



The north entrance of the Ratlou Complex in Thaba Nchu, overgrown with wild shrubs and grass.

Photos: Teboho Setena

# Vandals destroy buildings

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Two multimillion rand buildings in Thaba Nchu are in a state of ruin. The destruction and vandalism of these buildings continues unabated.

These are the Ratlou Complex and the Botshelo Community Centre.

The Ratlou Complex is one of the notable buildings constructed during the era of the late Lucas Manyane Mangope, leader of the Bantustan of Bophuthatswana.

Now the buildings are the property of the Free State government's Department of Public Works.

The buildings are being vandalised at a fast pace. Wild shrubs and grass more than a meter high have also grown within them.

At the entrances a visitor is greeted by the sight of waste, broken window panes and damaged ceilings, as well as roof structures that have been stolen. It seems that electrical wiring and copper have been stripped, presumably to be sold at scrap metal dealerships.



The entrance to the building of the Free State Department of Social Development, housed in the Ratlou Complex.

The Ratlou Complex houses numerous units of Free State departments, which include that of the Department of Social Development. The ongoing vandalism has forced the closure of the offices of the department, affecting the delivery of services.

According to Lerato Tlhapuletsa, spokesperson for the department, the Ratlou Building was closed on 13 January after the Department of Labour had issued a prohibition notice. This was necessary due to findings that the buildings did

not comply with the Occupational Health and Safety Act.

"Air conditioners are not in working order and our lives were at risk during the hype of Covid-19. There is one door as exit and entrance, which is utilised by everyone, the workers and the clients," a source said.

Tlhapuletsa said 52 officials of the department had worked from offices leased from the provincial Department of Public Works.

"This office services between 550 to 650 clients per month."

Vandals apparently seized the opportunity to break into the building to strip copper and electricity wiring when the building was temporarily closed. Also, vandals are understood to be ripping apart the Ratlou Complex despite security officers being on guard 24 hours a day.

According to Tlhapuletsa, the Botshelo Community Centre was guarded during the day.

"At night there was a patrol vehicle, since there is no electricity."

She said incidents of vandalism reportedly started on 10 December and increased toward the end of January.

"The police managed to find some of the stolen assets after this was reported," she said.

According to Tlhapuletsa, the two departments – Public Works and Social Development – have begun to work together to address the ongoing vandalism at these two buildings.

The Ratlou Complex is also home to the Department of Education and the Department of Small Business Development, Tourism and Environmental Affairs.