

11.7	PARKS, OPEN SPACES AND ENVIRONMENT: (PC: J JOON)
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NONE

11.8	PLANNING :(PC: CLLR C VAN WYK)
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11.8.1	PRECINCT PLAN: FUTURE DEVELOPMENT AND UTILIZATION OF THE RHENISH COMPLEX AND SURROUNDS
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Collaborator No:

IDP KPA Ref No:

Good Governance and Compliance

Meeting Date:

22 March 2023 & 29 March 2023

1. SUBJECT: PRECINCT PLAN: FUTURE DEVELOPMENT AND UTILIZATION OF THE RHENISH COMPLEX AND SURROUNDS

2. PURPOSE OF REPORT

To obtain approval from Council to commence with a public participation process for the possible future development of the Rhenish Complex and surrounding area. It has generally been recognized that the Rhenish Complex is of significant cultural and heritage importance and is an invaluable asset for the town which demands proper maintenance and appropriate utilization. Several municipally initiated and supported studies and development frameworks have focused on the complex and its surrounds over preceding years. The report is the result of the evaluation and analysis of all existing planning and planning related documentation, current lease agreements and any documentation as it relates to the future utilization of the Rhenish Complex, its buildings and open space, the Braak and public spaces around the Braak including the potential linkage of Church Street with the Braak and Rhenish Complex.

3. DELEGATED AUTHORITY

Council

4. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Several municipally initiated and supported studies and development frameworks have focused on the complex and its surrounds over preceding years. These include:

- 1) Stellenbosch Conservation Strategy; Kruger Roos; 1997. (Approved by Council in 1997).
- 2) Die Braak, Voorlopige Ontwikkelingsraamwerk & Rekonstruksie; Kruger Roos, 1997.
- 3) Stellenbosch Historical Centre, Mill Square and Surrounds; Kruger Roos, 1998.
- 4) Heritage Study, Binnetuin Park, Stellenbosch; Pistorius and Harris, 2005.
- 5) Het Erfgoedbeleid van Stellenbosch. Het opstellen van ondersteunende komen – Die Braak en het Rijnse Complex als katalysator; Carton & Ryckeboer, 2012.
- 6) Kerkstraat sluiting, Piet Louw & Dave Dewar, 2020
- 7) Proposals call for the utilization of the Braak, Mayor 2019

While there are many relevant and good ideas included in the above-mentioned studies, the project allowed for an opportunity to consider the study area as a totality, as well as the site's integrated relationship with the general surroundings. A key question therefore is:

'What should structure the whole or the totality, in urban design terms, and how can the site, most of which is embedded, be unlocked to become part of the daily-use fabric of the town, from a public perspective?'

The project entailed the following processes.

- 1) The evaluation and analysis of all existing planning and planning related documentation, current lease agreements and any documentation as it relates to the future utilization of the Rhenish Complex, its buildings and open space, the Braak and public spaces around the Braak including the potential linkage of Church Street with the Braak and Rhenish Complex.
- 2) The identification of and exploratory discussions with Interested and Affected Parties as it relates to their understanding and ideas for the future use of the Rhenish Complex and gardens including the keeping of notes and minutes of such discussions.
- 3) The preparation and drafting of professional urban design proposals based on the existing studies and proposals linked to the preferred future use of the buildings, gardens and/or portions of buildings/gardens as well as other public space which might have an impact on the Rhenish Complex.
- 4) Drafting a framework for the Rhenish complex and surrounding properties linking the site to the historical centre and public spaces such as Die Braak, Dorp Street, Church Street etc.
- 5) The preparation of an urban design report and power point presentation with illustrations summarizing and motivating the future use of the Rhenish Complex.

The report provides an urban design framework which serves as a precinct plan that guides the future utilization, preservation and development of the study area with a view to unlock the potential of this area to play an important role to activate the Rhenish complex as a key site of cultural and heritage significance.

5. RECOMMENDATION

- (a) that Council take note of the precinct plan for the Rhenish Complex attached as **APPENDIX 1** to the agenda;
- (b) that Council gives approval for the commencement of a public participation process and advertisement of the precinct plan for the Rhenish Complex for a period of 60 days; and
- (c) that after the process of public participation is concluded, the precinct plan for the Rhenish Complex must be resubmitted to Council together with all comments received for consideration within 2 months.

6. DISCUSSION /CONTENTS

6.1 Background

Stellenbosch and its rural surrounds constitute an unique Cape Environment which is part of the cultural heritage of South Africa. The historical town and surrounding areas which provides its setting have special qualities which merit conservation. The Directorate of Planning and Development recognised the need to formulate a conservation strategy to ensure the enhancement and protection of the area and commissioned the drafting of such a conservation strategy which culminated in the approval by Council in 1997 of the "Stellenbosch Conservation Strategy; Development Guidelines. (Kruger Roos, 1997)". Already in this conservation strategy the Rhenish Complex was identified as a precinct of significant value and part of a key precinct incorporating the Braak, Dorp Street and linkages to the Eerste River. An Urban Design Framework for the Braak itself, incorporating a historical study, was undertaken in 1997 (Kruger Roos, 1997) and some urban design improvements were undertaken around the southern end of the Braak/ Mill Square.

Following the approval of the Stellenbosch Conservation Strategy the Directorate of Planning and Development embarked on a program to prepare detailed heritage studies of all significant heritage areas in Stellenbosch town as identified in the Stellenbosch Conservation Strategy and specifically the areas where large green

(public) areas were located. These heritage studies formed part of the Stellenbosch Spatial Linkages project (Kruger Roos, 2003/4), which were an exploration of the ways that the town can develop and enhance key public spaces and precincts and link them together in a network of pedestrian routes, thus improving access to the historical core – and enjoyment of its facilities and amenities – by residents and visitors.

Studies included the Stadshuis urban block (between Plein, Ryneveld, Victoria and Andringa Streets), the Bloemhof site (between Plein Street, Ryneveld Street, the University, and the Botanical Garden), and the Ou Kerkhof urban block (between Plein, Ryneveld, Church and Andringa Streets). Another of these studies was for the street block in which the Rhenish complex is situated and resulted in a report called “Binnetuin Park: Stellenbosch: Spatial Network of Gardens South and West of the Braak,” (Pistorius & Harris, 2005).

This heritage study identified the various cultural and environmental values on and around the site and is the essential foundational component to inform and guide development in this sensitive area, and to ensure that it benefits and enriches the Historical Core as a whole.

Location

The site is embedded in the historical village and is part of the centre of Stellenbosch town. The gardens occupy the inner part of a large block which wraps around the south and south-west sides of the Braak, the "village green" of Stellenbosch, with its two churches. Eastward is the oldest part of the village, with small blocks, narrow streets and a tight-grained fabric focussed on the Moederkerk. To the south is Dorp Street, the old wagon road to the Cape and the historical "spine" of the village, with its characteristic oaks and white-walled buildings. Further south is the Eerste River, a ribbon of green space which forms a natural edge to the village. Westward, the village fabric continues but has a looser grain and lower density than the oldest part. Immediately to the north is Market Street and the Kruithuis (Arsenal) on Markplein. This is part of the most direct pedestrian route between the station and the town and houses the Tourist Information centre.

The location of the site is shown on **Figure 1** below.

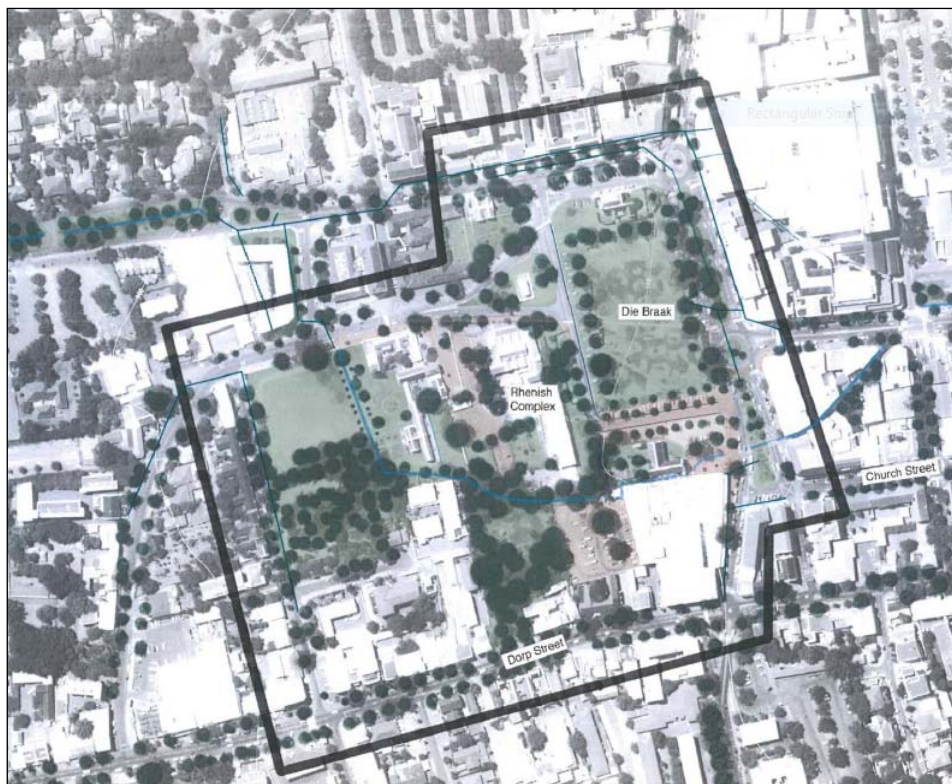


Figure 1. Location of study area

6.2 Block Characteristics

The block on which the site is situated is exceptionally large in relation to the village blocks to the east of the area and is distinctly larger than the surrounding ones, and constitutes a blockage, in urban permeability terms. For this reason, the pedestrian links through it are important. Without pedestrian permeability, the block would be a barrier to free movement – and in the case of Dorp Street, to the south, this is indeed the case: there are no northward links on Dorp Street between Herte Street and Bird Street, which is a fair distance on foot.

Vehicles are limited to the perimeter of the block, only penetrating at Schreuder Street cul-de-sac, off Herte Street, and the Old Mill Garden parking area (apart from access to private properties); there are no through-routes. The inner part of the block is consequently secluded and tranquil, shielded from the traffic in the busy streets around it. Unfortunately, this characteristic makes the site difficult to access thus limiting the utilization thereof.

The northern part of the block is occupied by the various components of the historical Rhenish Complex, associated with the Rhenish Church on the Braak. The freed slave cottages facing the Parsonage across Herte Street reinforce the important slave history theme of the Rhenish Complex. The Rhenish Parsonage is used as a toy museum and the building and grounds are open to the public, but other parts of the complex such as the School and Institute are not freely accessible.

The Tourist Information Centre in Market Street was an important visitor destination, from which many tourists start exploring the town. Most head for the Kruithuis and the Braak. Those who find themselves at the Rhenish Parsonage may discover the link to Voorgelegen garden by accident (by following the mill stream or a local who is walking purposefully), but the link is not clear at present and there is no directional signage. The mill stream can be followed upstream, southwards from Market Street into the heart of the block before turning to continue eastward to Meulplein. It is an important linear element which connects the green spaces at the centre of the block.

The southwestern quadrant of the block is residential in character: a mix of villas and infill flats behind the elegant buildings of Dorp Street.

The portion of Dorp Street edging the block on the south is particularly fine: noble and elegant buildings shaded by large oaks form a streetscape of strong character. This serene grouping comes to an ignominious end near Mill Street, where the activity associated with Checkers delivery yard is disruptive and intrusive. At the Mill Street/Piet Retief Street intersection the dignity and strong linearity of Dorp Street is broken down by modern traffic engineering – a fried-egg traffic circle and traffic island with historically uncharacteristic landscaping.

The southeast corner of the block is occupied by the Checkers shopping complex, a large building with a massing uncharacteristic of the historical core (but similar to the massing of buildings in the "commercial citadel" between Bird Street and Andringa Street). For the purposes of pedestrian spatial linkages, it is redeemed by the T-shaped mall that connects through it from the Mill Garden parking area to Meulplein in the east and Dorp Street in the south.

6.3 Landscape Character Assessment and Landscape Activation Opportunities

The Rhenish Precinct is a future-focussed initiative that looks to demonstrate a resilient vision for our urban centres. It is a place of health and abundance where communities can come together to share in their collective heritage and enjoy the range of amenities provided within this fascinating cultural landscape.

Income generated by the precinct is invested into the further development of the site and in the training of interns in horticulture, sales and marketing, event coordination, hospitality, urban landscaping, and maintenance. The design has transformed a semi-derelict site into a verdant working landscape, creating spaces that are both beautiful and functional and connects visitors to the production of their food, while creating a memorable immersive experience for communities in nature.

The Rhenish precinct provides an opportunity to bring agricultural and urban life together as the confluence of farming and cultural landscapes. Central Stellenbosch is bounded by two rivers and forms the urban heart of the Cape Winelands. A strong landscape masterplan consolidated visual identity of street furniture and landscape elements and integrated site management will all be essential to enable the success of the precinct.

6.4 Identifying Main Constraints and Informants

In the analysis and interpretation, the main constraints and informants impacting on the study area have been identified. These are graphically illustrated in Figure 8 in the report (page 27) and were addressed and considered in the outcome of the final proposal.

6.5 Main Ideas

Several ideas drive the spatial outcome of the proposals. These are captured in figures 31 and 32 of the report. These ideas are broadly captured as follows:

Improving Urban Permeability

To achieve improved integration and pedestrian convenience, the following ideas are proposed:

- 1) Create mid-block connections between activity generators along desire lines to accommodate pedestrian, bicycle, and emergency vehicles.
- 2) The linkages should be direct with a high degree of visual transparency and pedestrian scaled lighting. A straight paved avenue (binne-tuin laan) is proposed.
- 3) The entrances to these linkages to be managed for closure during specific times for security and surveillance reasons.
- 4) Resolve the spatially confused condition of the Meulplein precinct with pedestrian priority and sympathetic townscape qualities.

An Integrating Urban Design and Spatial Concept

The design concept includes the following elements.

- 1) The creation of a mid-block connection in the form of a straight paved avenue between Dorp Street and Market Street with lockable control gates at the ends.
- 2) The creation of an urban resource hub space at the northern end of the avenue integrating the surrounding buildings into a central heart for the precinct. The access points to the buildings should all face onto the space.
- 3) The southern and eastern edges of the space should be edged with a roofed and rear-walled pergola structure suitably laid out for flexible market-related activities.
- 4) The 'Binnetuin' should be the subject of landscape treatment, including water management. The eastern edge of the garden should not be accessed from the Shoprite parking area.

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- 5) The junction of the Binnetuin to Dorp Street should take the form of a commercial venture (restaurant, beer house) in the existing building with spilling out space onto a beer garden and tea garden, all accessed from the existing building. The building to the immediate east along Dorp Street should perform a supporting public-orientated function, although quieter.
 - 6) The parsonage garden should be transformed into an agriculturally based vegetable and herb space with the produce sold from the market structure in the hub space on periodic days.
 - 7) The uses within the existing buildings around the hub space should be community focused, with an emphasis on learning, access to resource management, arts, crafts, and cultural activities.
 - 8) To the north-eastern edge of the hub space, the entrance to the hall of the school should be transformed into a dignified forecourt space.
 - 9) On this north-eastern corner, a new tourist information facility should be created on the edge of the market square precinct. The market square space should be re-instated to an orthogonal space and the through-traffic should be simplified to generate a more people friendly space around the 'Kruithuis'.
 - 10) The western and southern edge of 'Die Braak' space should be edged with a werf-type wall with openings which respond to the pedestrian desire-lines and paths. New tree-planting and associated stormwater swales compliment the making of this edge (see cross-sections).
 - 11) The Meulplein is reconfigured with the closure of the Church Street connection. A new westerly one-way connection for traffic circulation is created at the junction of Blom Street and Meul Street to give access to the parking on the western and southern edges of 'Die Braak'.
 - 12) Meulplein is paved in one material and the water wheel is re-located in its original position.
 - 13) The Shoprite-corner should be the subject of an action project to explore its improved potential.

6.6 Returning to the Essence of the Idea and the Bigger Context

Figure 48 captures the essence of the proposed municipal-led intervention in terms of unlocking the site and integrating the precinct with the surroundings and mutually reinforcing activities through a before and after comparison. The outcome is much more spatial and consistent with the qualities of the original historic core.

In terms of achieving continuity of space and linkages, Figure 49 locates the precinct in relation to the Church Street precinct. This bigger idea is ideal for very large events, festivals, and special days. Also shown are the municipal parking areas on the periphery of the east-west activity core/spine. With appropriate management, it should be possible to control the extent and spatial distribution of events of different sizes and characters in the larger precinct.

6.7 Transport Engineering Input

As part of the urban design framework, a transport engineer was involved in evaluating and testing the feasibility of the main proposals contained in the precinct plan. The report is included in the precinct plan as pages 64 -70. The main findings of the transport engineer were the following:

- 1) The potential exit from Checkers Parking area onto Dorp Street is currently a driveway access located opposite another driveway access and adjacent to the Checkers service area. The potential exit is possible from an access management perspective.

- 2) The entry and exit portion of the Mark/ Blom intersection is currently split to accommodate a historical feature on a central island. The current Blom/ Mark (1-way) is priority-controlled with Blom having priority. It is proposed to close the southern link (the entry portion) to enable the creation of a dedicated pedestrian link between Plein Street and Mark Street and the current Mark Street (1-way portion westbound) will become an urban square with a pedestrian route. This will require that the existing approach to the intersection on Mark Street (currently a 1-way eastbound) in the Blom direction, will become a 2-way section.

This is possible as it is expected that the Blom/ Market Street intersection (currently priority-controlled with Blom having priority) will have sufficient capacity to accommodate 2-way traffic on Mark Street. Access to the existing parking areas must just be considered and adapted in the reconfiguration of this section of Mark Street. A Transport Impact Assessment will also be required to determine the impact of the additional entering traffic volumes at the Blom/ Mark intersection.

- 3) It is also proposed to close the portion of Church Street between Mill and Bird Street. Mill Street and the portion of Bird Street between Dorp and Alexander (currently dualled) forms part of a 2-way couplet system. The closure this portion of Church Street will have the following impacts:

- i. Vehicles looking for parking along Bird Street southbound will have to turn around at the mini circles in Dorp.
- ii. The parking (8 bays) along this section will have to be removed.

This proposal is possible, but subject to a parking investigation and a Transport Impact Assessment.

- 4) New full intersection at Blom/ Mill and Bird is proposed at Blom/ Mill to enable the vehicles to cross the median of the Bird - Mill Street couplet and create another turn opportunity that will be lost due to the closure of Church between Mill and Bird.

The proposal will have traffic engineering implications and it is advised that a Transport Impact Assessment be undertaken to understand the impact on intersection operations, intersection spacing and parking.

6.8 Identification of Action Areas and Action Projects

The intention of the precinct plan is to inform the municipality of a series of preliminary action areas and projects that were identified for possible further investigations and strategies and that these actions and plans be implemented over time. These are spatially shown on the figure 46 of the report.

6.9 Effectuation and Way Forward

As a way forward, the following activities are recommended:

- 1) Endorsement of the intent and ideas of the proposals by the Municipality and the critical role-players.
- 2) Identify stakeholders and prepare questionnaire, engage with stakeholders.
- 3) Explore discussions with Interested and Affected Parties as it relates to their understanding and ideas for the future use of the Rhenish Complex and gardens.
- 4) Establish the basis for public/private partnerships and their related negotiations.
- 5) Undertake accurate survey of the study area.
- 6) Undertake coarse-grained technical feasibility studies for Action Areas and Action Projects
- 7) Prepare implementation strategy and prioritize action projects.

7. INPUT FROM OTHER DEPARTMENTS

During last year, the precinct plan was presented to the Director: Corporate Services, Director: Planning and Development and Director: Infrastructure Services. The proposal was well received in general, and reference was made the need to establish a management structure that can manage the implementation and future utilization of the Rhenish Complex as a unit as the municipality does not have the in-house capacity to do so. This report supports the idea of establishing a form of public partnership in one way or another to undertake the further work required and in implementing the proposed uses.

8. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

No financial implication.

9. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

A land claim was previously registered against a section of the property. Although this department is not familiar with the details the Director: Corporate Services is dealing with the matter. However, this precinct plan represents a spatial vision of the Rhenish Complex and does not award or take away any land use rights. Any owner of the property or sections of the property will have to take the precinct plan into consideration when considering any improvements to their property.

10. STAFF IMPLICATIONS

None.

11. RISK IMPLICATIONS

None.

RECOMMENDATIONS FROM THE EXECUTIVE MAYOR, IN CONSULTATION WITH THE EXECUTIVE MAYORAL COMMITTEE, TO COUNCIL: 2023-03-22: ITEM 7.8.1

- (a) that Council take note of the precinct plan for the Rhenish Complex attached as **APPENDIX 1** to the agenda;
- (b) that Council gives approval for the commencement of a public participation process and advertisement of the precinct plan for the Rhenish Complex for a period of 60 days; and
- (c) that after the process of public participation is concluded, the precinct plan for the Rhenish Complex must be resubmitted to Council together with all comments received for consideration within 2 months.

APPENDICES

APPENDIX 1: The Rhenish Complex and Surrounds, Stellenbosch: Unlocking the Potential

FOR FURTHER DETAILS, CONTACT:

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REPORT DATE	10 November 2022

APPENDIX 1



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The Rhenish Complex and Surroundings

Stellenbosch: Unlocking its Potential

November 2021



Piet Louw
Architect | Urban Designer | City Planner



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A special word of appreciation is due to Bernabé de la Bat of the Department of Economic Development Services, Municipality of Stellenbosch, for guidance in terms of spatial issues and the explanations of previous work and studies undertaken in the precinct.