**What’s happening at Ruigtevlei?**

*by Heidi Sonnekus, Eden Express*

"Jan Sak is flooding." Where I come from, that is shorthand for "Take the long road to town/school/work/the doctor because the Karatara River is flooding the drift at Ruigtevlei T-junction." That is Jan Sak’s family. They had a store out there, and had moved decades ago, has made no difference to the reference and the problem that the stretch of road has for years been the bane of lives of the people of Karatara, Hoogekraal and Karatara.

The arrival of earth moving equipment has raised hopes of a solution to this old, old problem. But no, it is not a dam or a bridge. The structure being built at "Jan Sak se Drift" is a weir. "We did try our best to upgrade the old cement drift, but were told by the Provincial Roads Authority (PRA) that we were not allowed to touch the road. The PRA also stipulated that the weir should be no closer than nine metres from the cement drift. This to make sure the effect of hydraulic leap has dissipated well before the water reaches the road."

Melissa Mackay, Ecological Control Officer of Cape EAPrac, was quite passionate when she talks about the project with which she has been very closely involved for the past few years. But before she will explain the weir’s workings to me, she asked me to get two friendly yet very urgent messages across to locals concerned about the site of the weir.

1. **PLEASE SLOW DOWN.** "Locals either do not notice our ‘Men at work’ signs or choose to ignore them. This is dangerous to you and to the contract team. Please reduce your speed significantly when you approach the site. There are no railings and you could cause severe damage to your vehicle, to very expensive earth moving equipment or to team members,” she points out.

2. **WE KNOW WHAT WE ARE DOING.** "No quick, unconfirmed decisions were made when this weir was planned. The process of public participation and design has been ongoing since 2011. We looked at this from all angles - the problem we wanted to solve, the health of the environment, flood-levels, health and safety of the public - before any decision was made. Every process was done properly and signed off on and local people were invited to participate in the process. Several registered Interested and Affected Parties were of great help including Alan Cook (retired engineer) from WEKSA and Ian Russell and Maretha Alant from SANParks."

Melissa visits the site several times a week to brief crews and monitor the work. She says she has often had to deal with locals who slam on brakes to give her a dressing down. "design-tips for the dam” and to tell her "how the Knysna Municipality should be spending their money."

**So why a weir?**

Primarily it is to stop salinity spreading upstream in the Karatara River in times of drought, polluting the Ruigtevlei Water Treatment Works, as has happened in *A flooded Jan Sak se Drift* in June 2011. Picture: Heidi Sonnekus, Eden Express.

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**IPD REVIEW MEETINGS COMPLETED**

The toilets at the Karatara cemeteries, which was recently-opened, was listed as a priority during the IDP process.

The first year review of the third generation Knysna Integrated Development Planning (IPD) is in its final stages following a series of public participation meetings in all ten wards of the Knysna municipal area.

Knysna Municipal Manager Lauren Waring said the IDP, which was finalised last year and planned for a five-year period from 2012 to 2017, identified and prioritised needs and projects in each ward.

"Every year from now onwards, the IDP will be reviewed to determine the status of the identified projects for the previous year and whether the remaining projects are still relevant and priority. As wards and circumstances are dynamic, new projects may be identified that require more urgent attention than the ones previously identified."

Waring thanked residents for attending the IDP meetings, which took place in April and May, and in general went very well. "We welcome the fact that communities are increasingly becoming involved in the development of their town. It is important that residents understand that the IDP process is linked to the municipality’s budget and that capital and operational projects on the IDP are much more likely to become a reality on the ground."

"The public has told us their needs and priorities in terms of development and these will now be considered and possibly placed on the IDP projects list. Projects that may not be suitable for this process could be met in other ways such as council’s annual Ward allocations."

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**Municipality takes action on absentee landlord’s premises**

Ongoing mismanagement of a vacant property in Knysna’s Hedge Street has prompted action against the absentee landlord including criminal prosecution and law enforcement raids on the premises.

Knysna Municipal Manager Lauren Waring said the municipality was experiencing increasing problems with land owners who were allowing vacant properties to fall into ruin, which in turn encouraged vagrancy and criminal activities and raised concerns regarding devaluation of surrounding properties and fears regarding public safety.

"In the case of the Hedge Street property, the Knysna Municipality has appointed an advocate to seek demolition of some of the structures on the property while the Eden District Municipality has laid a formal criminal charge in terms of the National Health Act. On 23 April, the Knysna Municipality, the SAPS and Eden District Health Services took part in a crime prevention operation on the property. Police confiscated suspected drugs and related paraphernalia on the premises."

"It is unacceptable that any property owner will allow such degradation and neglect on his or her property, and the municipality recent years. We do this to ensure water for the town of Sedgefield and to protect the environment: salination has a huge impact on the flora and fauna around any body of water, especially if it is not adapted to dealing with it."

Melissa pointed out that the Karatara River Weir-project was actually proof that the Knynsa Municipality was functioning well and involved in intelligent, sensitive long-term planning and clever use of resources. The weir will be a low- upkeep, unmanned, unplugged system that will protect the road from flood debris and will make the flow underneath it more effective. It will even slow down and calm flood-run over somewhat.

"The municipality is not just blowing local ratepayers’ money on this: they applied for and received funding from the central government’s Municipal Infrastructure Grant (MIG). All municipalities can apply for funding from this source for long-term projects, but since it is a bit of a process, many just don’t bother."

She points out that the Knysna Municipality has had to jump through many hoops to be allocated the R5, 7-million needed; and has since had to prove that it had kept to its mandate and plans every step of the way.

Since it was a community-based project, local contractors were used and skills-development was part of the package. Several local residents were trained and employed. "The workers have really treated the area with respect. You will not see any litter or cigarette butts lying around,” she points out proudly.

Equally impressive is the fact that the sediment levels in the water, due to digging were kept minimal through the use of coffer- and biddum filter-dams. "You can imagine that stirring up of silt affects water creatures in the same way a sandstorm would make us feel. So we really work hard to keep the water clean and flowing. And it works: our results are better than we aimed for."

The weir is expected to be completed in July. This article is being used with the permission of Eden Express in which it was first published.

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**Promising local youths off to Cape Town**

Eleven youths from the Knysna municipal area have joined the Chrysalis Academy in Cape Town for a three-month army-style training course aimed at developing physical, psychological and spiritual skills in promising individuals.

The men, aged between 17 and 25, had to complete a written test and physical assessment to qualify. Knysna Executive Mayor Georlene Wolmarans congratulated the successful candidates and encouraged them to stick with the course. "Of the participating municipalities, Knysna had the most candidates qualify. We are extremely proud of our youth whom we believe will return with skills that they can in turn pass on to others. Ultimately, young people who would otherwise have been labelled as ‘youth at risk’ will now be known as ‘youth with a future’,” she said.

The Knysna Municipality provided logical support for the programme, which was locally driven by the Eden District Municipality, and assisted with transport for the young men to Cape Town. The municipality also donated stationary packs while municipal staff collected funds to assist with other relevant personal items required to participate at the academy. Ms Wolmarans and Head of Disaster Management and Social Services, Richard Meyer, handed them their stationery packs before their departure last month.

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