

Rats infest 'disgusting' dilapidated government-owned properties in Howick

KERUSHUN PILLAY

PROPERTIES owned by the government in Howick, one of them the old Howick Museum, have become completely dilapidated, infested by rats, and littered with faeces.

The properties, owned by the national Department of Public Works (DPW), are completely run down and are missing entire sections of walls and roofs. They are both surrounded by dense bush and have tall plants growing inside them — an indication of just how long they have been left.

One of the buildings used to be the Howick Museum until 1992.

These two buildings, on Morling Street, are not far from a third DPW-owned house which is dilapidated.

That house, on Bell Street, was originally bought by the DPW to house the local magistrate. It has been vacant since 2011 and has smashed windows, with unkempt grass climbing up the surrounding fence.

The house is on a quiet residential road and in previous years was the bane of residents' lives as it was home to vagrants and criminals. However, after numerous complaints, it is now

guarded.

uMngeni Municipality councillors and DA spokesperson for public works in the province, Sizwe Mchunu, were refused access to the house when they met *The Witness* in the area.

One resident of more than 20 years, Moray Calder, said the neighbourhood was plagued with petty crime when vagrants lived in the house, adding that he had scaffolding stolen from his yard and was accosted by a person armed with a knife in his home two years ago.

"It's been a problem for years, and the condition of this house makes us feel unsafe."

Mchunu said he would write an urgent letter to MEC for Public Works in the province, Ravi Pillay, requesting immediate intervention.

"This is seriously disgusting. The impact of buildings like this to property rates is disheartening. Valuable assets are not being looked after. The department should be ashamed and take responsibility."

The ward councillor, Janis Holmes, said she had written numerous e-mails to the DPW over the years to get them to intervene. "These proper-



A property owned by the Department of Public Works on Morling Street in Howick has been reduced to rubble.

PHOTOS: KERUSHUN PILLAY

ties are on land that could be used for something, so it shows how badly the DPW is managing land. The grass [at the properties on Morling Street] is

cut maybe once a year."

Speaking about the home on Bell Street, Holmes said: "This property could be worth R1,5 million if it was



DA MPL Sizwe Mchunu and Howick councillor Janis Holmes at a former historical site on Morling Street which has been reduced to ruins.

taken care of. The [DPW] could be making R8 000-R9 000 in rent every month."

The DPW did not reply to a detailed query last week.