

SECTION 27

HERITAGE STATEMENT

FOR

FOREST HALL ESTATE PORTION 2 OF FARM 496 THE CRAGS, PLETTENBERG BAY

JUNE 2026

BY



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1. INTRODUCTION

This application is being made to Heritage Western Cape (“HWC”) on behalf of Mr. **Luca Bechis**, the owner of Portion 2 of Farm 496, The Crags, Plettenberg Bay (“Forest Hall”). PHS Consulting (Jenna Theron and Paul Slabbert) has been engaged to assist in obtaining heritage approval for alterations to the existing building, which is older than 60 years and has been graded as a Grade II Provincial Heritage Site and therefore subject to Section 27 application in terms of the National Heritage Resources Act (Act 25 of 1999) (“NHRA”). The proposal, in terms of this application, is minimal in nature and relates to the functional use of the building for tourism/ residential/ entertaining purposes as per approved land use rights. The proposed works will also assist with the maintenance of the historic structure through keeping direct rain off the building walls keeping moisture off the foundations. The overall longevity and sustained commercial use of the building and site is at the forefront of the proposal.

2. BACKGROUND

In 2010/2011, Graham Jacobs (ARCON Architects & Heritage Consultants) undertook a heritage process for the “*regularization of unauthorized work to a Provincial Heritage Site (NHRA Section 27)*”¹ at Forest Hall Estate. The purpose of this application was to regularize unauthorized alterations and additions to Forest Hall and its immediate context. Forest Hall is a former National Monument and currently a Provincial Heritage Site.

The alterations and additions referred to at the time included unauthorized work by previous owners of the property after 2001, as well as work undertaken by the present owner. In the beginning of August 2010, ARCON Architects & Heritage Consultants (Graham Jacobs) was approached by the present owner, Mr. Luca Bechis, to obtain the necessary heritage approvals for the unauthorized work. The owner had only become aware of the requirements of the NHRA after being alerted to the fact by the local authority during building plan submission.

According to the National Monument proclamation of Forest Hall in 1992 “*the proclamation area of Forest Hall is identified as the manor house, together with surrounding land extending 15m to the south, 20m to the west, 20m to the east, and 175m to the north of the building footprint up to and inclusive of the entrance gates*”² (Refer to **Figure 3 & 4** below). The majority of the unauthorized work, in accordance with the 2010/2011 application, fell within this area, with most of the work focused on Forest Hall Manor, a veranda extension and the nearby swimming pool house. When the NHRA came into effect in 2000, all proclaimed National Monuments were automatically re-designated Provincial Heritage Sites (Grade II) and protected in terms of Section 27 of the ‘new’ legislation (i.e. NHRA).

Heritage Western Cape (HWC), as per the Record of Decision (ROD) dated 17 May 2011, approved “*the architects conceptual proposal including the creeper elements in accordance with the drawings submitted*” subject to two omissions. Revised plans were submitted to HWC for final approval and a Permit was issued by HWC on the 14 December 2011 (**Appendix 1**).

Forest Hall is utilised as a commercial venture within the Tourism and Hospitality industry and is hired out for a number of high-end functions. The Applicant has identified a further need to improve the functionality of the space, specifically the Kitchen, allowing for a better flow of guests. The ‘clip on’ veranda’s (previously approved in the north and south) have also proven

¹ Graham Jacobs, 2010/ 2011. *Application for regularization of unauthorized alterations and additions to Forest Hall in terms of Sections 27 of the National Heritage Resources Act*. ARCON Architects & Heritage Consultants.

² <https://sahris.org.za/node/39205>

to assist with water proofing and maintaining the structural integrity of the old structures clay walls. Therefore, the alterations involve minor internal changes relating to the master bedroom and ensuite (first floor) as well as the kitchen and study (ground floor). External alterations relate largely to the proposed new solarium kitchen extension and the new covered verandas (east and west) to match and connect the existing verandas on the north and the south of the building. The proposal is discussed in detail further below.

3. STATEMENT OF INDEPENDENCE AND ACCREDITATION

The authors of this report have no financial interest in the proposed development, or any other projects being undertaken by the developers. Paul Slabbert is an accredited principal member of the Association of Professional Heritage Practitioners: Western Cape (APHP). He has been involved in urban and rural conservation and heritage/visual assessments since 1999. Paul Slabbert is a Planner, Heritage and Environmental Consultant with rural and urban design experience in the private sector. Jenna Theron is an accredited associate member of the Association of Professional Heritage Practitioners: Western Cape (APHP). She has been involved in various aspects of Environmental and Heritage Planning since 2008.

4. LOCALITY

Portion 2 of Farm 496 ("Forest Hall") is 49.57 ha in extent and located off Forest Hall Road in The Craggs, Plettenberg Bay (Bitou Municipality, Division of Knysna, Western Cape Province). The site is located approx. 14km northeast of Plettenberg Bay and approximately 5 km west of Natures Valley.

Refer to the Locality Maps in **Figure 1** and **Figure 2** below.



Figure 1: Close up locality and aerial view of Forest Hall Estate (red boundary) with Forest Hall Manor House indicated by the 'Monument' symbol.



Figure 2: Locality of Forest Hall Estate indicated in red.

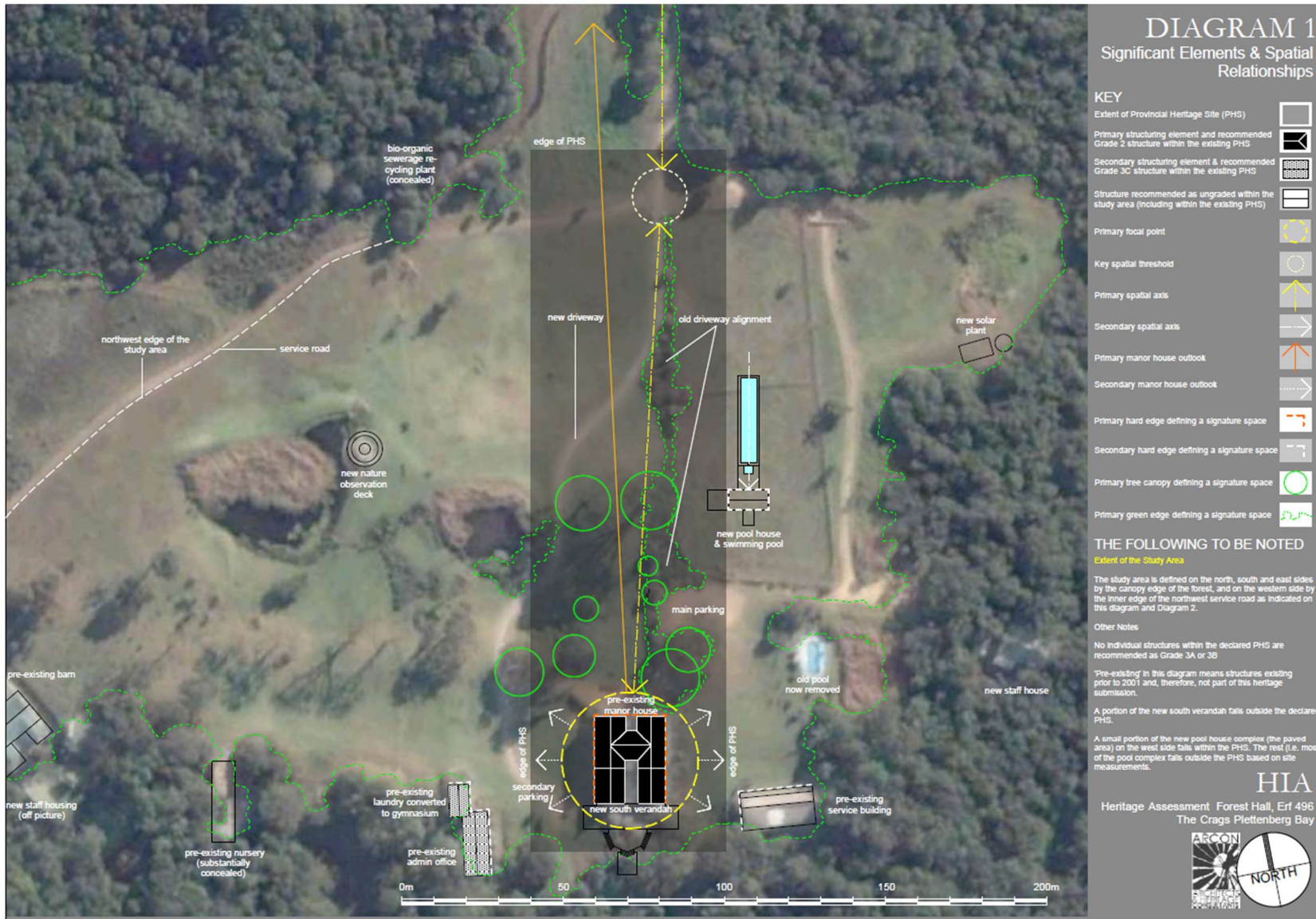


Figure 3: Diagram 1 – Significant Elements and Spatial Relationships of the Provincial Heritage Site (Jacobs, 2010)

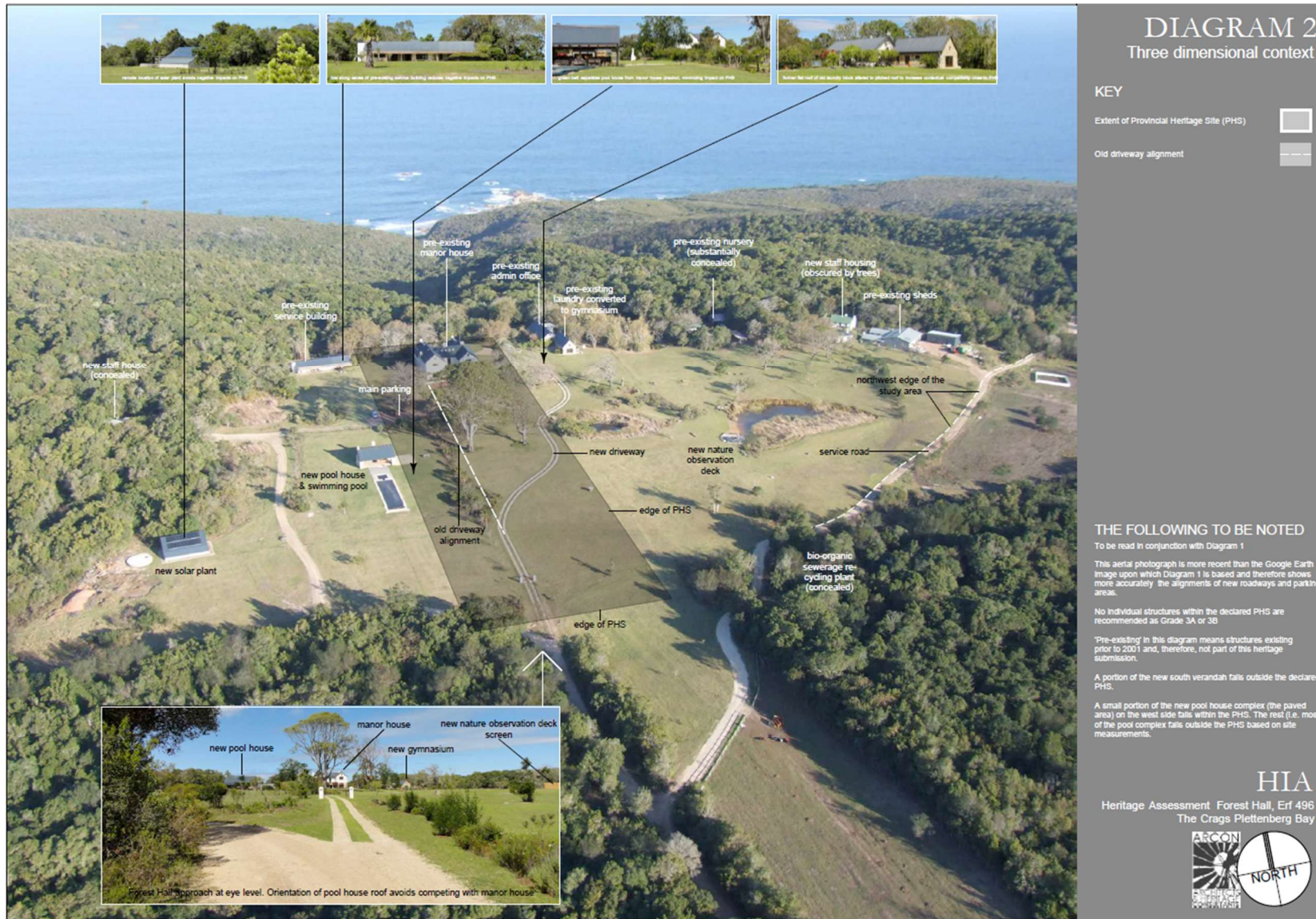


Figure 4: Diagram 2 – Three-dimensional context of the Provincial Heritage Site (Jacobs, 2010)

5. STATUTORY CONTEXT

5.1 Title Deeds & SG Diagram

Title Deed T14716/2007 confirms the ownership of *Luca Bechis*. The SG Diagram is dated 2009 (No. 4881/2009). There are no restrictive title deed conditions preventing the proposed alterations.

Refer to the Title Deed and SG diagram attached under **Appendix 2**.

5.2 Zoning

The subject site has an **Open Space Zone III** zoning. The proposed alterations are minimal in nature and do not have a bearing on the zoning of the property.

5.3 National Heritage Resources Act (Act 25 of 1999)

Forest Hall is a former National Monument and currently a declared Provincial Heritage Site. Section 27 (18) of the NHRA states that: "*No person may destroy, damage, deface, excavate, alter, remove from its original position, subdivide or change the planning status of any heritage site without a permit issued by the heritage resources authority responsible for the protection of such site.*"³ This document constitutes the Heritage Statement to inform proposed works to Forest Hall and is considered part of the documentation to be submitted to Heritage Western Cape (HWC).

Grade II (Provincial Heritage Site):

In 1992 Forest Hall was declared a National Monument and in the year 2000 the property was automatically re-classified as a Provincial Heritage Site (Grade II) when the then 'new' National Heritage Resources Act (1999) came into effect⁴.

According to HWC, "Sites graded as Grade II sites must have special qualities which make them significant within the context of a Province or region, while satisfying the requirements of Section 3(3) and Section 7 of the Act, and its Regulation GN R548.

Section 3 (3) states that "*a place or object is to be considered part of the national estate if it has cultural significance or other special value because of:*

(a) its importance in the community, or pattern of South Africa's history;

(b) its possession of uncommon, rare or endangered aspects of South Africa's natural or cultural heritage;

(c) its potential to yield information that will contribute to an understanding of South Africa's natural or cultural heritage;

(d) its importance in demonstrating the principal characteristics of a particular class of South Africa's natural or cultural places or objects;

³ South Africa. (1999) National Heritage Resources Act, Act No. 25 of 1999. Cape Town: Government Printer.

⁴ Graham Jacobs, 2010/ 2011. *Application for regularization of unauthorized alterations and additions to Forest Hall in terms of Sections 27 of the National Heritage Resources Act*. ARCON Architects & Heritage Consultants.

(e) its importance in exhibiting particular aesthetic characteristics valued by a community or cultural group;

(f) its importance in demonstrating a high degree of creative or technical achievement at a particular period;

(g) its strong or special association with a particular community or cultural group for social, cultural or spiritual reasons;

(h) its strong or special association with the life or work of a person, group or organisation of importance in the history of South Africa; and

(i) sites of significance relating to the history of slavery in South Africa.”⁵

Section 7 of the NHRA deals with the 3 categories of grading:

“(a) Grade I: Heritage resources with qualities so exceptional that they are of special national significance;

(b) Grade II: Heritage resources which, although forming part of the national estate, can be considered to have special qualities which make them significant within the context of a province or a region; and

(c) Grade III: Other heritage resources worthy of conservation.”⁶

According to HWC *“Grade II sites are so special that they need to be given a status beyond the protection provided by being entered in the Heritage Register but are not of outstanding national significance. They may be rare examples of their kind or otherwise be highly representative of a type. They may connect closely to an event or figure of provincial/regional significance. Grade II sites should enrich the understanding of the cultural, historical, social and scientific development of the Western Cape and of the region in which they are situated. The intrinsic, comparative and contextual significance of the heritage resource must be determined. Once declared, Grade II sites become Provincial Heritage Sites and are managed by HWC in the Western Cape.*

Grade [I and] II sites may include, but are not limited to places, buildings, structures and immovable equipment of cultural significance; places to which oral traditions are attached or which are associated with living heritage; historical settlements and townscapes; landscapes and natural features of cultural significance; geological sites of scientific or cultural importance; archaeological and palaeontological sites; graves and burial grounds; sites of significance relating to the history of slavery in the Western Cape; sites of significance to Khoesan heritage in the Western Cape and sites of significance relating to the liberation struggle in the Western Cape.

The cultural significance or other special values of a Grade [I and] II site may include, but are not limited to its importance in the community or pattern of the history of the Western Cape; the uncommon, rare or endangered aspects that it possess reflecting the Western Cape’s natural or cultural heritage; the potential that the site may yield information that will contribute to an understanding of the Western Cape’s natural or cultural heritage; its importance in demonstrating the principal characteristics of a particular class of the Western Cape’s natural

⁵ South Africa. (1999) National Heritage Resources Act, Act No. 25 of 1999. Cape Town: Government Printer.

⁶ South Africa. (1999) National Heritage Resources Act, Act No. 25 of 1999. Cape Town: Government Printer.

or cultural places or objects; its importance in exhibiting particular aesthetic characteristics valued by a community or cultural group in the Western Cape; its importance in demonstrating a high degree of creative or technical achievement at a particular period in the development or history of the Western Cape; its strong or special association with a particular community or cultural group for social, cultural or spiritual reasons; its strong or special association with the life or work of a person, group or organization of importance in the history of the Western Cape; sites of significance relating to the history of slavery and sites of significance to Khoesan heritage in the Western Cape.”⁷

Review of Cultural Significance:

ARCON Architects & Heritage Consultants (Graham Jacobs) undertook a review of the Cultural Significance of Forest Hall in the 2010/2011 Section 27 Application. According to the report the findings were as follows⁸:

“The cultural significance of Forest Hall is reviewed in terms of the original National Monument proclamation (1992) and subsequent National Heritage Resources Act (1999). The Statement of Significance (heritage statement) included in the submission to the then National Monuments Council (13&14 April 1992) states:

Forest Hall is associated with the Newdigate, Duthie Rex and Barrington families that has (sic) close ties with the history of Knysna and Plettenberg Bay and is of particular importance because of its mixture of English and local building techniques and materials. Together with the already proclaimed Redbourne and Belvidere Churches and its historical association with Belvidere House, it forms an integrated link in the history of the Southern Cape and the colony in the 19th century.”

In terms of the definitions found in the National Heritage Resources Act (NHRA), ‘Cultural Significance’ means: “*aesthetic, architectural, historical, scientific, social, spiritual, linguistic or technological value or significance*”. ARCON Architects & Heritage Consultants (Graham Jacobs) used this definition as the basis for an updated heritage statement of significance for the property as described in 2010 as follows:

“Aesthetic Significance

The Forest Hall farmstead is situated in a large man-made clearing located within an extensive tract of indigenous forest. Unlike contemporary sites with sea view potential, the homestead has been oriented with its back to the coastline, facing the direction from which all visitors would have to arrive. This was clearly intentional, as it enabled the presence of the house to be felt a long distance away from the approach road to the farmstead. When William Newdigate was asked why he planned to settle so far from civilization, he famously replied that he intended to take civilization with him. The orientation of the homestead terminating the approach axis, and the nature of the manor’s landscaped setting clearly reflect this. This was patently intended to be a little piece of England transplanted to the wilds of one of her far-flung colonies.

Forest Hall manor and its setting, defined by its 50 Ha of surrounding indigenous forest, is therefore considered to have great local aesthetic significance in terms of the landmark stature

⁷ HWC: Grading: Purpose and Management Implications, 2016

⁸ Graham Jacobs, 2010/ 2011. *Application for regularization of unauthorized alterations and additions to Forest Hall in terms of Sections 27 of the National Heritage Resources Act.* ARCON Architects & Heritage Consultants.

and orientation of the homestead, the arrangement and scale of its outbuildings, and the nature of its garden landscaping including strategic location of trees and other planting patterns, all of which contribute to establishing the manor house as the principal focal point in this cultural landscape.

Architectural Significance

Notwithstanding successive alterations, Forest Hall manor is considered to be of regional architectural significance as a rare surviving example of an imported building style adapted to local conditions using local materials including now rare indigenous timbers, and displaying a high degree of craftsmanship. Craftsmen brought out from England by William Newdigate, and who were involved in the construction of Forest Hall, were also instrumental in the construction of a number of other architecturally and historically noteworthy buildings in the region: most notable of which were the Belvidere chapel designed by Sophia Grey and St Michaels All Angels at Kirbywood, both of which are now Provincial Heritage Sites.

Historical Significance

Forest Hall is of some national significance relating to its historical associations with important national figures such as Bishop Grey and his talented architect wife, Sophia; Thomas Bain; Andrew Bain; Lord Milner and a former Governor of the Cape, Healy Hutchison. The property is also of considerable regional historical significance given its associations with the Rex, Barrington and Duthie families; and its close ties with the history of Knysna and Plettenberg Bay, in particular.

Scientific Significance

Apart from its indigenous timber and other scientifically significant botanical species, Forest Hall is of some international scientific significance as an historic habitat of the rare Leto Venus moth, much sought after by lepidopterists in the 19th Century. William Newdigate's daughters were able to collect specimens of these and sell them to a buyer in England. The proceeds were used to build the church of St Michaels All Angels for the benefit of the local underprivileged community at nearby Kirbywood.

Social Significance

Forest Hall is of regional social significance relating to its historical associations with important historical personalities as mentioned [under Historical Significance above]. In addition, the farm formed part of an extended social network during the time of the Newdigates, who conducted an open house to visitors from the region and further afield. The manor became a venue for balls, fairs and even hosted the English national cricket team in 1901 under WH Grace. It was Hilary Newdigate Peter, who hosted a number of parties and other social events on the lawns of the manor house during the 1980's and early 1990's, who revived the practice of Forest Hall as a social focus.

More recently, former owner Michael Johnson revived the historic tradition of Newdigate benefaction by starting a number of social upliftment initiatives for the nearby underprivileged community of Kurland at Kirbywood. During his ownership Forest Hall played host to a number of government dignitaries. He was also responsible for funding and constructing a new local police station for this community. The maintenance funding of the police station continues under the present owner, Luca Bechis, along with a number of other projects including a soup

kitchen and various agricultural self-help schemes. Assistance is also provided to local sports clubs, and the farm manager of Forest Hall coaches the local Kurland rugby team.

Spiritual Significance

Although Forest Hall is of no direct spiritual significance, it is historically associated with the spiritual wellbeing of the nearby community of Kurland/Kirbywood through the historic initiative that led to the construction of St Michaels All Angels church on property formerly forming part of the Forest Hall estate. The Newdigate sisters responsible for that initiative are buried in the churchyard at St Michaels.

Technological Significance

Forest Hall is of no historical technological significance, although the recently completed recycling, purification and solar heating systems on the farm promise to become a significant sustainability demonstration project for the region in the future.

Archaeological Significance

No archaeological investigations have been conducted within the affected area to the author's knowledge. It is, therefore, possible that pre-colonial remains may exist in the form of stone-age scatters within the broad vicinity of Forest Hall. However, given that almost all of the work for which this application is being submitted has already been completed, and given that all of this work, apart from the construction of the swimming pool and pool house, occurs substantially within areas already disturbed by building activity, little purpose would be served for undertaking such investigations at this stage.

General Statement of Significance arising from the above

Forest Hall and its immediate context are of considerable regional architectural, historical and social significance. It is of regional scientific significance with historical international associations relating to its biophysical resources, and of great local aesthetic significance in terms of its landmark attributes within a rural wilderness setting. It has no direct spiritual or technological significance although it does have indirect historical spiritual connections with nearby communities. The property may have archaeological potential although little purpose would be served in undertaking such investigations given the nature of this application."

6. HISTORIC CONTEXT - FOREST HALL

Graham Jacobs report (2010/2011) also addresses the historic context of Forest Hall Estate in detail and is summarised below⁹:

6.1 Phase 1: The Early Years: c1860 – c1930

“Forest Hall is the ancestral seat of the Newdigate family in South Africa. It remained in the family until sold in 1996 by the last heir to the estate, Mrs. Hilary Newdigate-Peter.

*Forest hall was completed in about 1864 by William Henry Newdigate, son of the 3rd Earl of Dartmouth, after having come into a substantial family inheritance. The property was originally acquired for its timber and for farming purposes. Craftsmen who he had personally recruited from England constructed the house using bricks manufactured on site, and substantial quantities of stinkwood and yellowwood felled on the farm. It is significant that many of these craftsmen were also instrumental in the construction of other historically and architecturally noteworthy buildings in the Knysna/Plettenberg Bay area. Most important of these is probably Belvidere Church in Knysna (now also a Provincial Heritage Site), for which William Newdigate did many of the stonemason’s drawings.” Refer to **Figure 5**.*

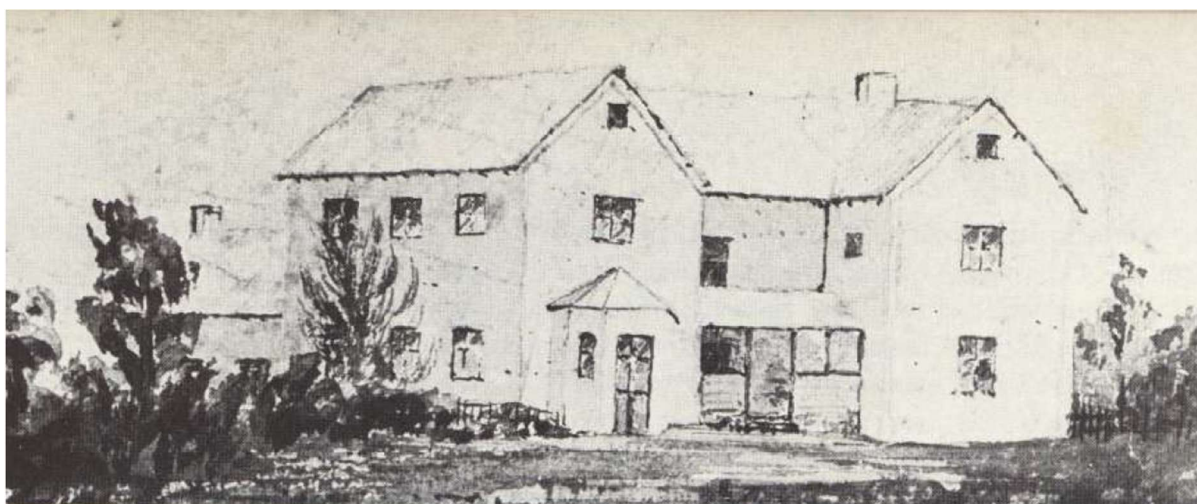


Figure 5: Watercolour of Forest Hall by Francis Henry Newdigate painted in 1878. This early illustration, completed 15 years after the construction of the house, shows the house in what appears to still be a ‘semi-wild’ natural setting. Note the bay window (now gone) with French doors on the left hand side and a partly enclosed shallow central entrance porch under what appears to be an ‘ogee’ profiled curvilinear canopy. (Photo: Jacobs, 2010)

“William and his wife Caroline (nee Duthie) proceeded to live in the style of the landed English gentry at Forest Hall, keeping open house and entertaining all who traveled through the area. Consequently, a number of historically well-known figures stayed there. These included Bishop Grey and his wife Sophia (1863 and subsequently), Andrew Geddes Bain (1880), Le Comte de Vasselot de Regne (1882), Thomas Bain and his wife Johanna (1883), Col Scharmbrucher (1883), Sir Alfred Milner (later Lord Milner), Healey Huchinson, then Governor of the Cape, Col Mitchell, John Barrington of Portland Manor, Knysna, and George Rex. Caroline Newdigate continued to live at Forest Hall after the death of William Newdigate in 1884, until her own death in 1922 at the age of 90.” Refer to figures 6-7 below.

⁹ Graham Jacobs, 2010/ 2011. Application for regularization of unauthorized alterations and additions to Forest Hall in terms of Sections 27 of the National Heritage Resources Act. ARCON Architects & Heritage Consultants.



Figure 6: Early photograph of the exterior of Forest Hall. This photo appears to have been taken during the mid-1920's judging by the style of clothing worn by the figures in the foreground (presumably members of the Newdigate family). Note the small relative sizes of the windows, which are inward opening casements with shallow arched upper panes typical of a fashionable rural English country gentleman's residence of the period. The stepped Gothic Revival drip mouldings are the only decoration in an otherwise austere façade. The central porch is supported on four (what appear to be) cast iron columns. The corrugated iron roof may already be a replacement (compare with **Figure 5**). The only element still surviving on the current façade today, is the front door. All other elements including the bay window, casements windows, roof sheets and veranda colonnade have either been removed or replaced. Note the 's'-shaped wrought iron wall anchor bracket on the right-hand wing, suggesting that even at that stage, there were structural problems with at least this external wall. (Photo: Jacobs, 2010)



Figure 7: A presumably later photograph of the exterior of Forest Hall. This photo appears to have been taken after Caroline Newdigate's death, judging from the unkempt state of the garden and the rust on the corrugated iron roof sheets. (Photo: Jacobs, 2010)

6.2. Phase 2: c1930-1971

“In the 1930’s, Caroline Newdigate’s surviving son and four unmarried daughters moved out of Forest Hall, which was thought to be too remote. The house was passed down to Frank Newdigate who never took occupation and, as a result, the house became derelict and gradually deteriorated. From 1948-1963, the house was rented out to Doctor David Sym and his wife, Mary, who undertook certain repairs in exchange for a nominal rental. However, the house again fell into dereliction after they moved back to Plettenberg Bay. By 1971, the house had been vandalized with some of its heavy yellowwood roof beams and stinkwood doors stolen. Birds were by then nesting in the gallery of the entrance hall, and the large dining room was being used as a cow stall, irreparably damaging its large yellowwood floor.” Refer to Figure 8.

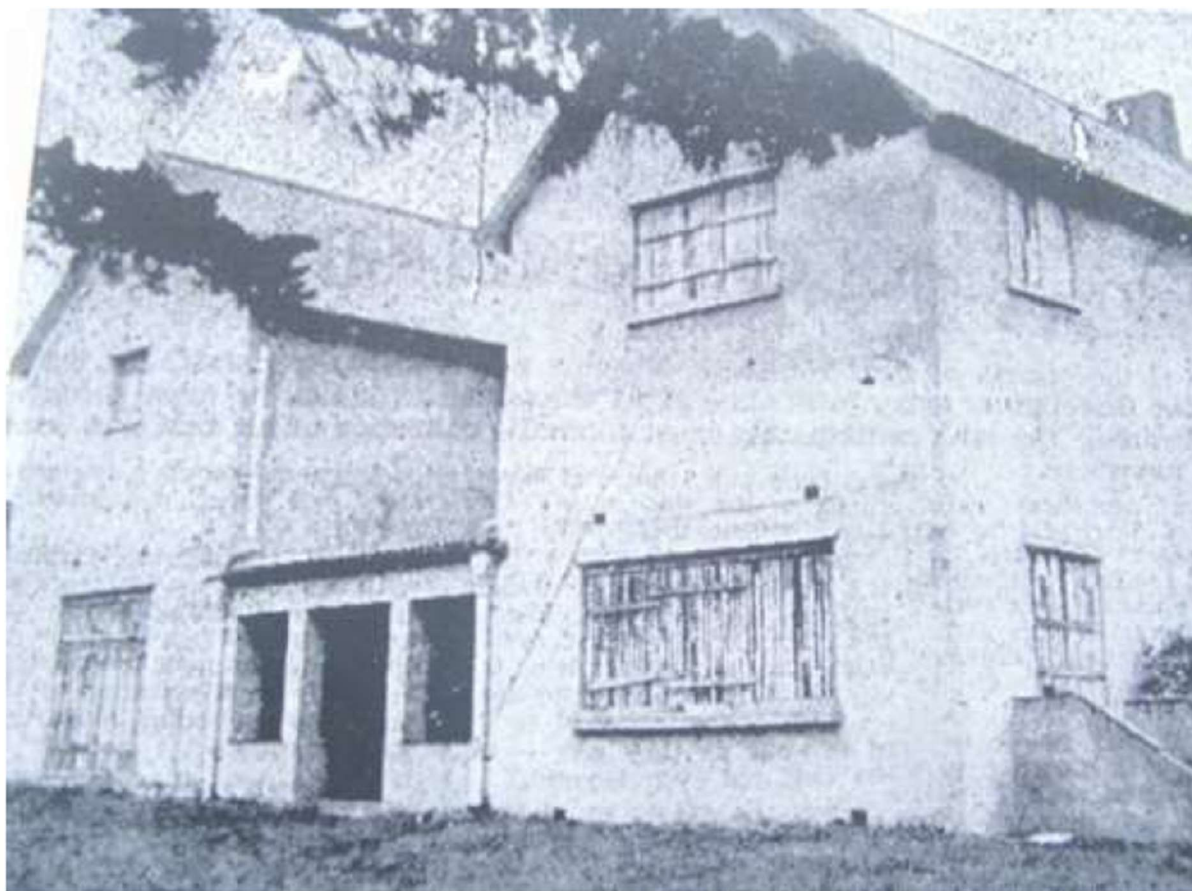


Figure 8: Forest Hall boarded up and derelict in about 1971. By this time, the left-hand bay window had disappeared and all doors and windows on the front façade replaced, apart from a single first floor window below the left-hand gable. The stepped mouldings above the (presumably) original windows had by now been removed, along with the wall creepers. Note also that asbestos cement roof sheets had by now replaced the earlier corrugated iron. The central porch was by now deeper, supported on plastered columns standing flush with the front façade, detracting from the clearer definition of the central porch space provided by the earlier colonnaded porch. (Compare with Figures 6 & 7) (Photo: Jacobs, 2010)

6.3 Phase 3: 1971 – 1994: The First Restoration of Forest Hall



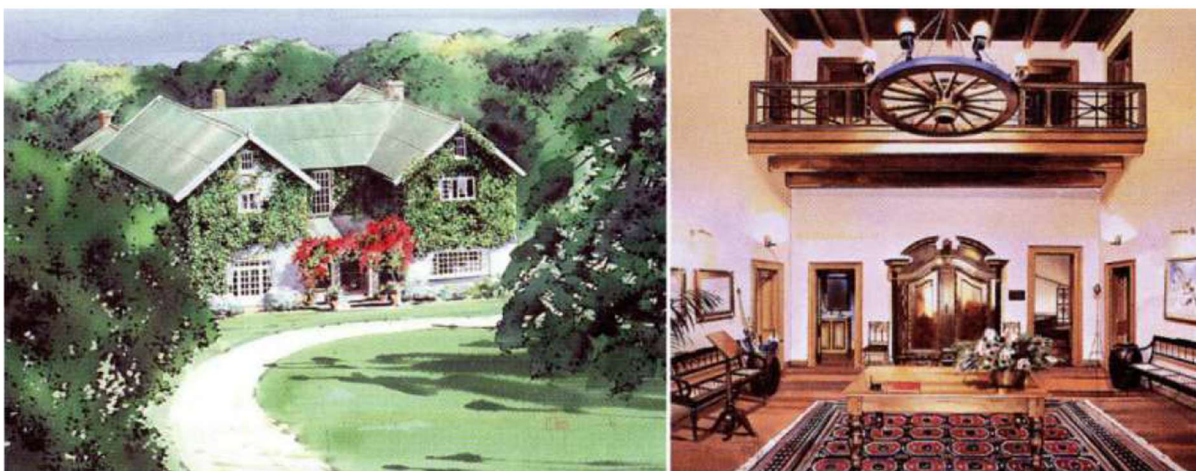
Figure 9: Above left: the entrance hall of Forest Hall as drawn by Stanley Leighton during the latter half of the 19th Century. This interior is described by Picton Seymour as giving the impression of a Scottish shooting box ‘– that prestige symbol of Victorian family life’. Above right: the entrance hall in 1990 after restoration by Hilary Newdigate Peter. (Photo: Jacobs, 2010)

“In 1971, the great granddaughter of William Newdigate and daughter of Frank Newdigate, Hilary Newdigate Peter, took ownership of Forest Hall and commenced a protracted cleaning and restoration program of the property with limited funds. By 1990, Forest Hall had been turned into a guest farm and the homestead furnished with antiques from Hilary’s antique business. In the course of this work, the irreparably damaged dining room floor was replaced with a pine floor. Later period four panel doors and architraves (e.g. providing access to the first-floor gallery and linen room) are most likely also part of this restoration. In 1992 Hilary Newdigate Peter was instrumental in having Forest Hall declared a National Monument. By 1994, the management and upkeep were beginning to become too much for her, and the property was sold with the understanding that she would continue to retain occupancy of the ‘studio’ outbuilding (now the farm office) on the western side of the werf, along with the use of 5 Ha of land for her horses. This arrangement with the new owner, Marius van Biljon, didn’t work out and she subsequently moved to Plettenberg Bay.” Refer to **Figure 9 & 10**.



Figure 10: Forest Hall in 1990 after restoration by Hilary Newdigate Peter (mounted on the horse in the foreground). The hall window above the central entrance porch has been enlarged (though this was probably done before her time) and wall creepers re-grown. The casement windows are by now likely to be substantial, if not complete replacements given the condition of the house prior to 1971 (refer Figure 8). (Photo: Jacobs, 2010)

6.4 Phase 4: 1994 - 2001: Further change in Ownership



Figures 11a & 11b: Forest Hall between 1994 and 2001 during the ownership of the property by Marius van Biljon and his wife. (Photo: Jacobs, 2010)

“During the period of ownership under Marius van Biljon, the property was secured with a security fence and gates, thereby bringing to an end casual visits that, until then, had been part of the tradition associated with Forest Hall. The property did, however, continue to run as a private guesthouse. The homestead appears to have remained substantially unaltered apart from some minor changes to the interior. A few years later, the owner unfortunately died in a tractor accident on the farm and the property was again put up for sale.

In 2000, the property was automatically re-classified as a Provincial Heritage Site when the then ‘new’ National Heritage Resources Act (1999) came into effect.”

6.5 Phase 5: 2001 – 2006: The ‘Second Restoration’ of Forest Hall

“In 2001, an American entrepreneur, Michael Johnson, acquired the property after the untimely death of Marius van Biljon. Michael Johnson undertook a second round of extensive repairs to the manor house, which was by now displaying disturbing signs of structural problems. It was discovered that the foundations of the building consisted of yellowwood logs, and these were deteriorating. They were subsequently replaced with injected concrete. External walls that had been ‘peeling’ away from the rest of the house were tied back and stabilized. The signature wall creepers had to be removed and the walls re-plastered. The water supply to the farm, which had until then been intermittent, relying on water from a large cistern at the rear of the house, was augmented by a system of nine new interlinked dams in the kloof below the house. These supplied water to a main dam which now supplies the house. The new water management system was carefully planned along ecologically sustainable principles. This solved what had been an historical water problem at Forest Hall. It was also now possible to properly sustain the existing garden and lawns, allowing them to merge with the surrounding forest.”

Numerous alterations were undertaken in accordance with Building Plans submitted. *“This work required careful stabilization of the roof structure due to the number of structural roof beams stolen while the manor house was standing vacant prior to 1971. The yellowwood ceiling boards recovered from what are now master suites 1&2 were used for the construction of the new staircases providing access to the loft accommodation of the main house. Missing doors were replaced with copies made using locally sourced stinkwood and yellowwood, and new supplies of yellowwood were used when the stock of re-cycled wood from the house was felt to be used more appropriately in other parts of the building. During the course of these repairs, renovations and refurbishments, the creepers on the external walls were removed and the walls re-plastered and painted. Unlike the previous stucco wall finish, the new finish applied after the repairs were completed was, and remains, painted plaster. The historic patina of the exterior has, therefore, unfortunately been lost.”*

6.6 Phase 6: 2007 - 2010.

“The current owner, Luca Bechis, has consolidated Forest Hall by buying back an adjoining portion of the original estate called Buitenverwachting, introducing tree planting and veld management programs, and continuing to introduce eco-minded water management and energy systems on the farm. This includes a sewerage recycling plant and solar heating plant for a recently completed heated swimming pool. The sewerage recycling plant employs bio-organic and bio-digestible systems that enable the soil water to be reintroduced into the ecosystem, using a combination of earth worms, plants, inorganic filtration and flow forms.” It was also during this period that most of the unauthorized work described in the 2010/2011 report (Graham Jacobs) was undertaken.

“This work focused essentially on creating larger outdoor lounge space, and the re-decoration of the four luxury bedroom suites constructed during the ownership of Michael Johnson, extending into the unused loft spaces of the house.”

In summary, the Graham Jacobs report focused on the following unauthorized work completed between 2001 and the date of his application (2010/2011) which had a direct impact on the Provincial Heritage Site (refer to **Figure 12**):

- i. Re-alignment of the front driveway from the east to the west side of the central approach axis to the farmstead.
- ii. Stabilization and repair work to the manor house;
- iii. Internal non-structural alterations to the manor house;
- iv. A new substantial verandah extension along the south side of the house;
- v. New retaining planters along the base of the front facade of the manor house; and
- vi. A paved area forming part of the new pool house building (refer Diagram 1 (**Figure 3** above)).



FIGURES 12a & 12b: Forest Hall after the second round of repairs, structural stabilization measures and addition of the new loft accommodation by former owner Michael Johnson (note the skylights along the roof faces). The house's characteristic stucco and wall creepers had to be removed in order to carry out the work. The external walls are currently plastered and painted. (Photo: Jacobs, 2010)

Please refer to **Appendix 3** for a full photo report of the building as it stands today.

7. THE PROPOSAL

The current proposal in terms of this Heritage Statement & Section 27 Permit Application is for the following alterations (refer to the architectural plans/ elevations included in **Appendix 4**):

1. East elevation: On the ground floor level, the only exterior changes relate to the replacing of a window with a door, however the same height and width of the existing opening will be used. This is in relation to the Study which is to become a bedroom. Furthermore, the most significant change would be the new covered veranda which will connect the verandas in the north and south of the dwelling. The veranda will be open.
2. West elevation: The only exterior changes relate to the replacing of the kitchen window with a doorway however, again, the same height and width of the existing opening will be used. The intention is for guests to be more connected to the kitchen space allowing an extension off the kitchen space in the form of the proposed new solarium. As is the case on the eastern elevation, a new covered veranda will therefore connect the verandas in the north and south of the dwelling. A portion of this veranda will be enclosed with glass creating the solarium off the kitchen providing some much-needed space opening up the kitchen and allowing a better flow. The remainder of the veranda will be open.
3. Internal Floorplan:
 - Ground floor: The study will be converted into a bedroom and therefore the adjacent passage will be turned into an ensuite bathroom. Minor internal changes are proposed in this regard, resulting in the sealing off of 3 internal doors in the passage, however the doors are to remain in place. As mentioned, the window in the study is to be replaced with a door, leading onto the new open veranda, however the same height and width of the existing opening will be kept. As mentioned, the kitchen window will be replaced with a doorway however, again, the same height and width of the existing opening will be used. The doorway will lead onto the new solarium kitchen extension.
 - First floor: Minor internal alterations are to be undertaken. The Master Suite will be converted in terms of turning the dressing room into a bedroom. This will result in the reconfiguration of the existing bathroom space by creating two en-suite bathrooms for the existing suite and the new bedroom

The existing 'clip on' veranda's (previously approved in the north and south) have proven to assist with water proofing and maintaining the structural integrity of the old structures clay walls. Therefore, the primary motivation for the alterations have resulted in the proposal to wrap around the existing verandas (north and south) along the eastern and western elevations. The majority of the newly proposed veranda will be open, except for the solarium extension off the kitchen which will be enclosed with glass as per the precedent already set by the southern veranda.

Furthermore, as Forest Hall is utilised as a commercial venture within the Tourism and Hospitality industry and is hired out for a number of high-end functions. The Applicant has identified a further need to improve the functionality of certain spaces in order to sustain the site operations. The kitchen solarium will allow for a better flow of guests and allow guests to connect and interact with the kitchen space, which is currently disconnected from the rest of the house. The study is better suited for a bedroom which has resulted in the practical conversion of the passage into a bathroom. The passage is used for storage and currently a "dead" space. Although this results in the sealing off of 3 internal doors in the passage, all the doors are to remain in place. The large dressing room in the master suite (first floor) is

unpractical and will therefore be converted into a bedroom which it is better suited to, however this resulted in some practical reconfiguration of the existing bathroom space, to allow two en-suite bathroom one for the existing suit and one for the new bedroom.

8. CONSULTATION & PARTICIPATION

This document will be circulated to the following interested and affected parties for a 30-day comment period (11th June – 13th July 2026) prior to submission of the application to HWC (Please refer to **Appendix 5**):

- Bitou Municipality: Economic Development and Planning Department: Anje Taljaard (Environmental Management Officer)
- Bitou Municipality: Town Planning: Chris Schliemann (Senior Manager)
- Bitou Municipality: Building Control: Ludolph Gericke
- Executive Mayor: Cllr. Jessica N Kamkam
- Simon Van Der Stel Foundation (Southern Cape): Dr Natie De Swardt
- The Van Plettenberg Historical Society

A Site Notice will be placed at the entrance to the site for the duration of the 30-day public comment period.

An advertisement was placed in a local newspaper (Knysna-Plett Herald).

This section will be updated after the Public Participation Process to include all the comments received and our responses.

9. CONCLUSION & RECOMMENDATIONS

Forest Hall was built in 1864 and is the ancestral seat of the Newdigate family in South Africa. It remained in the family for 132 years until sold in 1996 by the last heir to the estate, Mrs. Hilary Newdigate-Peter. Forest Hall is over 162 years of age. In 1992 Forest Hall was declared a National Monument and in the year 2000 the property was automatically reclassified as a Provincial Heritage Site (Grade II) when the then 'new' National Heritage Resources Act (1999) came into effect.

The existing 'clip on' veranda's (previously approved in the north and south) have proven to assist with water proofing and maintaining the structural integrity of the old structures clay walls. Therefore, the primary motivation for the alterations have resulted in the proposal to wrap around the existing verandas (north and south) along the eastern and western elevations. The majority of the newly proposed veranda will be open, except for the solarium extension off the kitchen which will be enclosed with glass as per the precent already set by the southern veranda.

Furthermore, as Forest Hall is utilised as a commercial venture within the Tourism and Hospitality industry and is hired out for a number of high-end functions. The Applicant has identified a further need to improve the functionality of certain spaces in order to sustain the site operations. The kitchen solarium will allow for a better flow of guests and allow guests to connect and interact with the kitchen space, which is currently disconnected from the rest of the house. The study is better suited for a bedroom which has resulted in the practical conversion of the passage (currently used as storage) into a bathroom. Although this results in the sealing off of 3 internal doors in the passage, all the doors are to remain in place. The large dressing room in the master suite (first floor) is unpractical and will therefore be converted into a bedroom which it is better suited to, however this resulted in some practical reconfiguration of the existing bathroom space.

Measuring the proposed work at Forest Hall against the statement of heritage significance for the property, the following conclusions are reached:

Aesthetic significance: None of the proposed alterations will affect the spatial quality of the historic core including the proclaimed PHS and therefore Forest Hall manor retains its landmark significance. A precent has already been set by the verandas in the south and north. The existing 'clip on' veranda's (previously approved in the north and south) have proven to assist with water proofing and maintaining the structural integrity of the old structures clay walls.

Architectural significance: The historical architectural alterations at Forest Hall have left the manor house largely unchanged in terms of overall massing, shape and configuration even though the current external finishes have resulted in the almost complete loss of historical patina. The proposed alterations are however minor in comparison and would not impact the architectural significance. A precent has already been set by the verandas in the south and north. The existing 'clip on' veranda's (previously approved in the north and south) have proven to assist with water proofing and maintaining the structural integrity of the old structures clay walls. The 'clip on' approach is done lightly to separate the new from the original structure through skylights that allow light to filter through and highlight the original fabric. It further allows the eye to observe the separation of old vs new.

Historical Significance: The extensive structural and other repairs to Forest Hall historical, while clearly necessary, have resulted in a distinct loss in historical character to the building's exterior. Interior alterations have, on the whole, been stylistically either contemporary or clearly distinguishable from the historic fabric of the building in other ways. This includes the successful back yard solarium conversion and the extension in the form of the south veranda addition. These types of additions are regarded as contemporary, yet measured expressions of high-quality hospitality, for which Forest Hall is historically well known. Forest Hall retains extensive records of its history in the form of documentation and framed illustrations and photographs, which are on display in its public rooms and bedrooms. The existing 'clip on' veranda's have proven to assist with water proofing and maintaining the structural integrity of the old structures clay walls. The most significant alteration would be the eastern and western veranda which will connect the existing southern and northern veranda. However, the historical significance of Forest Hall will remain intact and will not be impacted by the proposed alterations.

Scientific Significance: Current developments at Forest Hall are still aimed strongly at eco-tourism, with the result that alterations within this landscape have heritage impacts that are naturally either positive or at worst, of no to low (negative) significance. There will be no change in the technological significance of Forest Hall as a result of the proposed alterations.

Social Significance: On the whole, the cultural significance of Forest Hall will not be negatively impacted on. The medium to long-term development strategy for Forest Hall, has not changed as it is aimed at sustaining the property as a social focus by marketing it as a historically, ecologically, and socially significant hospitality destination.

Technological Significance: There will be no change in the technological significance of Forest Hall as a result of the proposed alterations.

It is recommended that, the building plans for the Forest Hall Manor House, as included in **Appendix 4**, be endorsed by HWC.

REFERENCES:

Graham Jacobs, 2010/ 2011. *Application for regularization of unauthorized alterations and additions to Forest Hall in terms of Sections 27 of the National Heritage Resources Act*. ARCON Architects & Heritage Consultants.

<https://sahris.org.za/node/39205>

South Africa. (1999) National Heritage Resources Act, Act No. 25 of 1999. Cape Town: Government Printer.

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