

# Bay West 'moves' local flora, fauna before construction

In what is described as an environmental first, the developers of the R2-billion Bay West Mall in Port Elizabeth engaged an environmental specialist to relocate a natural rocky outcrop and thousands of plants from the path of construction.



Independent environmental specialist Mark Marshall is at the helm of conserving the site's protected areas, of which almost 30% of the 330 hectare site has been set aside for this purpose. More than 4500 plants, noted as "species of special concern", have been carefully handpicked and preserved in an off-site nursery.

The search and rescue of sensitive flora and fauna on site - spiders, lizards and snakes included - took several months. No heavy machinery was allowed on site until Marshall was satisfied that the flora and fauna of special concern had been preserved or relocated to protected areas. When development of the mall is completed towards the end of 2014, he will oversee the relocation of the plants back to conservation areas on site.

## New outcrop

He also managed the mammoth task of relocating an entire natural rocky outcrop and - over and above the species preserved in the nursery - replanting 2500 individual plants at site of the relocation within a cordoned-off protected area.

"I had to do a lot of research before undertaking this project. I found out that no one [in South Africa] has relocated a natural rocky outcrop like this before," Marshall said.

The rocky outcrop had to be positioned exactly as it had been before, meaning 3 ton rocks were individually hauled to the new site and carefully placed back in the ground, as they had been before.

"We dug out large troughs where the ribs of the outcrop would be placed. The positioning was also in alignment with existing outcrops in the area, to improve rocky outcrop corridor continuity. This is a perfect example of how development can meet environmental needs."

Tons of topsoil from the original outcrop was relocated to the new site and hand-placed, while the various plant species

were positioned as they had been before - at the edges of the outcrop, in the middle and protected from the wind, in the shade of rocks or exposed to the sun.

The plants are being hand-watered to ensure their integration into the new environment. The outcrop was also positioned to allow the run-off of rainwater, so as not to flood and kill the plants, while some of the larger rocks were positioned with their original plants still intact.

## **Hand rearing plants**

The nursery was also a major feat, he added. "The nursery took three months to set up. We had to check the survival of each specimen. Some species like groundcovers had to go into beds, not bags, and all of the soil used was taken from site. The hardest to transplant was the Agathosma. We have to water and weed the plants regularly, because they are in a fake environment."

Seeds of the Agathosma - a "species of concern" - have also been collected for preservation. The new outcrop, along with the protected areas of the site, is under Marshall's care for the duration of the project.

"For developers to go out of their way to comply with the Department of Environmental Affairs' regulations is rare. They really put passion into it," he concluded.

Sherry Moorhouse of Moorhouse Consulting, appointed to ensure that environmental conditions are adhered to, said an Environmental Monitoring Committee had been set up and consisted of municipal officials, ward councillors, and Environmental Affairs officials. The committee was regularly updated on developments at the site.

## **Employment opportunities**

Bay West Mall - the first phase of the Bay West City project - is jointly owned and managed by Abacus Asset Management and Billion Group.

During the construction phase of the mall, more than 10 000 jobs will be created, 3 000 through direct employment and more than 7 000 indirect and induced jobs. About 1 500 permanent jobs will be created on completion of the Bay West Mall, which will have an 85 000m<sup>2</sup> gross leasable area.

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