

Paarl field of dreams turns into neglected nightmare

By **BOBBY JORDAN**

● It used to be a field of dreams – a place of rugby heroes and passing-out parades.

Now a 6ha sports stadium in the heart of Paarl has turned into a national embarrassment, prompting legal action against public works minister Thulas Nxesi.

Barely an inch of the Sanddrift stadium – next to a secondary school – has not been vandalised.

The structure now serves to keep the rain off a transient group of homeless people who sleep among piles of refuse and excrement.

The inside of the stadium, gutted by fire and without any fittings, was a rain-soaked jumble of rubbish when the Sunday Times visited recently, with only one clearing where a couple sleep.

Even the urinal – or what is left of it – was filled with clutter.

On the open stands several homeless people lay sleeping. One man, who was making a fire, said he worked as a car guard at night.

The eyesore was declared a “problem building” last year by the Drakenstein municipality, which this month filed court papers against the minister and the department of public works in an attempt to spur them into action.

The municipality wants the department to demolish the stadium and clear the site, failing which it will do the work and send the department the bill.

Executive director of planning and development Lauren Waring told the Sunday Times: “The municipality has continuously requested the national department to clean up the stadium and secure the area, or demolish the rundown structure, or alternatively, to allow the municipality to take over the facility so that it can be restored and operated as a safe, fully functional sport facility for the community.”

Waring said the stadium was unsound and posed a danger to people entering it, including “homeless people who often find refuge here”.

The impasse has infuriated neighbours, especially those who remember the stadium’s glory days, when it was leased to Paarl’s police college and later to a rugby club, the Young Gardens.

Retired policeman Wynand Viljoen, who lives a block from the stadium, said at one stage he intervened to seek a solution with public works, to no avail.

Public works said it was “aware of the problem” at what it described as a “surplus property”.

Spokesperson Thamsanqa Mchunu said: “The issue of illegal occupants is currently under discussion and the local authority will be requested to provide further input.”

Final whistle

August 2

● Date on which the Drakenstein municipality applied for a court order compelling the department of public works to demolish the Sanddrift stadium.

August 28

● Date when court application will be heard.

30 days

● Period in which the department will have to demolish the stadium if the order is granted.