

■ DEVELOPMENT

No decision on plans for River Club

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A DECISION has not yet been reached regarding an appeal by the City and province to lift a provisional heritage protection for the Two Rivers Urban Park in Observatory.

The Department of Cultural Affairs and Sport's ministerial independent tribunal was still in a meeting late last night.

At the heart of the appeal is a multi-million rand redevelopment of the River Club that is opposed by groups concerned about the heritage of the Liesbeek River and surrounds.

The appeals were lodged last year by the City, the Department of Transport and Public Works, the Department of Environmental Affairs and Development Planning, and the Liesbeek Leisure Properties Trust. Earlier this year, at a special council meeting of Heritage Western Cape, a decision to withdraw the area's protection status was recommended, but rejected.

Heritage Western Cape chief executive Dr Mxolisi Dlamuka said: "The matter is being dealt with by the minister's independent tribunal.

"Heritage Western Cape took a decision in 2017 and it was appealed."

For seven years the residents of Observatory have been objecting to the redevelopment plans. They have also raised concerns about how the proposed redevelopment on the banks of the river could have a negative effect on the environment, and affect the significance of the area's history.

The Liesbeek River is in the oldest urbanised river valley in South Africa.

The Two Rivers Urban Park is at the confluence of the Black and Liesbeek rivers, close to the city centre. Because of its environment and history, the area has become ideal for a development that can enhance job creation.

The Liesbeek Leisure Property Trust, which owns most of the land on which the conference facilities and golf courses are situated, plans to redevelop five hectares of the site, while the remaining 10 hectares will be landscaped and rehabilitated for recreational use, or for service infrastructure such as roads and parking.

Chairperson of the Observatory Civic Association, Tauriq Jenkins, said: "This is a battle of restorative justice. It has deep historical roots. It's important for all the stakeholders to take note.

"This is a very sacred ground."