

SITE IN ATHLONE PARK TO BE 'HANDED BACK TO DEPARTMNT OF PUBLIC WORKS'

Vandals trash weather station

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THE old weather radar site in Radar Road, Athlone Park, has become an eyesore for residents, as well as being constantly vandalised by criminals.

The Independent on Saturday visited the site this week to find the previously locked gate open with broken locks.

The main building is damaged in numerous places, including whole windows missing. The palisade fencing around the property has also been broken in numerous places. At the back of the property there is thick undergrowth with a path leading to the road behind.

Local resident Steve Bekker said: "The criminals can walk freely in and out and the palisade at the back is so broken a car could drive through it. Copper pipes, cables and equipment have all gone. The site is unsecured and nobody seems interested in securing the property."

The radar was decommissioned in 2018. Prior to that, rising more than 100m above sea level, the giant radar was a landmark for many Toti residents. After being dismantled, it was donated to a research institute.

It stopped operating in 2010 when the airport relocated to the North Coast with the opening of King Shaka International Airport. It was replaced by an more up-to-date radar in uMhlanga.

Reports at that time indicated the station was built in 1992.

The SA Weather Service regional manager for KZN, Siyabonga Mthethwa, said this week that securing the former weather bureau's radar site had given him "sleepless nights". He added that it was in the process of handing back the site to the Department of Public Works.

"Due to severe budget cuts, we can no longer afford to keep the unused



RESIDENT Steve Bekker outside the former weather radar site in Athlone Park, near eManzimtoti, which is being regularly vandalised. Locks on the front gate have been broken open and some of the windows have been removed from the building. | SHELLEY KJONSTAD African News Agency (ANA)

site. The site has been repeatedly vandalised and I have requested help from our technical service department to install private security while we wait for Public Works to take back the site," Mthethwa said.

There is still an automatic weather station at the site which Mthethwa confirmed would also be removed.

"All the copper cables have been stripped, not once, but twice, by crimi-

nals. The site has given me many sleepless nights and I am doing everything I can to find a solution to this problem which I inherited," Mthethwa said.

He added that it had been difficult to trace documentation relating to the site because it was before his time at the weather bureau, but that during his investigations there appeared to be "no paperwork showing that the site was given to us. It seems like it was a

gentleman's agreement made verbally years ago".

The weather radar site is used largely for the monitoring of severe weather, such as thunderstorms and heavy rain, to warn the public through disaster management structures, aviation and marine communities.

The Department of Public Works did not respond to requests for comment.



THE radar tower infrastructure being dismantled in April 2018.