

Arniston/Waenhuiskrans

Proposal for Cape Agulhas spatial development framework

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1. Introduction

Planning for Arniston / Waenhuiskrans forms part of planning for the whole of the Cape Agulhas region. We nevertheless restrict this submission mainly to Arniston / Waenhuiskrans as a continuation of our participation in previous planning processes. We trust that the present comprehensive planning process for the region will be extended with more detailed planning for Arniston / Waenhuiskrans.

This written proposal is a summary of our more extensive verbal submission.

2. Background

2.1 The Place

Arniston, described by Time magazine as one of the world's best kept secrets, was for long a remote, quiet fishing and holiday village.

It has expanded into a small resort town, with holiday homes and cottages, a hotel and some guesthouses. Owing to intervention by conservationists, the original fishermen's hamlet, Kassies Bay, was saved when the local authority wanted to demolish the houses and remove the inhabitants. The fishing village was then extensively renovated and eventually graded as a Grade 1 National Cultural Landscape.

Arniston Bay, the restored Kassies Bay village, the limestone cliffs and the pristine surrounding dunes have become well known as icons for the Western Cape natural beauty. However, the town had not been developed to the same degree as similar areas of exceptional beauty. The relative isolation of the village and lack of water were the early impediments. Environmental groups and residents' associations also helped to prevent some development proposals that would have posed a threat to Arniston's unique sense of place.

Arniston is surrounded by significant tracts of land that are gradually being consolidated, by the government and wildlife trusts, into what will eventually become the Nelson Mandela wildlife reserve. This reserve will span more than a hundred kilometres of undeveloped coastline and a marine reserve with the most populous whale colony along the South African coast.

2.2 The People

The fishermen of Arniston, always poor, have experienced an ever-diminishing income from fishing for almost two decades. Government-allocated fishing quotas have become smaller and more difficult to come by. Some fish stocks are becoming depleted. Any early improvement of the situation seems unlikely. In a small village, far removed from industrial infrastructure, the fishermen of Arniston have little access to other forms of income. The effect of diminishing income from line fishing and also from poaching of perlemoen will be felt for many years.

While it is government practise to guide economically active people to localities where livelihoods are already available, and away from localities that may become poverty traps, there are substantial arguments that the fishing community must be supported to remain a fishing community, but with added direct and indirect income from tourism. This is the last remaining historical fishing village in the country. Both the place and dimensions of indigenous knowledge and living are worthy of support, from a cultural as well as from an economic perspective.

2.3 The potential

Tourism is an obvious source of income that could be exploited for Cape Agulhas as well as for Waenhuiskrans / Arniston. It is the best possible source of future income for both the permanent residents of the town and for the Cape Agulhas Municipality. The government has also designated tourism as the best route to the upliftment of communities such as the fishing community in Waenhuiskrans / Arniston. It is imperative that the fishing community of Waenhuiskrans obtains access to income from tourism, not as employees only, but also as owners of enterprises and property directed at tourism. Assets like the harbour, which has been created with an eye to fishing, will also increasingly have to be utilised to access income from tourism. Various proposals for the empowerment of the fishing community have already been submitted to the Cape Agulhas Municipality from stakeholders in Arniston / Waenhuiskrans. We regard it as important that proposals such as these receive close attention.

There is worldwide acknowledgement of the fact that tourist facilities like hotels and restaurants do not necessarily promote tourism. Such developments frequently bring about a brief revival only. Sustainable development occurs when there is a fundamental reason for such development, a "destination". If there is no particular and characteristic "destination", development is hardly ever sustainable. It is also true that the advantages of development frequently are often of brief duration when the nature of a particular "destination" is not clearly understood and sensibly conserved. Arniston / Waenhuiskrans already appear on the list of unique destinations in an eclectic array of local and international travel publications. The sense of place, which is inclusive of the sea and the dunes, the beaches and the fishing village, and the intimate scale of the village, provides a unique destination, but it still needs to become properly understood and conserved as such by its inhabitants and governing bodies.

Arniston might well grow as a treasured destination at Cape Agulhas if residents and the municipality take care to understand and nurture the essence and the value of this "destination". Sound planning could enhance both the value of this "destination" and the "sense of place" for residents.

In the long run the municipality will not be able to equal the income from tourism and from the increased value of existing properties by simply developing and selling more residential plots. Poverty relief in Waenhuiskrans will be best served through well-considered planning for continuous tourism than through the allocation of more residential plots, which will probably result in more residences that will be occupied for less than twenty percent of the year. At peak periods the beaches are already at maximum carrying capacity. And because the settlement intrudes on the natural

distribution of sand between dunes, the sea and the beaches, the Arniston beaches had diminished dramatically over the last century. This beach erosion continues; it is a catch-22 position: the bigger the footprint, the greater the risk to the beaches.

It would thus be preferable for Waenhuiskrans, in essence, to remain on a small footprint, growing in density rather than in land size. The utilisation of the village should be adapted, over time, to shift the focus from fishing to become a textured tourist town with a continuous flow of tourists throughout the year.

Though income from fishing will not be able to sustain the town, there are strong human, historical and economical arguments to keep on supporting the local fishing industry. National laws governing fishing activities do not provide adequate space for a fishing community like Arniston to survive. Yet we believe it must be possible to make provision for a special reserve with special conditions for a place like Arniston. In separate papers we have argued that such a solution can be both scientifically sound in protecting sea resources and economically sustainable. Such a solution would be cheaper than to build a harbour with a breakwater or other engineering solutions.

3. Issues for the spatial development framework

3.1 Harbour

The harbour probably represents the single most important under-utilised spatial element in Arniston / Waenhuiskrans. Sound planning could open up an opportunity to realise far better use of the harbour for extending the experience of the town as a unique place along the South African coastline.

The harbour should be upgraded to permanently solve the problems that subsistence fishermen experience (a tractor that is used to launch boats breaks down frequently and may not provide a permanent solution).

The harbour should also be utilised as a resource for tourism. Proper planning will ensure the proper operation of the harbour and simultaneously create space for income from tourism in and around the harbour.

The harbour should also become a "gateway" to the fishing village, while the harbour and the area behind the beach and in front of the hotel could become the focal point or "heart" of the town. (the coloured and the white towns still remain too acutely divided, both visually and socially). The above presupposes that the harbour will form a more prominent part of the town and be visually upgraded, without being fenced off. In terms of town planning, buffer zones between white and black or coloured areas were seen as negative spaces of no social value for the community during the period of separate development. The green zone separating the white and coloured town and the harbour, which was part of this buffer zone, may now be viewed as a positive space and be utilised.

The harbour and the surrounding vacant space therefore require sensitive planning to become the future "heart" of the town. Inhabitants and tourists who experience this

environment should entertain positive feelings about the town as a whole when they leave it.

3.2 Marine reserve

To ensure a functioning, sustainable subsistence fishing harbour one need not look for prohibitively expensive engineering solutions to excavate or extend the present harbour, as has been done in previous investigations. The present fishing boats are too heavy and too big for the present harbour ramp. These boats have been built to be workable within a specific set of quota and licence regulations. If the present regulations are adapted to create a exclusive fishing reserve for Arniston/Waenhuiskrans smaller boats could once again be used that would be practical within a special set of regulations for such a special reserve. Such a reserve could be managed by the National Government in conjunction with a local body representing the community and local fisherman. The motivation for such a departure from existing licensing regulations for fishing will be the preservation of Arniston/Waenhuiskrans as a historic fishing community and as a tourist destination bringing income not only for Cape Agulhas, but to a much wider area.

3.3 Nodes

Different nodes must be acknowledged in the SDF. There could be separate scheme regulations for each node, especially for the heritage sensitive nodes.

The historic Kassies Bay forms one such node. It should be protected by regular maintenance; planning for increased use of motor vehicles in the area; and for the possibility of generating higher income from tourism. The visual scale of the town should be guarded as it will be negatively affected by the construction of high and large buildings alongside the historical town.

The historic town, the old so-called white town, which comprised the fishing village before the fishermen were moved to Kassies Bay in 1905, forms the second historic node. At one stage it was marked by its organic character, with meandering walkways, buildings up to the boundaries of plots and few or no walls to indicate the boundaries of plots. This unique character has been essentially harmed by construction work that deviates from the scale of the environment and the idiom of the old town. Tared roads with out of place finishes also contributed to the change in character. It is still possible to correct some of these mistakes.

The rest of the town provide the possibility of establishing further nodes through distinctive scheme regulations.

The open area along the harbour and in front of the hotel has the potential, to become the "heart" of Arniston / Waenhuiskrans, an area where the different areas and nodes will be connected. It is important that traffic flow in this area be well regulated, so that a traffic-free pedestrian zone may be created.

3.4 Tourism

The social and economic wellbeing of Arniston / Waenhuiskrans suffers as a consequence of the huge percentage of dwellings in the town that are used only during weekends and summer holidays. Overcrowding during the summer holidays places a huge burden on the beaches and on the infrastructure. More sustainable continuous utilisation by tourists would be an obvious solution to this problem.

The fact that a continuous and sustainable income can no longer be derived from fishing necessitates that the erstwhile fishing community generates some income from tourism. This implies that tourism should be encouraged in both the SDF and scheme regulations. Urban compaction and guesthouses should be encouraged.

Arniston / Waenhuiskrans and surrounding areas, such as De Hoop (see 3.10) can, under certain specific circumstances, accommodate unique high level tourist developments, which may prove to have a greater economic impact on the fishing community, through opportunities for work and for complementary small enterprises, with limited ecological impact than extended residential developments or mid level developments not uniquely differentiated from similar developments elsewhere.

3.5 Pedestrian Zones

Zones for pedestrians should be provided for in the historic Kassies Bay and in the area surrounding the harbour. Constructed pedestrian routes are also possible on the sea side of the old town and in the vicinity of the Waenhuiskrans cave.

The provision of pedestrian zones in the Kassies Bay and old town areas must not have an undue negative impact on the privacy of inhabitants.

Unproclaimed streets, such as the one in front of the hotel could be closed to vehicle traffic, to establish a green pedestrian zone.

There are well documented experiences worldwide of the fact that traffic congestion at the nucleus gradually diminishes the value and potential of a "destination". The best of the world's charming villages have devised methods for organising motor vehicle traffic in such a way that the heart of the village remains unaffected.

3.6 Beaches

Low-level and sensitive upgrading of all three beaches is possible. In the long term the beaches should be protected against further erosion, which is likely to continue at an accelerated pace if there is a significant increase in the footprint of the settlement.

3.7 Public spaces

Public spaces, e.g. at the community hall, the library and the entrance to the town could be visually focused, with low level walls etc. Public spaces at the harbour, in front of the hotel and at the beaches could be defined in similar style.

3.8 Maintenance of heritage area

The village environment in Kassies Bay could be a focus area for regular maintenance. There are a number of ways in which the existing land rules of the fishing community can be maintained while economic capital can be unlocked with share block or similar schemes. Access to capital, in the form of subsidies and also loans, will enable the community to unlock further economic potential, while still preserving the historical heritage as well as the present structure of community management.

3.9 Economic housing

When low cost housing is provided in the future, the placing must be done with more sensitivity than was done previously, when sound planning guidelines were at times ignored.

3.10 Business nodes

The old structure plan stated that the Arniston Centre was not ideally situated. The town planners resolved this problem by creating a new commercial area opposite the caravan park, to enable the relocation of shops, restaurants and the supply of fuel. The original problems with the old commercial site, in the old village, still need to be resolved.

3.11 Entrance to De Hoop

De Hoop would be better utilised and would be to the advantage of Arniston / Waenhuiskrans if the main entrance to the reserve could be on the road between Bredasdorp and Arniston / Waenhuiskrans. The existing entrance could be used as an alternative entrance at those times should the new main entrance ever need to be closed for reasons of military security. De Hoop has the potential for one or more high level eco tourism hotels.

3.12 Airport

It would be to the advantage of Arniston / Waenhuiskrans if the military airport between Arniston / Waenhuiskrans and Bredasdorp could also be used by civilian aircraft for public air transport. The town has the potential to be a unique world holiday destination, specifically for tourists of higher income.

3.13 Town Limits

It would be undesirable to substantially enlarge the existing footprint of Arniston / Waenhuiskrans, particularly if this were done by developing new plots for the construction of houses that are of high bulk and that will be used primarily as holiday accommodation. Such development will contribute to and accentuate the existing problems created by short-term overcrowding.

The present size and scale of the town contribute to its status as tourist draw-card and to its unique value. These characteristics should be maintained and protected.

The Municipality and the Department of Nature Conservation could possibly renegotiate the border between the town and the nature reserve to the west of the town to facilitate its broader and better utilisation, management and conservation.

3.14 Visitor's Centre, Heritage Centre, Resource Centre

The Waenhuiskrans Community Development Trust has proposed a centre that will unlock further tourism potential for the town and region. This Centre will also serve as a resource centre for the fishing community and as a hub to assist members of the community in establishing and developing sustainable micro enterprises. A business plan for this project has already been submitted to the Municipality and to the National Department of Environmental Affairs and Tourism.

3.15 Water

The contractual agreement for water supply from the Overberg scheme was terminated by the Cape Agulhas Municipality. It may not be possible to re-instate this agreement ever again. Future planning should thus take the reserves of water available from Bredasdorp into account.

4. In conclusion

Arniston / Waenhuiskrans has unique potential for sustained development of a special variety. It could benefit disproportionately from sensitive planning that is intelligently managed.

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