

Erf 3025 Constantia

Spaanschemat River Road,
Constantia



View of the subject building from the east, with the main entrance at the centre, the existing office on the left and the wine shop on the right.

HERITAGE STATEMENT

to accompany an application for a Permit
i.t.o. Section 34 of the National Heritage Resources Act (No.25 of 1999)
for alterations to the existing restaurant building

prepared for:
Open Door (Pty) Ltd

prepared by:
Frik Vermeulen
Heritage Practitioner

September 2014

1. Introduction

This report accompanies an application for a permit i.t.o. Section 34 of the National Heritage Resources (Act 25 of 1999) to permit minor alterations to the existing restaurant on Erf 3025 Constantia, known as the River Café, located at the entrance to Constantia Uitsig wine estate. This building, formerly the Tokai Primary School, was constructed 1917-1918 and is older than 60 years. The location of the building is shown on **Figure 2** and **Figure 3** overleaf.

2. Historical Background

The property on which the Tokai Primary School was built was a portion of the farm 'Plumstead' (as 'Buitenverwachting' and 'Constantia Uitsig' were collectively known in the late 19th C and early 20th C). That estate was assembled by Stephanus Petrus Lategan, who purchased one portion from Johannes Wynand Louw (Deed of Transfer T379/1881) and another from Martina Jacoba Brunt (Deed of Transfer T386/1885). The farm however traces its origins back to 1685 when the farm 'Constantia', was granted to Simon van der Stel by the Dutch East India Company. 'Plumstead' previously formed part of the farm 'Bergvliet', which had, in turn, been deducted from 'Constantia' after the death of Van der Stel in 1712.

In 1892 SP Lategan sold a portion to his son Willem Hendrik, who named it 'Constantia View'. In 1900, following the death of SP Lategan, the remainder portion of 'Plumstead' was divided between his other two sons - 57 morgen to Johannes Retief Lategan and 122 morgen to Daniel Stephanus Lategan. Johannes sold his portion to his brother Willem in 1902 and, after Daniel became insolvent in 1908, Willem also purchased his two portions from their respective owners (Jose Burman, 1979, *Wine of Constantia*, p137).

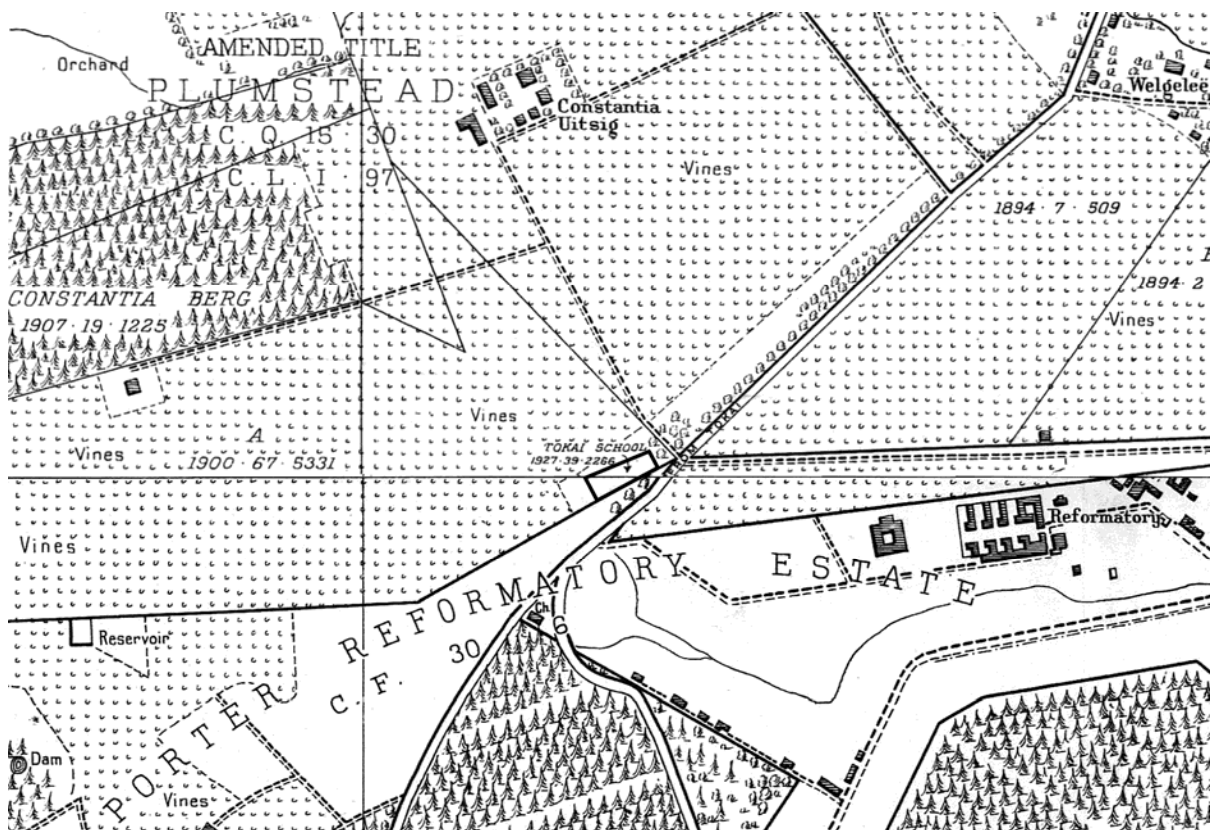
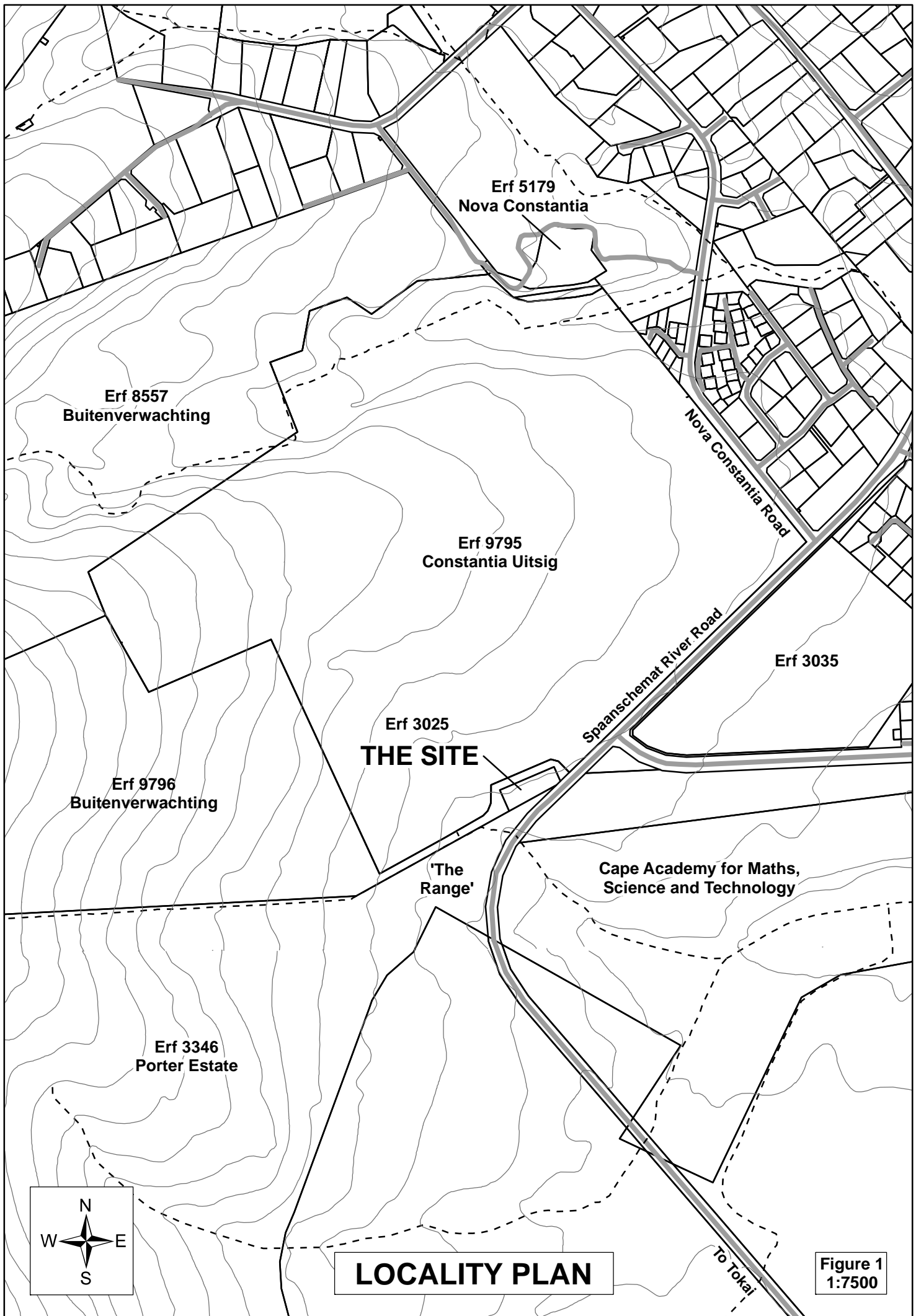


Figure 1: A 1931 survey map, showing the farmstead of Constantia Uitsig, but the primary estate is still referred to as 'Plumstead'. The Tokai Primary School site is located at the centre of the image. (Source: Cape Town and Environs, Office of the Surveyor-General; courtesy of CoCT EHRIC)



LOCALITY PLAN

Figure 1
1:7500



Figure 2



 1:500 @ A4

Erf 3341

SPANSGHEMAT RIVER ROAD

Entrance

Ablution Block

Erf 3025

Wine Shop

Covered Courtyard

River Cafe Restaurant

Erf 3346

Erf 9795

Constancia Uitsig

Ablution Block

Erf 9796

Buitenverwachting



Figure 4: Extract from the 1945 aerial photograph, with the U-shaped 1918 school building at the centre and its freestanding toilet blocks on either side (Source: Chief Directorate Surveys & Mapping, Job 203B, Strip 5, Tile 2700)

The first Tokai Primary School building was completed in 1902, as the Educational Gazette of 1902 states that the school was opened at the start of the 3rd term that year. It was a *'third class public undenominational school'* and when it opened, already had 56 learners, all of them white (Sigrid Howes, Centre for Conservation Education, pers. comm. 18-06-2014). It is most likely that this earlier building was a modest farm school and was privately funded, as the land on which it was situated remained in the Lategan family's ownership until 1917.

On 5 April 1917, the property, which is now Erf 3025 Constantia was subdivided from Erf 3023 and sold by Willem Hendrik Lategan to the Trustees of the Tokai Undenominational Public School for the amount of 250 Pounds Sterling (Deed of Transfer T2266/1917).

Later that year, a new school building was built by the Colonial Government on the site of the previous farm school. The architect was John Perry, who was working in the office of James Morris at the time. The building contractor was J. James of Wynberg. The **1918** completion certificate states that the building cost, excluding professional fees, was 3 585 Pounds Sterling (Cape Archives. PAE 96/B2021).

According to Sigrid Howes, the school largely accommodated children of warders at Porter Reformatory and Pollsmoor Prison. By the 1920s, it was an Afrikaans school, called Tokai Primêre Skool. By 1921 the school had 137 pupils, all still white.

It is not known exactly when the school changed from a 'white school' to a 'coloured school', but the establishment of new, larger and better equipped white schools in the area - Bergvliet Primary School in 1950 and Sweet Valley Primary School in 1957 - would have led to a drastic reduction in numbers of white learners attending Tokai Primary School. School inspection reports by the 'Commissioner of Coloured Affairs' date from the mid-1970s (Cape Archives KUS 4/58/7/2/1/E42).

The Tokai Primary School was finally closed in 1987, due to dwindling numbers of learners. The forced removals in terms of the Group Areas Act would have had a drastic effect on the school. The last few learners were accommodated at Constantia Primary School and the three teachers were transferred (Cape Archives KUS 4/58/7/2/1/E42).

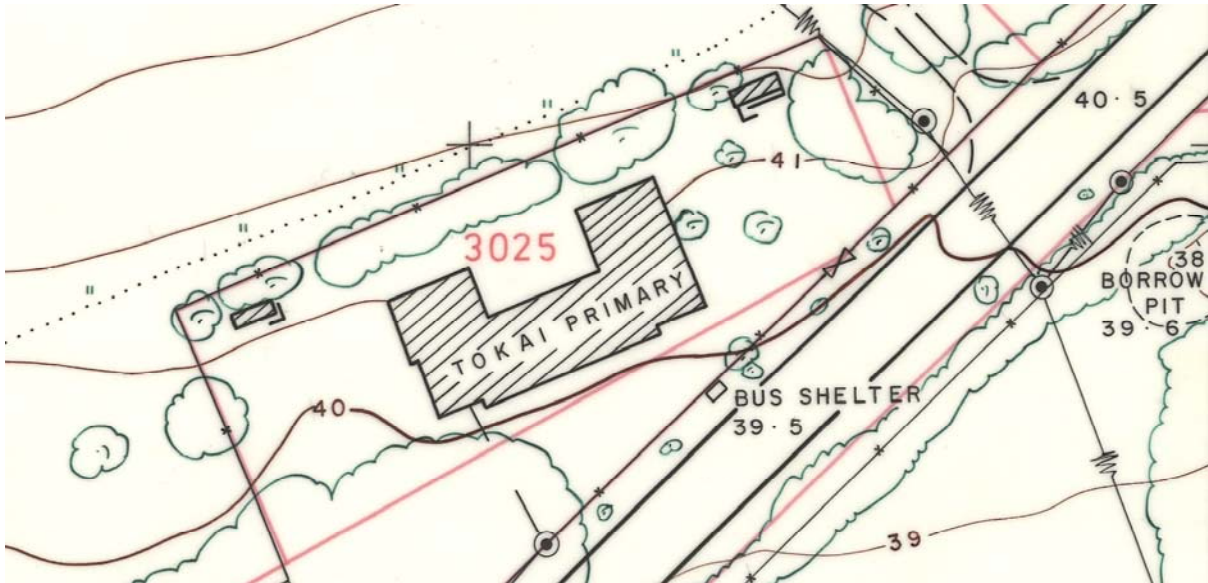


Figure 5: Extract from the Divisional Council of the Cape topocadastral map series of February 1978, showing the school building, its two ablution blocks and bus shelter. (Sheet 5268B)

In 1994, following an extensive period of disuse, the property was purchased from the State by the Constantia Valley Local Council, who intended to lease it out as a creche/pre-primary school. This use did however not materialise and it was sold to David McCay of Constantia Uitsig Farms (Pty) Ltd in 2001 to become a one-stop wine shop for the wine estates in the area (Henry Aikman, former planner at Constantia Valley Local Council, pers. comm. 12-06-2014).

Soon thereafter, the building was converted to also accommodate a restaurant, known as the River Café. Outdoor seating was provided under two new canopies in the courtyard at the back.

In 2008 additional alterations and extensions were made to the school building, including new toilets and a flat-roofed service extension to the kitchen.



Figure 6: One of the two dining rooms in the former River Café. (Source: Michael Dall Architects)

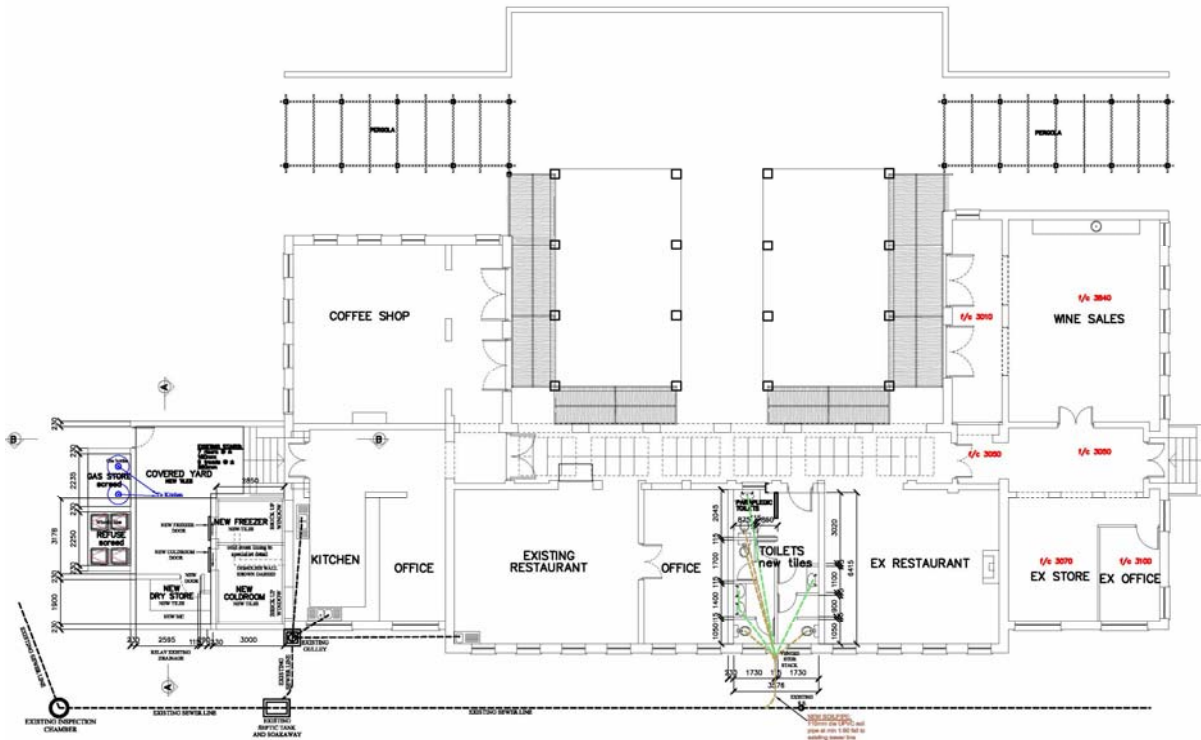


Figure 7: A 2008 building plan by Michael Dall Architects for internal alterations to create toilets (at the centre) and a service extension (on the left).



Figure 8: One of the two covered outdoor dining areas in the courtyard of the former River Café. (Source: Michael Dall Architects)

In 2014, Constantia Uitsig (Erf 9795) and the River Café site (Erf 3025) were purchased by Meerenhof Properties (Pty) Ltd. A new restaurant operator, Open Door (Pty) Ltd, has recently secured a lease for the former River Café premises and this submission is for minor alterations to the building.

3. Statement of Significance

The site is located in the Cape Winelands Cultural Landscape, which was identified as a Grade 1 Heritage Site by SAHRA in 2006, but has not been declared a National Heritage Site to date. In terms of a memorandum of agreement between HWC and SAHRA, HWC is the approving authority and SAHRA is a commenting authority for applications in terms of Section 27, 34 and 38 of the NHRA. It should also be noted that in 2007, the Cape Winelands Cultural Landscape, including the subject site, was placed on the tentative list of UNESCO World Heritage Sites.

The 1918 school building is considered to have significance as part of the history of Constantia. In the 1991 Todeschini & Japha Constantia-Tokai Valley Conservation Study, the school building is described as “*pre-1915 buildings of historic interest*”. In the 2007 Heritage Study by Todeschini & Blanckenberg, it is considered to be either Grade 3A or 3B.

In assessing the significance of the school building, HWC’s *Short Guide to and Policy Statement on Grading* (30 May 2012) was consulted.

The building is not considered to be of high architectural quality, but it is typical of an early 20th C school and, despite its 1990s alteration into a restaurant and shop, still has distinctive ‘institutional’ characteristics and its public facades visible from Spaanschemat River Road, are largely intact. Its architect, John Perry (1874-1943), was a respected practitioner, who previously worked at MacGillivray & Grant and then with James Morris until he opened his own office in 1920. His works include several schools and at least ten Standard Bank branches around the country.

The Tokai Primary School does not “*date to the early origins of a place*” (Constantia) and even though its exterior is largely intact, very little original fabric remains internally. The building does serve as a “*historical and/or visual-spatial landmark*” and it “*contributes to the environmental quality of a Grade I heritage resource*”. It also “*illustrates the key uses and roles of a place over time*”. It has some association with public memory and historic events, including the forced removals in terms of the Group Areas Act, which would have contributed to its eventual closure.

As such, the school building is considered to be a local heritage resource, which has some intrinsic social and historical significance and a grading of **Grade 3B** is recommended. The two freestanding toilet blocks, which are currently the subjects of a separate demolition application, are however not deemed to be gradable.

The school building is conservation-worthy and it is proposed that it is formally protected by placing it on the **Provincial Heritage Register** i.t.o. Section 30 of the NHRA.

4. Heritage Indicators

The **public views** of the school building from Spaanschemat River Road and the entrance gate of Constantia Uitsig are important and should not be obstructed.

Its 'institutional', but fine-grained appearance should also not be compromised and no external changes should be made to its southern and eastern facades, including windows and doors. The **symmetry** of the street façade should not be altered and the **rhythm** of the vertically orientated windows should not be changed or interrupted.

The roof of the main building should remain unchanged and further **visual clutter** in the form of fume extractors that break the roofline, should be avoided.

Signage on the public facades should be kept to a minimum and not be visually intrusive. Not only would large or obtrusive signage affect the authenticity and character of the school building, but would also be inappropriate on a road like Spaanschemat River Road, which is rural in character and has been identified by the City of Cape Town as a **Scenic Route**.

The existing **planted hedge**, which screens the service extensions on the western side should remain.

The more recent additions to the restaurant should remain **subservient** to the main building. These contemporary structures should not be substantially enlarged and any new enclosures should be **transparent**. New work should be **clearly distinguishable** as new and should preferably be **lightweight and simple** structures. Alterations to the exterior of the building should be limited to **non-public facades** (the northern and western sides)

In recent correspondence from the Constantia Property Owners' Association (26-06-2014), they have requested that a **plaque**, which identifies the historical significance of the school, be installed in a prominent place at the school building. This recommendation is supported, as the history of the Tokai Primary School is not well documented and is unknown to most visitors and residents.



Figure 9: View from the south-west, with the school building as a visual-spatial landmark when travelling along Spaanschemat River Road. The existing service extensions on the left-hand side are screened by a hedge



Figure 10: View from the east, with the school building on the left and the entrance to Constantia Uitsig estate to the right. This is the most important façade of the building and contains its historic main entrance.

5. Proposed Alterations

It is proposed to relocate the existing wine shop to another building on Constantia Uitsig estate and for the refurbished restaurant to also incorporate that space. The following alterations are proposed to the existing building:

- (a) The internal relocation of the toilets from the centre of the building to the south-eastern corner (currently offices);
- (b) Demolition of some internal walls to enable an extension of the existing kitchen and new, open plan food hall;
- (c) Enclosing the existing two canopies in the courtyard with glass, so as to provide wind protection
- (d) Inserting a new 18m² wind lobby in the courtyard, between the two existing canopies, using the existing columns. This will consist of a flat, concrete roof, glass surrounds and glass sliding doors;
- (e) A new, open timber deck on the southern side of the building, to be used for outdoor dining.
- (f) Replacing two existing windows with new double-opening French doors of the same height as the remaining windows, so as to access the new timber deck.

The existing east and south elevations will remain unchanged and the roof of the main building, as well as the two canopies at the back will also remain unchanged.

These interventions are shown on the attached drawings by Inhouse Brand Architects and the areas of intervention are shown on the photographs below:



Figure 11: The existing wine shop in the north-eastern wing of the building, which will be converted into a dining room. The existing arches and the outside windows will remain unchanged.



Figure 12: The existing office in the eastern corner of the building, which will be converted to accommodate a small office and toilets. The arches will be filled in and doors inserted. The outside windows will remain unchanged.



Figure 13: View along the corridor from the main entrance. On the left, in the foreground is a dining room, followed by toilets, offices and the kitchen in the distance. To the right, through the arched doorways, is the covered courtyard.



Figure 14: The existing toilets, built by Michael Dall Architects in 2008, which will be demolished and the space incorporated into the proposed open plan food hall. The toilets will be relocated to the current office space in the eastern corner of the building, near the main entrance. The doors will be re-used.



Figure 15: An existing office, located between the toilets and the kitchen. This space will be opened up and incorporated into the open-plan food hall. The outside windows will remain unchanged.



Figure 16: The dining room in the western wing. The central two windows will be replaced by double-opening French doors, centred between the remaining windows and with the same height as the windows.



Figure 17: Outside view of the existing western wing. The second and third windows from the left will be replaced by French doors of the same height as the windows. This far end of the building is not visible from Spaanschemat River Road.



Figure 18: Current view of the courtyard at the back. The retractable cover that links the two hard canopies will be removed and the space in the foreground will become a glass-enclosed, flat-roofed wind lobby, using the existing columns.

6. Conclusion

The current adaptive re-use of the historic school building for commercial purposes is considered appropriate from a heritage perspective and allows the general public to access the building, while assuring its ongoing conservation and maintenance. As recommended by the CPOA, it is proposed that a plaque be erected at a prominent location inside the building or within the courtyard, which outlines the history of the Tokai Primary School.

The proposed refurbishment of the restaurant will not impact negatively on the significance of the building and is considered to be sensitive to its landmark location on a scenic route. Most of the interventions to the historic building are internal and the external interventions mostly involve the contemporary fabric at the back.

The relocation of the toilets from the centre of the main wing of the building to the south-eastern corner will merely be a reversal of the 2008 insertion of toilets by Michael Dall Architects and is supported, as it will not impact on the external appearance of the important southern or eastern facades of the school building.

The demolition of some internal walls to enable an extension of the existing kitchen and creation of an open plan food hall is supported. While the corridor, which is a typical feature of school buildings, will no longer be enclosed on the southern side, the evenly-spaced columns along that side, as shown in Figure 13 above, will remain and the linear effect will not be lost.

Enclosing the existing two canopies in the courtyard with glass will provide wind protection and, since they are transparent, will remain subservient to the 'solid', school building that surrounds it on three sides. Similarly, inserting a new wind lobby in the courtyard, between the two existing canopies, also with glass surrounds and sliding doors, will maintain transparency and will be subservient to the school building.

The new, open timber deck on the southern side of the building will not have any impact on the school building or create any visual clutter or obstruction of views.

The loss of two windows at the far end of the west wing (the 'breakfast room') is regrettable, as any loss of historic fabric is. This is however not one of the two important, public facades of the building, but an already 'compromised' façade, which also contains the 2008 service extensions. It is screened from Spaanschemat River Road by a mature hedge, but even if they were not screened, the new double-opening French doors, which will have the same height as the remaining windows on either side, will not be visually intrusive or architecturally insensitive, as can be seen on the West Elevation on Drawing LA_1002.

It is concluded that the proposed alterations comply with the above-mentioned heritage indicators and are supported. Hence, it is recommended that Heritage Western Cape **approve** the alterations as shown on Drawings LA_1001 (Rev.1), LA_1002 (Rev.1) and LA_1003 (Rev.1), all dated 17-07-2014 by Inhouse Brand Architects and grants a permit in terms of Section 34 of the NHRA.

It is also recommended that the school building be placed on the Provincial Heritage Register i.t.o. Section 30 of the NHRA.