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# Mabuyane puts his head on the block for Bhisho Office Park

**Construction of R1.6bn precinct to start before year is out, premier vows, with a sod-turning set for month end**

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The provincial government is so confident of finally realising its decade-long dream of constructing the ambitious R1.6bn Bhisho office park precinct that premier Oscar Mabuyane has vowed to resign if the start of the project is not realised by the end of 2025.

The province is giving the mega-project another try, after numerous previous failures, with Mabuyane telling the the Bhisho legislature during his recent policy speech that he did not see a future for himself as the province's political head if the project could not be realised in 2025.

The project is more than 10 years overdue and to date there is nothing to show for the R65m already spent on it.

First mooted in 2013, the precinct was supposed to accommodate seven provincial government departments, which lease office space at an annual reported cost of about R200m.

The departments include human settlements; transport; social development; community safety & liaison; sports, recreation, arts & culture; rural development & agrarian reform; and economic development and environmental affairs.

In 2015, it seemed all systems go, with construction then set to begin in 2016 and three years given to complete the project.

But by 2022, Mabuyane said in reply to a question in the legislature that the first two bids to secure a developer had failed.

The third bid was cancelled due to Covid-19 regulations and changes in space requirements.

Since then, not a single bid has been submitted.

At that time, about R38m had been spent on concept designs and plans.

And so, Mabuyane said, another attempt to get the project off the ground had started, with a closed bid to SOEs meant to be finalised in September 2022.

In the event that this bid failed, Mabuyane promised contingency plans were in place for open bids to be published.

Fast forward to 2024, and not much had happened, despite the amount spent almost doubling to R65m.

However, Mabuyane is confident things will change this year.

Speaking to the Dispatch, he said he had placed the project under his "microscopic view".

"This is the project that I have given space, allowing people to do as they please, but I have sensed a lot of upheavals around it, hence I've just put it under the [microscope]. The project must be done and I can tell you now, if it cannot be done, why would I



**VISION DEFERRED:** Artist's impression of the R1.6bn Bhisho office park precinct, yet to materialise after a decade and R65m. PICTURE SUPPLIED

remain a premier, why would I be here, if it does not start by this year?

"That is why I said by the 30th of this month [April], the project must be launched.

"So we will be handing over the site and doing a sod-turn-

ing," Mabuyane said.

"The MEC of public works and infrastructure, Siphokazi Lusithi knows, and the HOD knows, so if I don't go, others are going."

Mabuyane said when it came to the "upheaval" around the

project, he could not really put his finger on it.

But this time there would be no excuses: "I do not care whose interests are [involved] or who wants to benefit.

"What I want is the project. I am not interested in talking."

Over the years, other delays to the project have included BCM's moratorium on developments around Bhisho, Qonce and the surrounding areas because of the shaky state of the water and sewerage infrastructure in the area.

The treatment works in Bhisho, Breidbach, Schornville and Zwelitsha have been operating above capacity for years.

The moratorium is yet to be lifted as the metro grapples with completing the multimillion-rand Zwelitsha wastewater treatment works – a project where over R400m has already been spent by the city even while the project remains in ruins.

But Mabuyane said plans were in place to counter this challenge, which had hampered other major developments and planned housing.

"Yes, the development was hampered by the lack of such bulk infrastructure.

"But the designs and plans that had been developed now have taken care of that for the short to medium term.

"But for long term, BCM has been working around the development of that area in terms of bulk infrastructure, particularly for water and sewerage, so we believe the project is going to go ahead."

Delivering her department's policy speech last week, Lusithi said the department was "making steady progress" in seeing Mabuyane's dream realised.

"This flagship initiative represents a bold and transformative vision for government infrastructure and service delivery in our provincial capital.

"In alignment with our commitment to explore alternative, innovative and sustainable infrastructure funding models,

the department is implementing the Bhisho precinct through a blended model that transitions from a private-public partnership to a public-public partnership.

"This approach has enabled the appointment of the Coega Development Consortium as the implementing agent," Lusithi said.

The project, Lusithi added, was more than just a construction project "but a catalyst for economic development and social transformation".

She said the site handover at the end of April would mark a critical milestone, "not only as the physical start of the project, but as a tangible step towards turning the premier's vision into a lived reality for the people of the Eastern Cape".

"The construction and post-construction operational phases will unlock significant economic opportunities, particularly for local SMMEs, and create much-needed employment opportunities for our people.

"Through inclusive procurement and job creation strategies, this initiative will foster local economic development, empower communities, and contribute to building a capable and developmental state.

"The progress made in the Bhisho Precinct project reaffirms our commitment to using infrastructure as a driver of inclusive growth and a tool to bring government closer to the people," a confident Lusithi said.