

Abland to restore old Loftus "Sinbin"

Adjacent to Loftus Versfeld, where once stood the infamous Sinbin, Abland is developing Loftus Park, a new mixed-use precinct.

This building was constructed in 1929 as a clubhouse for the local tennis club. But when the tennis courts moved away many years later, it stood vacant for a time and it was then that its reputation changed. It became a rather infamous pub, the local hangout of rugby supporters before and after matches.

During this time the building was left in a poor state. When Abland purchased the land from the Blue Bulls Rugby Union a few years ago, it committed to retaining the building due to its social and cultural significance as part of the broader sports complex. Abland's aim was to restore it to its original splendour.

Protected under National Heritage Resources Act

Although the architect is unknown, the clubhouse is older than 60 years and is therefore protected under Section 34 of the National Heritage Resources Act (Act No. 25 of 1999). However, to accommodate two levels of basement parking, the entire site had to be excavated ten meters in depth.

Right in the middle of the site stood the Sinbin. The excavation would have left the clubhouse standing on a very high earth pedestal with the associated risks.



Process

Therefore Abland applied to the Provincial Heritage Resources Authority of Gauteng via their Heritage Consultant Dr Janet du Plooy, to utilise the method of 'deconstruction and reconstruction' in restoring the clubhouse. "The clubhouse of the Eastern Sports Ground is one of the few remaining historical clubhouses in Pretoria. In line with neo-Cape Dutch architecture the plan of the building is based on a Latin Cross," explains Du Plooy.

Upon obtaining advice from Anton Jansen, a renowned restoration, as well as a cultural and industrial heritage advisor, this method of restoration, was preferred. The method implies that the building is taken down brick by brick (deconstructed) while being carefully documented. All the building material is then numbered, placed in boxes for safe keeping and stored in a secure facility until reconstruction can commence.



Thus the building is built all over again using its original material but without any structural risk. The same method was followed with the Potato Sheds in Newtown, Johannesburg as well as Kaya Rosa at the Lynwood Road entrance to the University of Pretoria. A further advantage was that students could benefit from learning through first-hand observation. To this extent, Abland welcomed around 35 final year architecture students and their professors on site.

Highlights

The 55,000m² (Gross Lettable Area) site includes a piazza with water spouts and a little stream where children can play while their parents relax at one of the five restaurants surrounding the play area, as well as a stage where events will be hosted regularly.

The Virgin Active Gym, Protea Hotel, Netcare Hospital, and a hand-picked selection of shops form the base upon which the Prime Grade offices are situated. These offices enjoy great visibility and allow for easy access to the CBD, Gautrain station and N1 as well as Ben Schoeman highways.

Loftus Park will open its doors around April 2019 and is said to juxtapose the heritage aspects of the clubhouse with a futuristic 'smart city' experience in connectivity.