

'We need homes'

Oribi locals want houses, not a school

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FED up with the slow pace of housing delivery, some Oribi Village residents have vowed to fight any plans that will see a vacant former Telkom Technical Services (Pelham) property transformed into a school. Instead, the residents say they want the property to be turned into a residential area.

The residents, who tried to descend on the property on Tuesday and yesterday, broke into a riot after they were prevented by private security guards and police from entering the site.

Msunduzi Mayor Themba Njilo visited the area yesterday morning to try and calm the situation. This after police had to use rubber bullets to disperse the angry crowd.

Sections of the property were torched during the protest, but police said no one was arrested. While many residents were not willing to be interviewed or photographed, they told *The Witness* yesterday that they didn't want a school but were in favour of the property being used for low-cost housing. A resident, who declined to be named, said: "We are missing the need for proper housing in the area. Although we don't dispute the school development; our priority is housing."

The residents claimed that ward councillor Nokuthula Msimang had not consulted with them over plans to transform the property into a school.

"I have two children and I'm not married. I want a place for them so that when I die, they would have a place to live.

"I don't have a place of my own because I don't own the place I live in. So, I want to provide my children with a home," said another resident.

Others complained about being used as "voting fodder" by political parties and blamed Msunduzi Municipality for failing to deliver houses for them since the beginning of democracy.

The residents said as much as they do not sanction illegal property invasions, they have been complaining for years about a lack of adequate housing, but nothing is being done to address the issue.

They said while some of them have lived in the area for decades, the conditions they live in are not conducive to calling the place they live home. "I have been staying



A security guard looks around the burnt out building in Oribi Village yesterday. **PHOTOS: IAN CARBUTT**

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with my three children in a small wendy house in a backyard. We have been living there for years. We are crammed up and require a house urgently,” one said.

Ward councillor Msimang confirmed that the property had been earmarked for a school. “During public meetings they [residents] complained the area didn't have a school or clinic. Looking at the structure of the building, we thought it



Disgruntled residents outside the old Telkom office in Oribi Village yesterday.

would be feasible for a school,” she said. Msimang said she would meet with the residents again on Sunday to try and find solutions.

She said there were plans in place to re-vamp and redevelop the area for proper housing. “Old and new Oribi housing sections are in the process of being transferred from Human Settlements to Msunduzi Municipality,” she said.

Telkom spokesperson Noma Faku said they were informed of the riot and the attempted invasion on Tuesday night. “Telkom relocated from the site due to business requirements to another Telkom-owned site in Pietermaritzburg,” she said. Faku said Telkom had previously leased the building from the Public Works Department.

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