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A file image of Ye Olde Thatch, a property with heritage status located on Waterloo Green in Wynberg, taken last year. Conditions continue to worsen at the three properties owned by the Department of Public Works and Infrastructure.

PHOTO: NETTALIE VILJOEN



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Residents of Ward 62 have been asked to put their support behind a petition for the demolition of derelict houses and addressing security risks on Waterloo Green Road in Wynberg.

In a communication distributed via WhatsApp and email on Wednesday 31 May to residents, Ward 62 councillor Emile Langenhoven implored the entire ward to sign the petition.

"So that we can show that we are united in our support," he wrote.

According to Langenhoven, the houses had become a refuge for

criminals who conduct crimes in Wynberg and neighbouring areas.

"It, therefore, affects not only Wynberg, but the entire ward."

Prior to 2015, all three houses were let to members of the military or police but, without proper maintenance, two of the houses gradually became unliveable. As these tenants moved out, street people moved in. Over the past eight years, the two properties located furthest down the road have been systematically stripped. One of these properties, called Ye Olde Thatch, suffered at least two fires in recent years.

The properties, as well as the 8 500 square metres of open field that lies behind them, belong to the Department of Public Works and Infrastructure (DPWI).

In February last year, the department shared that funding for the demolition of two of the three homes had been approved ("Small step forward", *People's Post*, 1 March 2022. However, since then communication lines seem to have gone silent.

On Friday 19 May, the newly appointed DA shadow minister for this portfolio, Sello Seithlolo, visited the crumbling heritage buildings ("Property woes in Wynberg drag on", *People's Post*, 23 May).

Addressing the residents who had gathered in Waterloo Green Road for the site visit, Seithlolo urged them to draw up and sign a petition that he would be able "to push" in the portfolio committee where he serves.

He said the committee had the authority to summon government

departments and any other stakeholders to give account.

"And that is where we would then need to get a commitment from the department as to why has it been so many years that they have allowed this particular situation to happen," said Seithlolo, adding that if the matter ended up going to court, they would have something in hand.

In last week's communication, Langenhoven explained that the Waterloo Green houses were a test case on how to deal with neglected national government properties at a local level through a petition which will be submitted to Seithlolo for submission to the DPWI portfolio committee. Specific concerns raised in this petition include criminal activities, security risks and neglected properties.

With two of the houses completely gutted, Langenhoven claims they are being used as drug dens and for prostitution. The third house is being guarded by private security, paid for by the state.

"And, therefore, your tax money. They are completely ineffectual, and the last house may succumb to the fate of the other two."

David Hoffman lives directly opposite "the last house" and has done so for the past 21 years. Present at the site visit held in May, Hoffman said something needed to happen urgently.

"I live across the road from this and I saw a gangster bleeding out on the corner there last year. He had been cut with a panga and nearly beaten to death and I pay rates to

▶▶CONTINUED ON PAGE 3



Publication: People s Post Constantia-Wynberg - Main

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Page: 3

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▶▶CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

live here and be exposed to that.”

A resident, who asked to remain anonymous out of fear of retribution, said she was waiting to be murdered in her own property.

“These people keep accessing it.”

Another resident, who also asked not to be named, said she was living in fear.

“I had a knife and a gun at my head, in my own home, in hard lockdown.”

Nic Louw, who owns a property in the area, said he shared the security concerns as well as the drop in property value. Louw, who is also a practicing architect, also expressed his despondency at the loss of heritage.

“This building is of great historical value, this entire area is, Waterloo Green. It is a fine example of a beautiful Victorian building that fell and fell and fell. We are watching our heritage falling apart in front of our eyes. Now, with all that has happened, the only thing that is left is when will they demolish,” he said.

Louw, who had just returned from a road trip to Phalaborwa Gate at Kruger National Park, said he witnessed this decay in government-owned property as he travelled through the north west.

“I went through all those little towns. Brits, Kimberley. I stayed at the Kimberley Club Hotel. Beautiful old buildings, the McGregor Museum, town halls falling apart.”

Louw said “the rot” needed to be stopped.

“You know you see a sign ‘potholes’, instead of fixing it. The latest one is ‘beware of falling debris’. I promise you. I have taken photographs of these signs on a crumbling historic building. The department is printing signs saying beware of falling debris. So that the homeless people can be warned that debris may fall on them at night.”

To obtain a copy of the petition, email natasha.theron@capetown.gov.za with the Subject: “Waterloo Green Petition”. Alternatively, collect at Wynberg Library or at the Alphen Subcouncil Office (opposite the Constantia Village). Signed copies can also be emailed to the above email address or dropped off at these sites.