



## public works & infrastructure

Department:  
Public Works and Infrastructure  
REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA

### PARLIAMENT PRECINCT: AFRICA HOUSE

### PERMIT REQUIREMENTS: APPROVAL FOR DISABILITY COMPLIANCE PROPOSALS

### BUILT ENVIRONMENT UNIT

**DATE: 17 – 10 – 2022**

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## 1. Introduction

Parliament forwarded a request to the Department of Public Works and Infrastructure to assess whether Africa House is equipped with the relevant facilities for persons with disabilities since reports were received of officials having difficulty accessing the building due to certain constraints. After the building and relevant facilities were assessed, it was discovered that provision was made for persons with disabilities, but that those facilities lacked compliancy to Part S2 of the National Building regulations.

The aim of this submission is to obtain approval/a permit from the South African Heritage Resources Agency (SAHRA) for the following:

- 1) Implementing new minor construction works to assist with the access for persons with disabilities.
- 2) Ensuring that the existing facilities for persons with disabilities is made compliant.

Africa House was built in 1937. It was previously known as The British High Commission office. Not only does the building have high heritage significance, it is also located in the Parliamentary precinct which was classified as a Grade 1 heritage site.

Africa House is located on the corner of Stal Plein and Parliament street. The North West façade (front) faces onto the National and Old Assembly buildings. The South West façade (side) faces onto Stal Plein.

MAP/site plan insert

Africa House was extensively restored and refurbished in 2008-2009, the building has great charm and character with well-proportioned facades and has been well maintained since.

## 2. Description of the building

Africa House is well constructed, helped along by the use of high quality and durable materials: dressed sandstone, teak casement windows with louvered shutters and wrought iron grilles, and original roof covering. The external design of the building reflects Italian palazzo influences and relates well to Marks building in terms of external design and aesthetics. The building's prominent position on the precinct (located opposite the Houses of Parliament and at the entrance to Stal Plein), contributes to its importance.

The building consists of seven floors: a basement, office spaces, boardrooms and an attic. It is a relatively small building, measuring approximately 245square meters on the Ground floor and less (approximately 225sqm per floor) on all the other floors. The materials and finishes used in the interior relates to the good and durable quality of the exterior. The finishes are well proportioned, giving the building a stately aesthetic. Prominent spaces in the interior, specifically the ground floor are the Main Entrance, Lobbies, Foyer and Staircase. Due to the high security nature of the building and the function it performs, a new security access control system was incorporated in the Foyer during the 2008/2009 restoration which was designed around and fitted into the existing interior framework of the Lobby.

### 3. Statement of Significance

Cape Town had a significant role to play in the global trade history in Africa and the political landscape of South Africa. Cape Town was the gateway in which the British and the Dutch entered, established themselves and ruled before the democracy era. The Cape Town Parliament Precinct hosted many political events which altered the trajectory of the Republic from colonialism to democracy.

The Cape Town Parliament Precinct is deemed a Grade 1 Heritage Resource. It was declared a National Heritage Site by the South African Heritage Resources Agency. Such heritage sites are protected under the terms of Section 27 of the National Heritage Resources Act, which means that no changes may be done on such sites without a permit. The building is also subject to Section 34(1) of the National Heritage Resources Act which controls any alterations and/or demolitions to buildings older than 60 years.

### 4. Project Description

The Department of Public Works & Infrastructure (DPWI), being the custodian of national immovable assets, which includes the Parliamentary Precinct, is tasked with the safety, ensure compliancy with the National Building Regulations etc. and handle the restorative works of all the structures and infrastructures located within the Parliamentary precinct.

An email request was received on the 12<sup>th</sup> July 2022 from Directorate: Prestige via the office of Director: Projects Cape Town to Professional Services, to compile a report which was intended to verify the appropriateness of the existing facilities for persons with disabilities, and whether these facilities were sufficient to meet the requirements.

An extract from the:

*NATIONAL REGULATIONS PART S2: FACILITIES TO BE PROVIDED* stipulates that:

*(1) In any building contemplated in regulation S1 requiring facilities for persons with disabilities:*

*(a) Persons with disabilities shall be able to safely enter the building, use all the facilities subject to the provisions of sub-regulation (3) within it and leave it;*

*(b) There shall be a means of access suitable for use by persons with disabilities, from the main and ancillary approaches of the building to the ground storey; via the main entrance, and any secondary entrance;*

*(c) There shall be a means of egress suitable for use by persons with disabilities from any point in a building to a place of safety in the event of an emergency;*

A site visit took place on the 15th July 2022 by a DPWI Architect- and Quantity Surveyor from the Cape Town Regional office to verify whether the on-site conditions were compliant with the

national regulations that prescribed for persons with disabilities are catered for in a public building.

The site visit revealed that there are two access points into the building.

1. Main Entrance (North West façade off Parliament street). This entrance is access controlled, both physically (SAPS presence) as well as electronically controlled.
2. Secondary Entrance (South West façade off Stal Plein). The secondary access was established during the 200/8/2009 restoration project. This entrance is also electronically secured and serves as an escape route as well as an access point for persons with disabilities.

5. Findings on site

6.

5.1 Main Entrance:

The only provision made for persons with disabilities is the existing external ramp in front of the building. The main entrance is through a system of double doors and a sequence of lobbies. In between these lobby spaces is a change in levels (2 steps leading downwards) which approximates 450mm in height. There are both physical and electronic security controlled access in the Entrance Foyer.

Findings:

- No provision was made for access for persons with disabilities in this area.
- The Lobbies within the Main Entrance are very small and restricted, making it difficult to implement disabled facilities of any kind. Placing a temporary metal ramp over part of the steps will not work – the gradient will be too steep to navigate.
- As indicated earlier, the Ground floor Foyer is a prominent part of the circulation space in the interior and cannot be adjusted.



Figure 1.1 Location of Africa House in Parliament Precinct



- 4.2.2.1 The small size of the Lobby with the low L-shape wall as well as the existing electronic security equipment, restricts the movement of wheelchairs, eg. making maneuvering around corners very difficult.
  - 4.2.2.2 The position of the existing access control biometrics is too high.
  - 4.2.2.3 The security personnel currently utilizes a small area of the space to rest during breaks External
  - 4.2.2.4 The existing intercom and biometric panel is too high.
  - 4.2.2.5 Wheelchair bound persons has to access this entrance by travelling along the side of the building (distance = +/- 24 meters from the front entrance door).
- 4.2.3 Please see the existing layout of the secondary entrance.

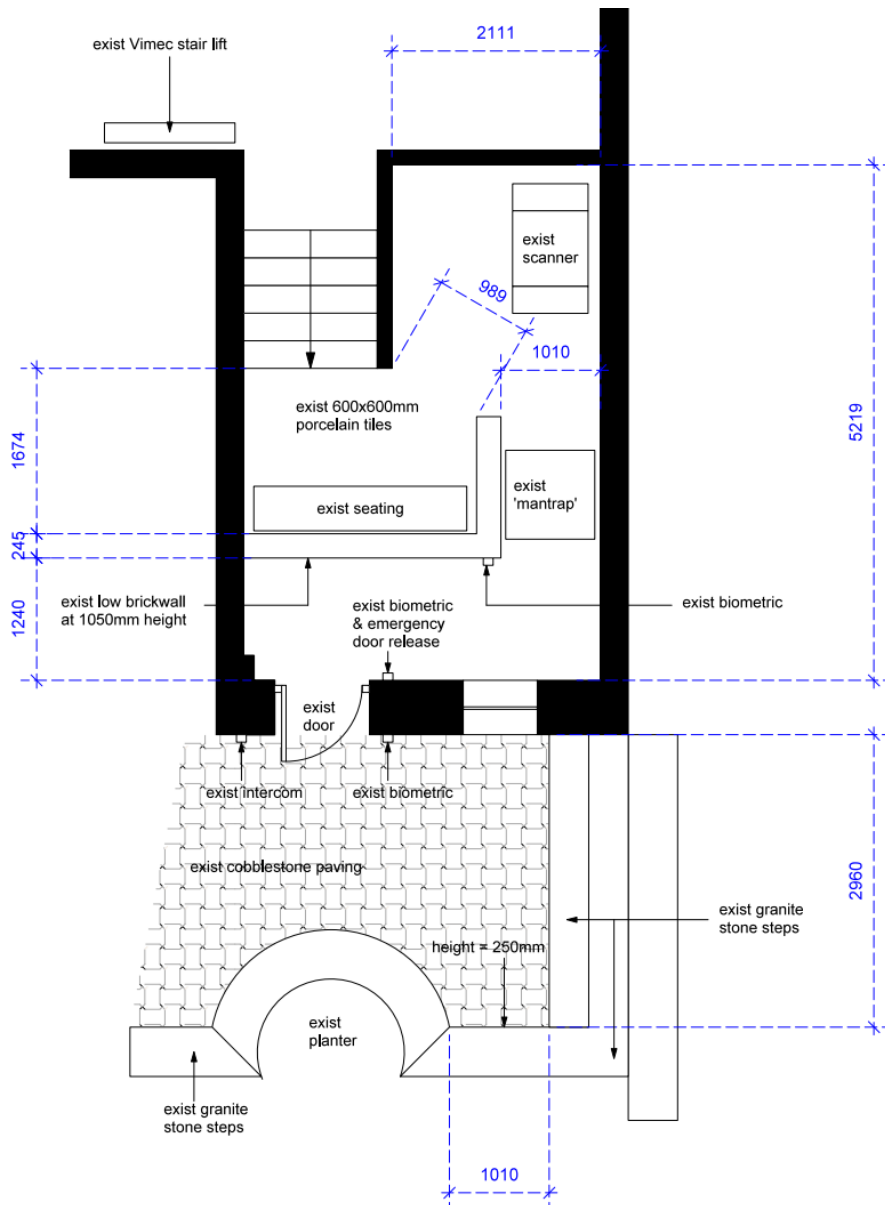


Figure 4. Existing Layout

#### 4.3 Proposal:

4.3.1 The following proposal was presented to Parliament :

Demolition of the existing low-wall and re-arrangement of the security equipment.

4.3.1.1 Remove existing seating

4.3.1.2 Remove the bulk of the low L-shape wall, but allow for +- 450mm length of wall to remain and made good.

4.3.1.3 The Existing 'Mantrap' and scanner to remain. The scanner can be positioned next to the 'Mantrap' to utilize the space more efficiently.

4.3.1.4 Allowance to be made for the inspection and servicing of the chair lift into a functional and proper operational state.

Fit a new 1318mm L x 1100mm H stainless steel paraplegic gate with glass insert panel, operable at 90 degrees in both directions.

Gate to be connected to the existing access control in the building.

Allowance to be made for power supply to the gate.

- Reposition the existing biometric access control panel to be closer to the gate (to be positioned on the 450mm wall).
- Lower the existing biometric access control panel and emergency door release at the entrance door from 1350mm height to 1000mm, center of the units.
- Allowance to be made for the fitting of new 600x600mm full bodied non-slip best grade porcelain tiles for the whole Lobby area.
- Allowance to be made for stainless steel edging strips to the edges of each step/landing.
- Allowance to be made for the preparation and painting of the Lobby walls. External
- Lower the existing biometric access control panel and intercom at the entrance door from 1450mm height to 1000mm, center of the units.

5.3. The following item was proposed as a means of convenience for persons with disabilities. Implementing it however, might be seen as having an effect on Stal Plein.

5.3.1.1 A new ramp was proposed to reduce the distance wheelchair-bound persons have to travel to gain access to the secondary entrance at Africa House. As mentioned above under items 4.1 and 4.2.2.5, the existing ramp in front of Africa House is. +- 24 meters away from the secondary entrance.

5.3.1.2 To benefit persons with disabilities, it was proposed to convert a small unutilized area just outside the secondary entrance into a short ramp.

5.3.1.3 This area is somewhat tucked away and does not interfere or distract from the high visual significance of Stal Plein as a forecourt to the highly significance of the Parliamentary buildings.

#### 5.3.2 Benefits of the ramp

5.3.2.1 The ramp will not cause an obstruction. Rather, it will benefit persons with disabilities coming from areas like Stalplein, the Goodhope building, Tuynhuys, 120 Plein street etc.

5.3.2.2 It will discourage officials from using the space in front of the entrance as parking space.

5.3.2.3 It will blend it with the existing surrounds by means of the following :

a) There is an existing ramp next to Africa House to assist people coming from 120 Plein Street onto Stal Plein.

b) The same surface materials will be used (either cobblestones or granite slabs to match the existing surrounding area.

c) The following method of construction is proposed for the construction of the ramp:

- Remove the existing cobblestone pavers in the corner, to the right of the entrance door (when facing the door).

- Construct a reinforced concrete ramp with up-stand, and new Mentis type or equally approved GMS hollow core tube handrails and stanchions fitted securely to the up-stands.

- Surface finish on the ramp to be either granite slabs or re-using the existing cobblestone pavers.



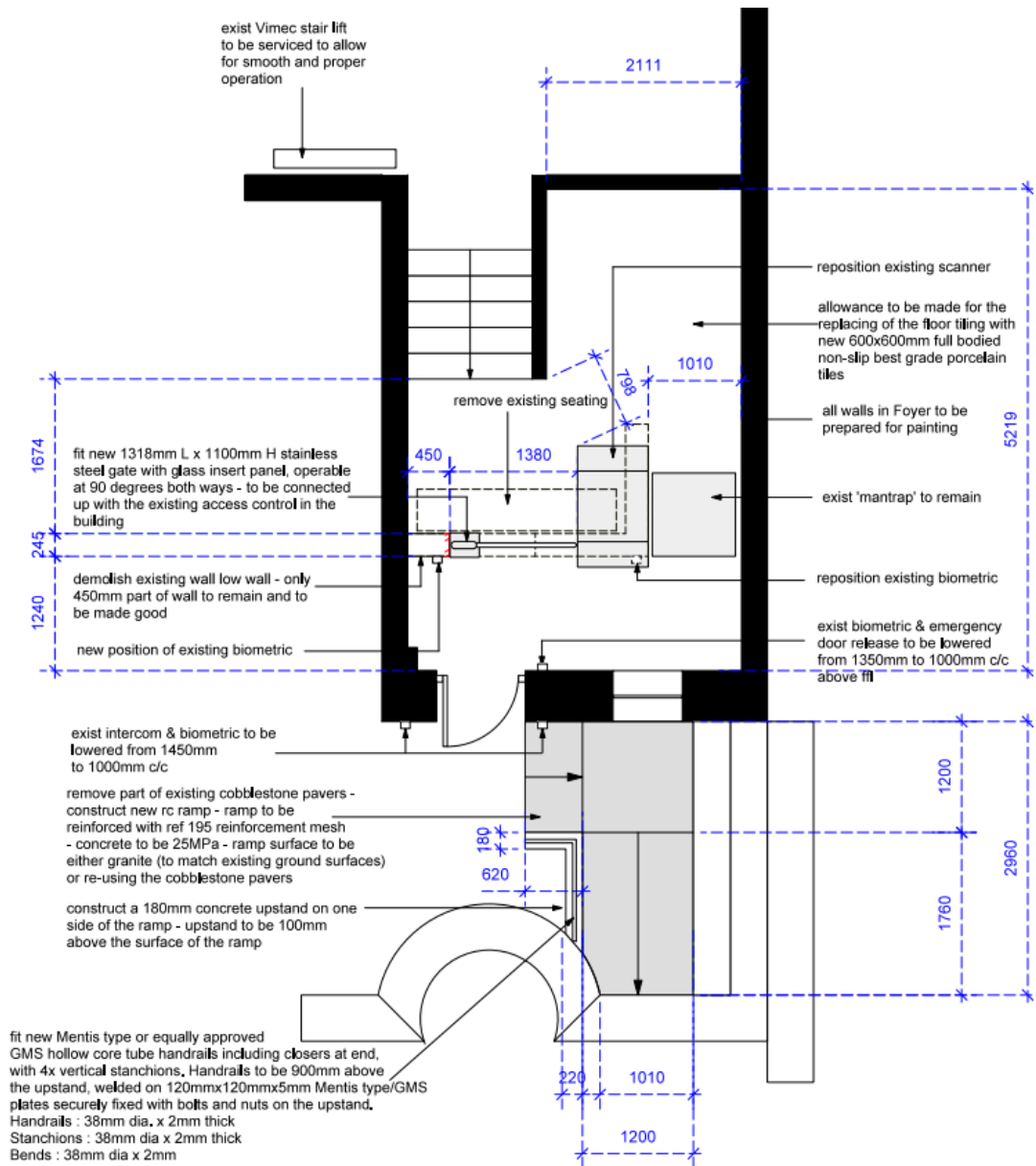


Figure 5 Proposed Layout

## 6 Permit Request

The Department of Public Works & Infrastructure, being the custodian of the Parliamentary precinct hereby present this submission to SAHRA for approval and requesting the issuing of a permit in order for the above-mentioned works be implemented so that Africa House may be compliant with Section S of the National Building Regulations concerning Persons with Disabilities. Proposals were compiled with the consciousness of the Heritage status of the Precinct and building and the intention was to retain the character and integrity of the historical building

7 Images



Figure 6 Ramp to Entrance



Figure 7 Broken Floor Tiles



Figure 8 Broken Tiles



Figure 9. Main Entrance Lobby and security access control



*Figure 10. Main Entrance: Distance between steps and security desk*



*Figure 11. Secondary Entrance*



*Figure 12. Location of Proposed Ramp*



Figure 13 Security Equipment



Figure 14. Security Entrance Low wall



Figure 15. Security work Space

## 8 Sources

1. Ragmat Davids. 2022. *Internal Memorandum – Parliament Precinct: Africa House – Assessment report regarding facilities for persons with disabilities within the building.* October 2022. DPWI.
2. Arcus Facilities Management Solutions (Pty) Ltd. 2018. *2017 Annual Building Plan for Africa House.* October 2022. DPWI.
3. Culture Connect. 2019. *Parliament of South Africa – Architectural History.* October 2022. <http://cultureconnectsa.com>
4. Images taken by R. Davids