

GRIPES IGNORED

Abandoned SAPS houses a 'crime den'

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A MUD-STAINED teddy bear, broken bottles, shattered windows, dense bush and the stench of faeces are all that remain at two abandoned state-owned SAPS houses in Brindhaven, Verulam.

The buildings in Russom Street were formerly occupied by police captains, who moved out two years ago.

Residents say the houses are now used by drug addicts and for criminal activities.

One of the houses is situated next to the Verulam SAPS but complaints to the station's management, some residents claim, have been ignored.

Recently, a high school pupil was stabbed near one of the abandoned buildings and his cellphone, wallet and school shoes stolen.

Earlier, a jogger was accosted and robbed of his cellphone.

"There is an influx of crime, especially petty theft, as a result of the vacant properties," said Sam Govender, who moved into the area four years ago.

"Sugar addicts use these spots as hide-outs and a trading place. Once some residents entered the premises to see who was using the properties. We found bedding and other personal belongings to suggest someone is using the place."

Govender, who is also part of the Brindhaven Neighbourhood Watch, said he contacted senior management at the police station to intervene but there was no feedback.

"Councillor Johnson Chetty is assisting to escalate the matter to the relevant provincial government department. People are always looking for houses to buy or rent. Why not put the site to better use instead of it being vacant and attracting crime? I am sure the properties can be redeemed and salvaged for those who are in need of homes."

Vishal Dhudibal, a fellow resident and chairperson of the Brindhaven Civic Association, said he had also addressed the matter with the local police.

He said there were various incidents of petty crime over the past month.

"Every day criminals are stealing from the area and using the houses as storage facilities at night. In the morning, they leave and sell the stolen items."

"The properties are an eyesore and a hazard. It's also in the vicinity of two schools. Today it could be petty crime and tomorrow a tragedy. We (should) rather nip the problem in the bud while we still can."

Dhudibal said there was a pathway from Inanda Road to the nearby Mount-view Secondary School.

"Pupils were stopped, searched and robbed. Recently, a pupil was robbed and stabbed. The primary school is in the vicinity and kids often play around there. It is scary to think about what could happen. It seems the owners of the properties do not care about the consequences of the vacant land."

He suggested the properties be turned into a facility where crime victims could receive trauma counselling.

"The government could even give it to the primary school, as additional facilities to assist pupils."

A fellow resident said he often saw suspicious activity taking place at the sites.

"Some people come to see what



THE community has said the houses are used by drug addicts and for criminal activity. This is what remains of one of the buildings. | JANINE MOODLEY



COUNCILLOR Johnson Chetty outside one of the two abandoned state houses on Russom Street in Verulam.

they can take from the houses."

Chetty, the ward councillor, said he approached government officials last May but the excuses for them not having visited the properties since then included the Covid-19 pandemic and bad weather conditions.

He said the properties were initially used by white officers during apartheid and that it was subsequently used by officers of all race groups as part of their subsidised housing.

Chetty said the R102 was at the bottom of Russom Street and that drug addicts were taking drugs and sleeping in the vacant homes.

"They also commit crimes and use this as a hideout. It is rather ironic that

in Verulam, crime is aided and abetted indirectly by the SAPS. I have done what I could to persuade SAPS management to take responsibility for these properties, which are registered with Public Works. All I got were excuses for the site inspection which never happened.

"It's rather sad that the SAPS has failed to patrol and remove the illegal vagrants who occupy the properties, despite promises.

"This sorry state of affairs is symptomatic of an uncaring and unaccountable government which treats its people with contempt."

The police and the Department of Public Works had not commented by the time of publication.