

Table Talk, pg 6 - 31 Jan 2018

Future uncertain for Happy Valley

Happy Valley's residents want an update about the plans for the land. Far right: A shack close to the Happy Valley informal settlement. Future uncertain for Happy Valley
SUMMER JACOBS
Residents of Happy Valley settlement, opposite Netcare laauwberg Hospital, say they don't know how much longer they can ward off people wanting to build shacks on the land. The site, home to about 20 families, is being considered for lowcost housing development by the Housing Development Agency HDA. Last year the HDA spokeswoman Zingaphi Matanzima said the agency was assessing the site, erf 1117, to "determine the desirability and sustainability of any potential development" "Housing plans for Happy Valley", Table talk, September 6, 2017. Rumours about lowcost housing plans for the site have been circulating since 2015 when the City of Cape Town swore to Blouberg residents that no such plans were in place.

Now the people of Happy Valley say they want to know once and for all if and when they will be moved because "outsiders are trying to get in". Catrina Februarie, who has been living at Happy Valley for 13 years, said that for a while now people from Dunoon, Khayelitsha and elsewhere had been showing interest in Happy Valley. "They pull up here, some in fancy cars, and ask if they can build shacks here. Some of them offer money, but we show them away." She said surrounding communities saw Happy Valley residents as outsiders when they were actually "safeguarding" the land. Michael Bodkin said they were risking their lives by stopping people from moving onto the land. "When they ask us if they can live here, we threaten them with law enforcement and the police, but we are putting our lives at risk because they could get angry and burn our shacks down," said Mr Bodkin. So far, nothing like that had happened, but he feared it could. "There's nothing stopping 10 families pulling up in a truck and putting up shacks overnight.

We won't be able to stop them," he said. Another Happy Valley resident, Desmond Februarie, said four police detectives had visited the site last week and told him the residents would be moved to brick houses nearby. Mr Februarie pointed to several shacks surrounding Happy Valley that he said were not part of the community. Ms Matanzima told Tabletalk the land's development potential was still being investigated. "The land has not been sold and the HDA, jointly with the national Department of Public Works, are still investigating the development potential of the land. No development decision nor development application have been lodged nor agreed to," she said. HDA's executive head of strategic initiatives Willem Steenkamp said he was upset about malicious rumours of erf 1117 being developed. He said once all investigations on the land were complete all stakeholders would be consulted on the way forward. "A large portion of erf 1117 cannot be developed due to the protective fynbos growing there. If studies show there is potential development, we'll ask all stakeholders what kind of development they would like to see taking place there. "I guarantee that nothing will happen on this property without consultation of all stakeholders, this includes Happy Valley residents and surrounding communities,"

said Mr Steenkamp. "The residents of Happy Valley have been great. They have been protecting the land for a long time. If a time comes that they have to be moved we are not at liberty to make that decision alone. HDA, the City, province and the Happy Valley residents will all be involved in the process," he said. Vicechairman of the Table View Ratepayers' Association TVRA Mandy da Matta called for clarity on the site because of its potential to attract other occupants. "The fact that illegal occupants are inhabiting the property is alarming. Our concern is that the wheels of the law turn slowly and that by the time the eviction order is ready to deal with Happy Valley it will be a full blown township full of illegal occupants," she said.