STELENBOSCH BLOEMHOF SITE HERITAGE STUDY

For the Municipality of Stellenbosch and the University of Stellenbosch
Co-ordinated by FVM Projekte

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Cover: detail of Kuys map post-1822 (Smuts 1979:54)
INTRODUCTION

The Bloemhof site has been identified in the Stellenbosch Conservation Development Guidelines (KrugerRoos, 1997) as part of a key precinct in the Historical Core, requiring a detailed urban design framework and offering particular opportunities for enhancement of linkages, eg to the University and Botanical Gardens. This heritage study identifies 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.

BRIEF

The heritage study is in the form of a report, with illustrations and maps, and includes:

- the historical evolution of the precinct on a place-by-place basis,
- analysis of the historical patterns and characteristics of the surroundings;
- the identification and mapping of heritage resources and features on and around the site,
- investigation and explication of their essential character and qualities, heritage values and significance (in accordance with the criteria set out in the National Heritage Resources Act) through on-site inspection and archival research;
- consideration of any proposals being considered (such as the possible reconstruction of Faure House) in the light of international conservation principles and the specific findings of the study.

A key part of the report is the identification of clear and explicit “development indicators” arising from the heritage qualities and values, which will usefully inform conceptual and design proposals.

Examples of development indicators are the identification of those physical features that should be retained and restored, those which may be altered or removed without negatively affecting heritage values; and guidelines about appropriate siting, scale, form, landscaping, etc, to ensure that any new development is positively integrated with its context and that any negative impacts are minimized.

The work of the heritage consultants frequently reveals particular development opportunities arising directly (or through creative “visioning”) from heritage values and qualities – which are regarded as an especially rewarding part of their participation in projects such as this.

The scope and focus of the study is informed by development intentions for the site. The site size is 1.7 ha (17000m²). The type and extent of accommodation currently envisaged is:

Conference centre 2-3000m² footprint
200 seat and 500 seat auditoria
Exhibition space, functions for 1000 max people
500 vehicles underground parking
Committee rooms and boardrooms
100 room hotel within 5-10 min walk

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METHODOLOGY OF HERITAGE ASSESSMENT

Each place is methodically discussed under the headings below.

Description
Illustrations
History
Essential character and qualities
Heritage values and significance
Design and development indicators

Heritage Assessment:
The assessment of heritage values uses the following categories of significance (from S. 3(3) of the National Heritage Resources Act).

**Historical pattern**
Importance in the course or pattern of South Africa's history (e.g. associated with important events or developments)

**Rarity**
Possesses uncommon, rare or endangered aspects of SA's natural or cultural heritage

**Information eg archaeology**
Potential to yield information that will contribute to an understanding of SA's natural or cultural heritage (study of the building fabric, archaeology, spatial arrangements and alignments, palaeontology, geology, patterns of flora and fauna, etc, may provide currently hidden information which is not immediately accessible)

**Typicality**
Demonstrates principal characteristics of a particular class of SA's natural or cultural places or objects (eg is a good example of a type of building or place)

**Aesthetic eg architectural**
Exhibits a particular aesthetic characteristics valued by a community or cultural group

**Technology, creativity**
Demonstrates a high degree of creative or technical achievement at a particular period

**Spiritual, cultural**
Has a strong or special social, cultural or spiritual association with a particular community or cultural group

**Social history**
Strong or special association with life or work of a person, group, organisation of importance in SA’s history

**Slave history**
A site of significance relating to the history of slavery in SA
HERITAGE VALUES

Heritage values according to Stellenbosch Conservation Survey, KrugerRoos 1998
In order to keep the text as compact as possible, abbreviated names have been given to various parts of the property, shown on the diagram above.

There are several adjacent properties which are directly impacted by the development, described below. They should be considered part of the design. They are included when we use the term “site”. The presently proposed building area is referred to as the “site proper”.

Chief among them are
- Ryneveld access road: the land at the side of the Synagogue and side of Bloemhof School, as well as the Bloemhof outbuildings which are seen as the road enters the site proper.
- Botanical Gardens: the development will need to “address” the Garden (either formally, in the way the National Library faces the Company’s Garden, or in a “softer”, more transitional way). This will entail redesign of some adjacent areas of the Botanical Gardens, and may affect the position of current gateways and circulation patterns, which should form part of design proposals.
- The north section of the site behind Bloemhof School. We understand that part of this land is available for development. The rear courtyard of the Bloemhof School needs to be redesigned as an
integral part of the development, and Bachelors needs a setting, entailing landscape work beyond the site boundary. All these properties are in University ownership, as is the site proper.

- If our suggestion of making a pedestrian entrance between the Synagogue and the Hall land as a pedestrian entrance should prove possible, that land (it includes the Skuinshuis) would be considered part of the site.
- We have noted the pedestrian permeability of the site. Where routes through the development are made, they need to be designed beyond the site boundary (e.g., through the University residences to Victoria Street).
CONTEXT AND LOCATION

Location of the site
The site is centrally located in Stellenbosch.

On the edge of the historical village: Ryneveld Street is “of” the village, as is Plein Street up to Drostdy Street; but Victoria Street and Van Riebeeck Street are “outside” the core of the historical village. The site is on the northern edge of the oldest part of the village, which has very small blocks, narrow streets and a tight-grained fabric.

The block is a transition zone between the village to the south and west, the Edwardian suburb to the east and the University to the north.

Access
Because it is so centrally located, the site is easily accessible on foot from the historical core, the University Precinct and the closer part of the suburbs to the east. It is within walking distance of the station (about 1.3 km).

Vehicular access is more of an issue because traffic congestion is a problem in the historical core. Increasingly, the local authority policy is to try to reduce traffic in the narrow streets of the historical core and promote it as a pedestrian-friendly environment. An increase of traffic in the village would be regarded as a negative impact on the historical environment.
Block Characteristics
The block on which the site is situated is large: more than twice as big as village blocks. It has a “doughnut” character: edge development, nothing (undesigned, unpaved parking) in the middle.

Despite being relatively impermeable at present, the block is an important pedestrian through-route and short cut. It connects the university in the north and east and the suburb in the east (via the botanical garden) to the village centre with its shopping, municipal and cultural facilities.

Characteristics of surrounding urban fabric
The village (historical core) is fine-grained, urban, small scale: predominantly small footprint, 1-2-storey (with some higher buildings). Streets well defined and contained by buildings (many with stoeps or verandahs) and boundary walls, although building lines vary. Buildings attached or close together. Streets relatively narrow, except Plein St. Street trees are mostly oaks.

Within the historical core is the “city” precinct, with larger-scale, modernist commercial buildings. The core of this area is north of Plein Street, between Bird and Andringa, but there are “outriders” of this type of development nearer the site – notably ABSA and the Sanlam building on opposite corners of the Ryneveld Street-Plein Street intersection.

The University precinct is characterised by large “block” buildings set back from streets in open green spaces, with broad pavements. Much coarser grain than the village: buildings larger, further apart. Victoria Street plane trees are particularly notable. The parts of the University closest to the site are particularly loose and unresolved – they have an undesigned “back” character and do not address the site, but turn away from it.

The botanical garden, although part of the University has its own distinct character: a secret oasis with many “rooms” of different character (fern house, water garden, tea room, succulent rockery, herb garden, bonsai, greenhouses, etc.); the “delight” of the garden, plus a serious, scientific overlay of classification and labelling of species.

The Edwardian suburb has a looser grain than the village, but a finer grain than the University. Single and double storey houses set back in lush gardens, tied together in this block) by the mill stream with its bridges and sluices. The streets are lined with oak and other species.

Policy context
The site is part of the Bloemhof/Town Hall Precinct identified in the Stellenbosch Conservation Strategy: Development Guidelines by KrugerRoos (1997) as being a Key Precinct requiring a detailed Urban
Design Framework “to facilitate proactive development, enhance the context of the conservation area, and provide opportunities for both public and private investment” (p. 26).

The precinct is described in that report as “the transition zone between the University and the Historical Core. It contains significant historical building stock, such as the Ryneveld Street buildings, the Wilgenhof Forecourt, the Sasol Art Gallery and the row of shops linked by an arcade to the parking area adjacent to the Botanical Gardens, as well as relatively recent development such as the Town Hall complex and parking area, and the pedestrianisation of Beyers Street. The inherent opportunities in the Precinct include:

- The provision of a pedestrian link from the University to the Core.
- The conversion of the Bloemhof Parking area into a positive public space and cultural centre.
- The possible conversion of the parking area at the rear of the Town Hall as a public space, which could still accommodate parking.
Design Indicators

Role, structure and form
- The key role of the site is to resolve the problems and opportunities of the block in its context, through appropriate urban design.
- The primary role of development should be to tie together the “loose ends” of the different character precincts immediately around it:
  - to mediate and express the transition from one character area to another;
  - to make the linkages across the site spatially coherent and legible;
  - to integrate the fragmented townscape in this part of Stellenbosch.
- The relationship (and potential relationships) between development of this site and the possible future development of the parking area behind the Town Hall should be taken into consideration and their respective roles clarified.
- Recognise and formalise existing pedestrian routes through the site, and design and manage them as public paths – they should not be closed off at night, but should function as part of the town. Security for the development should be at points of access to the buildings.
- Increase pedestrian permeability through the site, especially from Ryneveld Street (make sure that vehicular access is compatible with pedestrian access).
- There are strong opportunities to make a public “place” (plaza, square, court) or series of connected places along routes through the development.
- The scale and grain of any development on the site should respond directly to the scale and grain of the urban fabric around it. This should be tested from the earliest stages of design through the use of figure-ground plans of the proposed development drawn in the context of the fabric of the town around the block.
- The consequence of all of the above is that the development should not be monolithic, but should be structured like a contemporary extension to the village: broken up into clusters of buildings scaled in response to their immediate context, and placed around people-scaled spaces and “streets”.

Use
- The proposed use of the site as a convention centre is compatible with the cultural and tourist role of the historical village. It has the potential to contribute to the revitalisation of the historical core of Stellenbosch. A convention centre is an appropriate facility to connect the historical core and the University precinct. Provided there is some flexibility about the way the centre operates and the form that it takes, we see no reason why a convention centre cannot successfully be developed within the parameters outlined above.
- The provision of some residential accommodation on site to serve the needs of conference-goers, such as a small hotel, would be most appropriate. The part of the site abutting the Botanical Garden is particularly suitable for this use.

Vehicular access
- The impact on the historical core of increased vehicular traffic resulting from the development is potentially problematic. Underground parking for 500 cars is proposed. Busses will also need to be accommodated.
- The impact of arrivals in the village would be minimised by encouraging car users to approach via Merriman Street and Ryneveld Street (inter alia with clear signage), thus avoiding the heart of the historical core.
- An additional advantage of this route is that it passes the impressive University Hoofgebou, providing an appropriately formal introduction to the University and creating a mental association with the convention centre. (The University wishes the convention centre to improve its exposure to the town centre).
Vehicular access points to the site in relation to main through-roads in Stellenbosch.

- Because Ryneveld is one-way south, this route cannot be used by people leaving the centre. Since arrivals are more likely to be staggered than departures, the impact of departing traffic on the historical core is potentially very great, and we recommend that serious and urgent attention be given to the problem. We consider keeping additional cars out of the core of the village (ie the narrow grid between Dorp Street and Plein Street, Dorp Street itself, and the area around the Braak in particular) as a primary heritage objective, and a principle that should not be violated. We offer two alternatives for consideration by traffic engineers:
  - one (less favoured) would be to consider whether exiting traffic could be routed through the parking area behind the Town Hall to Victoria Street and Andringa. Departing cars would either have to cross Ryneveld from the Synagogue exit, or could be routed up the southern part of Ryneveld from Plein Street (removal of on-street parking would enable this part of Ryneveld to carry two-way traffic);
  - the preferred alternative is to consider the possibility of making the whole of Ryneveld between Plein Street and Merriman a two-way road, with appropriate urban design modifications. We envision it as a calm, dignified “university” boulevard, with grand buildings set back from the edge, broad pavements in the shade of the trees, and parked cars clustered in “courts” or hidden behind the buildings. The existing traffic calming measures between Victoria and Merriman Streets (raised, brick-paved pedestrian crossings) could be extended southwards, facilitating the existing east-west pedestrian movement between the convention centre site and the town. In effect, this would double the impact of passing the Hoofgebou, giving it the townscape prominence that it presently lacks.
- Signposting will be needed as far afield as the R44 and as close-by as the Ryneveld lawn and in Plein Street. Consider thematic graphic design. Consider detailed location and size of signage: boards can be intrusive and obscure heritage features.

Specific design indicators for the points of access/egress to the proposed on site parking: (in Ryneveld Street and in Plein Street/Van Riebeeck Street) are in the relevant place-by-place sections.
INDEX TO COMPOSITES

The site is mostly the interior of an urban block and the areas that surround it have quite different qualities. In the descriptions which follow, these morphological areas have been used as composites of the various places that comprise the site and its features and make its edges. They are set out as encountered going clockwise round the site.

1.0 Plein Street Frontage

2.0 Ryneveld Street Urban Ribbon

3.0 Airy Edwardiana

4.0 Callebasse Kraal
5.0 University Quarter

6.0 Botanical Garden

7.0 Leafy Edwardian suburb
INDEX 1.0 PLEIN STREET FRONTAGE

The historical core of Stellenbosch is a grid of tree-lined streets lined with tight-grained, small-scale urban fabric, much of it very old. Its north-east corner is framed by Plein Street and Drostdy Street. Here the compactness of the urban core dissolves into a parking lot with disconnected memorials.

1.0 Composite: Plein Street Frontage
See detailed discussion page 19

1.1 Millstream
See detailed discussion page 22

1.2 Millstream Memorial
See detailed discussion page 25

1.3 Du Plessis Monument
See detailed discussion page 26
1.4 Demolished Outbuilding
See detailed discussion page 27

1.5 Demolished Uitspan Building
See detailed discussion page 28

1.6 Decameron Restaurant
See detailed discussion page 30

1.7 Sanlam
See detailed discussion page 31
1.0 PLEIN STREET FRONTAGE
The north half of the site is discussed later; see Callebasse Kraal.

Description
Parking area behind wall with capped posts. Along the south side, Plein Street cranks and narrows to become Van Riebeeck. At the eastern end are two memorial walls. At the western end there is outdoor seating for the restaurant on the adjacent site. The millstream flows in a pebble lined channel at the east, then goes underground except for a glimpse in a brick-lined drain. Scattered mature trees eg Jacaranda, oak.

History
From 1924-1961 the end of Plein Street was formed by a “wall” of two storey buildings. In the position of Sanlam and Decameron there was a terrace of four1 double storey houses with parapets. These were put up soon after 1879, incorporating a single storey building that was in that location in 1814 and was probably much older. Continuing eastwards up Plein Street there was next a narrow two storey building with a parapet newly built in 1926. Of a similar height was the Uitspan restaurant, which was raised to two storeys in 1924 from a single storey building that incorporated a 1760s homestead. Next there was a single storey extension to the Uitspan that was in existence before the 1817 map was drawn. Extending forward from this wall of buildings was a single storey outbuilding that closed the end of Plein Street. A very effective ensemble with strong and positive townscape qualities. The forward- projecting outbuilding was the first to go, before 1920. In the 1940s a memorial to Prof du Plessis was placed here. The cuboid Sanlam of the late 1950s destroyed the Victorian terrace, and in 1961 the Uitspan and adjacent building were demolished. The site has been vacant since. The capped wall is believed to have been erected in the 1960s and the site was used as playing fields for a time. Presently it is a car park. (Deeds Office surveyors diagram 304/1814, Deeds Office erf register, Hoskyn 1979, Smuts 1979, Vos et al 1992.)

Essential character and qualities
Transition area between (a) Plein Street and the village, with its tight-grained, small-scale urban fabric enclosing streets, and (b) Van Riebeeck Street and the looser-grained Edwardian suburb with buildings set back in gardens.

   At present messy, unresolved and incoherent - there’s no there there. Somewhat redeemed by greenery, but space “bleeds”, gateway qualities are weak, the mill stream, memorials and other fragments are lost and unconnected.

Values and significance
An important “edge” to the town centre.
A key “gateway” point in the townscape, where the village meets the leafy Edwardian suburb.
Forms the termination of Plein Street and of Drostdy Street, both of which are highly significant streets in the historical core.
The site of pre-1960 buildings which performed effective townscape functions – terminating vistas, enclosing public spaces and creating streetscapes.
The only substantial public frontage of the site proper.
Design and development indicators

- This frontage presents major and significant opportunities to restore **historical townscape and urban design qualities** which have been lost, and improve on them:
  - Enclose streetscape by buildings; restore historical building lines and block structure;
  - Create new termination to Drostdy Street axis (note: Faure House was not on axis);
  - Recreate spatial and geometric termination of Plein Street, including enclosure by building/s, and a people-oriented public space on the north side, incorporating the mill stream.
  - Create spatially coherent, legible transition from Plein Street to the different character of Van Riebeeck Street.

- The re-erection of Faure House (Uitspan Café) and the coachhouse should **not** be considered (see discussion in box on following page)

- The new building/s along this frontage should follow the historical building lines (see diagram above).

- The frontage of the new building/s should be a maximum of three storeys high; provided that a feature higher than this, above the main entrance to the development, could be considered on the axis of Drostdy Street, subject to the approval of the Stellenbosch Heritage Committee and provided that it in no way competes with the dominance of the Church spire in the townscape.

- The historical townscape structure should be restored and a public space created on the north side of Plein Street. This would require the removal of the (rather charming) restaurant extension in front of the Decameron restaurant 22 Plein Street. The animation provided by the long-standing restaurant is an asset, and it should be encouraged to continue to operate in its present location. The removal of the extension, the restitution of the façade of that building and the provision of an equivalent indoor seating area (on the Bloemhof site) should be considered part of the new development and negotiated with the owner of the building. The restaurant’s outdoor “garden” seating should be incorporated in the design of the public space.

- The mill stream should be opened up across this frontage as a feature of the public space. The feasibility of it following its original route should be studied.

- The granite base and backing of “Pienk Piet” should be removed. Consideration could be given to deconstructing it and incorporating the materials, including the base stone (God verdedig die reg) into the design of the public space as a “memory” of the statue that once stood there.

- Pedestrian-oriented urban design and heritage considerations must take precedence over traffic engineering standards in this part of the historical core. The Drostdy Street-Plein Street intersection must be very carefully designed as a high-quality urban space (which is also befitting for the public frontage of the proposed convention centre). The generation and accommodation of extra traffic in the historical core is one of the disadvantages of the proposed development on this relatively hard to access site (500 underground parking bays are intended). From a heritage viewpoint, the development will only be acceptable if vehicular traffic at this intersection can be accommodated in such a way that it does not undermine the spatial qualities of this part of the historical core. If the main vehicular access and egress from the convention centre is positioned at this intersection, (and