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NEW LIFE FOR THE OLD CAPE DUTCH HOUSE

by Chris Olsen

The Old Cape Dutch house at the corner of Main Service and Egret Road, the last building off the highway to Knysna, is set to become a Western Cape Education and Training Centre.

For several years the building in question was handed between governmental departments until the Department of Public Works transferred it to the Department of Higher Education (DHET). The DHET have earmarked it for a non-fee community college that serves adults, primarily, to complete formal education up to Grade 9. Subsequently students from Sedgefield and Knysna will not only be able to complete formal schooling but also be directed to skills schools. There is also the possibility of learners acquiring technical skills, such as plumbing and electrical work, at the revitalised building.

In a social media post Ward 1 Councillor Levael Davis and Amanda Dippenaar from

Southcoast Real Estate made an appeal to the community for help with restoring the building. In the space of just over a week, a plumber, electrician, security company, internet provider, muralist, local hardware store and many others all offered donations and expertise.

The excitement and generosity from the community was especially encouraging for the representatives from Western Cape Education and Training who came for a site visit and meeting on 15 May. Their desire is for the community to be involved and for the site to be ready as soon as possible.

However, the project manager, Suren Gopichand has issued a warning that there may be delays owing to the need for compliance with Municipal Infrastructure Bylaws. An initial walk-through of the site revealed deep cracks on some walls and possible asbestos



that would need removing.

Of most concern is if the building is found to be over 60 years old it will be categorised as a Cape Heritage Site. A Cape Heritage Site would need to receive a grading after an application from Gopichand and that would affect the level of alteration that could be completed.

Gopichand has committed to sending a list of what can be done by the community while the full report is being prepared with correspondence from the Knysna Municipality.

Email amanda@scre.co.za to be added to the mailing list and kept up to date with progress and how you can help.