

LAND

Military sites 'cannot be used for affordable housing'

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THE Department of Public Works and Infrastructure said military sites identified by land and housing activists for social and affordable housing could not be released, because they were still used by the Department of Defence.

The Development Action Group, Ndifuna Ukwazi, South African SDI Alliance, Community Organisation Resource Centre, Legal Resources Centre and Professor Vanessa Watson have called for military sites Wingfield, Youngsfield and Ysterplaat to be released, to address the City's housing crisis and apartheid spatial legacy.

Department spokesperson Zara Nicholson said the sites, under the custodianship of the Department of

Public Works and Infrastructure were currently allocated to and being utilised by the Department of Defence.

Former Cape Town mayor Patricia de Lille had called on the national government to release these sites for human settlement development purposes, said Nicholson.

"In January 2021, Minister [of Public Works and Infrastructure] De Lille undertook a joint site visit with the Minister of Defence and the Minister of Rural Development and Land Reform to these military sites to see which parts and how much of the land is being utilised by the Department of Defence, as the Department of Defence had concerns regarding their own operational viability if all three sites are to be released," said Nicholson.

"Following the visit, the three ministers made recommendations to the Inter-Ministerial Committee (IMC) on Land Reform regarding the potential use of the land. The IMC has agreed that the Minister of Defence must prepare a Cabinet memorandum to make recommendations to Cabinet for consideration."

While the departments and Cabinet worked on the matter pertaining to the military sites, various other parcels of land have been signed off for release by De Lille. Over the past 12 months, these included: 3 000 hectares of land in towns and cities for human settlements purposes; 2 500 hectares of land to finalise long-standing land restitution cases; 25 500 hectares of farm land for release for land redistribution purposes; and 12 state buildings have

been refurbished and released to the Department of Social Development for use as gender-based violence and femicide shelters.

However, the NGO coalition said: "While we appreciate the various parcels of land the Department of Public Works is releasing, there has to be a clear distinction between urban and rural areas, in particular, clarity on land released in metros for affordable housing.

"The City of Cape Town, previously under the administration of Minister De Lille, also called for the release of these specific underutilised parcels of land. It calls into question, when there is a national and Cape Town housing crisis, why we need three clearly underutilised sites for military purposes."