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# 'Fix old buildings'

## Abandoned buildings in KZN 'a playground for criminals'

**KHETHUKUTHULA XULU  
and LONDIWE XULU**

The KwaZulu-Natal government and state entities own numerous buildings that are abandoned, dilapidated and stripped — making them playgrounds for illegal activity.

Dozens of these buildings came to light after the April 2022 floods, which destroyed homes and left thousands homeless.

Opposition parties such as the Democratic Alliance (DA) and the Inkatha Freedom Party (IFP) then pushed for the provincial government to refurbish some of these buildings to house displaced families instead of putting them in community halls for long periods at a time, and moving families from one temporary shelter to another.

Recently, the DA has been conducting oversight visits at some of these houses and buildings. The party believes the buildings pose a danger to the public as they are not suitable to live in.

Yesterday, DA shadow minister of Public Works Sello Seitlholo MP, DA KZN spokesperson on Public Works Marlaine Nair MPL and Central Durban Constituency head Dianne Kohler Barnard MP conducted oversight visits at the infamous Excelsior Court building in Durban as well as "Howick's havens of vice" in uMngeni.

The Excelsior Court building, which was owned by the Department of Public Works, was previously occupied by the South African Police Services (SAPS). It is now being stripped by gangs and there are reports that the building is being illegally rented out.

According to the DA, there have

been many attempts in the last 10 years to address the matter by engaging the government and the Department of Public Works, but this was to no avail.

Seitlholo said the building was in an appalling state, with everything of worth and value — especially steel — having been stripped. "This building is not fit for human living, however, we found one person sleeping in one of the rooms, which was filled with human faeces."

He said it was the DA's duty to bring such issues to the department's attention. However, he added that it was not unknown to the department that these issues existed. "Buildings like this are everywhere in the country. It seems the department has no idea where all their immovable assets are, which is why they are not taken care of, and there is no political will to see that illegal occupants are [removed]."

Member of the Mayville SAPS CPF, Janus Horn, said the building was problematic as at some point more than 200 people moved in at once and it was up to the CPF and the local police to evict them.

"Whenever people are spotted in the building, the first thing residents do is call the police or CPF, and it's impossible for us to be able to ensure that the building is not invaded as we don't have the resources."

He said a lot of illegal activity took place at the Berea building, including stripping of cars and slaughtering of animals.

Seitlholo and Nair later went to Howick where they visited three Public Works properties with Ward 2 councillor Janis Holmes.

The three properties include a house



The abandoned Excelsior Court building in Durban. **PHOTO: SUPPLIED**

on Bell Street, a piece of land in Mevana township that has been turned into an informal settlement, and a building opposite the Howick Magistrate's Court.

The Department of Public Works in KZN said all these properties belong to national government.

Holmes said the two properties had been a haven for crime until the department placed a security guard at the house in Bell Street and removed roofing from the one opposite the court.

"There have been a lot of muggings on the roads near these properties. The house in Bell Street used to have

overgrown grass that criminals used as their hideout spot. Even the police asked us to do something about this property due to the amount of crime in the area," she said.

Holmes said the municipality has been writing to the department regarding the use of properties opposite the court to expand the Howick tax rank.

"Most of these properties are in a better state because of uMngeni Municipality," said Holmes.

The KZN Department of Public Works was contacted for comment but none was provided by the time of going to print.