Heritage Impact Assessment of the old railway shed situated on the site of the taxi rank, Ixopo, Sisonke District Municipality

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1. Introduction

Debbie Whelan of Archaic Consulting was requested by Mr. Stephen Burton of SiVEST to inspect the old railway shed at Ixopo with the view towards its destruction. The building is located, and has been for many years, within the taxi rank at the entrance to the town (see Fig 1 below). This is evidently an undesirable state of affairs, particularly as the intention of the local Municipality is to develop and formalize the taxi rank space. This necessitates its destruction. In terms of the KwaZulu Natal Provincial Heritage Act no 4 of 2004, this building is protected, being over the age of 60 years.

2. Methodology

Debbie Whelan visited the site on Saturday 7 September 2013. A number of photographs of the building were taken, which form the basis of assessment in this report. Further to this, limited archival investigations were undertaken in order to establish the value of this particular building within its history.
3. Short history of railway at Ixopo / Stuartstown

Archival evidence points at the arrival of the railway line at Stuartstown as being at the turn of the 20th century. This is reinforced by the 1940 Masson Map (see below) which shows the railway line running north to Mabhedlane.

Fig 2: Excerpt from Masson Map showing the railway line running through Stuartstown

4. Assessment of building

4.1 Exterior

The structure is an elongated wood – and - iron building which forms part of the southern interface within extant the taxi rank. It has a double pitched roof, and timber louvered ventilators to the ends. It has had accretions added to over the years, all without planning and permission. Some original timber sliding doors are still evident, but these have also been patched and altered. The width of the building changes along its length, which alters the pitch of the roof. It has been painted in the past, but has not been maintained in recent years.

The building most likely operated as a goods shed.

It is important to note that this building is occupied by a variety of tenants, notably a number of residents who have sectioned off the internal space into around ten different rooms, in which they live. There also appears to be an informal shebeen operating out of this building.

According to local informants, the Esperanza – Donnybrook railway line closed over 25 years ago. It appears as though this building was abandoned by the Railways and handed over to the Ixopo Municipality. This means that the building has been located within the taxi rank for over 20 years, and in this period has historically been occupied by resident tenants. Informers from shops around the rank note that the Municipality had given notice to these people over a decade ago, but after a change in governance this had fallen through.
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The **Fig 3: North Elevation**

*Fig 4: Showing the front elevation, accretions and alterations in roof pitch*

*Fig 5: Accretions to the west*
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Fig 6: Elevation along the west

Fig 7: Eastern elevation showing hawker stands in the foreground

Fig 8: Looking down length of the eastern elevation at accretions
Fig 9: Condition of base of building

Fig 10: Showing sliding timber door, patched

Fig 11: Base of wall adjacent to door (above) with concrete plinth
4.2 Interior

As noted, the building has been sectioned off using gumpoles and cardboard packing cases into a number of different rooms, which are tenanted / occupied, along its length. The condition of the trusses is good, but the quality and the integrity of the internal space is severely compromised. In addition, there are numerous holes in the corrugated sheeting roof.
Fig 14: Trusses in roof space – note ad hoc additions in terms of space dividers

Fig 15: View along the length of the interior of the shed

Fig 16: Detail of room dividers inside the shed
5. Adjacent buildings and street context

As indicated, there is little in terms of context to support this building, situated as it is within the local taxi rank. There is no railway infrastructure such as lines, etc remaining. To the north of the site is the open rank with a number of face-brick buildings of recent construction housing small businesses. To the east is a building of relatively informal construction housing an eating house, and behind this a series of locally constructed hawkers stands in variant stages of disrepair. To the west of the building, and overshadowing it, is an elevated face-brick building of recent construction with a ‘Brown – Built’ type roofing, housing a wholesaler, a bakery, and a liquor outlet, as well as an undecipherable covered space. To the south of the building is wasteland and a small, double-pitched utilitarian building of recent construction which has limited relationship to the old goods shed.

*Fig 17: Informal structures immediately to the east of the building*

*Fig 18: Raised building adjacent to the taxi tank on the west*
6. Conclusion

6.1 Significance of railway goods shed

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This modest structure is the only surviving remnant of the railway which ran through Ixopo from the beginning of the 20th century until around three decades ago. It has low significance on all levels from a local, national and international perspective. However, it is in a compromised position physically, being located in the centre of what has been a taxi rank on the outskirts of Ixopo for at least the last two decades. Furthermore, although there have been few alterations over the years and the core of the building is reasonably intact, the condition of the material that constitute this structure is not very good.
It is in the opinion of the author that the structure contributes little to the streetscape or architectural fabric of the area, being subsumed as it is into the workings of the taxi rank. It is devoid of any historical or social context. Reuse is a possibility, given an appropriate and practical context. It is recommended that the building be offered to the Alan Paton railway for incorporation into their operations, and failing this, that it be removed and the roofing timbers be offered to Amafa aKwazulu-Natali for storage towards reuse.

7. References

Campbell, E.1951. The Birth and development of the Natal Railways. Pietermaritzburg, Shuter and Shooter


Ingram, J. 1895. The Colony of Natal- an official illustrated Handbook and Railway guide

Lloyds .1906. Twentieth century impressions of Natal: its people, commerce, industries, and resources. London: Lloyd's Greater Britain


Braby


PVS 115 2222/1909 Chief Veterinary Division Pmburg: Suggests fencing the Stuartstown Railway line from Donnybrook to Esperanza. Remarks AGR3107/1909. GW828/1909

MJPW 68 LW2954/1899 Thomas Foster: Deputation from Stuartstown to present resolution of public meeting that that district be connected by railway extension with the main line, such extension to touch as near the village as possible. Remarks CSO5434/1899 ECR1291/1899 LW2954A/1899.

MJPW 68 LW2954A/1899 Thomas Foster: Deputation to present a resolution passed at a public meeting held at Stuartstown on railway extension through the Ixopo Division. Remarks: placed with LW2954/1899.


MJPW 110 LW703/1904 Engineer - In - Chief, Maritzburg: Stuartstown Branch Railway - Mr. RM Archibald asks for information. Remarks ECR235/1904 placed with LW1475/1904.


MJPW 133 MJ3179/1906 John Stone Contractor Durban: is prepared to hire two - hundred persons for work on the Stuartstown Railway.