

Graaff - Reinet

Heritage Society

Erfenisbewaringsvereniging

P.O. Box 88 Graaff-Reinet 6280 Tel. 049-8910998



2013/05/13

Urban Concepts
Unit F2 Urban Hub
40 Dorp Street
Bo-Kaap
Cape Town
8001

ATTENTION: Helen May (helen@urbanconcepts.biz)

Dear Madam

DROSTDY HOTEL – INTERESTED & AFFECTED PARTIES CONSULTATION

The Graaff-Reinet Heritage Society was established in 1975, by concerned citizens of the town, as a direct result of the destruction of numerous historic buildings by both corporate and government institutions.

The Society has played an active role in heritage conservation in the Graaff-Reinet community since its founding and operates as a pressure group, public educator and municipal advisor on heritage related issues. The Society has had representation on the Aesthetics Sub-Committee of the Infrastructure and Technical Services Standing Committee of the Camdeboo Municipality since its establishment and on equivalent committees of the Graaff-Reinet TLC and Graaff-Reinet Municipality before. In the above roles the Society has become the sole independent community voice on heritage matters in the Graaff-Reinet area.

Given the above history the Executive Committee of the Heritage Society has unanimously endorsed the approach to the public participation component of this application. The committee further affirms the view that consultation with the broader community of Graaff-Reinet is unnecessary as the Heritage Society is widely recognised as representative of heritage opinion in Graaff-Reinet.

Yours faithfully

P. WHITLOCK
CHAIRMAN

Graaff - Reinet

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COMMENT:

DROSTDY HOTEL, GRAAFF-REINET, DRAFT HERITAGE STATEMENT

INTRODUCTION

The Drostdy Hotel has for many years been the flagship of Graaff-Reinet hospitality establishments and a noteworthy heritage landmark within the heart of the town so when it was closed it certainly did not go unnoticed by the Graaff-Reinet community. Needless to say, as one may expect from a country town like Graaff-Reinet, rumours and conjecture as to the eventual outcome of the closure were rife. The Heritage Society was also not untouched by this uncertainty and the issue of the “upgrading” of the Drostdy Hotel was raised more than once at committee meetings during the period. It would accordingly not be an exaggeration to say that there has been an enormous sense of expectancy within the Heritage Society Committee regarding the future of the hotel. This sense was heightened in recent months with the knowledge that behind the scenes work had commenced and that formal approaches had been made to the Committee with respect to the public participation process.

The Draft Heritage Statement was, after many months of expectation, tabled for comment at the Heritage Society Committee Meeting of 7 May 2013. The report was very positively received and it can be accurately recorded that the content thereof exceeded the long-nurtured expectation of the Committee.

RECORD & ANALYSIS OF EXISTING

The Committee welcomed the rigorous nature of the recording and analysis of each and every structure within the Drostdy Hotel complex. The members were unanimous in concluding that the tabled document and annexures represented the most comprehensive heritage assessment viewed by the Committee to date.

While the majority of committee members are not intimately familiar with the back of house structures in particular, most, are very familiar with the pre-closure Hotel, its public facilities and Stretch’s Court. Certain aspects of the heritage assessment thus provided previously unknown insights into the historic fabric of the precinct. Notably the relevance and dating of site features like boundary walls was of particular interest.

The Committee acknowledges with gratitude the commitment of the consultant team to the adherence of recognised principals of best heritage practice in the implementation and execution of their brief.

Even a relatively cursory study of the analysis within the report provided a clear picture of the manner in which the evaluation of heritage significance ties into the “Demolition Plan” of the architects and this in turn to their “Masterplan”.

More specific comments will be dealt with under respective headings hereunder.

MASTERPLAN

The masterplan was scrutinized and discussed at some length by the Committee. The comments were overwhelmingly positive and a sense of excitement, with the prospect of the meaningful rejuvenation of this important heritage precinct in the historical core of the town, was pervasive.

Concepts that were particularly positively received as catalyzing fundamental improvements are listed hereunder:

- The relocation of the main parking area to the periphery of the complex.
- The rationalization of circulation with the separation of the main vehicular and pedestrian circulation and the pedestrianisation of Stretch's Court.
- The use of the main vehicular circulation route as a barrier between public and private realms.
- The comprehensive replanning of back-of-house facilities and the resulting validation of important spaces through improved spatial allocation notably the Drostdy garden and courtyard with proposed restaurant and reception area.

DROSTDY BUILDING

The Committee views the intention to undertake the minimum of breaking work in the Drostdy building very positively as this building, together with Reinet House, are regarded as models of accurate restoration in Graaff-Reinet. The Drostdy has the status very similar to a museum in the public eye. The axial linkage, between these two buildings and strong visual impact thereof particularly when entering the Drostdy garden from the back should, in the view of the Committee, be treated with the utmost sensitivity. Accordingly any proposals for the Drostdy courtyard area (under the pergola) should be done with the utmost circumspection.

Given the above you will understand that the single area of greatest concern in the entire proposal is the "opening out" of the north and south wings of the building into the courtyard space. While the Committee understands the desirability of this in terms of the brief and the effective function of the facility and also acknowledges that the proposed partial demolition will not disturb historic fabric (but rather reconstructed fabric dating to the 1970's restoration) there is a clear concern that this intervention will disturb the existing balance between wall and opening areas to such an extent that the very authentic old world feel of the back courtyard will be destroyed irrevocably and with it the museum-like quality.

The Committee is thus of the opinion that this area of the proposal requires serious review.

STRETCH'S COURT

The Committee concurs entirely with the view that the heritage value of individual buildings within Stretch's Court, which differ considerably dependent on the extent of remaining historical fabric and nature of interventions over time, should be secondary to the heritage value of the street as a precinct of buildings related to important historic events. This approach also recognises the important role which Stretch's Court plays, particularly amongst the general public at large, as purveyor of Graaff-Reinet's heritage image which has particular economic value for the community.

The Committee thus supports in principal the following:

- The demolition of the intrusive structures like the carports and laundry to free up land for more meaningful development including landscaping and pedestrian circulation routes.
- The creation of a new swimming pool court in the position of the existing central courtyard and the relocation of the commemorative bell to the head of the street.
- The correction of inappropriate material usage during the 1970's restoration, in particular the stoep paving.
- The retention of the existing colour schemes that have become, in a relatively short time, an aspect of the popular heritage of this street.
- The selective and informed removal of internal walls to better support the function dictated by the brief.

The closure of Stretch's Court, which has essentially been a public street to the present time, was viewed less positively by the Committee, however the proposal that public access would not be denied entirely and could be secured by arrangement (group tours etc.) was regarded an appropriate mitigating measure given privacy issues of guests. Some concern was also expressed on the manner of the closure at the Bourke Street entrance and its impact on both the buildings of Stretch's Court and the streetscape of Bourke Street. It was however understood that this would be covered during the design process and would be dealt with, together with more detail aspects of the points enumerated above, in future applications.

KROMM'S INN

The Committee acknowledges the intention of the applicant to retain the existing external character of the building and welcomes the intention to reinstate the original spatial layout, disturbed by the arguably ill-considered bar conversion, to the extent permitted by the envisaged new function.

CAMDEBOO RESTAURANT & THIBAULT ROOM

These two facilities have in recent years, for reasons which are not pertinent to this commentary, done considerable harm to the image of the Drostdy has reputable hospitality establishment. This perception together with the fact that the former core functionality of these buildings, particularly the restaurant, exhibit poor spatial and functional relationship with the rest of the hotel operation makes them ripe for total redevelopment. The fact that they relate directly to the street supports more loosely related commercial functions.

Principal support is thus given for the following:

- The demolition of poorly maintained portions of the buildings of no heritage value that cannot support proposed new functions.
- The proposed re-assignment of function of the front sections of the buildings to serve as art gallery and shop respectively.
- The proposed partial re-assignment of function of the rear to new back-of-house facilities.
- The enhancement of both the Camdeboo building and the courtyard space by the introduction of more well-considered fenestration and other measures for future application.
- The review of the fenestration of front façade of the Thibault Room.

SITE FEATURES & LANDSCAPING

The recognition of the value of site features like trees, hedges, boundary walls and irrigation furrows in layering and structuring the built environment and the sensitive manner in which these have been addressed is acknowledged and supported.

The fact that certain boundary walls identified as having heritage value are to be selectively / partially demolished to accommodate a new vehicular entrance in the case of Parliament Street and new vehicular circulation in the heart of the site will, in our view, in the former have limited impact on the streetscape of Parliament Street and in the latter be appropriately mitigated by the acknowledgement of its former position by surface treatment as proposed and suitable interpretive information plaques or boards. The negative impact of the insertion of a new gateway into the Parliament Street wall is also mitigated by the retention of the old cobblers shop.

The following is also viewed positively:

- The proposed approach to planting as a means of softening the built environment and knitting together old and new.
- The preferred use of faster growing indigenous trees
- Recognition of the importance of leading water furrows.
- The preference for the use of lower walls rather than high walls
- The contemporary styling of new built insertions
- The proposed treatment (greening) of driveways and parking areas.

CONCLUSION

The Graaff-Reinet Heritage Society Committee views the renewal of the Drostdy Hotel complex as a project of enormous importance to heritage conservation in the town and the ultimate success of the project will have a significant impact on the Graaff-Reinet community as a whole it therefore acknowledges with gratitude the degree of sensitivity with which the proposals have been formulated.

The Committee is very excited by the prospect of the development and trusts that the comment contained in the report above will be of value to the unfolding process. The Committee further pledges its wholehearted cooperation in the future process.



P. WHITLOCK
CHAIRMAN
GRAAFF-REINET HERITAGE SOCIETY

2013/05/13

Helen May

From: Brian April <aprilb@camdeboo.gov.za>
Sent: Thursday, May 09, 2013 8:23 AM
To: Helen May
Subject: DROSTDY SUBMISSION

Good morning

The subject refers,

I had a meeting with mr. Whitlock from the local Heritage Society yesterday. He confirmed they discussed the matter at their monthly meeting. I was also informed that he engaged with you regarding their input and when they will have it ready. Our input will be based on their's as we have a close working relationship with them and the Provincial Heritage Agency. We therefore will be giving our input as soon as they have submitted their's.

Kind regards

*BRIAN APRIL
BUILDING INSPECTOR
CAMDEBOO MUNICIPALITY
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Helen May

From: Kok, Marietha <Marietha.Kok@rmb.co.za>
Sent: Thursday, May 09, 2013 1:50 PM
To: helen@urbanconcepts.biz
Subject: Message from GT FERREIRA

Dear Helen

Speaking on behalf of my Mother, who is still living in 11 Parliament Street, and myself, being a former inhabitant of the Ferreira House, I believe Graaff-Reinet should build a small monument for Mr Rupert (perhaps next to Andries Pretorius) as, without his insistence (and monetary support), this project would never have gotten off the ground.

I/We are totally in favour and cannot wait to see the Old/New Drostdy Hotel opening its doors again.

Kind regards
GT FERREIRA

KARIN ALANT

From the desk of:

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This e-mail is subject to a disclaimer, available at

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Helen May

From: Johan Minnaar <minnaar@eastcape.net>
Sent: Thursday, May 16, 2013 7:02 PM
To: helen@urbanconcepts.biz
Subject: Drostdy Hotel

Dear Helen

Thank-you for the correspondence. The proposed development appears to be very carefully planned and I wish you all every success.

I am not able to make out exactly what is proposed directly behind my property at 38 Church Street (under the old Ficus).

I would like to share an idea with you regarding the frontages of the various cottages in Parliament Street and Bourke Street. Those cottages have always appeared closed-up (as though the home owner is away for a long time) even whilst hotel guests have been in residence, and in the case of Kromms whilst guests were regaling indoors. Of course the cause of this situation is the crime issue. Guests rightfully keep doors and windows bolted. Where those cottages should exude joy and tranquility, those streetscapes appear dead / abandoned. The high iron balustrading that one sees in rows and rows, in London streets - in front of the Terraced Houses ,could work well in securing the cottages and allowing guests to sit on stoeps while enjoying the security of the Drostdy complex. Grt is all about a coffee / gossip on the stoep. What I am suggesting is beautiful,secure balustrading all along Parliament and Bourke Streets.Not sure whether I am making myself understood ???

Wishing all involved well - we are excited for Graaff-Reinet.

Yours sincerely
Johan Minnaar