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● Department throws ball back in SAPS's court, urging it to initiate request for permanent structure to be built

Public works won't refurbish Rocklands satellite police station

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The public works and infrastructure department has dropped a bombshell by declaring that the Rocklands satellite police station will not be refurbished.

Instead, the department has thrown the ball back in the police's court, urging the SAPS to initiate an official request for a permanent structure to be built on the site.

Speculation had mounted that the satellite station would be renovated, bringing back a functioning police station in the area for the first time in almost three years to deal with rising crime, including a farm attack on January 6.

The defunct station, which once housed a fully operational client services centre, was declared uninhabitable in 2021 by the national department.

When The Herald team visited the abandoned police station, the scale of the damage to the structure was evident, with dry rot visible and an associated musty smell hanging in the air.

Official crime and ID documents, a safe and police hats lay scattered on the ground, and there was evidence of vandalism.

A high-voltage generator had been stripped of its components, with the thieves seemingly having entered the yard through an unlocked gate. In the absence of a dedicated police precinct, the Rocklands area falls under the jurisdiction of the Kabega Park police.

However, the police station is more than 20km away and searching questions have been asked about its effectiveness in dealing with crime in Rocklands, amid ongoing reports of farm attacks.



IN RUINS: The defunct Rocklands satellite police station, which once housed a fully operational client services centre, was declared uninhabitable in 2021 by the national government. Resident Marie Swanepoel surveys the damage inside the derelict structure. Pictures: WERNER HILLS

The attacks include the July 2022 invasion of a smallholding by two men who callously bludgeoned an elderly farmer and robbed him.

Two suspects were arrested.

Asked about the progress in renovating the satellite police station, public works spokesperson Thamsanqa Mchunu said no repair work had been undertaken and that it would not be viable to renovate the facility.

"Based on internal investigations, it has been found that the damaged structures are mobile park homes, not brick and mortar," he said.

Mchunu said public works did not fix mobile office structures: "That responsibility lies with the SAPS."



SORRY SIGHT: Official crime and ID documents lie strewn around the abandoned Rocklands satellite police station

"The public works regional office in Gqeberha, through architectural professionals, has conducted a comprehensive technical report suggesting the damaged structure be demol-

ished, and a capital project registered.

"The SAPS should initiate the capital project [through] a formal letter to public works to execute the project [by] clear-

ing the site and constructing a permanent structure.

"Public works has also [urged] SAPS to prioritise this request to avert service delivery interruption to the community of Rocklands and its surrounds," Mchunu said.

Police spokesperson Colonel Priscilla Naidu said the police had made a recommendation to public works to upgrade or renovate the building.

DA MPL Bobby Stevenson raised several questions about the abandoned Rocklands station in the provincial legislature last year.

Speaking to The Herald, he said public works should get its house in order promptly to sort out the issue, which had hampered critical service delivery to



the community.

"It is clear the department takes a long time to renovate a police station," Stevenson said.

"Hence, [public works] should allow the community to assist in the meantime, so it can become operational.

"I will continue pursuing this matter in the provincial legislature to try shed light on the progress that must be made."

Highlighting a countrywide crisis affecting the efficiency of law enforcement due to shortages in funding, manpower and police vehicles, Stevenson emphasised the need for collaboration to bolster policing.

"You can't leave fighting crime solely to the SAPS and public works.

"It needs to be a broader partnership between the community, security companies and the municipality.

"Where they can't do the job, they should allow the community to assist with such things as renovations," he said.

DA Ward 20 councillor Jason Grobbelaar said he had hoped efforts by residents of the Rocklands area, who handed over a petition to the police and the municipality, would have the desired effect.

"The petitions were handed over to Kabega Park police station on October 12, and to the mayor's office on November 9.

"I posted on Facebook [recently] to confirm we will continue to raise [the matter] to the government.

"Residents are concerned about [continued] attacks."

