

Community claims DPW land



LONDIWE PEARL XULU

About 20 timber houses have been erected on vacant land (corner of Theed and Berea Roads) belonging to the Department of Public Works (DPW) at KwaMevana. The people building these houses said they had waited for more than 15 years for houses and the growing population left them no choice.

The community sent a letter last week to the DPW asking that the vacant land be given to them so they could build on it.

Speaking for the community, Sandile Masondo said they had been maintaining this piece of land using their own money. "It had become a dumping site, a hideout for criminals, and drug dealers sell whoonga here," he said.

He added that recently, a homeowner living next door to the property was killed by criminals.

Masondo said the invasion was done in an orderly manner without aggression.

"We are more than happy for anyone to communicate with us. We are not fighting and this is not associated with any political party.

"We are just a community desperate for land on which to build our houses as we have nowhere else to build. We can't even expand on existing houses, because there is no space, yet the population keeps on growing."

The land in question has been divided into 33 sites, each 270m sq: 33 houses are expected to be built here.

"We are not creating a squatter camp as we don't want another informal settlement," he said.

Masondo added that he was born and raised at KwaMevana and there were more than 21 of them living in a two-bedroom house.

"As a man, I had to move out and rent elsewhere in the community," he said.

And while many assume that most houses at KwaMevana are

being rented out to outsiders and foreigners, Masondo said only a few people rent out their outbuildings.

"Most of the people renting are from the community, who move from their homes because they are overcrowded," he said.

A neighbour to the hijacked land told *Village Talk* that as long as the new settlement does not become a squatter camp, he was happy because it would at least no longer be a dump site and criminals would have nowhere to hide.

"We hope this will decrease crime in the area," said another.

However, others living in close proximity said they were concerned about the "invasion". There were also concerns about where these houses would get electricity and water, and how their sewage needs would be tackled. One said his property was going to immediately lose its value.

Last year, uMngeni Municipality Mayor Sizwe Sokhela launched a housing project of 26 RDP houses for the KwaMevana community. Ward Councillor Bongani Zuma said there were no issues with the project, and that nominated beneficiaries had to resubmit their documents and construction would begin.

A model house was begun in September but never completed. Asked about the land invasion, he said he was "only aware of it over the weekend and will look into it".

However, Councillor Janis Holmes said that contractors started work on the model house in September last year but stopped building because of non-payment.

She added that it was a terrible situation because as much as the community needed houses and were sick of broken promises, "they are still taking over land illegally that does not belong to them, and sadly, because of this, there will be repercussions".