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NATURES VALLEY – SPECIAL RATES AREA

1. INTRODUCTION

This document has been prepared by the Natures Valley Ratepayers Association (NVRA) for consideration by Bitou Local Municipality (Bitou LM), as a proposal for establishing Natures Valley (NV) as a Special Rates Area (SRA). The objective of establishing an SRA would be to supplement and enhance the services currently provided by the municipality by improving the standard of routine maintenance as well as the improvement and upkeep of common areas and public open spaces. The ultimate aim being to ensure the protection of the unique environment and appeal of the Natures Valley Township for future generations of owners, tourists and visitors from local communities.

2. MOTIVATION FOR ESTABLISHING NATURES VALLEY AS AN SRA

Background information

- NV is a residential township located on the coast approximately 30km east of Plettenberg Bay and falls under the jurisdiction of the Bitou LM. Access to the township is via a single entry and exit road off the R102 at the bottom of the Groot Rivier Pass.
- The township, which was promulgated in 1953, consists of +-400 erven of which 396 have been developed. Approximately 90% of the erven are zoned Res 1. Forty or so houses are occupied by permanent residents (mainly retired) and the remainder are holiday houses, many of which are let out to holiday-makers and local and international tourists throughout the year.
- The township is surrounded by the Tsitsikamma National Park and is managed as a Contractual National Park under a tri-partite agreement between Bitou LM, SANParks and the NVRA. The municipality is represented in the village by a Community Liaison Officer (CLO). No local municipal work force or maintenance equipment are provided.
- As a result of its unique location in the National Park, bordered on one side by the pristine Groot Rivier lagoon, the village has developed a reputation as one of the most unspoilt and environmentally sustainable urban areas in SA.
- The NVRA and the NV Trust, together with co-operation from SANParks have endeavoured with great success over the years to maintain the unique “sense of place” of NV.
- Bitou LM are responsible for the provision of services and maintenance of the infrastructure (water, electricity, sewage, roads, stormwater etc) as well as the collection of domestic waste and the routine clearing and trimming of grass and vegetation on the road verges and in public open spaces.
- The village is not provided with water borne sewage and relies on septic tanks serving the majority of properties and conservancy tanks for the remainder. The municipality provides a “honey-sucker” service on demand, for clearing the conservancy tanks.
- Water supply is limited and is sourced from the adjoining Groot Rivier from a water treatment plant and reservoir which is owned and managed by Bitou LM.

Motivation

- Prior to Bitou LM taking over responsibility for the infrastructure and maintenance in the township some 20 years ago, the village was managed under the Knysna Divisional Council. The Divisional Council was represented by a Superintendent and small team of assistants who lived in the village. They were responsible for the day-to-day maintenance of the town infrastructure and were authorised and equipped to carry out the work effectively.
- This management structure came to an end in 1994 when NV became part of the Bitou municipal area. Since that time certain aspects of service have improved, specifically the quality and reliability of the water supply and the routine collection of household waste. The maintenance and management of the electrical infrastructure has worsened, the storm water system gets no attention, the roads and verges

receive sporadic and minimal attention and public parking areas and other unpaved trafficable areas get no attention and are deteriorating rapidly.

- The “minimalist” approach to service delivery is, we believe, largely due to the remote location of the township as municipal officials do respond to urgent calls for assistance as well as attending diligently to emergency infrastructure failures. However, the provision of anything but essential services is not provided on a regular basis and the efficiency of municipal workers, when they do appear in the village, tends to be low due to lack of supervision. There is no follow up to ensure that work has been done satisfactorily or even completed. The time and cost of travelling to NV, coupled with low productivity is without question resulting in wasted expenditure. These factors certainly mitigate against NV receiving the level of service which is being paid for.
- The NVRA have for a number of years attempted to negotiate with municipal officials to improve the effectiveness of the CLO by providing him with a small team of assistants, properly equipped, who could carry out routine maintenance tasks. Promises have been made, as such an arrangement would provide employment for local workers, but these discussions have come to nothing.
- Unfortunately, due to the financial constraints being faced by Bitou LM, we do not anticipate that this situation is likely to change or that service delivery is likely to improve in the future.

3. AIMS OF ESTABLISHING NV AS A SPECIAL RATES AREA

- The NVRA, which has a supporter base of approximately 70% of the owners in NV, is mandated to liaise with the local authority to ensure that aesthetics of the urban environment are maintained, that the infrastructure remains effective and reliable and that the provision of services is in line with the rates and taxes being paid by owners. The NVRA officials are concerned that they are, to an extent, failing in this mandate.
- The committee of the NVRA are of the opinion that the establishment of NV as a Special Rates Area, in line with what has been achieved in other clearly defined areas in the Western Cape, represents a suitable option to be considered to improve the medium to long term outlook in this respect. We believe it would provide the community with the means to manage certain critical functions and activities and so enhance the quality of the township environment and prevent ongoing deterioration. Also it is seen as an important means to develop a public/private working partnership with the municipality and make better use of available human resources, resulting in better service delivery to the community.
- The concept of establishing NV as an SRA was presented at the most recent AGM of the NVRA in Dec 2014. Approximately 90 owners were represented and although concern was expressed about the possibility of having to pay additional rates, there was overwhelming support for the idea and the committee were given the go ahead to proceed with negotiations.

4. PROPOSED FUNCTIONS OF THE NV SRA

The NVRA committee are familiar with the concept of the structure of an SRA, based on other such models which have been implemented in Cape Town and Stellenbosch. Based on our very clear understanding of the areas of service weakness in the township, we have prepared a list of the routine functions which we believe could usefully be undertaken by the Non-Profit Company (NPC) which would have to be formed to assist the municipality in the management of NV.

Proposed functions to be undertaken by the NV Non-Profit Company

Some of these functions are considered as supplementary to the responsibilities of the municipality. However, a large proportion are activities we regard as the responsibility of the municipality, which are currently (and historically) not being adequately addressed. These activities are indicated with an asterisk *.

1. Road maintenance and pothole repairs (after upgrading by Bitou LM)(*)
2. Maintenance of Public Parking areas (after upgrading by Bitou LM) (*)
3. Maintenance of storm water drains (after clearing by Bitou LM) (*)
4. Management of WTS and Recyclables collection facility (after upgrading by Bitou LM)(*)
5. Routine litter pick up in the streets (*)
6. Maintenance of public open spaces and control of alien species. (*)
7. Trimming of bush and road verges and removal of organic waste (*)
8. Maintenance of street infrastructure (fencing, signage, traffic signs etc.) (*)

9. Electricity kiosk security management (after upgrading by Bitou LM) (*)
10. Management of Security Services (oversight of contractor)
11. Baboon monitoring (*)
12. Building Plan assessment to ensure compliance with Title Deeds and NVRA Guidelines
13. Building site inspection to ensure compliance with building plans. *(In conjunction with LM)
14. Site inspections for OSCA Permit applications (*)
15. Inspection of Conservancy Tank and Septic Tank installations during construction (*)
16. Witnessing percolation tests for Septic Tanks.
17. Monitor and control the occurrence of illegal dumping (*)
18. Manage signage in the township (*)
19. Liaison with SANParks and Bitou LM (Contractual National Park Agreement)
20. Ongoing liaison with Bitou LM and other ratepayer organisations in Ward 1
21. Creation and management of a composting facility for NV organic waste.

The objective of undertaking these activities would be to support, supplement and enhance the services currently provided by Bitou LM, as follows:

- To dramatically reduce the need for teams of municipal workers to visit NV to undertake routine maintenance tasks.
- To improve the quality of maintenance and expand it to cover all areas of common property so that the current appearance of neglect is eliminated over time and kept that way.
- To assist the municipality in managing the spread of alien vegetation in the township and close surrounds.
- To prevent the regular flooding of certain areas by keeping the storm-water system clear of debris and vegetation.
- To control the access to electrical kiosks, which currently represents a security risk.
- To ensure the cleanliness and acceptable aesthetics of the WTS and recycling facilities.
- To assist the municipality in preventing illegal dumping of rubble and organic waste in the township and nearby surrounds and investigate the opportunities for creating a composting facility in NV to reduce the environmental impact of carting and dumping organic waste.
- To assist the municipality in the improved control of building activities.
- To ensure compliance with the Title Deeds of NV. The NPC would require that all building plans for NV are required to be vetted by the Company before being submitted to Bitou LM for approval. Subsequent to its formal acceptance, the NV LASP to form the basis for future building and development in NV.
- To assist the municipality in ensuring the effective management of sewage in NV. (Until the required water-borne sewage infrastructure is in place, it is in the interest of the community to assist in ensuring that septic tank systems and conservancy tanks are built in accordance with the Building Regs and that they are operating as designed).
- To maintain the investment value of properties in NV and the eco-tourism potential of the town and its surrounds.

5. CONCLUSION

It is hoped that this proposal will receive the support of Bitou LM and it will be viewed as a positive attempt to assist in improving service delivery to the ratepayers and maintaining the valuable asset of Natures Valley and its immediate surroundings.

Signed:



DC Blaine

Chairman, NVRA (24 Feb 2015)