

DEAN MACPHERSON



*Dear Team*

### **Public Works & Infrastructure,**

When I wrote to you in June, I emphasised that now is the time to expedite the work we are doing to turn South Africa into a construction site and use public property for the public good – so that people across the country can begin to feel the fruits of our labour.

Indeed, in July, we definitely shifted into a higher gear as we launched projects across the country and worked to shape the Department into the economic delivery unit of South Africa. None of this would have been possible without the dedicated efforts of Department of Public Works & Infrastructure officials across the country.

One of the biggest milestones we achieved in July was the tabling of our budget in the National Assembly and the National Council of Provinces. In a press briefing before delivering the vote in the National Assembly, I emphasised how becoming Minister roughly a year ago has been one of the hardest jobs I've ever undertaken – but also the most rewarding – as we are able to make a meaningful difference in the lives of South Africans.

The budget represented a significant turning point for the Department as we moved from talking about the work we want to do, to taking meaningful action. In the budget, we announced key moves to reduce our R6 billion lease portfolio while public properties stand empty; to work with the Minister of Human Settlements to achieve Operation Vulindlela goals for well-located affordable housing; and to partner with AgriSA and AgriBiz to improve rural infrastructure and boost agricultural production.





One of the most important initiatives we announced is our digitisation programme, which – for the first time – will see the Department use digital processes to manage leases and public properties. This will also help improve accountability and transparency. In the past, officials had to rely on stacks of paper to manage assets and leases, increasing the risk of things slipping through the cracks. We are now moving these processes to entirely digital-based systems.

A good example of our success so far is the application we developed in-house, which enables digital sign-off of submissions. This will bring an end to the days when papers had to be flown between Cape Town and Pretoria for physical signatures – often causing delays of up to six months for approvals.



We will continue to build on these successes. I have now invited experts from the public and private sectors to join the advisory committee in my office to help us rethink our programmes and initiatives for the 21st century. The inaugural meeting of the advisory panel – whose members serve at no cost to the state – took place at the beginning of July. I look forward to seeing how they will help us reshape the Department to ensure it plays a meaningful role in South Africa's economic recovery.

In July, we continued our work to use public assets for the public good. We handed over previously unutilised property in the Nkandla Local Municipality in KwaZulu-Natal to the municipality for the development of commercial activities – initiatives that will undoubtedly create much-needed jobs in the community. In Malmesbury, in the Western Cape, we handed over properties to the provincial Department of Social Development to be used as a shelter for victims of substance abuse, as part of nationwide efforts to address Gender-Based Violence.





We also hosted important community gatherings in Gqeberha and Phoenix in Durban, where community members were given the opportunity to personally share their infrastructure concerns with officials from the municipal, provincial and national governments. It was during these meetings that I was able to intervene personally to help unblock delivery bottlenecks.



One of the highlights of the past month was the historic agreement we announced with the United Kingdom (UK) to help capacitate the Department's Strategic and Special Delivery Unit (SSDU) as we optimise asset management and infrastructure delivery. The agreement, which I announced alongside the UK Chancellor of the Exchequer, Rachel Reeves, on the sidelines of the G20 Summit for Finance Ministers in Durban, will go a long way in helping the Department expedite delivery at a time when South Africans are desperate to see change.

The very next day, I had the privilege of joining Expanded Public Works Programme participants at an innovative initiative in Bellville. The initiative provides shelter for homeless individuals in the community, as well as offering skills and training to support them in finding permanent employment. As we work to reimagine the EPWP, these are precisely the kinds of initiatives – those that improve the lives of the most vulnerable – that we must build upon.



July also saw the Department release the findings of two key investigations. In a closed-door meeting with the families of the victims of the George building collapse, I shared the outcomes of investigations conducted by the Council for the Built Environment and the Engineering Council of South Africa. These investigations found that structural issues in the building were covered up and that some engineers lacked the required experience for a construction project of this scale. We will ensure that the appropriate legislative amendments are made to prevent such incidents from occurring in future, and we have submitted all relevant reports to the South African Police Service to assist in criminal investigations.



At a media briefing in Pretoria, we also released the findings of the PricewaterhouseCoopers investigation into the procurement of PSA Oxygen Plants by the Independent Development Trust (IDT) for the Department of Health. The investigation revealed serious governance failings, irregular procurement processes, and possible fraud in the documentation provided by bidders. I have instructed both the Department and the incoming IDT Board to take urgent and appropriate action as part of our efforts to remove corruption and abuse from this important entity.



As we entered Women's Month this August, it was an honour to celebrate the women in the community of Kwadukuza in KwaZulu-Natal, and share the opportunities for women present in the construction and infrastructure sectors. I also look forward to attending CIDB's Empowerment and Recognition of Women in Construction Awards dinner in Johannesburg as we pay tribute to women in the industry.

As always, may our reflection on the past month energise us as we continue working to turn South Africa into a construction site and ensure that public assets are used for the public good. We have made great strides, and I look forward to building on this momentum to create a better South Africa.

Thank you for joining me on this journey. May we – by working together – build a better country.

*Yours in service*

**DEAN MACPHERSON MP**

**MINISTER OF PUBLIC WORKS AND INFRASTRUCTURE**