



ROBERT J W BRUSSE B. ARCH. (NATAL) MIA **ARCHITECT**

149 RED HILL ROAD • SEAVIEW 4094 • P O BOX 15257 • BELLAIR 4006

TELEPHONE (031) 465 1158

Ref : St A 2023.07 28

28th July 2023

KwaZulu Natal Amafa and Research Institute,
Built Environment Department,
195 Langalibalele Street,
3200. Pietermaritzburg,

email to : ros.devereux@amafainstitute.org.za

96 JABU NDLOVU ST. PIETERMAARITZBURG

CONVERSION OF ST ANNE'S HOSPITAL FOR NEW KZN MUSEUM

This letter is intended to record my objections to the most recent submission by Lindsay Napier Architects acting as Heritage Consultant for Sakhisizwe Architects in their application for development of the former St Anne's Hospital site and buildings in Pietermaritzburg for a proposed New KZN Museum. My objections are set out hereunder :

THIS PUBLIC PARTICIPATION PROCESS

Persons interested and affected as a consequence of the latest application have been directed to the SAHRIS website where relevant documentation has been uploaded. Access to relevant information has been extraordinarily difficult for the average layman.

Even though the Amafa 'Interim Decision' noted that '*Public Consultation : The committee required that the application be subjected to a public participation process that would involve the KZN Amafa and Research Institute placing an advertisement in the Witness newspaper and contacting the previously identified interested and affected parties.*' heritage architects who are members of the SAIA KZN were only informed of this process two weeks before the closing date.

As a professional architect, working in the field of the built environment heritage of South Africa for forty years, we have engaged with the information uploaded and found it wanting in many aspects referred to in our assessment below. We wish to register our concern that this form of Public Participation is unsatisfactory, which is born out by the absence of any other 'comments' up-loaded by concerned citizens wishing to respond to such an important project.

AMAFA INTERIM COMMENT dated 10th May 2023.

As the responsible Heritage Resource Agency for the Province of KwaZulu-Natal , 'Amafa' has considered the merits of the buildings and site concerned and has issued Interim Comments in response to previous submissions, in particular :

- *The Committee was concerned about the extent of the interventions on fabric that was previously destined to be protected in the development.* Apparently the Architects have not considered this comment at all and have proposed the demolition of all but two of the existing buildings. What has changed that Amafa should now think these heritage resources should be of any lesser value than before?
- *The proposed demolitions and replacement proposal were motivated by the function of the proposed museum as well as the additional cost of restoration of the derelict buildings.* There is a certain irony in a Museum organisation applying for the destruction of heritage resources – their core objective should be to preserve and make historic material available for the edification and entertainment of the greater society!
- As far as '*function of the proposed museum*' is concerned there are some glaring anomalies in the current proposals, which can be highlighted as follows :
 - New Museum : the functionality of the new museum is effectively divided into two new developments - one building on the Jabu Ndlovu Street, the other building situated at the rear of the development overlooking the rear of the site. Only on the top floor can one move from one museum space to the other, an inconvenience to both visitors and staff that will become seriously apparent once the building is opened, and 'functionality' is fully experienced
 - Visitors Parking is located as low down the site as possible, resulting in visitors having to traipse up the hill even before they enter the multi-storied 'museum' venues.
 - Administration and Curation of two separate display entities will be an on going staffing problem.
 - The juggling of the new build for the museum's technical facilities into the spaces left over after the demolitions have been completed, appears to be more informed mainly by the *spaces available* rather than by the actual '*functionality*' of the activities of those departments. There is apparently no indication that specific spaces have been created for specific activities unique to an efficiently functioning museum or research institute. The previous submission with new build stepping down the site along contours would appear to have been more logical.
- As far as '*as well as the additional cost of restoration of the derelict buildings*' the application for demolition on this assertion should be evaluated in terms of both the philosophy of conservation as well as the consequent costs of demolition and replacement.

- If a building has previously been graded by the applicant for the demolition as either a Grade 3a or a Grade 3b building – and these gradings have been undertaken by an interested party to the demolition application – then the question of '*additional cost*' should become secondary to the pecuniary considerations. The demolition of Blocks A, E and G have both tangible and intangible architectural, historic and sociological merit. It should be noted that the public has been offered NO information on Blocks H & J.
- As far as the '*additional cost*' is concerned, these would apparently be generated by the cost of rectifying state generated 'demolition by neglect' – something that the heritage fraternity have objected to for years – and the cost of actual demolition. The consequences of demolition is that there is then a clear slate on which to design as one wishes, except that there is a moral obligation to design a replacement that is architecturally as good as, and hopefully better than that which has been demolished. The tangibles and in-tangibles associated with history and sociological aspect of the building can, *ipso factor*, never be retained.

INFORMATION NOT AVAILABLE TO THE PUBLIC

Reference is made in the Heritage Architect's submission in support of the application she refers to correspondence with the KZN A & R Institute dated *08 November 2022* and other significant communications, which the Public and Interested and Affected parties do not have access.

THE HERITAGE ARCHITECT'S CORRESPONDENCE DATED 05 JUNE 2023.

- Reference has been made to a '*Structural Engineers appointment to prepare an updated report to confirm the state of the structures*'. It is my opinion that it would have been more appropriate for Amafa to have appointed a totally independent Structural Engineer to undertake such a report.
- The Grading that has been given to various of the buildings in the HIA is open to reassessment, and could also be reviewed by an appropriate body, with the likely-hood of higher gradings. I believe that the Chapel has been under Graded, as have Blocks A & F.
- If, as stated '*The design team used this (the conservation worthiness of Blocks A and C) as the base-line for the new development plan....*' then it must be noted that the proximity of adjacent new build is so close that it hasn't improved the viewing of these two buildings significantly.
- '*Block G was considered for integration in the new site development plan, but its awkward location on the site a distance away from the other buildings, next to the main vehicular access, it was ruled out and proposed to be demolished. Its social significance is noted and the various achievements of St Anne's hospital will be celebrated in the Museum.*' This demonstrates one of the major flaws of the whole scheme : a grudging

acknowledgement of historic, or other significance and yet a recommendation for demolition for convenience – 'convenience' rather than 'conservation'. Mammon overrules Principal.

RESPECT OF THE INTANGIBLE HERITAGE OF THE SITE AND BUILDINGS

There is reference to '*the various achievements of St Anne's hospital will be celebrated in the Museum.*' at various points in the application but neither the proposed buildings nor any details that have been included showing a genuine understanding of the intangibles associated with either the buildings or the site. Impersonal plaques recording the founding of St Anne's hospital, the dedicated community of religious who committed their lives to the service of Pietermaritzburg's citizens, or the achievements of the service community have hardly been researched and certainly not celebrated in these buildings : they are relegated to a contrived loss of institutional memory.

ARCHITECTURAL QUALITY AND STREET SCAPE

These new buildings either side of the old Block C will become significant elements in the street scape of lower Jabu Ndlovu Street. The architectural language that has been adopted for the new build is not respectful of the heritage resources, nor is it considered indicative of the 'Museum'. The samples of polychromatic brickwork is foreign to most of the heritage of South Africa (its heritage is Victorian Railway stations and Anglican Churches in Great Britain). The significant forms chosen – the curved walls - have little relevance to place of neighbourhood, and are at variance with most, if not all buildings in the area. The scale of the new buildings is considered 'threatening' to their historic precedents.

If such forms and designs are preferred, then it would be more appropriate to separate the old from the new and make an honest contemporary statement that can be judged on its own merits.

USE OF THE SITE

The older buildings were sensitively placed along a urban street, with viewing over the sloping site that overlooks Alexandra Park. The previous proposals at least made some attempt to acknowledge the site. In contrast the present proposal jumbles the new and the old in and around each other, almost like a Kasbah, with visitor's parking inconveniently located down the bottom of the site. It is my opinion that development along the contours, at appropriate intervals and heights would allow for a much improved planning, phasing and environment.

COLLATERAL DAMAGE ARISING FROM THIS PROPOSAL.

Reference has been made fleetingly to the possible re-use of part of the existing museum building, which reminds one that by moving out of that building one creates a new set of conservation problems : what to do with a very fine building that has its own heritage values, was specifically designed as a museum and is typical of a certain era, that was sensitively enlarged at a much later date for the enhanced services that the museum served Pietermaritzburg's society. Condemning one building to demolition as a consequence of demolishing and rebuilding another set of buildings has its own conservation challenges to our heritage environment. The present historic museum building should be taken into consideration in the approval process of this New KZN Museum.

CONCLUSIONS

In conclusion I would like to see consideration given to :

1. the incorporation of a clear statement of Intention to apply for the demolition of Heritage Resources are included in application for such a development so that the lay public is properly informed and doesn't have to navigate the complex byways of SAHRIS' website.
2. the retention, incorporation and professional restoration of Blocks E, F, and G, as well as Block A & C and their integration into the functional planning of the new museum and support structures,
3. the new build is either respectful of the architecture and 'place' of the heritage buildings that are retained, or else it is clearly defined as a stand alone, contemporary building of great quality,
4. the functional requirements of both the visitors viewing areas and the technical functions of the new Museum are made a pre-eminent design consideration – a campus that needs directional signs to navigate by, has not been planned optimally,
5. the creation of a new Museum should set standards of resource management commensurate with its core ethos : the preservation and conservation of the cultural heritage of the generations that have come before them, for the edification and enjoyment of those that follow – buildings, grinding stones, fish traps or handkerchiefs.

Robert J W Brusse,

28th July 2023.

