



SOUTH AFRICAN HERITAGE RESOURCES AGENCY

# SOUTH AFRICAN HERITAGE RESOURCES AGENCY

## Background to Declaration of District Six



SAHRA Ref No: 9/2/018/0154

SAHRIS SITE ID: 93149

Enquiries: H. Weldon / K. Africa

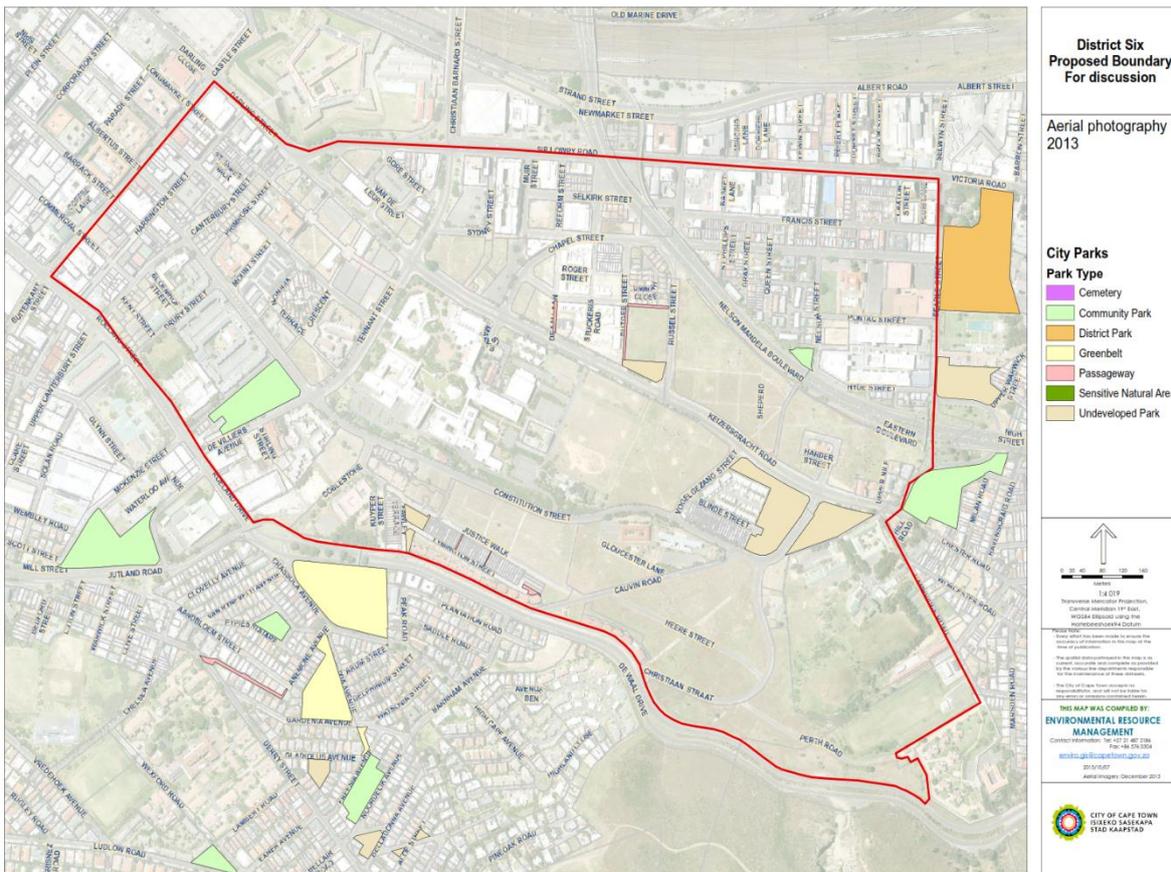
## Background to Declaration of District Six

*“The memories of the victims of the Group Areas forced removals of District Six cannot be forgotten. As a vocal member of this close-knit community of District Six, the people will always remember all that District Six epitomised. Even after the Group Areas forced removals of District Six and demolition experienced during apartheid, memory does not forget the varied architectural landscape of District Six in Cape Town and more significantly colourful mix of humanity of varied class, race where people came together.<sup>2</sup> For Capetonians the proclamation of District Six in 1960, as a White Group Area in terms of the Group Areas Act (Act 77 of 1957) represented and epitomised the destructive nature and spirit of apartheid. The demolition of the historic District Six left a spatial and visual scar on landscape for all to set eyes on. This visual scar included surviving relics of religious buildings and schools and some housing” (Vida Memoria; District Six Nomination Report).*

Since the promulgation of the National Heritage Resources Act no 25 1999 (NHRA) in 2000, SAHRA has been working to protect and recognise District Six. In 2004, SAHRA approved that the entire area referred to as District Six has national cultural heritage significance (i.e., Grade 1). The District Six Museum assisted SAHRA in developing the statement of significance. This proposed boundary of the entire area includes approximately 800 owners and properties with developmental rights and a large number of buildings that were not older than 60 years. This poses difficult management implications.

Therefore, SAHRA considered the identification of various sites within the graded area in a serial declaration of core sites. The intangible value of the area has been symbolically recognised through the renaming the area back to District Six. After the forced removals, the apartheid state renamed the area Zonnebloem in an attempt to eradicate any traces of District Six.





Vidamemoria, through engagement with owners of sites, compiled a list of sites for possible initial declaration, namely religious sites and the Seven Steps. In addition, SAHRA received a nomination for the Trafalgar High School and therefore it was decided to focus on religious sites and sites of Education.

The Seven Steps have been included as it was these steps that symbolises the vibrant community of District Six and is a powerful symbol of diversity and inclusivity.

District Six was named for the sixth municipal district of the city Cape Town, in 1867. The District, which is thought to have its origins in the early 1840s, was made up of a diverse population that criss-crossed the barriers of race, class and ethnicity. The residents of the District included the descendants of freed slaves, artisans, merchants and immigrants. A vibrant centre with close links to the port of Cape Town, the District flourished as a community numbering some 50,000 people by the early 1900s. By the early 1960s the District had 16 churches, 17 schools and training colleges and 4 thriving community centers and was home to a considerable community of artists, educators, intellectuals, writers, musicians and political activists. Some of South Africa's most distinguished artists, activists and politicians grew up in District Six. Both documentary evidence and memory characterize the District as a *community* in the most inclusive and positive sense of the term.

In 1950, the South African Nationalist government introduced the Group Areas Act. This act, frequently amended throughout its lifespan, had one explicit aim. The act consigned groups of people, on the basis of the State's definition of their ethnicity, to specific geographic areas, irrespective of their history or ownership of the land. The State- designated classification of colour - White, Coloured, Black, Indian - determined not only geographical regions of residence and travel, but also education opportunities, curriculum standards and content, and employment prospects. By the end of the 1960s, District Six had become synonymous with the horror of displacement and social engineering perpetrated on hundreds of communities in South Africa in the name of apartheid.

The first people to be "resettled" from District Six were black South Africans who were forcibly displaced in 1901. In 1966 District Six, which was situated on the lower slopes of Devil's Peak with spectacular views of Table Mountain, the harbour and the sea, was formally declared a White area. This in effect meant that people designated by the State as non-white – a term that contains numerous subcategories – no longer had the right to reside in District Six. By 1982 60,000 people had been forcibly removed from the area and their houses bulldozed to rubble. Entire families and communities were ripped apart and "resettled" to some of the most barren and desolate parts of the Western Cape.

For more than two decades, the land, still referred to as District Six, remained unused. Regarded as "salted earth" by many, numerous architects, contractors and developers refused to be associated with development on the land. Today a small group of housing projects as well as the state-built Cape Technikon stand uneasily in District Six, dwarfed despite their size and solidity, by the fields of waving grass that obscure the rubble of a once vibrant community.

**It is motivated that the history of forced removal and dislocation in South Africa marks a profound period in the memory and the history of our country.**

District Six together with other forced removal sites of national significance, should be identified as places where infamous atrocities can be remembered, reflected, celebrated by the current South African society and future generations. Historically the dense and diverse community of District Six housed a large variety of places of worship. The area also had 17 schools and colleges, and four community colleges where many of them were attached to churches and mosques. These buildings which are still standing are tributes to the resistance of the religious communities to the destruction of the area. to courage and dignity of those South Africans who suffered this fate.

#### **Brief Statement of Significance:**

District Six, the once vibrant multi-cultural residential heart of Cape Town, ripped out by forcing more than 60 000 people from the economic centre and relocating a whole community on the Cape Flats, an area devoid of opportunity located at the periphery of the city. In the same fashion, many communities across South Africa were disenfranchised, disempowered and dehumanised. Urban dwellers of colour were relegated to the least favourable areas and their economic ability, social opportunities and lifestyle were considerably reduced.

District Six is considered to possess national heritage value as ‘telling a national history of forced removals.’ District Six constitutes a previously neglected memory of the history of South Africa that is to be used as part of the reconstruction and healing of the nation.

The significance, of District Six is threefold as it tells the story of how people became the victims of their circumstance, but through years of non-violent resistance and a fervent struggle became victorious.

1. Firstly, “land was stolen from people who were defenceless, voiceless and disenfranchised in the land of their birth”
2. Secondly the resistance and struggle of the people prevented the area of District Six being redeveloped into a middleclass white area as was envisioned and planned by the apartheid planners. The pen and the word were used as armour in the struggle and resistance of this community to return and get back their ‘stolen goods’.
3. Restoration, redevelopment and reconstitution are the final steps in the reconciliation of a community. Currently, this is taking the form of recalling the community of District Six to transplant the cultural heart back into the city.

This legacy of history must be remembered for having the potential to yield information that will contribute to an understanding of South Africa's cultural heritage. It must be celebrated for its importance in the community and pattern of South Africa's history.

### Seven Steps

The Seven Steps remains one of the main symbols to represent the community of District Six. The very mention of the ‘Seven Steps’ immortalized in Taliep Petersen’s musical ‘District Six’, stirs up deep emotions. The Seven Steps of stone, worn by the thousands who used these over the years, to work, to home, to school, to play, to ‘bok’, to church, to mosque, to shop, to celebrate and to mourn, were part of the great big soul of the district. Today, so many years after its destruction, the Seven Steps stands out as the premier symbol of District Six that still lives in the hearts of all who lived, loved, played and worked in the ‘District’. It is a powerful symbol of diversity and inclusivity and what that is currently located in the new CPUT residence.

### Holy Cross

The Holy Cross Congregation is a religious congregation under the Catholic Church founded in Switzerland in 1849. Their mission is the provision of education wherever the need persists. The Sisters arrived in South Africa as a missionary order in 1883, with their first school being established in Umtata.

Holy Cross School was known as Holy Cross Mission in the early days and was the first Coloured School in the Cape. The school opened on the 24th January 1910 after four sisters set out from the Transkei to start a coloured mission here in Cape Town. Until 1920 when free education was introduced, the Sisters charged fees of one penny per week in the lower classes and 4 pence from standard four up. The numbers of learners increased progressively so that in 1933 a new building had to be erected. Even through hardship such as the displacement and destruction of the District Six community, the

school produced priests, religious brothers and sisters such as the Rector of the University of the Western Cape, Mr Brian O Connell and ex-Mayor of Cape Town, Ms Theresa Solomons.

### **Moravian Church**

The Moravian Church has a deep history in South Africa as it was the first church to have a mission station in South Africa when Georg Schmidt arrived in 1737 to begin his work in Baviaanskloof, now Genadendal. The Moravian Chapel previously located in Russell Road, known as Moravian Hill, was built in 1886 and consecrated 25 September 1886 became the first urban Moravian congregation.

The bell of the Church provides another history as bells have come to form part of our cultural history and it was initially, 'brought to South Africa for church and civic purposes from the earliest days of the Dutch settlement at the Cape.' Bells served numerous purposes within the Moravian Church such as, announce worship services, earlier years, at the mission stations the ringing of the bell called-up the residents for community work, and the tolling of the church bell announces that someone in the congregation has passed away. The bell at Moravian Hill hangs in a bell cote above the apex on the west end of the church with a backdrop against Table Mountain with the date of 1936 engraved on it. 1936 represents the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Church and it may be the bell coincided with that commemoration.

### **Zeenatul-Islam Masjid**

Zeenatul-Islam Masjid, also known as Muir Street Masjid, celebrated its 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary in 2020. The pioneers of this Mosque arrived as immigrants from the State of Gujarat, India in the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century. Collectively these immigrants came to be referred to as Kanamias. They settled in District Six with the hope of seeking opportunity and to provide for their families back home in India. 3 Muir Street became the jamaat khaana (a group prayer space) due to there not being a masjid and it served as a place of solace for new immigrants. Members of the community on January 2, 1919, made an announcement of their plans to construct a masjid to replace jamaat khaana. Two adjacent properties were bought on the corner of Muir Street and Chapel Streets in September 1919 and converted into a masjid with a minaret. By 1923 all alterations were completed, and the Kanamia Moslem League was founded to oversee the affairs of the masjid.

### **Al-Azhar Mosque**

Al Azhar Mosque represents the oldest mosque in District Six, in Aspeling Street, founded in 1887. Imam Kassiem Gamielien served as the first Imam of the Masjid. The Mosque is still in use today and serves as a memorial to the community of District Six.

### **Trafalgar High School**

Trafalgar High School was opened in 1912 as the first state high school for people of colour. The school was established due to the efforts of Dr Abdurahman, President of the African People's Organisation and Harold Cressy, the first person of colour to obtain a BA degree from the University of Cape Town. Harold Cressy was the school's first principal. The school and building is synonymous with the fight against apartheid. The teaching staff were politically aware activists who formed part of organisations such as the Teachers' League of South Africa, the New Era Fellowship, the Non-European Unity



Movement. Alumni of the school include: Dullah Omar; Abdullah Ebrahim (Dollar Brand); James La Guma; Judge Siraaj Desai; Helen Kies; Ben Kies; Rahima Moosa; Cissie Gool; among others.

### Harold Cressy School

The school represents resistance to apartheid laws and association to public memory of forced removals, segregation, and academic excellence. In 1941 the buildings that previously housed Hope Lodge Primary School, which catered for the Jewish Community was occupied by Hewat Training College. Hewat College was the first coloured tertiary institution and provided a focus of intellectual resistance to white segregation. The college remained in Roeland Street until 1961. The demand for a high school grew and Cape Town Secondary School was founded in January 1951. The school consisted of three teachers: Mr F Hendricks (the Principal), Miss D Fuchs and Mr F Hilario. In 1953, the school was renamed Harold Cressy High School in honour of Mr Harold Cressy who had to overcome formidable disadvantages and overwhelming odds in his pursuit of academic excellence and in his dedication to community service.

The 1960's were challenging years for Harold Cressy. The school took a blow with the destruction of District Six, the community of which the school drew the majority of its students. Cressy was further politicised with the student uprisings of 1976 and 1980 that reached a peak in 1985. For four months the school abstained from the prescribed curriculum and instead educated students in the struggle for liberation. The school applied a radical approach, demanding not only an improved education system but a full democracy. The conflict with the government resulted in the imprisonment of two of their teachers

### Jewish Cemetery

The Jewish Cemetery displays high historical and social significance and is testament to the role, history and legacy of the Jewish community in District Six. Many communities lived in District Six but one thing that is noted in The Jews of District Six is: "As the history of the Jews of District Six has receded or has been subsumed into the iconic status District Six has rightly achieved as a symbol of man's inhumanity to man. It is a salutary reminder of a time when a multi-ethnic and multi-religious community could live together in peaceful coexistence".

One of the first things Jews do, long before they develop a congregation or even a synagogue, is to get land for a cemetery (Gwynne Robins). The Cape Town Hebrew Congregation was formed in 1841 – in 1842 they bought two plots of land In Woodstock – what became the Arthurs Road cemetery. One of the 1841 founders was the first person buried there – his posthumous child was the first Jewish child born here. Solly Berger has written about the establishment of the cemetery in the Great Synagogue's 2005 Centenary History publication and Prof Howard Philips has researched the cemetery and its graves.





LIST OF PHASE 1 SITES:

| Site No. | Name of the District Six Site  | Erf No                   | Town      | Municipality      | Province     |
|----------|--|--------------------------|-----------|-------------------|--------------|
| 1.       | Seven Steps  | 9929; Cape Town          | Cape Town | City of Cape Town | Western Cape |
| 2.       | Holy Cross Roman Catholic Church, Centre (Hall & Presbytery) and Convent | 8846; 8858;<br>8859;8869 | Cape Town | City of Cape Town | Western Cape |
| 3.       | Moravian Church  | 176411                   | Cape Town | City of Cape Town | Western Cape |
| 4.       | Zeenatul- Islam Masjid   | 161478                   | Cape Town | City of Cape Town | Western Cape |
| 5.       | Al Azhar Mosque  | 115728                   | Cape Town | City of Cape Town | Western Cape |
| 6.       | Trafalgar High School  | 168162                   | Cape Town | City of Cape Town | Western Cape |
| 7.       | Harold Cressy High School  | 5854-RE                  | Cape Town | City of Cape Town | Western Cape |
| 8.       | Jewish Cemetery  | 10772<br>10773           | Cape Town | City of Cape Town | Western Cape |

