

SYMPOSIUM ON THE 'ETHICS OF URBAN DEVELOPMENT IN THE WESTERN CAPE'

SUSTAINABLE LIVING

1 INTRODUCTION

In essence, the buildings and structures of the human made landscape, other than most art objects, are located in the public domain (they cannot be packed away, its in your face so to speak). The public domain is a mirror of society and, the visual dimension in particular, tells the observer much about the character nature and history of the people living in any given area. There are however, in addition to the visual dimension, other dimensions and forces that have an influence on how people perceive places and the identity and qualities that people appreciate and that effect the way public domain is perceived. Care must therefore be taken that the factors that affect the character and nature of the public domain as may be perceived by people are understood and recognized in the design of places (especially new places) and the preparation of design/planning policy and design guidelines.

In order to strive for a better future for all in this Province, the human-made landscape should clearly reflect the moral values that mould and support us of a just, equitable and proactive society. Yet, it should also promote and protect the natural ecology on which we sustain ourselves as living beings of an interactive and complex system.

A number of issues face the urban development environment of the Western Cape that undermine the public domain such as bad and ugly architecture, growing urban sprawl, poor housing conditions, improper resort developments, ecological degradation, various forms of pollution, problems facing the N2 Gateway housing development project, inequality regarding access to natural, economic and social resources, high water and electricity demand, private car usage and waste generation patterns etc.

Furthermore, these above-mentioned problems/issues were enhanced or even created by the lack of holistic integration of planning policies at all legislative levels (also refers to the integration of various provincial, local departments, NGOs, heritage agencies, etc.) in the Province which is not currently fully incorporated and functional. Also, giving practical effect to the three imperatives (i.e. human well-being, environmental integrity and economic efficiency) of sustainable development in the urban development milieu has still to be implemented in a more effective, innovative and efficient manner.

The global trend of rapid urbanisation poses a number of challenges in our goal of building a sustainable home for all in the Western Cape. This inevitable trend towards urbanisation places us under pressure and the obligation to redress the Apartheid social and spatial legacy and add to this the responsibility to increase growth, a shared growth in terms of the Accelerated and Shared Growth Initiative of South Africa, then it is clear that the growth and development trajectory we choose in the Western Cape must be rooted in the principles of sustainable development.

Sustainable development, although a widely used phrase and idea, has many different meanings and therefore provokes many different responses. In broad terms, the concept of sustainable development is an attempt to combine growing concerns about a range of

environmental issues with socio-economic issues. Sustainable development has the potential to address fundamental challenges for the Western Cape Province, now and into the future.

2 CURRENT DEVELOPMENT SITUATION

What is important is that, in the Western Cape at this time, there is a reality to face – the eradication of poverty and inequality comes first. This can only be effectively achieved by economic growth and development and the latter can be best achieved through building on a region's comparative economic advantages. However, this does not mean that the value to the natural environment may be in any way neglected. Only through a project-based sustainable development approach can the above-mentioned be achieved. The urban development process in this Province should be seen as part of a sustainable development entity.

At the heart of the matter seems to lie misconceptions pertaining to the nature and role that development should play in our province and how it should be guided from the inception phase through to implementation. The term 'sustainable development' is at times being misused in the property development-conservation debate in that it is primarily used to acknowledge environmental impact instead of recognizing a long term systems approach to economic, environmental and social issues. All types of development should foster a strong sense of community involvement and the building of private/public partnerships and consensus among key stakeholders is an imperative if we were to respond positively of the new South Africa.

Urban development or property development projects that consists of endless expanses of structures that have been styled in some foreign, unsuitable and exotic architecture which lacks a notable sense/spirit of place for that region, and which have a complete disregard for the natural environment; and which also brings no viable economic benefits or spin-offs for its surrounding area should be avoided at all costs and be classified as developments which go against the core of the Constitution of our country.

In the planning and management of resources, especially land, and the design and implementation of projects relating thereto, it is imperative that a clear vision be set and that the objectives and strategies required for the implementation of such a vision be clearly defined and motivated. It is fundamental that practical effect be given to the vision and that the developmental plans and actions resonate with the constitutional imperatives of our country. In other words, our actions in this Province should culminate in practical and positive changes to both the human-made and the natural environment, and the long-term conservation of the latter.

Government and others have implemented and support many programmes and projects to promote and give practical effect to public-private-community partnerships and which can facilitate the engagement of a wide spectrum of role players in the planning and development process.

Unfortunately, there is still a tense continuum in certain quarters of the Province with developers on the one side and conservationists on the other side and in between there are some government officials and NGOs with their own explicit and sometimes damaging agendas. Instead of pooling resources together to tackle undesirable developments, a conflict may arise where ego's, own agendas, bias and selfishness overshadow the initial good intentions of all parties involved and may result in an unwanted deadlock where no-

one comes out as a winner. In order to veer away from such an unnecessary tug-of-war between developers, conservationists, NGOs, government officials, public and private sector, it is important to keep the vision that our moral duty is to create a man-made landscape which does not infringe on the core aspects of a sustainable living.

In order to sustain a human-made landscape over time, the following sense should always be recognized, namely: *sense of place* (i.e. uniqueness/local authenticity of an area), *sense of history* (i.e. learn and appreciate history), *sense of craft* (i.e. local craftsmanship, art, *building materials*), *sense of nature* (i.e. nature is a good model for design) and *sense of limits* (i.e. limit of human scale in the built environment).

3 DEVELOPMENT OUTSIDE THE URBAN EDGE

Recently, a Pandora's Box was opened regarding property developments outside the urban edge of settlements (especially golf course developments). Various policies have been put in place to combat the wanton urban sprawl in the province, and to promote urban densities in the existing urban areas. Whilst an urban edge is necessary to combat urban sprawl and to promote the conservation of agricultural and ecological resources outside the urban areas; it is also near-sighted to draw up a line around a settlement/town and expect that no development whatsoever should take place beyond this line.

The fact of the matter is that we have a growing population, a massive base of poverty-stricken communities, an unequal distribution of wealth and access to resources, etc. These people need shelters, they need employment opportunities, they need a safe and healthy environment, they need an urban landscape they feel at home at, of which they can be proud of, and also where a sense of community, place and vibrancy can be created. Coupled to this, the natural and ecological environment must be protected, managed and monitored, and the all above-mentioned ideals should be viable over a long term and support the sustainable development ideals spelt out by our Constitution, the Nation Address of our President and existing policies that are in place at local and provincial level such as municipal Integrated Development Plans (IDPs), Spatial Development Frameworks (SDFs), Manual of Bioregional Planning Policy, Draft Coastal Zone Policy, Provincial Spatial Development Framework (PSDF), etc.

If no development is allowed outside an urban edge, it could have some disastrous consequences for the Western Cape Province. By achieving higher densities in existing settlements to incorporate these growing populations and in building new houses, the development impact on the existing infrastructure of that particular settlement could be quite severe. For instance, it could lead to multi-storey buildings that may become ghetto's, public open spaces could be compromised for housing developments, traffic congestions could increase, towns may lose their identity that made them well-known in the first place (e.g. Stellenbosch is a famous historic town and there is not much room to develop except on its public open spaces – the Braak for example?), towns may lose their appeal as a tourist attraction and eventually negatively impact the local economy, etc.

Instead of having a single urban edge for large urban area in terms of a 'one size fits all' type approach why not propose a nodal development pattern whereby each nodal settlement should have its own defined urban edge that is delineated for large urban areas that comprises out of a number of nodal developments. For example, Klipheuwel and Philadelphia which are included in the City of Cape Town's urban edge but they are actually nodal settlements in their own right and thus can lose their unique sense of place and history if they form part of a more general urban edge delineation. Especially rural

settlements could be envisaged as small villages (i.e. nodal settlements) where farm workers and people employed in agriculture or service industries could be accommodated.

The establishment of urban edges would be dependent on the local conditions and the different urban areas in the province need to be addressed differently as the implications of urban edges differ from town to town.

Property development projects (especially those outside the urban edge) should not always be seen as these monstrous white elephants on the horizon that seemingly bring no viable solution to uplift the poor communities or are riddled with empty promises that would help the needy or that favour only an 'elite few' and also have no conservation conscience. Without a doubt, there are property developments which rape and scar the provincial landscape with their unsightly, unlawful and unethical planned structures and which have been built on top agricultural or ecologically-sensitive soils and are only benefiting the rich and famous.

If the property development abides to the three imperatives of sustainable development and provides creative ways of facilitating investments that would help transfer the *Second Economy* whilst growing the *First Economy*, then it could for example, make a significant contribution towards the practical implementation of the *iKapa elihlumayo (Growing the Cape)* vision. Planning and development approaches should recognize that *iKapa elihlumayo* aims to support economic growth by increasing public-private investments and promoting broad-based empowerment strategies. This is important to note since government institutions cannot fund all housing developments, conservation programmes, cultural and heritage programmes, upliftment programmes, etc. By creating more public-private-community partnerships through property development which are sustainable, more funds and means can be made available for programmes such as restoration and rehabilitation initiatives of the region where the development is located.

4 SOLUTION

The design of places where human dwelling takes place is in essence a normative activity. For this, the main aim of design is to create an environment which would enhance human dwelling qualitatively and that would give practical effect to the concept of a living tradition within the context of the concept of sustainable development. The challenge is to ensure that the qualities that provide a place with its unique and appreciated identity and meaning is protected and enhanced where a new property development is undertaken.

Furthermore, it is of paramount importance that adherence is given to local and provincial policies, and the local and district IDPs and SDFs. Instead of always re-inventing the wheel (especially when it comes to new development policies) which is a growing worry in this Province, use what is available on the proverbial table and promote the sustainable ideals as put forward in these policies as for example in the Manual for Bioregional Planning which is based on bioregional management systems by institutions such UNEP (United Nations Environmental Programme), IUCN (International Union for Conservation of Nature) and the WRI (World Resource Institute).

The encompassing objective of property developments is to promote sustainable development and this should be achieved through the following:

- a) Building upon and promoting the comparative economic advantages of the region within which the development is located.
- b) Utilizing the natural resource base in a sustainable manner.

- c) Merging ecological and economic considerations in decision-making.
- d) Making a meaningful contribution to the eradication of poverty and inequality.
- e) Ensuring an acceptable return on capital invested by the core project investors.
- f) Ensuring that local communities, especially those who had been disadvantaged by historic injustices are recognized as stakeholders in the planning and development process.
- g) Giving practical effect to the transformation of the South African society as is contemplated in the Constitution.

New development projects should ensure that new places, buildings or landscapes be consistent with local, district and provincial planning policy. Where such policies exist, design policy and guidelines should embrace that ethos of sustainability where human well-being and environmental integrity is promoted by ensuring environmental efficiency.

Recognize the fact that South African solutions should be found for South African problems over a South African time scale.