



KLIPSA PART 4: ENVIRONMENTAL RESOURCE AND EDUCATION CENTRE

Photo courtesy of Earthshare www.earthshare.org

The Klipriviersberg Sustainability Association (KlipSA) is a community based organisation promoting a new approach to development in the southern areas of Johannesburg. Its aim is to protect, promote and enhance the value of the natural assets in the south of Johannesburg, particularly the Klipriviersberg Nature Reserve and surrounds. This is the fourth in a series of ongoing articles.

The Klipriver Sustainability Education Centre (KlipSEC) is a proposal for the design and development of an environmental education centre to provide educational resources and facilities for local communities, school children and university students. Andrew Barker, chairman of KlipSA, says there is presently no environmental education centre in the south of Johannesburg: "We need a repository for environmental information, a knowledge base to which school children, researchers and the general public have access. We hope to establish a centre with a library and all the necessary technology for research and knowledge capture. It is anticipated that it will also serve as a tourism hub, in addition to providing educational and training facilities," he explains.

A further purpose for the centre is the establishment of an indigenous nursery within the Klipriver Nature Reserve where medicinal and indigenous plants can be propagated. Barker says that many medicinal plants in the area have been stolen for "muti" purposes and the nursery would hopefully provide a safe space for propagation and seed collection in order to ensure a constant supply of local genetic material.

With the Klipriviersberg Nature Reserve being referred to as a 'living laboratory' for student research, Barker says that linkages with educational institutions such as schools and universities are critical. The University of Johannesburg (UJ) has already shown interest in participating and its students are already conducting environmental research and projects for their degree courses.

The proposed centre will also assist with skills development for farming and agriculture, where hands-on training can be done to upskill people wanting to work in this sector: "We would like the facility to be seen as

a significant component of the agricultural value chain with an integrated tourist value chain," says Barker.

Key factor

The building itself is key to the whole initiative and architect George Flack-Davidson did his final year project on a similar facility, embracing the principles governing green building development. For the design of the centre, he intends to draw on examples of other education centres in the UK, Sweden and California, but will adapt these and place them within the local context. He is heading up a design team which will engage with Johannesburg City Council, academic and educational institutions and local community stakeholders and representatives. Final approval will need to be given by the Johannesburg City Council.

In accordance with the environmental mantra of 'reduce, re-use, recycle' an existing building, the Klipriviersberg Recreation Centre, could serve as the starting point for the proposed environmental education centre. Barker says it is an ideal opportunity to put this principle into practice. "We believe that the facilities of the existing recreation centre and surrounding areas could be easily upscaled for the new environmental education centre. Furthermore, we would not be building on a pristine site as the area has been disturbed in the past."

Added value

Barker stresses that the design, development and management of the environmental education centre is an opportunity for a successful business-led initiative, in collaboration with the Council, that will add value to the city's assets, for the benefit of the community. It forms part of the Klipriviersberg Agritropolis project (see previous issue of Landscape SA), the other projects being an organic farming initiative, a tourism strategy and an environmental upgrade of the Klipriver Wetland Management Plan.

Andrew Barker is a registered town and regional planner and has participated in many aspects of national, provincial and local urban planning processes. He has a thorough understanding of all spheres of government, private sector companies and communities in developing areas. He is also a certified value engineer and has been involved in business management and organizational development since 1985. He may be contacted on 083 274 4424 or andrew@andrewbarker.co.za **isa**