

BACKGROUND INFORMATION DOCUMENT & INVITATION TO COMMENT: THE PROPOSED ESTABLISHMENT OF A HOUSING DEVELOPMENT AND CONSERVANCY ON BELTON FARM IN THE EASTERN CAPE

Background

The development of an 'eco-estate' or 'eco-residential' housing estate has been proposed by Mr and Mrs Wilmot of Belton Farm. The owners currently farm pineapples and cattle and wish to supplement this income by the creation of a small, eco-friendly housing estate. Such estates attempt to reduce the impact on the bio-physical environment by incorporating large areas of open space and maintaining or introducing indigenous fauna. The aim is to ensure that development is undertaken in a sustainable manner and that the unique environment is preserved. The vast majority of the land will be retained as a nature reserve. Previously endemic game such as small antelope will be reintroduced to the area.

The proposed plots will be just below the ridge of a hill, avoiding any streams and catchment areas, and the vegetation specialist will inform us if there are any sensitive areas which can then be avoided by the development.

Project Description

The proposed Belton Conservancy development constitutes a small area (less than 20 hectares) on Belton farm. This farm is known formally as Portion 6 of the Farm Aquavista, ERF No. 299, and is located along the Kenton-Grahamstown road, in the Bathurst- non-urban area of Ndlambe Municipality.

The development will consist of 15 residential units, which will fall under the name of the Belton Conservancy Trust. The plots on which the houses will be built are roughly 40 x 40m, although a minimal amount of vegetation will be removed and the indigenous bush will be retained around the houses.

The proposed residential development will include the following:

- Roads – a new gravel road will be built to provide access to the houses, existing roads will be upgraded, and small service roads leading to the houses will be created.
- Water pipelines will be extended from the farm's borehole
- Electricity will be upgraded to the area
- 15 residential house

No development of any kind, including gardening, will be permitted outside the designated footprints. It is also proposed that foot and bridal paths be established. The extent and position of these paths will be planned to avoid sensitive indigenous vegetation.



View from proposed housing site overlooking over the Bushman's River Valley

AIM OF THIS DOCUMENT

The aim of this Background Information Document is to provide people affected by and interested in the proposed project with information about this project, the process being followed and to provide them with an opportunity to be involved in the EIA process.

Interested and Affected Parties (IAPs) may raise issues of concern; these along with potential environmental, social and economic impacts will be examined in the EIA process.

The findings of the EIA will be provided to DEDEA for final decision making as to whether or not the project will go ahead and in what form.

Return address for comments:

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Your involvement in this process is important and will help ensure that all relevant issues are raised and assessed in the EIA process.

Details of Services

Infrastructure

- A new gravel road will be created to lead from the R343 to the new houses. This road will be carefully planned in order to cause minimal damage to sensitive soils and natural vegetation.
- Electricity supply will be primarily from Eskom. Homeowners can choose to supplement this with energy from alternative power sources such as solar panels.

Water supply

- Every house built will be required to include rain water storage facilities and grey water management systems.
- It is planned that the development will supplement this with water from the farm's borehole.

Sewage Reticulation

- Sewage disposal will be by way of septic tanks with a French drain system. The geological specialist has ascertained that the environment can support such a system, and that the low number of houses will mean that there will be little impact on the surrounding ecological area and groundwater.

Alternatives

Alternatives to the proposed development will be assessed as part of the Basic Assessment.

The land where the development is proposed is unsuitable for agricultural use. As such, a viable alternative to the proposed development would be the creation of a private game reserve with eco-tourism facilities. Such a development would require the construction of small, self-catering lodges to house tourists. The proposed area would be fenced off, and a selection of small game would be introduced.

The proposed development will also be compared against the no-go option, The no-go option requires evaluating the impacts that would occur should the situation remain as it is without any development taking place.

Potential issues for investigation

Ecological Issues

- Loss of indigenous vegetation and habitat for fauna
- Impact on indigenous fauna (e.g. red data species, fencing etc)
- Alteration of drainage patterns and the water table
- Impact on water resources
- Introduction of game
- Loss of topsoil and soil erosion
- Cumulative impacts of the development on the natural resources (as above)

Socio-economic Issues

- Market demand for housing in the area
- Visual and aesthetic impacts
- Loss of 'Sense of Place'
- Pollution (air, noise and water)
- Development within the context of existing plans

Relevant legislation

According to Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) regulations, promulgated under the National Environmental Management Act (No. 107 of 1998) as amended in 2006, listed activities need to be assessed. In this case the application is to undertake the following listed activities: 23(i) of GN No. R. 544.

The application has been submitted to the Department of Economic Development and Environmental Affairs (DEDEA). The development will also be evaluated in the context of current planning frameworks.

Approach to this Basic Assessment

The process required for the proposed project is a Basic Environmental Assessment. This process serves primarily to inform the public and relevant authorities about the proposed project and to determine any impacts. Should all impacts and issues be adequately addressed in the report, it will serve as the final document. However, if not, the process will proceed into the next stage which is a full Environmental Impact Assessment.

**WE ARE
HERE**

Review of previous studies



Background Information Document and notification of the proposed project to all identified IAPs



Preparation of Basic Environmental Assessment



Release of the Draft Report to IAPs for comment



Record of decision or terms of reference for EIA

How can you be involved?

A Public Participation Process (PPP) is being conducted as part of the Basic Assessment. The aim of the PPP is to allow everyone who is interested in, or likely to be affected by, the proposed eco-residential development to provide input into the process.

The Public Participation Process will include:

- Advertisement in the The Herald and The Grocotts
- Circulation of the BID (this document) to all IAPs identified.
- Comments period
- Review of the draft Basic Assessment by all IAPs.
- A public meeting (if required)

The **Draft Basic Assessment Report** is expected to be made available at public libraries and public access areas as well as on the **CES website** at www.cesnet.co.za (Click on public documents link) for 14 working days following the release of the draft report which will be advertised in newspapers.

I hereby wish to register as an Interested and Affected Party (IAP) for the Belton Farm BA process

Name: _____

Organization: _____

Postal address: _____

Email: _____

Phone #: _____ Fax#: _____

My initial comments, issues or concerns are:

Other individuals, stakeholders, organisations or entities that should be registered are:

Name: _____

Organization: _____

Postal address: _____

Email: _____

Phone #: _____ Fax #: _____

Please return details to: **Ms Amber Jackson:** P.O. Box 934, Grahamstown, 6140

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