

■ PRISON

Two SA prisons and its prime land not for sale

Department has continued need of facilities

NICOLA DANIELS

nicola.daniels@inl.co.za

POLLSMOOR Prison may be on prime land, but all considerations to sell it were thrown off the table even before a feasibility study was completed, in light of fiscal constraints for accommodation and infrastructure, the Department of Public Works said.

The idea to sell the prison was introduced in 2014 when the Department of Public Works, custodians of the land, undertook a feasibility study on the possible disposal of Pollsmoor Prison in Cape Town and Leeukop Prison in Johannesburg.

This as the two facilities are located within increasingly urbanised developments, and residents had expressed concerns around the security.

Then-justice and correctional services minister Michael Masutha had said the purpose of the study was to assess the market for interest within the private sector for developing the land in further urbanisation strategies, as well as to determine the replacement values of the correctional centres.

At the time, the 2.5km² of land that Pollsmoor sits on was estimated at more than R100 million. Property developers said it was big enough to house a new suburb.

Department of Public Works spokesperson Thami Mchunu said: "This department undertook to

conduct a feasibility study to consider the highest and best use of each of the properties to inform their optimal utilisation in the provision of suitable and cost-effective accommodation for the user department, being the Department of Correctional Services (DCS).

"Subsequent engagements between the two departments, however, resolved that in light of fiscal constraints for accommodation and infrastructure, and in light of the confirmation by the user department of the continued need for these facilities, that the disposal (sale) or any other alternative use of the properties would not be considered, therefore detailed feasibility studies were not concluded."

The 2018/19 Judicial Inspectorate for Correctional Services' annual report found overcrowding, old infrastructure and a lack of proper maintenance were the main contributing factors to poor conditions of correctional facilities.

"The effects of overcrowding are far-reaching; kitchens work overtime to prepare enough food for inmates, plumbing and hot water systems constantly break down due to overuse.

"There are cases where centres have lice and other pest infestations mainly due to the high turnaround of remand detainees," the inspecting judge, Justice Johann van der Westhuizen, had said.

The Department of Correctional Services did not comment by deadline.