

HWC Reference no: 19090401AS0927E

**ERVEN 103 and 104, Wittedrift and portion of Rotterdam Street
Proposed Retirement Village**

Addendum to HIA and other submissions made to HWC



prepared by



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1. Introduction

This report follows on a number of submissions made to Heritage Western Cape, to gain approval for a retirement village development in the settlement of Wittedrift. When the matter was last tabled at IACom on the 10th of March 2021, the Committee recommended that the applicant consult with peers regarding the following aspects:

- Analysis of the cultural landscape, including built form;
- Assessment of the significance of the heritage resources identified, including the grading of individual buildings and the cultural landscape as a whole; and
- Development of a site of heritage indicators which will inform the design response (and against which the design response may be assessed).

It was noted that the proposal does not adequately address place-making criteria that considers distinctive rural settlement patterns and street scale interfaces.

I was subsequently approached to assist with the above matters and visited the site and surrounds over the Easter weekend of 2021.

It is my professional opinion that the nature and significance of the heritage resource has been poorly represented from the outset of the submissions made to Heritage Western Cape and that in fact the site and its context has limited, if any, heritage significance. I would go so far as to venture that a heritage impact assessment was never warranted. Having reviewed the NID submission to HWC, it is understandable that an HIA was requested as the submission did not contain sufficient information about the history of the settlement and the site, nor the immediate context of the site. It is thus presumed that HWC had decided to err on the side of caution. The subsequent heritage and visual impact assessment submissions to HWC, similarly did not clearly illustrate the context of the site, nor the history of the settlement (the importance of this aspect to follow). In particular it is my view that the identification of heritage resources in the settlement was overly optimistic and included structures that do not warrant any grading. A site visit by IACom would have been ideal to clarify the matter, but in the absence thereof, I support my contention with a more detailed description of the historic development of the settlement, photographs of the context and a review of the grading of heritage resources below.

Could the reader kindly ensure that they read this report at an appropriate size on their computer screens – ideally at “page width” to get a better feel for the nature of the settlement and its constituent parts.

2. History of Wittedrift

The earlier submissions to HWC regarding the history of the settlement and the site provided a generalised history of the settlement of the larger Plettenberg Bay area. The short section on the history of Wittedrift itself was taken entirely from a marketing website for the area – according to this website *the village church and school date back approximately 150 years and there is evidence that Matthias Theodore Thesen of the Knysna-based Thesen family lived on a farm named Wittedrift in the area in the early 1870s*. The site continues on to state that *the village and especially the Green Valley township is home to people whose family roots extend back many generations* (this in itself is a statement that seems somewhat non-sensical) (<https://www.wittedriftway.co.za/the-wittedrift->

[story/](#) - visited 25 April 2021). No references are provided by this website to corroborate the information.

My archival research at the Deeds Office in Cape Town and internet searches revealed the following: The farm Wittedrift, measuring more than 2000 hectares, was first granted to Hendrik van Huysteen on a quitrent basis in 1818 (George Quitrents Vol. 2 Folio 25). In 1884 the whole property was regranted to 10 individuals, mostly Van Huysteens and likely descendants of Hendrik, and also Matthias Theodore Thesen (Knysna Quitrents Vol. 2 Folio 5).

Matthias, originally a sea captain, was the brother of Arnt Thesen, who founded the Thesen Company in Knysna. Members of the Thesen family arrived in South Africa in 1869 and eventually settled in Knysna 1870 where they set up a various businesses including the now famous timber supply business. According to the Heritage Portal, Matthias and his son, Hans managed the farm Modderhoek at Knysna, purchased by the Thesen family for its timber reserves in 1876, but did not stay long and moved away to farm at Wittedrift. In 1891 Hans returned from Wittedrift to join the Thesen family business in Knysna¹. According the Wikipedia page on Charles Thesen (son of Arnt), Matthias died in 1884, in the same year as he was granted a share (which also seems to have been apportioned) in the farm Wittedrift.² Thus, although there is a definite connection to the Thesen family, it is of little consequence to the legacy and impact that this family had on the development of the town of Knysna and the timber and shipping industry in South Africa.

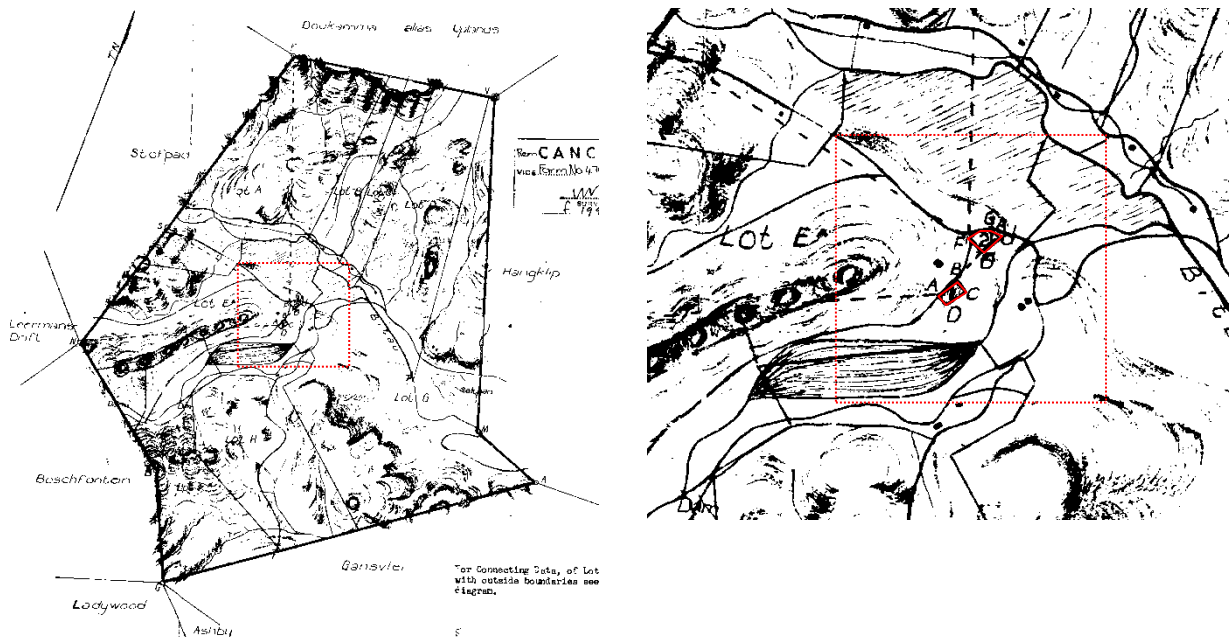


Extract from SG Diagram 2400/1883 attached to the Knysna Quitrent grant of 1884

¹ <http://www.theheritageportal.co.za/article/thesen-homes-knysna> - visited 26 April 2021

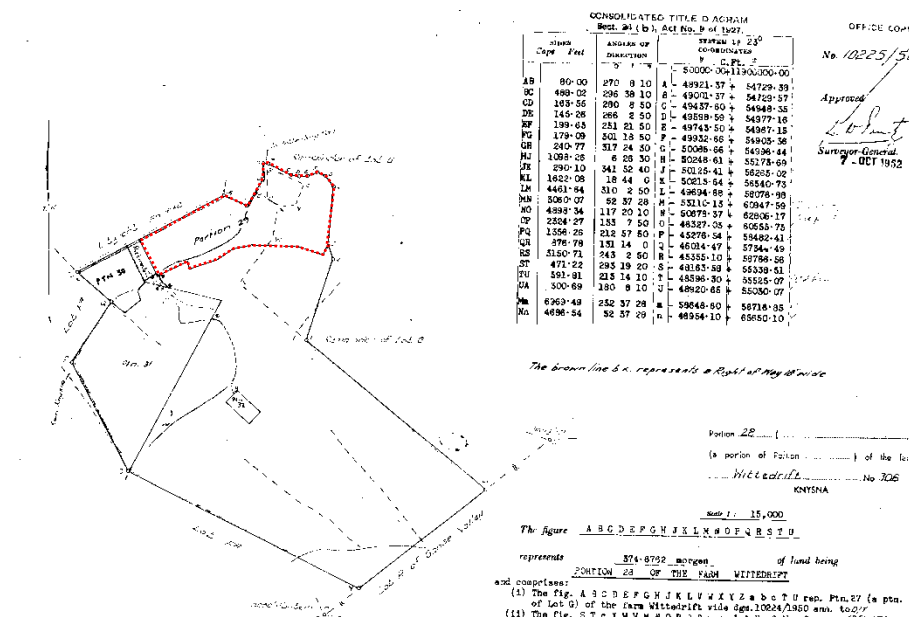
² https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Charles_Wilhelm_Thesen - visited 26 April 2021

By 1885 two portions of just more than 1 morgen of the farm Wittedrift, was transferred to the Dutch Reformed Church of Knysna, presumably to build a church for the farming community of the area and the remainder of the farm was divided between the shareholders of the 1884 regnant.



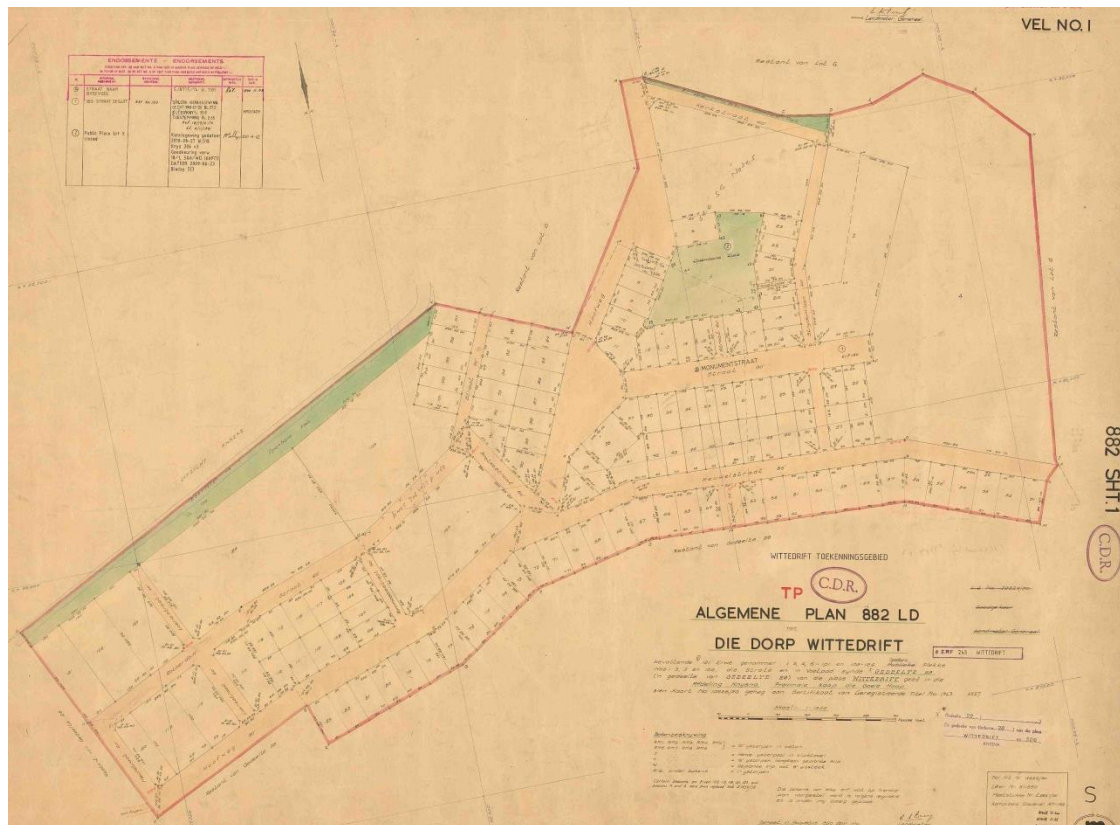
SG Diagram 2400/1883 from Suveyor General database, indicating the location of the two portions transferred to the DRC and the subsequent subdivision of Wittedrift.

The settlement of Wittedrift has its origins in Portion 28 of the farm, a consolidation of the land allocated to the DRC (known as the Mclachlan Congregation), Portion H, known as Rotterdam, and a part of Portion G (also known as Mclachlan). The property registers indicate that these portions were almost exclusively in the hands of Van Huysteens, until 1947 when the properties were transferred to the DRC and in 1961 a certificate of consolidated title for Portion 28 was issued to the DRC.



Extract from SG Diagram 10225/1950 for Portion 28 of Farm 306, Wittedrift

In 1950 already a General Plan for the town of Wittedrift on Portion 29 (a portion of portion 28 – see figure above) was approved by the then Divisional Council.



Approved General Plan for Wittedrift – SG Diagram 10227/1950

In 1972, the bulk of the area covered by the general plan was sold Hendrik Petrus Truter, who sold four of the individual erven, until the remainder was expropriated in 1977 and passed to the Divisional Council, who subsequently went on to sell off the remaining erven.

Historical aerials, presented below confirm that the settlement of Wittedrift did not really develop until the late 1980s. The settlement of Wittedrift, which has its origins in the establishment of a congregation with its own church and most likely school, during the late 1800s, never developed into a historical church settlement, such as Darling or Napier, as recorded by Fransen in his *Old Towns and Villages of the Cape* (2006). Wittedrift, needless to say, is not mentioned in this publication.

The aerials also indicate that what historic structures there are, are almost exclusively contained to the northern end of the village on the large erven (originally Erf 1, Wittedrift, and still Remainder Erf 2 and Erf 4), where the church, rectory, school and school residences are located. The history of the settlement also suggests that the original church, which probably dated to the late 1800s was replaced by a new building dating to 1934. The miniature building on the church site would seem to be a replica of the original building.



Photograph of Wittedrift DRC Church with miniature replica building in foreground (Source:

<https://goo.gl/maps/u4dQzfYsSLrpNCBR7>)



2020 Aerial photograph of Wittedrift provided to assist with interpreting historical aerals (Source: Cape Farm Mapper) Site indicated in red dotted line



Extract from 1936 aerial photograph (Job no. 114, Strip 014, Photo 19250) (Source: <http://www.cdngiportal.co.za/cdngiportal/>). The dotted circles indicate possible structures or construction activity. NOTE: The oak trees, that gives the proposed development is name, is visible on this photograph (outlined in black).



Extract from 1958 aerial photograph (Job 421, Strip 11, Photograph 5274) (Source: <http://www.cdngiportal.co.za/cdngiportal/>) which clearly indicate existing structures at the time – in particular the line of institutional buildings at the northern end of what was intended to be a village. The structure circled in white no longer exists.



Overlay of extract from 1960 aerial photograph (Job 445, Strip 15, Photograph 3238) (Source: <http://www.cdngiportal.co.za/cdngiportal/>) onto Google Earth image provides a better indication of buildings other than institutional buildings above that could be historic (older than 60 years) as indicated.



Extract from 1974 aerial photograph (Job 736, Strip 11, Photograph 1034) (Source: <http://www.cdngiportal.co.za/cdngiportal/>) shows the slow progress of development of the settlement (NOTE: orientation is not exactly the same as other aerals)



Extract from 1985 aerial photograph (Job 889, Strip 08, Photograph 3970) (Source: <http://www.cdngiportal.co.za/cdngiportal/>) which shows some new houses, particularly to the south-west along the Main Road

In conclusion then, the settlement of Wittedrift is largely a recent development – this will be illustrated with photographs to follow and only a few historic structures remain almost exclusively in the northern portion of the village. The 1950s General Plan cannot be described as particularly innovative or sensitive to creating a distinct sense of place. This in combination with the fact that most houses are fairly recent modest family homes of varying style has resulted in a settlement that has a suburban quality, despite its rural setting.

3. Nature and quality of recent development and impact on site

Erven 103 and 104, Wittedrift, were originally intended as a school site and are zoned for Institutional Purposes. The site is bounded on three sides by contemporary single residential development and to the west by the Bosfontein River corridor. These houses, although all fairly modest in size, vary in style, design and use of materials and none could be described architecturally significant. Most of these houses are fenced in with walls or other types of fences. As a result there is no distinct sense of place that could be described as a heritage resource. The following photographs illustrate this, but please note because of the relatively low density of development is difficult to portray a complete streetscape.



Recent aerial photograph of site and immediate context (Source: Cape Farm Mapper)



View along Protea Street looking east towards Main Road with the site to the right of the photograph



View along Protea Street looking west towards the Bosfontein River corridor with the site to the left of the picture. The boundary of wall of the pink house in the photograph above is visible beyond the high wooden fence of the house on the corner.



View along Kamassie Street, looking east towards Main Road with the site to the left.



View along Kammassie Street, looking west towards the Bosfontein River corridor with the site to the right.



Houses along Kammassie Street immediately to the south of the site



View onto development opposite the site along Main Road looking south, with the site to right, just beyond Rotterdam Street intersection. Some of the oaks on the site boundary are visible.



Similar view as above but from opposite the site looking south







Houses to the east of the site on the opposite side of Main Road



View looking along Rotterdam to the south, with the site to the left and right of this road (Bosfontein River corridor to the right)



View across the eastern portion of the site, from intersection of Rotterdam and Kamassie Streets, with Bosfontein River Corridor to the left



View towards the village centre looking north along Main Road, with the site to the left, behind the viewer



View of the commercial strip of Wittedrift arranged around a triangular open space. Main Road is to the left of the open space visible on the left of photograph



Commercial buildings in village centre as viewed from the short leg of the open space triangle – Main Road runs behind the viewer



View of the commercial buildings with the central open space to the right of the photograph



Main Road entrance to Wittedrift with high density development to the left visible



View of development to the right of Main Road when entering Wittedrift (red roofed house also visible in photograph above)



Other forms of higher density housing in Wittedrift (in central area, behind village centre)



More examples of housing and streetscapes in northern part of Wittedrift



Historic cottage just before Wittedrift settlement, when approaching from the north



Historic farm buildings outside Wittedrift – to the right of Main Road when approaching Wittedrift from the north

In conclusion, the built fabric of Wittedrift, its layout and streetscapes are largely non-descript and suburban in nature. The village lacks cohesion and readability as one would expect from a historic rural settlement. The historic fabric is almost exclusively contained to the northern part of the village and beyond the village, before entering. Even the church, rectory and school buildings that are accessed off the first side street into Wittedrift when entering the settlement, is experienced as somewhat removed from the settlement itself due to the undeveloped land, between this row of buildings and the private houses in Wittedrift.

The southern portion of the settlement where the site is located is not visually part of the sense of the settlement that one gets when approaching the village from the north. This part in particular comprises of non-descript suburban style homes and industrial buildings, which could not be described as a heritage resource in the view of the author. The nature of this development flanking the Main Road, also compromises the notion that this road could be described as a scenic route, where it passes through the settlement.

4. Heritage resources and grading

The previous HIA submissions to HWC also included a survey of heritage resources and suggested gradings of these. A number of resources were identified, some that are not authentic in my view and do not appear on the historic aerials presented earlier in this report, such as an “Art Deco warehouse” in the central part of the village and a “Georgian twin gabled cottage” in the village centre and a Victorian looking cottage clad in corrugated iron to the south of the site (the latter does appear somewhat authentic, and thus could possibly be a later rebuild, using old fabric).

Following on Section 3 above, it is my view that this was not a necessary part of the exercise as all, bar one of the historic resources are located in the northern part of the settlement and beyond, is not visible from the site (also when developed as suggested) and their possible significance will not be impacted by the development as proposed. The one resource located to the south of the site along Main Road – a modest stone cottage, visible on the 1936 aerial, is also not visible from the site, appears to have limited significance and will not be impacted by the proposed development.

Having said this, I would suggest that the following buildings in the northern part of the settlement and in its immediate surrounds warrant a grading. I do not propose that this list is exhaustive, as I have not been able to survey the countryside to the north-west of the site, beyond the old farm-house indicated as A on the aerial below. Note also that this list is based on a rather cursory visual survey only and inspection of and research into the history of these resources is likely to refine the proposed gradings. I am however certain that there are no heritage resources in the immediate vicinity of the site that would be impacted by the proposed development.



Heritage resources in northern end of Wittedrift and its immediate surrounds



Building A – probably mid 20th C farm house
Suggested grading: IIIC - contextual value



Building B – Farmhouse with outbuildings dated 1838-1932 – possibly the original farmhouse of Wittedrift farm
Suggested grading: IIIA – Possible historic value, architectural layering, largely intact exterior and contextual value



C - Van Huysteen family cemetery – early 20th C
Suggested grading: IIIB – Historic & contextual significance



Building D – Two bay cottage, probably mid to late 19th C, alterations to windows and steep visible
Suggested grading: IIIC – contextual value



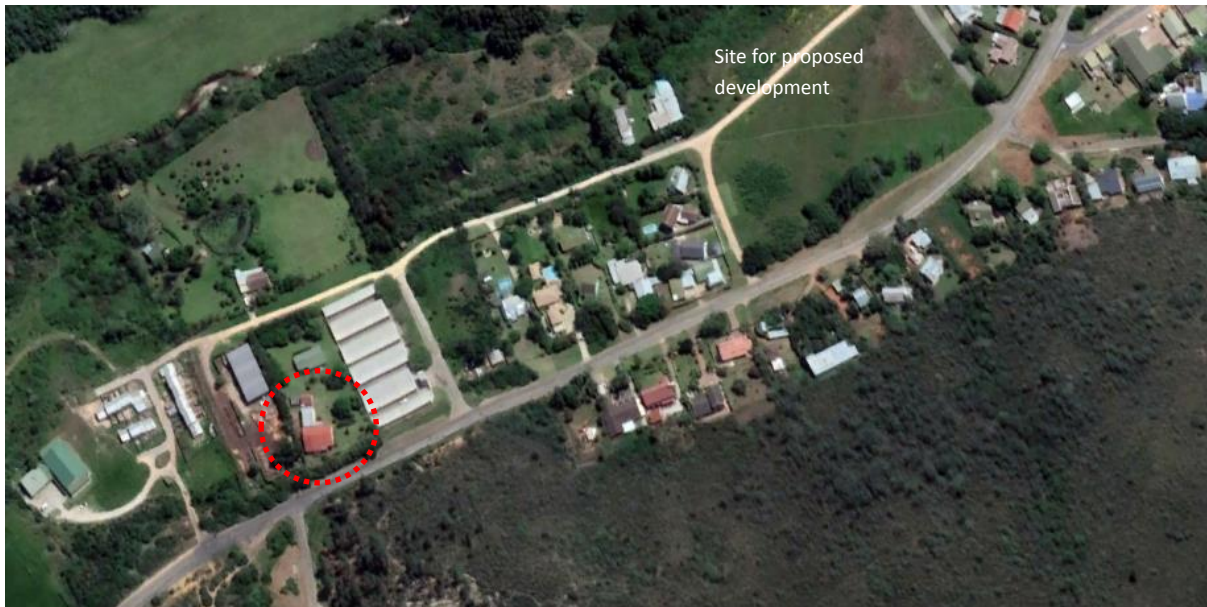
(Source: <https://goo.gl/maps/u4dQzfYsSLrpNCBR7>)

Building E – Dutch Reformed Church, 1934 with thatched roof replaced in 1970
Suggested grading: IIIA – Architectural merit (distinct South African Arts and Crafts detail), social, contextual and historic value



(Source: Vercueil HIA, Feb 2021)

Building F – DRC Rectory – early 20th C
Suggested grading: IIIC – contextual value



Location of Stone Cottage in relation to site



(Source: Vercueil HIA, Feb 2021)

Building G – Stone cottage – possibly 19th C
Suggested grading: IIIC – contextual value

Further possible heritage resources

Section 2 above that traces the historic development of the town, included an overlay of the 1960 aerial photograph on a Google Earth image of the town and indicated buildings that could possibly be historic. This includes the Wittedrift supermarket (photograph below), an overgrown house in Main Road, close to the intersection with Monument Street that leads to the village centre, and a building (house) in Heuwel Street. I have no photographic record of the latter two buildings and it is possible (but unlikely) that these buildings could have some heritage significance. The Wittedrift supermarket seems to be much altered and not regarded as gradeable. Finally it is noted that the Wittedrift High School complex may include buildings of heritage significance but it was not possible to access the premises at the time of the site visit.



Wittedrift Supermarket



Location of possible additional heritage resources (Source: Google Earth)

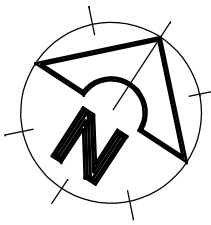
5. Conclusion

The above report illustrates the dearth of heritage resources in the vicinity of the proposed development site and the very limited if any inherent significance of the site itself. The only resource on site is the remaining historic seven oak trees along Main Road, which will be retained as part of the proposed development. Although the proposed development is of a higher density than its surrounds, this will *not impact* on any heritage resources in its context or even the larger Wittedrift area. It is my contention that IACom's request for a redesign which considers aspects such as rural placemaking criteria is not warranted in this instance. As noted in the introduction, the stance taken by IACom is understandable as the heritage significance (or lack thereof) of the site and its context was not clearly presented in any of the submissions made to HWC. It is also noted that the original HIA was advertised, no objections were received and it is understood that there is community support for a retirement facility in Wittedrift.

It is thus recommended that:

- IACom acknowledges the findings this report
- Concludes that the earlier submissions, with this additional report, now meets the requirements of Section 38 (3) of the NHRA
- The proposed development as presented in Drawing no. 5075-01/01(CD)/R09, by Erik Voigt Architects is approved

SEVEN OAKS



REVISIONS	
SYMBOL	DESCRIPTION
R1	.
R2	.
R3	.
R4	.
R5	.
R6	.
R7	.
R8	.
R9	.
R10	.

CONTRACTOR & GEN. NOTES	
●	ALL MATERIALS ETC. TO BE FITTED IN STRICT ACCORDANCE WITH MANUFACTURERS' SPECIFICATIONS.
●	ALL SPECIFICATIONS ETC. TO BE IN ACCORDANCE WITH MODEL PREAMBLES FOR TRADES AS PUBLISHED BY THE ASSOCIATION OF SOUTH-AFRICAN QUANTITY SURVEYORS.
●	ALL WORK TO BE DONE IN ACCORDANCE WITH THE NATIONAL BUILDING REGULATIONS (SOUTH AFRICAN CODE OF PRACTICE) AND BUILDING STANDARDS ACT, ACT SABS 0400-1990.
●	CONTRACTOR TO ALLOW FOR ARCHITECTS BOARD
●	ALL ELECTRICAL WIRES IN WALLS, FLOORS AND CEILINGS TO RUN IN SABS APPROVED CONDUITS
●	REGULATIONS AND REQUIREMENTS OF ALL RELEVANT AUTHORITIES TO BE ADHERED TO.
●	CONTRACTORS TO CHECK ALL DIMENSIONS AND LEVELS ON SITE BEFORE COMMENCING WITH WORK.
●	FIGURED DIMENSIONS TO BE TAKEN IN PREFERENCE TO SCALED MEASUREMENTS.
●	ALL STRUCTURAL DESIGN TO BE THE RESPONSIBILITY OF A PROFESSIONAL ENGINEER.
●	COPYRIGHT RESERVED.



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PROJECT, TITLES & DATA		
● Project	PROP. RETIREMENT VILLAGE FOR L. DEL MONTE on ERVEN 103 & 104, WITTEDRIFT	
● Drawing title	SITE LAYOUT 53 UNITS	
● Index data		
Job No.	Drwg. No.	Rev. No.
5075-01	01(CD)	R09
Scale	Date	Drawn
1 : 500	MAY 2019	ERIK VOIGT
SACAP 4182	SAIA PV1748	