

Report to Parliamentary Public Works and Infrastructure Portfolio Committee

Title: Report on Neglected DPWI Houses Located at Waterloo Green, Wynberg, Cape Town

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Executive Summary:

This report outlines the current state of three government-owned buildings under the jurisdiction of the Department of Public Works and Infrastructure (DPWI). These structures have been subject to neglect, invasion, and extensive damage caused by vagrants, leading to significant deterioration and posing various risks to public safety and the surrounding communities.

1. Introduction

The purpose of this report is to bring to the committee's attention the dire state of the three (3) DPWI owned houses located in a cul-de-sac called Waterloo Green, with the physical address of 14 Cavan Road, Wynberg, and situated on erf 66347-RE. It is the intent of this report to highlight the impact the neglect of these houses have had on the surrounding community.

It will provide a timeline of the efforts made by the community, public representatives, law enforcement agencies and surrounding schools to remedy the matter by offering workable solutions, dating back as far as 2018 and continues to date.

The three buildings have heritage status, two of which have been gutted to the point of being derelict while the last house still standing on the corner of Cavan and Waterloo Green is slowly being dismantled, regardless of the security appointed to protect it.

2. Background:

According to an article dated 20 April 2017 in the Constantia Bulletin and authored by Karen Watkins titled "Big Woes at Waterloo". "Around 1885 Waterloo Green was the playground of children attending the small, rural school housed in Glebe Cottage, across from what is now one of the busiest arteries in Wynberg." As can be seen in the image labelled "Waterloo Green" below, structure labelled **F** was a Victorian styled home while structure **E** was a thatched Cape Dutch styled house, similar to those found in the Old Chelsea Village along Wolfe Street, Wynberg. Each of these buildings have heritage status because they are 60 years and older as at 2017.

The article goes on to mention that the thatched house was once the home of the Station Commander of Simon's Town, but even while she was occupying the home, the building was broken into and a geyser stolen. The article also gives a snapshot of the state of the homes in 2017, with the decay already set in and the property invaded by vagrants and slowly being gutted by criminals.

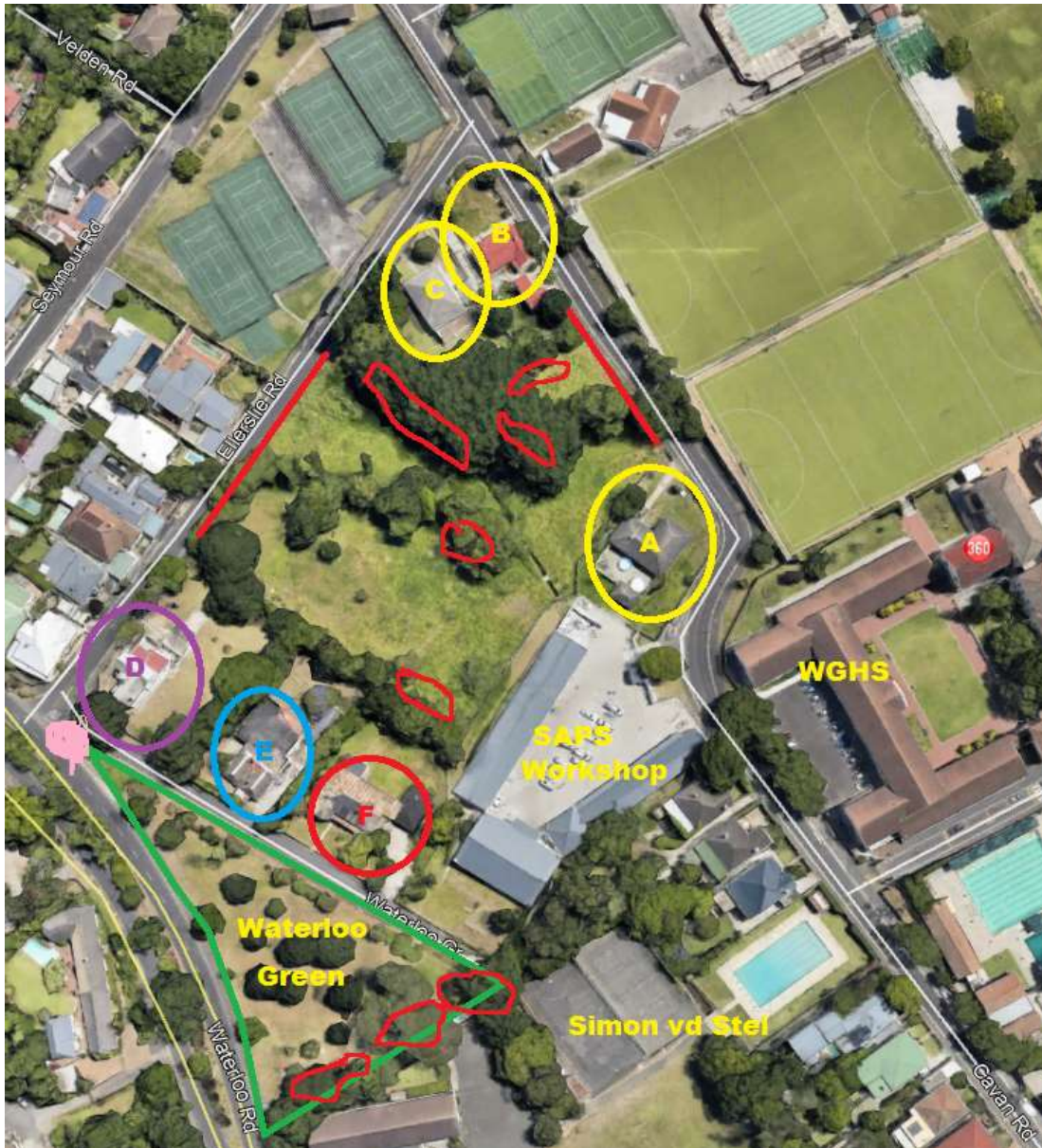


Image 1: Waterloo Green

3. Current State of the Buildings

Building E: Ye Olde Thatch

On Thursday, 2 November 2017, the thatched house, appropriately named “Ye Olde Thatch” went up in flames at around 5am. The cause of the fire remains unknown, but there are suspicions that a fire was started in the house by vagrants and set the thatch roof alight. The two images below illustrate the state of the house in February 2017, and then in January 2018.



Image 2: Ye Olde Thatch – Feb 2017 Image 3: Ye Olde Thatch – Jan 2018

It is evident, from image 2 above, that there had already been damage done to the thatched roof by February 2017 and on closer inspection, it was caused by a collapsed chimney. The building looks much the same in 2023 with nature taking its course and reclaiming the property and with the aid of criminals who saw the opportunity to further gut the house of copper, wooden flooring and other scrap metals.

It is important to note that this house was declared a national monument in 1974 and is now lost through neglect. The great tragedy is that Wynberg has lost one of its great heritage assets and could easily have been prevented if interventions were implemented earlier and the house were not allowed to stand vacant.

Building F: The Victorian House

The building has not suffered a catastrophic disaster as with Building E in Image 1 above, however, with the property standing vacant, it was quickly invaded by illegal occupants and gutted for scrap metal and wood. The rich wooden flooring has been removed completely and has been replaced with temporary ply-wood boards which are extremely dangerous to walk on.

On entry, the room on the left which looks like it may have been a lounge has had its floor boards removed and filled with rubbish from foundation to window level. I was able to ascertain that, further into the house, someone was in the building but was unable to go further due to the dangerously weak replacement flooring that had been put in place.

Buckets used for human relief stood in the passageway and there were distinct odour faeces, urine and drugs.

Building D: Cnr Cavan and Waterloo Green

This is the only house that remains of the three. The DPWI have assigned what few security they had to protect the three properties to this one location although, there are reports that pipes are already being stolen. The house is habitable, and with a little work it can easily be converted into an asset of value if disposed of on the property market. But it will not take much effort for the property to end up like the other two.

4. Implications and Risks

Annexure A attached gives a comprehensive history of actions taken by the City of Cape Town to try and resolve the matter by serving notices of remedial action. The report illustrates the conditions through the eyes of the officers doing the site inspections and highlights the risks imposed by the inhabitants of the property.

Annexure B1 – B20 are the minutes of meetings held by the Wynberg Sector 5 CPF Subforum in which regular reports and updates on the Waterloo Green houses as seen from a security perspective and how these houses have contributed to crime within the area. It is evident that the Waterloo Green houses were a staging area for criminals to conduct their activity in the immediate area and terrorize the residents of a once peaceful neighbourhood. It is quite ironic that the SAPS garage is located next to the property and that Wynberg SAPS is approximately 200m away, and yet little can be done about the criminal activity.

Annexure C1 – C3 are submissions made by residents who live in the area who give their perspective of the risks created by these houses and how it impacts the area. It is a great shame to see these properties through their eyes during the houses' glory days to become a monument to failure, neglect and degradation. These risks are also born upon primary and high school students who pass by daily and are exposed to the dangers to health and life.

Annexure K provides a summary of the crimes committed and criminals apprehended at Waterloo Green, the worst of which was a murder.

5. Remedial Actions Proposed

Over the past 8 years, several proposals have been submitted to the DPWI to take ownership of the property for the common good.

The school campuses in the area comprising of Wynberg Girls Junior and High School and Wynberg Boys Junior and High school have had meetings with representatives from DPWI and agreements were made to remedy the situation. The schools submitted a bid for tender UCACT27/2020 for the purposes of leasing the property (see **Annexure D** dated 22 September 2020 requesting additional information regarding the bid). The tender was subsequently withdrawn without explanation and no further tenders for this property were issued.

Annexure F dated 05 March 2020 provides evidence of a meeting held between DPWI representatives and various stakeholders where effective solutions were suggested, and is probably where the tender found its origins.

The school campuses, in their attempt to obtain custodianship of the property after the retraction of the tender met with DPWI and requested the permission to lease and maintain the property. This is evidenced in **Annexure E** dated 24 June 2021 providing both initial and maintenance costs, however, this was another dead end to acquire the property.

There has been ongoing correspondence that has been met with silence for the most part. Residents, upset with the lack of action from DPWI regarding the properties have reached out to their local ward councillor who, in turn, has taken the matter to Members of Parliament to deal with the matter at a parliamentary level. Correspondence was sent to the Acting Director: Real Estate

Management Services, Mr D. Gqibela, and commitments were made as per **Annexure G1** for the demolition of the property by April 2022 and the occupation of the third house by an official (Building D in Image 1 above). A confirmation letter was sent to MP Graham-Mare from the Regional Manager for DPWI, Mrs P. Penxa, (**Annexure G2**) indicating that the funding had been approved and documentation was required from Head Office to appoint a project manager for the demolition of the two derelict houses. Neither of these commitments were met to date to the great disappointment of the surrounding residents. However, as previously mention, all security resources have been moved to the last remaining house, leaving the other two structures open to continued occupation, drug use and criminal activity.

An oversight visit was conducted on 6 May 2022 by MP Graham-Mare and an oversight report submitted in the form of **Annexure H and I**, which gives a detailed narrative with images of the state of the houses.

After a reshuffle of the opposition Shadow Cabinet, MP Sello Seitholo took over from where MP Graham-Mare left off. He conducted an oversight visit to the Waterloo Green properties and other DPWI properties on 19 May 2023 which was reported on in the article “Call for Public Works to meet its Waterloo” printed on the front page of the Constantia Bulletin on 8 June 2023 and authored by Janice Matthews. Subsequently, he penned a letter to Minister Sihle Zikalala with his findings which can be found in **Annexure J** and were not dissimilar to those of MP Graham-Mare.

Stemming from the public meeting held on 19 May 2023 in front of the Waterloo Green houses, a petition was suggested by MP Seitholo which has ultimately resulted in the compilation of this report to the DPWI parliamentary portfolio.

6. Recommendations

Wynberg has grown considerably in population and its streets are narrow and congested. Moreover, the lack of passenger rail makes for an even more congested Wynberg with Taxis filling the need for public transport. Wynberg is one of the City of Cape Town’s major transport nodes and brings people in from all over the metropolitan area.

The four schools in the area have already made representations of their intentions regarding this property and have shown an eagerness to take custodianship of the property and be a lessee for the greater good of approximately 2000 students. The Schools need to compensate for the use of private vehicles in the absence of safe, dependable public transport.

It is therefore recommended that the property be leased to the four neighbouring schools in Wynberg for the use of the property for extra parking.

With regards to the two derelict houses, it is recommended that they be demolished as they are no longer safe for human habitation. It is also recommended that the properties are subdivided and sold as separate erven.

With respect to the last house currently habitable, it is recommended that it be sold on the property market, after subdivision of the three properties has taken place. An alternate recommendation for this property is that it be used as a dormitory for students who travel from outside of Wynberg from disadvantaged areas and attend these schools.

Annexures

1. Annexure A – Annexure A - Problem Building Unit Report
2. Annexure B1 - Wynberg Subsector 5 Minutes of meeting 23 Aug 2018
3. Annexure B2 - Wynberg Subsector 5 Minutes of meeting 11 September 2018
4. Annexure B3 - Wynberg Subsector 5 Minutes of meeting 9 Oct 2018
5. Annexure B4 - Wynberg Subsector 5 Minutes of meeting 9 July 2019
6. Annexure B5 - Wynberg Subsector 5 Minutes of meeting 8 October 2019
7. Annexure B6 - Wynberg Subsector 5 Minutes of meeting 6 August 2019
8. Annexure B7 - Wynberg Subsector 5 Minutes of meeting 5 November 2019
9. Annexure B8 - Wynberg Subsector 5 Minutes of meeting 5 Mar 2019
10. Annexure B9 - Wynberg Subsector 5 Minutes of meeting 3 September 2019
11. Annexure B10 - Wynberg Subsector 5 Minutes of meeting 2 Apr 2019
12. Annexure B11 - Wynberg Subsector 5 Minutes 11 May 2022
13. Annexure B12 - Wynberg Subsector 5 Minutes 8 June 2022
14. Annexure B13 - Wynberg Subsector 5 Minutes 7 September 2022
15. Annexure B14 - Wynberg Subsector 5 Minutes 6 July 2022
16. Annexure B15 - Wynberg Subsector 5 Minutes 3 August 2022
17. Annexure B16 - Wynberg Subsector 5 Minutes 2 November 2022
18. Annexure B17 - Wynberg CPF Subsector 5 Minutes 5 April 2023
19. Annexure B18 - Wynberg Subsector 5 Minutes 7 September 2023
20. Annexure B19 - Wynberg CPF Subsector 5 Minutes 23 August 2023
21. Annexure B20 - Wynberg Subsector 5 Minutes 18 October 2023
22. Annexure C1 - Resident's Submission - Peter Fox
23. Annexure C2 - Resident's Submission - Joss White
24. Annexure C3 - Resident's Submission - Samantha Wilcox-Diedricks
25. Annexure D - Letter from DPWI - Wynberg Boys Junior School - Tender Docs Required
26. Annexure E1 - Custodianship Submission 20210624
27. Annexure E2 - Portion of DPW property that Wynberg Schools would like to rent for parking - e-mail
28. Annexure E3 - Portion of DPW property that Wynberg Schools would like to rent for parking
29. Annexure F - Notes from meeting at DPW property - 4 March 2020
30. Annexure G1 - Letter ex DPWI - December 2021
31. Annexure G2 – Shadow Minister Response_Empty House Concerns Waterloo Green
32. Annexure H - Oversight Report - Waterloo Green May 2022
33. Annexure I - Waterloo Green - Oversight Report - Samantha Graham-Mare MP
34. Annexure J - Letter to Minister Zikalala re properties
35. Annexure K - Waterloo Green Crime Stats