

## DIE VLAKTE

**Die Vlakte** is a Special Area to the north of the Historic Core where forced removals occurred under Apartheid-era Group Areas legislation, whose significance rests almost entirely within the realm of the symbolic, social and intangible. The area currently consists of vast, bare patches of land and the typical 1970s townhouses and university structures that replaced the demolished houses. While it has limited architectural, aesthetic and townscape significance, the area possesses extremely high symbolic, social and intangible significance. The process and aftermath of forced removals left long-lasting scars among many Stellenbosch families. The attachment to, and subsequent loss of, houses, businesses and 'an exceptional community school' left a bitter taste.

On 25 September 1964 'Die Vlakte' was proclaimed a White Group Area. Besides the considerable number of Coloured people who were removed from the area as a result, six schools, four churches, a mosque, a cinema and ten business enterprises were also affected in various ways. The removal of people from the town centre to Ida's Valley and the present-day Cloetesville took place, bit by bit, until about 1970.<sup>1</sup>

Lückhoff School in Banhoek Road was the heart of Die Vlakte and the first Afrikaans high school for Coloured learners in the Boland. By 1969 the school had more than 1 000 pupils. However, on 30 October 1969 they had to vacate the campus under the Group Areas Act. A former teacher testified: "Everyone was sad to leave the school where there were so many happy memories. The school was central to the community of 'Die Vlakte' in particular and the Western Cape as a whole."<sup>2</sup> Other community nodes with similar links to the removed community include the Methodist School, church and mosque in Banghoek Road.

Please also refer to the Kruger Roos report for guidelines within the historic core of Stellenbosch. (Kruger Roos, Stellenbosch Conservation Strategy: Development Guidelines, July 1997).

**MAIN AIM:** ENHANCE (MANAGE) - The main aim of the proposed Special Area for Die Vlakte is not to protect each and every structure (aside from those that have been identified as having intrinsic heritage significance) but rather to enhance the characteristic elements and features associated with the community who used to live there: most importantly the mosque, church, schools, corner shops and public spaces. Opportunities for interpretation should be sought. This goes hand-in-hand with the protection of structures of historic significance, but the guidelines also look to ensure that any future development in this area remains in character with the Special Area as a whole.

**MAIN VALUE:** SOCIAL AND HISTORICAL – The appropriate use, renewal and interpretation of heritage features in this townscape unit is critical for their preservation, and the preservation of the memory of Die Vlakte. Any development that will result in the loss of the remnant historic elements within Die Vlakte will threaten the heritage value of this townscape unit.

**DEVIATED LAND USE/USES THAT WILL LIKELY ERODE TOWNSCAPE CHARACTER:** Over-scaled private dwellings, cluttered properties, gated residential estates, large-scale industrial structures, suburban development, large parking lot, business park, isolated shopping centres and their associated parking lots. Suburban "creep", and the development of blocks of flats, would erode the townscape character.

### A ECOLOGICAL

**Significance:** *The Krom River forms the northern edge of Die Vlakte.*

**COMPONENTS:** Pathways along the Krom River.

**Development Criteria:**

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<sup>1</sup>Grundlingh, Stellenbosch University, <http://www.sun.ac.za/english/Documents/Unsorted/Die%20Vlakte%20-%20English.pdf>

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

- Maintain ecological support areas (here associated with the Krom River Corridor).

## **B AESTHETIC**

**Significance:** *Banghoek Street in the vicinity of Die Vlakte, incorporates the key civic buildings of the Mosque, Church and the Luckhoff and Methodist Schools, which are remaining 'touchstones' for the removed community that once occupied this part of the town. Similarly, preserved sections of Van Ryneveld Street, and open spaces adjacent to the civic structures (particularly the church and school) have potential to assist in the interpretation of this townscape, as well as creating public places where reflection and engagement might occur.*

### **COMPONENTS: Special Places: Public Spaces and Social Foci, Street Grid, Tree-lined Streets.**

#### **Special Places: Public Spaces and Social Foci:**

- Work on public spaces of historic significance should only be undertaken by professionals who are sufficiently trained and experienced. Urban design expertise should be sought to formulate design framework plans, and consideration should be given to appropriate and positive uses of spaces "left over" by forced removal, and the position of public institutions that remain from that time. The open area opposite the Methodist School, and between Banghoek Road, Smuts Road and Merriman Avenue (currently used as a parking lot), has potential to be developed into a public space where the history of forced removals at Die Vlakte could be revealed. Similarly, the green open space behind the Anglican Church could perform a similar role.
- The School, Church and Mosque structures and sites have heightened heritage significance as remnants of a removed community. Their conservation is important as they perform the role of "touchstones" to a removed community. This significance has importance above and beyond their stand-alone heritage significance as historic structures.

#### **Street Grid:**

- The rectilinear street grid should be retained and reinforced, and the use of traffic circles is inappropriate in this environment.
- The scale of roads (especially those that align with historic wagon routes) should be the minimum possible. Insensitive, over-engineered, hard elements can compromise the character of a townscape as a whole.

#### **Tree-lined Streets:**

- Traditional planting patterns should be protected by ensuring that existing tree alignments are not needlessly destroyed, but reinforced or replaced, thereby enhancing traditional patterns with appropriate species.
- Significant avenues should be protected as a heritage component. Van Ryneveld Road provides a particularly significant example.
- The felling of mature exotic or indigenous trees within the Special Area should be avoided. Instead continuous tree canopies should be encouraged.
- Many of the strongest planting patterns that contribute to the historic character of landscape and townscape units, are within road reserves and on public land. A maintenance and re-planting plan should be developed. Trees must be regularly maintained.
- In some cases, remnant planting patterns (even single trees) uphold the historic character of an area. Interpretation of these landscape features as historic remnants should occur. This is particularly the case for the Oak tree opposite the Mosque.

## **C HISTORIC/ARCHITECTURAL**

**Significance:** *Die Vlakte is tangibly and intangibly "anchored" by the historic civic and community structures of the mosque, church and schools (Luckhoff and Methodist Schools). The avenue of oaks along Van Ryneveld Street, the row-housing there, a corner shop and modest cottages further up Banghoek Road, the remnant oak opposite the mosque, and several mature trees throughout the area also contribute towards giving presence to the removed community. The residential fabric between these elements comprises some structures of local heritage significance, and some that would be given heightened meaning through the interpretation of the forced removals in this Special Area.*

**Development opportunities in Die Vlakte fall into 4 categories: (1) Opportunities for conservation of historic buildings and elements of heritage significance; (2) Opportunities for alterations and additions to historical buildings and elements of heritage significance; (3) Opportunities for new structures within environments of historical significance; and (4) Opportunities to redevelop intrusive buildings, elements and sites in order to better reflect the character-giving elements of Die Vlakte.**

**Development Criteria:**

**Opportunities for conservation of historic buildings and elements of heritage significance:**

- Work on historic buildings and elements of historic significance should only be undertaken by professionals and builders/tradesmen who are sufficiently trained and experienced. Heritage expertise should be sought: it is in the interest of the property owners to have their plans prepared by advisors who have recognised experience and standing in their field of heritage conservation.
- Where the historic function or use of a building is still intact, the function has heritage value and should be protected. Where a new use is sought, every effort should be made to find a use that is compatible with the heritage significance of the element/site, and will require the minimum extent of alteration to historic fabric.
- Distinguishing original features, examples of craftsmanship and so on should not be falsified, destroyed or removed. These elements should be repaired rather than replaced as far as is possible.
- Where repair necessitates replacement, the replacement should be the minimum necessary, and the new material should match that being replaced in composition, design, colour, texture and other visual qualities, but its newness should be apparent on close inspection (its age should not be faked). Traditional materials should be used in repair work.

**Opportunities for alterations and additions to historical buildings and elements of heritage significance:**

- The basic plan of the historic core of the building should always be retained. Where internal walls are removed, the extent of removal should be the minimum necessary and ribs should be retained to reflect the historic layout of spaces.
- Any intervention should be the minimum necessary to meet the new requirements, reversible when possible, and designed not to prejudice future interventions and/or restoration. For instance, if the addition or alteration were to be removed in the future, the essential form and integrity of the historic structure would remain intact.
- Historical layering should be respected and protected – historic additions may have heritage significance in their own right. The removal of later fabric should only occur in instances where it has minimal significance or detracts from significance.
- Alterations and additions to conservation-worthy structures and elements should be sympathetic to their architectural character and period detailing, including their layout, scale, proportion, massing, alignments, access, landscaping and setting. Inappropriate 'modernisation' of conservation-worthy structures and elements should be prevented. Similarly, detailed elements such as windows and doors should respond to the historic elements in composition, proportion, colour, material and other visual qualities, but it should not be a pseudo-historical replica of the older elements. New additions should also be a true reflection to their own time. Heritage expertise should be sought.
- Distinguish old from new but ensure visual harmony between historical fabric and new interventions in terms of appropriate scale, massing, form and architectural treatment, without directly copying these details.

**Opportunities for new structures and spaces within environments of historical significance:**

- New structures should respect and respond to traditional settlement patterns and siting by considering the entire Special Area as the component of significance. This includes its spatial structure, layout, scale, massing, hierarchy, alignments, access, and landscaping setting. Any development that departs from the inherent character of the Special Area should be discouraged.
- Designers of new structures must have an understanding of the context, traditional patterns of place-making and historical architectural elements that are characteristic of the Special Area. New elements must respond to and interpret these character-giving aspects of the neighbourhood.

- Contemporary designs for infill buildings should not be discouraged, provided they do not destroy significant fabric and are compatible with the size, scale, material and architectural character of the property and Special Area.

**Opportunities to redevelop intrusive buildings, elements and sites in order to better reflect the character-giving elements of Die Vlakte:**

- Wherever possible, existing buildings that are intrusive because their scale, style, materials or siting departs from the strong character-giving patterns of the Special Area should be redeveloped in order to minimize their disruptive effect. This can be done gradually as part of general maintenance – for instance repainting in more sympathetic colours, or replacing mid-20<sup>th</sup> Century roof tiles with corrugated sheeting or “finer” roof tiles.
- Encourage mitigation measures (for instance use of vegetation) to “embed” existing intrusive elements and structures within the townscape.

**D SOCIAL**

**Significance:** *Die Vlakte has exceptional social significance due to the forced removals that occurred there from 1964 to around 1970, and the trauma and memory of these events and the meaning they hold for the communities that were effected by them.*

**Development Criteria:**

- Proposed development should recognise and take into account the relationship of communities to the Special Area and its communal facilities.
- Where structures and elements clearly date from the time of the forced removals, they have heritage value, and should be protected as far as possible.
- In this townscape unit, the church, school and mosque remain from the period prior to forced removals. These are important social markers for the community, and should be retained, revived and interpreted for a wider audience.
- Respect existing patterns, typologies and traditions of settlement-making by promoting the continuity of these heritage features. These include; (a) indigenous; (b) colonial; and (c) current living heritage in the form of tangible and intangible associations to place.
- Ensure physical permeability to communal resources such as rivers and mountains for the enjoyment of all members of the public. Existing footpaths and routes for walking, hiking, running and cycling should be reinforced and extended where possible. The potential exists to create public parks and squares within this Special Area that could interpret the events that occurred there, and provide a place for discussion.
- Encourage and support the establishment of local heritage conservation bodies, particularly within Special Areas, as is envisioned in the National Heritage Resources Act. Such bodies can assist with heritage resource identification, assessment and decision-making.

**E ECONOMIC**

**Significance:** *Die Vlakte is in close proximity to the Historic Core of Stellenbosch. There is an opportunity for developing housing in this area, as well as for developments and projects that could have a restorative function within the community of Stellenbosch.*

**Development Criteria:**

- Promote sensitive urban densification to protect the rural landscape as the main communal asset.
- Prevent over-engineered and insensitive infrastructural upgrades within historical settlements.