**302 Western Cape heritage buildings have been demolished in the last 16 months**

According to statistics released by Andrew Hall, CEO Heritage Western Cape, they have approved applications for the demolition of 302 heritage homes/ buildings since January 2013. This is a stagering number and one that is raising much concern by the people. it has been exposed to. But the public at large have no idea that the our heritage are being destroyed it at such an alarming speed.

We the Green Point Ratepayers and Residents Association ( GPRRA) are stunned by this statistic, particulalrly in view of an appeal that was lodged by the owners of 8 Romney Road and the developers, Signatura, with the Provincial Minister of Cultural Affairs and Sport against the decision of the Appeals Committee of Heritage Western Cape in May last year when that Committee upheld old the appeal of the Association and overturned a total demolition permit that was granted in March last year by the Built Environment and Landscape Committee of Heritage Western Cape. 8 Romney Road has been identified by the Association as a heritage resource worthy of protection. Prior to the appeal 250 Green Point residents signed a petition to protect 8 Romney Road and after the appeal had been won, close to 700 people welcomed this decision via the Face Book page Cape Town Down Memory Lane and other relevant group pages.

For this reason, Green Point Ratepayers’ and Residents’ Association is particularly dismayed that the owners of 8 Romney Road have seen fit to launch an appeal to the Ministry given that the Appeals Committee of Heritage Western Cape had extensively dealt with the merits of the Association’s appeal against the demolition permit. In coming to its decision the Appeals Committee of Heritage Western Cape had applied the principles in the National Heritage Resources Act and all the relevant provisions of that Act. The Appeals Committee also recognised that this Act must be interpreted in the light of the Constitution and the principle of sustainable development whereby the environment is held in public trust for the people, that the beneficial use of environmental resources must serve the public interest and that the environment must be protected as the people’s common heritage.

Mark Magielse, Co Chair of the GPRRA insists “The historical value of the building at 8 Romney Road is that its intact fabric dates to the early origins of the growth and development of Green Point and clearly illustrates a historical period in the evolution of Green Point. There is substantial local interest as indicated in the conservation of 8 Romney Road~~.~~ The Simon van der Stel Foundation, the Habitat Council, and several interested and affected parties also supported the Association’s appeal”

In fact it has come to our attention that the Heritage Association of South Africa, too is alarmed by the demolition of 302 heritage buildings/ homes over the last 16 months, particulalrly with regard to the grading of these properties, and approval thereof. This issue of grading also applies to 8 Romney Road which was downgraded from a 3B to 3C by HWC themselves. The Heritage Assocation of South Africa is requesting an examination of these numbers, and the approval of the relevant applications.

In addition the Drakenstien Heritage Foundation has sent numerous requests to Andrew Hall at Heritage Western Cape since Augsut 2012, querying the altering of the status of ”National Monumnets”, by their former owners. All correscpondence has gone unanswered. The downgrading of these is in contravention of the new National Heritage Resources AHRA Act.

Mr Magielse reiterates that 8 Romney Road and a number of other conservation-worthy buildings that survive in the area all contribute to the context, matrix and fabric of the character of Green Point. The City of Cape Town regards the property as having high local significance and wishes to protect the property but does not have the delegated powers to protect it other than by provisional protection. Such powers have yet to be delegated to the City by Heritage Western Cape but this delegation is being delayed.

Similar decisions and demolition permits have been granted by Heritage Western Cape in Fresnaye, Waterkant, Vredehoek, Bakoven and many other suburbs. We the ratepayers of Cape Town are not being heard. While we have no objection to development, we strongly object to our heritage being destroyed. It not only impacts on our history but also on tourism.

There has been a long process of attrition due the demolition of a number of old buildings in Green Point and other areas of Cape Town that are cause for great concern. The cumulative impact of a series of these demolitions over time is having a detrimental impact on the character of the city, this suburb and irrevocably destroying its’ very soul.

The appeal by the Ministerial Tribunal whether the demolition permit for 8 Romney Road should be reinstated is to take place on the 14th January at 1pm, where the GPRRA will be opposing this appeal and all other concerned residents of Cape Town are encouraged to stand against this appeal and stop the rapid and ongoing destruction of our heritage resources. If 8 Romney Road is not saved, it will not just be another statistic in addition to the other 302 heritage buildings/ homes that have been demolished in just 16 months but it will be a groundbreaking decision that indicates that notwithstanding that there is considerable public interest in the conservation of a building which the City of Cape Town regards as conservation-worthy and which the Appeals Committee of Heritage Western Cape decided should not be demolished, three members of a Ministerial Tribunal appointed by the Minister of Cultural Affairs and Sport can decide that demolition of a heritage resource should nevertheless be permitted. Such an outcome will pose many questions that will require answers.

Ends.

For more information please contact Mark Magielse on 0840862020 / markgpmagielse@gmail.com