



Publication: Constantiaberg Bulletin - Main
Title: Battle over Wynberg ruins goes to Parliament
Publish date: 30 Nov 2023
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Reach: 31316
AVE: R 52373.37
Author: Janice Matthews

Battle over Wynberg ruins goes to Parliament

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Petitioners calling for the demolition of two derelict and illegally occupied state-owned Wynberg properties have presented their case to a parliamentary committee.

The Waterloo Green Road properties, which are owned by the Department of Public Works and Infrastructure, are now in ruins following years of neglect and vandalism.

The properties are occupied by vagrants and have become a blight on the neighbourhood, according to ward councillor Emile Langenhoven who, together with residents, told the parliamentary portfolio committee on public works and infrastructure, on Wednesday November 15, that the properties should be demolished.

"This once tranquil part of Wynberg, which is surrounded by six schools, namely Wynberg Girls' High and Junior schools, Wynberg Boys' High and Junior schools, Simon van der Stel Primary and Springfield Convent School border Waterloo Green, which is the epicentre of what has become a staging area for crime visited upon residents and the schools," Mr Langenhoven said to the portfolio committee.



He said the historical significance of the 160-year-old Ye Olde Thatch, which was declared a national monument in 1974, and the 130-year-old Victorian house next to it had been eroded.

A third Waterloo Green Road property owned by Public Works is situated on the corner of Ellerslie Road. It is in much better shape, and security guards hired by the department patrol the

property.

"In November 2017, the inevitable happened: the Ye Olde Thatch was set alight and went up in flames," Mr Langenhoven told the committee. "The thatch

■ Ward councillor Emile Langenhoven with the DA's spokesman on public works, Sello Seifiholo, during a visit to the site in May.

PICTURE: JANICE MATTHEWS

roof disappeared, the inside of the house was decimated. During this period, the building was registered as a problem building with the City of Cape Town and several notices are handed over to the Department of Public Works manager, Cindy Green, and the line manager, Lizette Valentine.

"Later, two other fires were reported in 2019. As we speak, the remaining roof at Ye Olde Thatch has been stripped, leaving the entire building foundations exposed. The wooden floors, if not burnt to a cinder, have been completely removed, and all that remains are the bones of a carcass that was a historic building. Pieces of the zinc roof at the Victorian house are slowly being removed and repurposed. This house is also starting to be stripped for parts and will soon see its demise."

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Publish date: 30 Nov 2023

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Reach: 31316

AVE:R 19509.70

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‘In November 2017, the inevitable happened: the Ye Olde Thatch was set alight and went up in flames’

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He said that the community had recommended subdividing the property into four plots with three of them accommodating single residences to be sold to the public and the remaining plot to be used by the four schools for parking.

Phucuka Penxa, the Cape Town regional manager for the Department of Public Works and Infrastructure, told the committee she did not think parking would be the best use for the property.

“The Department of Justice has formally registered their interest in the Victorian house. They want to use the house as an office. We have done a technical detailed condition assessment of the property. In terms of costs, we are working with the client in terms of confirming funds in order for us to effect the reno-

vations on the subject property,” she said.

Furthermore, the Department of Defence, had shown interest in using the other two properties although there were no formal plans.

She added: “We’ve got security manning the properties, and, to date, the number of illegal occupants has decreased to five due to very stringent measures we have introduced in terms of what time they come in or go out.

“We are also in the process of approaching the state attorney’s office for the eviction of the illegal occupants and appointing a senior counsel who will be dealing with our matter going forward. Also pursuing the Department of Defence to see whether we cannot get their confirmation for them to take over.”