

■ HERITAGE

# Closure of Old Town House Museum a 'travesty'

*Slow progress with renovations slammed*

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IT REMAINS uncertain when the Iziko Old Town House Museum, closed for renovations for the past four years, will reopen.

Former members of the committee managing the Iziko Michaelis Collection – a collection of 17th-century Dutch and Flemish paintings that was housed in the Old Town House – have raised their concern over the extended closure, and wrote to the Department of Public Works and Iziko Museums of SA, demanding answers.

The steps of the historic building at Greenmarket Square are said to be at the exact centre of the CBD.

In the letter, co-signed by Juliet Lomborg, Clare Graaff and Helen Binckes, they wrote that the closure of the iconic building to South Africans and tourists was a travesty.

"The building is looking very dilapidated and derelict at present.

"We understand that it was closed to renew the electrical wiring and sort out damp problems. How can this have taken all this time?" They wrote.

Lomborg said since they complained last week, both the department and Iziko Museums of SA had been in touch with her.

Iziko Museums of SA chief executive Rooksana Omar said in December 2015 two serious electrical-related incidents – a fire alongside a wall and one in the ceiling – were reported at the Old Town House, making it unsafe for the public and staff, and a danger to the irreplaceable artworks.

Department staff and an occupational health and safety team assessed the incidents, and it was decided that the building should be closed.

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Rooksana Omar

CHIEF EXECUTIVE AT IZIKO MUSEUMS OF SA

Omar said since then, applications to have the electrical system overhauled were made in February 2016; by the end of 2017 Iziko had received quotations for ceiling repairs and painting of the façade; and in January last year, permit applications were submitted to Heritage Western Cape for the maintenance work.

"On February 26, Iziko received the actual permit from Heritage Western Cape for the repairs and renovations.

"Following this, Iziko sent out a request for quotation (RFQ) to architects with heritage expertise.

"On March 12, Heritage Western Cape advised that Iziko must formulate and submit a separate application for the electrical repairs with detailed specifications; and by the end of March Iziko sent out an RFQ.

"In June, Iziko received quotations.

"To date, procurement has concluded and the outcome of the process was received. Some of the processes of upgrading and maintaining the museum are beyond the locus of Iziko's control. Iziko is engaging with all stakeholders at national, provincial and local level, and have followed all required processes," Omar said.

The department said the matter fell under Iziko's mandate.