeep of the building, while government departments said they would have to investigate who should maintain it. The building has broken windows dotting the walls, missing window panes, a strong stench and evidence of homeless people sleeping in doorways and the parking area.

Referred to as the "police flats", the building stands out like a sore thumb in its vicinity. It is a towering tarnished 12-storey structure that hasn't been upgraded in years.

Stained blankets lie at the entrance of the building, with beer bottles and litter on the grass.

A resident emerged from the building and said "our washing lines were supposed to be replaced, but this never happened and we have to make do with trying to hang up washing wherever we can and it makes the place look untidy". He then walked off.

The entrances are rusty and neighbours said they had complained for years about the building and the problems they encoun-



Morester building on the corner of Beckett and Pretorius streets is in a dilapidated state.

tered from it being in its current state.

Another resident said sometimes the rats died on his roof and subsequently caused a horrible stench. "There's rat poison everywhere; sometimes we can't keep track of the dead rats," he said.

A nearby business owner said the rats had been chewing on his

cables for years. "I've tried everything, from rat traps to poison, but the rats keep coming back, swarming over my property," he added.

Edith Parsley, caretaker of the nearby Beckett Condos building, said the rats were a health hazard.

"We see rats running in the gar-

She said because of the slum-like appearance of the building, people used the entrance as a dumping ground, and another resident told the Pretoria News that the rat problem was out of control.

"We are having problems with rats and mice in some ceilings and they're eating through the ceiling boards. People have come out to

check but nothing has been fixed," she said.

Neighbours said the building might be mistaken for a beacon of safety and security by virtue of the large number of police who live there. "Petty crime such as muggings sometimes take place from the streetkids who sleep near the apartments.

"The are people sleeping outside and using the pavement as a toilet. The area stinks," said Parsley.

All the SAPS could say was: "It houses mainly those from far from Pretoria. They leave early in the morning and are back late and night and go home when they have time off."

PICTURE: BONGANI SHILUBANE/ANA