THE RHENISH COMPLEX AND SURROUNDS: RECOMMENDATIONS TO UNLOCK INTRINSIC VALUE AND CONTRIBUTE TO THE MUNICIPALITY’S STRATEGIC AGENDA

Report prepared by the Directorate of Planning and Economic Development in collaboration with the Stellenbosch Heritage Foundation, November 2016.

Imagine the Rhenish complex and the Braak ten years from now …

“What once appeared to be a forgotten, ‘lost’ space in the heart of Stellenbosch town is now a choice international and local destination; a vibrant expression of the best of the area’s history, its people, their culture and aspirations …

The historic buildings are appropriately maintained and actively used for a range of activities. There are corporate offices, public exhibition places, facilities for artisan and crafts-people, learning and trading places. Many forms of cultural expression are noticeable, with a focus on the local and regional. Some visitors are fortunate to stay in the hotel during their visit to the region. Eateries are plentiful, and frequented by tourists, local residents, and students alike.

The ‘Braak’ is truly the central place of Stellenbosch town, again used for a multitude of public gatherings and festivals. There is much to do and experience, for old and young alike. While the area clearly values and expresses its history – and there is ample opportunity to engage with and learn about that – there is also a focus on the new; new art, new music, and so on.

It is understood that the Executive Mayor initiated the renewal of the area, by inviting agencies experienced in historic conservation, urban renewal and the creative re-use of buildings to develop and manage the area in partnership with the municipality. A special board was set up to govern the work of the management agency and ensure that agreed public outcomes are met.

It is said that the area is not managed for profit in the normal sense. While it provides livelihood opportunity to many individuals, income that accrues to the management agency is ploughed back into area, enabling its further development, public programmes, maintenance, and upkeep.

As a result of the initiative, surrounding property owners have responded enthusiastically and sensitively. The Checkers complex has been redeveloped. A new signature building has been developed, which forms an open reverent edge to the old Mill Stream and Rhenish Church. To the west and north, significant redevelopment has taken place, including denser housing development, and many more places of entertainment. The municipality has also contributed, re-instating the original Mill Square.

Today, the Rhenish complex and the Braak is indeed special. Through innovative management, the municipality’s leadership established a stage where their commitment to creative expression, cultural development and an open town is expressed on a daily basis.”
Purpose

1. This report motivates that the Stellenbosch Municipality takes the initiative to unlock the development potential of the Rhenish complex – partly in municipal ownership – in a manner that:
   1.1. Ensures the sustainable, appropriate maintenance of existing buildings and spaces.
   1.2. Increase public access to these places.
   1.3. Contributes to municipal objectives of building the local economy, while enabling further cultural development and social integration in Stellenbosch.
   1.4. Ensures municipal savings through harnessing available extra-municipal management energy and capacity.

2. The report is a response to the municipality's strategic project identified in the 2016/17 Integrated Development Plan (IDP) to “use the Rhenish complex and the Braak productively”.¹

3. It is a first report, addressing matters of broad principle. However, the report identifies key elements and a process of further work needed to realise the initiative should the municipality agree with the key ideas and principles presented.

4. As elaborated in the main body of the report, the ideas presented here build on work undertaken over a number of years, involving a range of stakeholders. The report itself was compiled by the Municipality’s Directorate of Planning and Economic Development in association with Stellenbosch Heritage Foundation.²

The area under discussion

5. The specific area under discussion comprises the Rhenish complex, a grouping of historic buildings and associated spaces and gardens bounded by Market Street, the Braak, Herte Street and Dorp Street in central Stellenbosch.

![Figure 1: The location of the Rhenish complex in central Stellenbosch](http://www.stellenbosch.gov.za/documents/idp-budget/2016-6/drafts/3429-idp-2016-17-draft/file)

¹ The Built Environment Partnership assisted the Department and Heritage Foundation with the preparation of this report.
The individual buildings, spaces, and gardens that comprise the Rhenish complex are illustrated in figure 2. The complex abuts the Braak, Kruithuis, and the two historic churches associated with the Braak.

The land comprising the complex was acquired by the Rhenish Mission Society in the first half of the 19th century. Most of the buildings are indicated on the 1817 town plan.

The Rhenish Parsonage is used as a toy museum and the Rhenish Institute accommodates the P.J. Olivier Art Museum. The Stellenbosch Tourist Information Centre is located Market Street. The Old Mill garden area is used as a carpark for Checkers.

The complex is owned by the Municipality of Stellenbosch and the Western Cape Government (see figure 3).
10. Currently, the municipally owned component of the Rhenish complex generates a municipal income of approximately R… per annum. Municipal expenditure related to its upkeep and maintenance is estimated at approximately R… per annum.

To be completed


12. During 2011/12 the Stellenbosh Heritage Foundation also supported a post graduate research study “Het erfgoedbeleid van Stellenbosch; Het opstellen van ondersteunende richtlijnen om tot een duurzame planning van de stad en haar erfgoed te komen: Die Braak en het Rijnse Complex als katalysator”, undertaken by Carton and Ryckeboer.

13. In 2014, during the 14th International Winelands Conference 2014 “Innovation for the Urban Age” – which included the first conference of the Urban Design Institute of South Africa – the Rhenish complex and the Braak was the focus of a special design charrette, attended by a number of international and local built environment thinkers and practitioners. The workshop, curated by the Stellenbosch Heritage foundation, highlighted the exceptional potential of the precinct to contribute in many ways to the regeneration and further development of Stellenbosch town.
14. In December 2014, Heritage Western Cape approved the heritage survey for central Stellenbosch. The Rhenish complex, the Braak, and other adjacent buildings were graded as a “Grade 1 National Heritage Landscape”, the only of its kind in the Stellenbosch region.

15. As part of its grading, Heritage Western Cape specifically recommended that the Braak and the Rhenish complex, inclusive of the Kruithuis and the two churches on the Braak “should be documented and managed a cohesive landscape, over and above the grading of specific buildings in that landscape.”

16. Despite this considerable focus, the Rhenish complex and its surrounds possibly remains the most neglected and underutilised heritage asset in Stellenbosch. Notwithstanding its central location, and varied spaces, large and small, public and more secluded, few citizens have reason – or are encouraged – to go there.

Background

17. Through its Integrated Development Plan, the Stellenbosch Municipality has committed itself to contribute to national and provincial goals of economic and human development, thoughtful and sustainable resource use, and increasing the efficiency of and opportunity presented by existing settlements.

18. The municipality contributes to these goals – often in partnership with other government and non-government agencies – through direct delivery on the traditional menu of municipal services (for example, infrastructure, affordable housing, health services, and so on) as well in less direct ways, through enabling partnerships, investment, supporting special interest groups, and so on.

19. Building on and maintaining unique local assets are important strategies in the municipality's approach to service delivery. Stellenbosch’s natural and built resources, its history, and its university, are critical building blocks in maintaining and further development of the community. More recently, the municipality – recognising its university and a significant number of resident enterprises focused on innovation – have adopted a vision and special focus as the “innovation capital” of South Africa.

20. Few towns have as fine a record of achievement as Stellenbosch in conserving and maintaining its historic built fabric. Private individuals, organisations (including “Historiese Huise van Suid Afrika Beperk”), and the municipality – at times as land owner – has stepped in to protect valuable assets for present and future generations. Today, this commitment has resulted in numerous benefits beyond the conservation-specific, including a thriving tourism industry of global reach.

21. Although much has been achieved, it is believed that more can be done to sweat Stellenbosch’s historic assets. Specifically, there are linkages between historic conservation and innovation – the municipality’s new focus. Also, through practice, many extra-municipal organisations have learnt much about the creative and sustainable re-use of historic buildings. This knowledge and experience can be brought to bear on the municipal service delivery challenge.

22. Specifically, rethinking the management and use of the Rhenish complex presents a unique opportunity for Stellenbosch to merge older and new development agendas and to bring available competency and energy to bear on remaining historic assets belonging to the municipality.
23. As indicated in the municipality’s 2014 Local Economic Development Strategy and 2016/17 IDP, the productive use of Rhenish complex and the Braak can meet a number of strategic objectives, including strengthening the municipal and regional competitive advantage for sustained growth, broadening citizen participation in the economy, and learning towards a more enabling and responsive municipality.

24. At the same time, the municipality will ensure sustainable, appropriate maintenance of existing historic buildings and spaces, increase public access to these places, enable further cultural development, and achieve municipal savings to be re-directed to growing needs of its residents.

The Rhenish complex and the Braak as a “cultural precinct”

International and national trends

25. Much of the deliberations about securing the maintenance of the Rhenish complex and the Braak and optimising its use have focused on aspects of establishing a “cultural precinct”. This is aligned to international practice; many cities world-wide have recognised the significance of cultural precincts as a means to extend local opportunity – of various kinds – attract out of town spending, enable urban renewal, and maintain buildings and places of historic value.

26. The recognised “creative city” thought leaders, Charles Landry and Franco Bianchini, succinctly summarises the relationship between innovation, creativity, culture, and cities: “Historically, creativity has always been the lifeblood of the city. Cities have always needed creativity to work as markets, trading and production centres, with their critical mass of entrepreneurs, artists, intellectuals, students, administrators and power-brokers. They have mostly been the places where races and cultures mix and where interaction creates new ideas, artefacts and institutions. And they have been the places which allow people room to live out their ideas, needs, aspirations, dreams, projects, conflicts, memories, anxieties, loves, passions, obsessions and fears.”

27. In relation to the future success of settlements, they state: “Future competition between nations, cities and enterprises looks set to be based less on natural resources, location or past reputation and more on the ability to develop attractive images and symbols and project these effectively.” Elsewhere Landry suggests: “[we] need to rethink what capital is and broaden it,” Landry said, “not only as financial capital, which is obviously important, but a city only works when all forms of capital together are working. It’s about looking at other criteria and about seeing and valuing those things that are often seen initially as the invisible and intangible.”

28. The National Department of Arts and Culture – recognising both overseas and local successes to date – have launched a country-wide programme of establishing cultural precincts. The Department suggests that “cultural precincts are aimed at providing a conducive and enabling environment for the production and consumption of arts and culture … [creating] a demand for commercial enterprises (cafés, restaurants, entertainment) and thereby attract visitors and tourist to the neighbourhood. Such precincts enhance social cohesion through the collective consumption of arts, culture and heritage in public spaces.

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4 https://www.demos.co.uk/files/thecreativecity.pdf
5 Ibid.
6 http://www.independent.com/articles/people/Charles-Landry-on-the-Creative-City
They also contribute to infrastructure development, urban renewal and viable communities. By their very nature, cultural precincts are multifaceted and have the potential to contribute to a range of national imperatives such as job creation, economic development and crime reduction.6 The objective of a cultural precinct is described as providing “local and surrounding communities, the broader city community and tourists with places to meet and be together – enjoying a diverse range of culture and cultural offerings, learning, exploring and interacting with cultural and creative activities and people, eating and drinking, shopping and socialising – in an environment that is green (leafy streets and parks), in streets that are pedestrian friendly, in trendy cafés, restaurants, bars, speciality shops, galleries, museums, theatres and music venues. To attract the widest range of patrons and audience it is important that a precinct offer both free activities (open-air events, etc.), which attract people to the area, and charged activities. It provides the meeting point for key urban strategies, from local economic development, iconographic, community, environmental, and educational to cultural and artistic.”7

29. In the Western Cape, the Department recognises the thinking related to the ArtsCape complex as fitting its programme objectives. In Gauteng, The Newtown Precinct is regarded as a cultural precinct.

Success factors for cultural precincts: space and activity

30. Research over recent years has begun to clarify the “success” factors of cultural precincts. Sue Reddy, in a 2011 thesis assessing the Arts on Main precinct in Johannesburg drew on the work of Montgomery and Canter to suggest specific conditions which support successful precincts.8 The table below – adapted – indicates some of these conditions.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Activity (economic, cultural and social)</th>
<th>Form (the relationship between buildings and space)</th>
<th>Meaning (sense of place, both historical and cultural)</th>
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<td>In good cultural quarters one expects to find a diversity of primary and secondary uses including: • A range of cultural activities, from exhibitions to work and training. • Festivals and events. • Small firm economic development in the cultural sectors. • Managed work spaces for office and studio users • Location of arts development agencies and companies. • Arts and media training and education. • Community art development initiatives • Day and night time activity</td>
<td>It needs to have good “fit”, where activity and built form are mutually sustaining, including: • Large and small spaces, and a variety of uses (and opening hours). • “Interesting” spaces and buildings, attractions in themselves (e.g. historic buildings). • Availability of work spaces for artists and low cost cultural producers. • Art in the environment. • A range of movement routes (focused on the pedestrian). • Active street life.</td>
<td>The area will represent and signal meaning and identity to users and citizens, including: • Strong identity. • A sense of history. • Celebration, innovation, and creativity. • Cultural diversity.</td>
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6  http://www.dac.gov.za/content/cultural-precincts
7  Ibid.
8  The Arts on Main Development as part of a Cultural Precinct in the City Of Johannesburg, Sue Reddy (2011). wiredspace.wits.ac.za/.../Arts%20on%20Main%20Report%2028%20Novem...
31. In essence, a range of spaces is required, large and small, accommodating both production and consumptive activities. A sense of history is significant, and the area is experienced predominantly on foot.

Success factors for cultural precincts: management

32. Landry and Bianchini recognises the increasing role of partnerships in city management: “Across the world there has been a good deal of thinking about how city management needs to change to concentrate on the things it does best and contract out where it is weaker. Enabling authorities try not to be burdened by inappropriate tasks which are delegated to private, voluntary or semi-public organisations. At the same time they put more energy and resources into strategic oversight, anticipating citizens’ demands ...”

33. Partnerships are also more evident in conservation and cultural development initiatives. Given pressure to fulfil other public demands, there appears to be a downward trend in the direct resourcing and funding of conservation efforts by government world-wide. At the same time, there is an increasing realisation that the conservation of the historic urban environment poses specific and urgent challenges that require a multidisciplinary approach, where conservation actions are embedded within economic, social, cultural, and environmental development strategies. As a result, the private and third sectors are increasingly playing a pivotal role in these processes.\(^\text{10}\)

34. Partnerships are typically organized so that each of the participants—public and private—take responsibility for what they do best, which produces the most efficient management structure and ideally the one with the most value. Typically, private sector or third-party is responsible for conserving the historic structure, its operation and management through a long-term lease. In regeneration schemes government remains highly involved in the project’s design and development to ensure that the structures’ historic attributes remain available to the public. The long-term lease usually addresses the conservation expectations of the project, clearly specifying who has responsibility for maintaining the building’s cultural significance, and detailing the approval process for any changes and allowance for public inspection of the building. After the terms of the lease have been fulfilled, ownership and all responsibilities are transferred back to the public sector.

35. To fully realise the potential of the Rhenish complex and environs, it is believed best for the municipality to seek a public partner to develop and manage the complex within a management and development framework set by the municipality.

Likely success of the Rhenish complex as a cultural precinct

36. Arguably, the Rhenish complex already contains the pre-conditions for a significant cultural precinct and associated regeneration. These include:

\[\begin{align*}
36.1 & \quad \text{Highly valued historic buildings and spaces in an accessible location to all citizens and visitors.} \\
36.2 & \quad \text{A range of space options, open and enclosed, large and small, and varying in its degree of public exposure or privacy.}
\end{align*}\]

37. Added to the specific attributes of the Rhenish complex, a number of contextual characteristics of Stellenbosch broadly should contribute to a successful cultural precinct, including:

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37.1. A very strong public recognition and value of historic buildings and places.
37.2. A strong track record of conservation.
37.3. A range of organisations supporting an established calendar of cultural activities.
37.4. A strong destination brand and tourism sector, including supportive institutional mechanisms and a large, steady flow of visitors.
37.5. A large student population, attracted to trendy places, and a variety of cultural activities.

Establishing a partnership

38. The municipality’s first task in establishing the Rhenish complex as a cultural precinct is to publicly seek a management and development partner.

39. Apart from meeting the normal conditions of municipal procurement, the process of seeking a partner should occur within a management and development framework set by the municipality.

40. This framework should *inter alia* contain:
   40.1. The outcomes sought by the municipality, including aspects of public access, cultural development, and conservation standards.
   40.2. A clear definition of the area envisaged as a cultural precinct and the different responsibilities of the partner in relation to different parts of the site. For example, while the partner could secure a lease for the Rhenish complex, the partner may have not have a lease for the Braak but specific management responsibilities related to the Braak.
   40.3. Detailed tenure arrangements, including the term and cost associated with a lease and day-to-day municipal service provision to the complex.
   40.4. Broad principles for new development within the precinct.
   40.5. The principles for distribution of possible future development costs, including improved infrastructure or public space associated with the complex.
   40.6. The structure of institutional arrangements, including how decisions are to be made and municipal oversight is ensured.

41. At this stage, it is anticipated that the development partner will have two broad tasks:
   41.1. Management (of buildings, spaces, tenants, and special events) of the complex.
   41.2. Further development of the complex and its surrounds, including seeking appropriate development from surrounding land owners.

42. In relation to management of the complex, it is not foreseen that sub-letting some component of the complex to private or corporate tenants will be problematic or counter-productive. A corporate tenant may assist generously to ongoing management costs. The issue is really the extent to which overall balance is maintained between private use and public access to buildings and spaces.

43. With regards to further development of the complex and its surrounds two factors appear important. First, some new installations or structures could be acceptable in relation to improving functioning and sustainability without detracting from character (this was the subject of previous investigations). Second, the Rhenish complex – or new management entity – will not have direct control over the surround to the complex. Nevertheless, it could play a very significant role in motivating for and championing such improvements.
44. Previously, for example, the municipality has indicated how redevelopment of the checkers complex could provide a more sensitive setting for the Rhenish church, the Mill Stream and the Voorgelegen gardens. The Mill Square could also be re-instated, re-establishing the previous spatial configuration of Church Street and associated buildings. It is foreseen that the management agency can play a key role in negotiating these longer term improvements to the overall area.

Figure 3: A previous proposal indicating how the Checkers complex could be redeveloped to provide a more sensitive setting for the Rhenish Church and re-establish Mill Square.

45. It is believed best to task the Director Planning and Economic Development – under the direction of a nominated Mayco member – to prepare a detailed approach paper, process plan and the necessary tender documentation to support the initiative for submission to Mayco within a period of three months. This work should be undertaken in consultation with relevant service departments and the Stellenbosch Heritage Foundation.

**Recommendations on the way forward**

46. It is recommended that the Mayoral Committee:

46.1. Agree in principle that the Rhenish complex be employed to launch an initiative to establish a cultural precinct – managed and developed as a cohesive landscape – comprising the Braak and the Rhenish complex, inclusive of the Kruithuis and the two churches on the Braak.
46.2. Agree in principle that a public tender be issued seeking a development and management partner for the precinct.

46.3. Nominate a Mayco member to provide political leadership to the initiative.

46.4. Task the Director Planning and Economic Development to prepare, in consultation with relevant service departments and the Stellenbosch Heritage Foundation, a detailed approach paper, process plan and the necessary tender documentation to support the initiative. The approach paper should *inter alia* include the public outcomes sought through the initiative, the tenure arrangements favoured by the municipality, the institutional arrangements, roles and responsibilities envisaged to sustain the initiative, and the competency criteria to be met by prospective tenderers.

46.5. Task the Director Planning and Economic Development (together with the Stellenbosch Heritage Foundation) to explore the readiness of the Western Cape Government – and associated challenges – to contribute its property to the initiative.

46.6. Task the Director Planning and Economic Development to submit the documentation as outlined above to the Mayoral Committee for consideration within a period of three months.