



■ **Left:** Vagrants and vermin returned as did the drug deals and petty theft when DPW security left.

Right: A sign at Ye Olde Thatch, Waterloo Green reads: "Unauthorised entry and occupancy prohibited."



Heritage houses declared problematic

KAREN WATKINS

The two heritage houses on Waterloo Green and the house in Constantia Meadows have been declared problem buildings by the City of Cape Town.

Early this year the City told the national Department of Public Works (DPW) to clean up derelict state-owned houses or they would be put on the problem buildings list.

Architect, Nic Louw first reported the Waterloo Green houses to the City's Problem Building Unit on April 11, 2017.

"It took them 16 months to take action and in the interim,

one of the buildings (Ye Olde Thatch) has burnt down and the other was vandalised," he said. John Butler, chairman of the Constantia Meadows Homeowners' Association (CHMA), said the association was registered early in 2017 to deal with issues relating to the house tucked away in a corner of Constantia Meadows.

And on Tuesday February 27, the community surrounding that house came out in force to hold a peaceful protest, asking for it to be demolished ("Old house a hazard", Bulletin, March 8).

DPW officials told protesters their hands were tied.

They have to work with the Department of Justice. The wheels turn slowly, they said.

They did, however, arrange for full-time security at both sites for just under three months ("Victory for Waterloo", Bulletin, March 1). When this ended the vagrants returned.

Residents say the signs which prohibit entry to the properties have made no difference.

Mr Louw warned not to go to the houses alone for safety reasons.

On Saturday August 25, the Bulletin saw a fire burning in the garage at Ye Olde Thatch.

Erika Enslin who lives near to Waterloo Green, said the City

had been promising to board up the windows and doors for months.

Boards were put up at the three houses shortly after a town hall meeting called by ward councillor, Liz Brunette ("Wynberg still battling crime and grime", Bulletin, August 16). She said the decision makers are in Pretoria and the local DPW person is powerless. As a result nothing gets done.

Ms Brunette said the City's problem building unit would be bricking up windows and doors to these buildings. "Which is sad because of the heritage status of the two houses on Waterloo Green," said Ms Brunette.

Ms Enslin said the signs do not mean anything. "People are still coming out of the house. They approached me but I left and they went to beg at the traffic lights.

"The signs don't deter anyone, it just gives the message that it's not fit to live in," said Ms Enslin.

She said she has not been inside the houses but has heard that they were once exquisite with yellow-wood floors, sash windows and antique fittings. "These houses are part of our heritage," she said.

At the other house, in Constantia Meadow alongside Students Way, Deon Klein, who lives across the road from the meadow, said it used to be beautiful with two rugby fields and a hockey pitch and the house was in good condition. He said vagrants ignore the signs and are still living there.

He warned about the stench and mess inside saying, the Bulletin should not go there. But we did.

The windows at the back of the house are boarded up but not at the front where there are signs of people living in the garage.

Half of the roof has burnt away. Inside flies buzz through the rooms, the floor is dense with litter, and the walls are covered with graffiti.

After the protest, national DPW spokesperson, Thamsanqa Mchunu, said the site was inspected by their head office to determine the value of the property and decide on the

best investment decision. "Short-term, the DPW security staff will continue to conduct regular inspections at the property and will remove vagrants found on the premises. Long-term, a request has been forwarded to Treasury and is currently investigating the best investment decision," said Mr Mchunu.

Cape Town's acting executive director for safety and security, Wayne le Roux, said DPW is aware of the status of the buildings, which will be cleaned and secured by the end of October.

Mr Le Roux said the next step in the process is to issue a contravention notice and prepare a case for court. "We only proceed if the investigating officer is not satisfied with the DPW's representation on the way forward. However, this will not be necessary as the DPW is currently co-operating with the City," said Mr Le Roux.

He said the City cannot demolish privately owned property and the unit does not issue a fine.

He said normally the City prefers to address issues before any building or property reaches a state of total degradation.

However, the problem building unit relies heavily on complaints from the public.

He said the owner is then served with a compliance notice to effect the necessary repairs or clean up to the satisfaction of the City within a specified period. If the owner fails to adhere to the compliance notice, the City may do the repairs or clean up and recover the cost of about R5 000 monthly from the owner until the property has been removed from the declared problem building list.

Wynberg police spokesperson, Captain Ntombi Nqunkeka, said they are doing regular patrols at these houses but there is a long process to be followed by the DPW in order to demolish the buildings.

Report any concerns to the problem building unit or the City's central call centre number at 0860 103 089.