

CHANGING THE FACE OF MANDENI

Generally, the first entry into a public space, either greenfield or brownfield will be the public sector. This is evident in the rehabilitation of KZN's small towns. The KZN Provincial Department of Co-operative Governance and Traditional Affairs as well as the National Treasury, through their Neighbourhood Development Partnership Grant (NDPG) have provided strategic spatial programmes and funding for the revitalisation of small towns in urban areas.

The overall objective of the programmes, by both the national and provincial departments, was to:

- Re-form unjust spatial patterns directly
- Retain existing business

- Integrate and leverage public investment in infrastructure, transport, land and housing development to attract private investment

In KZN, several local municipalities have been beneficiaries of this type of support. One such town that has seen tremendous benefit both spatially and in terms of local investment has been the Mandeni Local Municipality, situated within the iLembe District Municipality.

The Mandeni Municipality is an administrative and service centre for a substantial rural hinterland. The Municipality is also a vital node as a part of the Primary Development Corridor between the ports of Richards Bay and Durban as identified within KZN Provincial Spatial Economic Development Strategy.

For the above reason and for the commitment and buy-in of the leadership in Mandeni, the municipality has been a beneficiary of the NDPG since 2010. The municipality has prioritised the development of the Mandeni Town Centre (also known as the Sundumbili Node Area) in terms of nodes identified in the Spatial Development Framework for the area. As part of the Development Concept and Urban Design Framework various projects have been identified and packaged in a manner that stimulates and accelerates investment in the poor marginalized neighbourhood. The programme has considered the strategic balances through public and private partnership arrangements, with the primary focus being to improve social integration and contribution to the upliftment of all the residents and their livelihoods.



Sibusizwe Community Hall

One of the programme objectives is to improve and strengthen the socio-economic and physical link between the respective precincts within the town. This programme comprises the following strategic urban landscape improvement projects, namely:

- Sibusizwe Community Hall upgrading and extension, incorporating open events arena, landscaping, access and parking, fencing, access control and security. **Complete*
- Sundumbili Sports Precinct which included the upgrade and revival of the Sundumbili Sport and Recreational Facility, landscaping and parking, fencing, access control and security. **Complete*
- Thokoza Road Upgrade, which includes the improvement of pedestrian walkways, the traffic calming linked to pedestrian crossings, street lighting including area lighting, streetscape and furniture, including tree planting. **80 % Complete*
- Upgrade of the informal stalls; **Planning Phase complete.*
- Multi-Modal Facility; **Planning Phase complete.*

The consequences of the public investment in Mandeni are numerous:

- Business retention and expansion is demonstrated
- Rates base of the municipality has increased
- Formal and informal business have expressed support and commitment to the upgrade projects, which is evident in their regular attendance at stakeholder engagement meetings
- Key government social departments have identified regional offices in this space
- The two completed projects now host significant sporting events
- Spatial transformation of the urban space has advanced considerably

The continued success of the project, in addition to the vision and leadership of the

Mandeni municipality has been the integrated approach in the delivering of the projects. While some tough and painful lessons have been learnt, the success of the project to date has also provided central lessons to "integrated development planning approach". The experienced multi-disciplinary team of engineers, development economists, social facilitators and environmentalist was managed by spatial planners who provided project management skills for achieving this vision. The lobbying of key infrastructure and funding government departments as well as regular feedback on demonstrated progress also ensured that departments could confidently report on expenditure.

In addition, the programme manager ensured that all planning approvals were achieved upfront so that once projects reached construction phase there would be no delays to implementation. The planning phase of the project was a fine balance between time management and respective planning processes. Not for the faint hearted!

As we move to finalisation of the remaining project, some key observations are beginning to emerge. Mandeni Municipality, like many other urban centres, will be confronted with the challenge of capacity to manage the improved urban space. The concept of a "urban improvement precinct (UIP)" is being implemented in others parts of the iLembe District and the eThekweni Metro. Essentially a management structure that is constituted of both municipality and local business that jointly ensure the management and upkeep of the UIP is required. This approach is currently being considered and has already found favour among business within the town centre. ■

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