



HERITAGE WESTERN CAPE CONFIRMS PROTECTION OF HISTORIC ATHLONE POWER STATION BUILDINGS MEDIA STATEMENT

Heritage Western Cape (HWC) confirms the declaration of the historic buildings at the Athlone Power Station site as a Provincial Heritage Site, following a nomination by Docomomo – an international organisation dedicated to the conservation of significant modern architecture.

After a thorough public participation process, which included extensive engagement with the City of Cape Town, the Council of Heritage Western Cape resolved to declare protection over the historic buildings and their immediate surroundings. It is important to note that the declaration does not encompass the entire power station site. The extent of the protected area was determined in consultation with the City of Cape Town and reflects a considered balance between heritage conservation and future development potential.

Commissioned in 1962 and decommissioned in 2003, the Athlone Power Station is recognised for its striking red face brick modernist design, its now-demolished chimneys and cooling towers, and its architectural and technical significance. Designed by architect William John Henry Gregory, it is notable for being an early example of sustainable industrial design in South Africa, particularly for its pioneering use of recycled wastewater for cooling.

Following the declaration, the City of Cape Town lodged an appeal with the Heritage Appeals Tribunal (HAT), an independent body appointed by the Office of the Provincial Minister of Cultural Affairs and Sport. The HAT dismissed the City of Cape Town's appeal and, additionally, placed the entire site under provisional protection for two years in terms of Section 29 of the National Heritage Resources Act, 1999 (NHRA). This provisional protection aims to allow time for further negotiation between the City and HWC regarding site boundaries and a management plan. Such a plan would, among other things, outline routine maintenance activities that do not require heritage permits. This is in line with the approach followed in the declaration of the Green Point Common, also a City-owned property.

Recent media coverage has suggested that the City is seeking a judicial review of the HWC declaration. It is important to clarify that the legal action pertains to the HAT's decision and not the original declaration by HWC. HWC has extended offers to the City to resolve the matter outside of court, but these have not yet been accepted.

It is essential to highlight that the heritage protection of the Athlone Power Station does not prohibit development of the site. Instead, it ensures that any development appropriately considers and respects the heritage value of the historic buildings. Adaptive reuse of the buildings in a sustainable way remains entirely possible. The declaration need not impede the City's broader plans for green energy initiatives on the site.

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