

MAMRE VILLAGE REVITALISATION

Rekindling traditional construction skills, mud-brick making, harvesting of alien trees and revival of the craft of thatching for social and economic development.

The objective behind the City of Cape Town's Heritage Management initiative to restore heritage buildings and to construct a new Visitor's Centre in Mamre was to boost tourism in the area. The spin offs include a way to alleviate poverty and promote self-sufficiency in the community through skills transfer programmes of traditional building methods using locally sourced materials.

We explore how to make sustainable heritage development relevant at a grass roots level and how these sustainable building practices and heritage conservation has helped to revitalise the community.

PROGRESS

According to the Ossie Asmal, director: environmental resource management department, City of Cape Town, since the completion of the Visitor Centre, many of the local contractors have found employment on the restoration works

currently underway at the Church *werf* (which is a Provincial Heritage site dating back to the 18th century) under the supervision of Cape Town-based architect and heritage consultant Graham Jacobs.

As part of the City's Mamre Revitalisation Project, Jacobs has completed proposals for the reconstruction of a ruined house, strategically located at No. 1 Klinker Street for a much needed community Arts & Crafts centre, identified during the public participation charette in 2007.

Reconstruction will include the use of hand-made clay bricks manufactured on site by locals as part of Sustain Property Development's (Sustain) skills development program. Like the Mamre mill and church restoration projects, the building will be thatched and include facilities for the disabled. The proposal involves not only the reconstruction of the ruin, but also the construction of another small building on Klinker Street for potentially housing the donkey cart, currently being used for tours around Mamre. The project is being managed by

A house in disrepair and houses that have been restored.





Sustain using funds made available by the Department of Environmental Affairs and Tourism (DEAT) for promoting local skills development.

According to the Visitor Centre's architect, Andy Horn, some of the team have also used their new skills to restore the thatch roof on one of the few remaining intact historic dwellings in the village.

Restoration work on the historic church building is currently on hold pending funding that will hopefully be available before the end of the year. When work commences, this will be undertaken by the Mamre Restoration Group (MRG), the same group that was established as an empowerment skills development initiative for locals.

COMMUNITY ADHERENCE TO HERITAGE BUILDING GUIDELINES

The City of Cape Town's Environmental Resource Management Department (ERMD) has developed

guidelines for Mamre to ensure sensitive design solutions for new developments in the proposed Urban Conservation Area as well as sensitive alterations to historic fabric and although a more sensitive approach to new work in the proposed Urban Conservation Area has been seen, this is an ongoing debate and will continue to be so until such time as the Urban Conservation Area can be formalised, which will allow the City stricter measures in terms of legislation. Currently only buildings older than 60 years have general protection under the National Heritage Resources Act.

In Mamre, a few hundred low cost houses were recently successfully retrofitted with insulated ceilings by the City's ERMDs Sustainable Development section to reduce the energy consumption of the houses and the City recommends that applicants or developers

The Visitor's Centre completed

A local making adobe bricks on site.



consider energy- and water-saving devices as per the City of Cape Town's Draft Green Buildings Guidelines. The ERMD is looking at various partnerships and opportunities across the city to meet these aims.

CONCLUSIONS AND VIEWS

"Teething problems were experienced with these projects," shares Jacobs, "but then that's hardly unexpected when one is involved in a learning process. The positive thing is that we are gradually building up a workforce of dedicated individuals. Although only in the early stages, there is clearly considerable potential within this remarkable local community to take this forward. The restoration of the Mamre mill and the ongoing restoration work on the historic church building demonstrates the way in which local communities can take charge of their future."

Jacobs concludes with these wise insights: "I also believe that projects like these are the only way of

making heritage and sustainable development both relevant and effective at grass roots level." ◉

** Read the full project feature on p62 in the October-November 2011 issue.*

SOURCEBOOK

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