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ITHEMBALABANTU CENTRE, SHAYAMOYA

KOKSTAD, SOUTHERN KZN

ARCHITECT: **EAST COAST ARCHITECTS**

BY **DEREK VAN HEERDEN**

APPOINTMENT

Having worked in Shayamoya between the year 2003 and 2006 on the well-published 7 Fountains Primary School, we were approached by Respond! Housing Association in 2007 to get involved in a centre in the same area that would deliver a range of social services to the surrounding community and include a place of worship for the local Roman Catholic parish. The initial approach was to facilitate the community buy-in and construction of a scheme designed in Dublin by a Guatemalan architect who had not visited the site. We examined the proposals and offered immediate criticism, such as of orientation issues

and the absence of space-making. We were then “commissioned” to compile a detailed report including suggestions of how the scheme could be ‘fixed’. We were called a few days later and asked to proceed with more “appropriate” proposals.

BACKGROUND

As a successful housing Association in Ireland, Respond! was seeking an international profile (before the 2006 [economic] crash) and were considering a project out of Ireland. Sites in South America and South Africa were discussed and a previous fraternal relationship between the Bishop of Kokstad and the CEO of Respond! led to Kokstad getting

the nod. They were certainly deserving – the shortage of housing in Kokstad is often a topic in the press and is cited as the reason why the local C Max prison is only half full; there aren’t enough houses for warders! The shortage is almost the exclusive result of insufficient bulk services: water, sanitation, electricity. These additional complexities and the ever-changing municipal leadership of Sisonke District led to delays with the housing project, whereas the project was conceived as a “sweetener” to establish Respond!’s credentials with locals – residents and government – and to mark time while the wheels of bureaucracy turned. The housing project has yet to start.



CONCEPT

Two adjacent sites were selected – a corner site on the southern edge of the township, with a poorly built portal frame and block structure that served as the parish church/nursery school, and an adjacent vacant municipal-owned site on the west

that was secured under a 20-year lease for the Training Centre. An existing municipal Community Hall was sited further to the west and these, together with a row of eight RDP houses, formed a township “block”. The church could seat 250 worshippers – the parish had grown and a

new church was proposed for a 500-seater, with an added 200 to cater for an overflow. There was much discussion about what social services were to be offered by the new centre. Our work over the previous four or five years had highlighted many of the social ills: unemployment,

- 1 3D view of whole complex
- 2 Site
- 3 Preliminary plan
- 4 Pedestrian street through the site
- 5 Sketch of church
- 6 Church – north elevation



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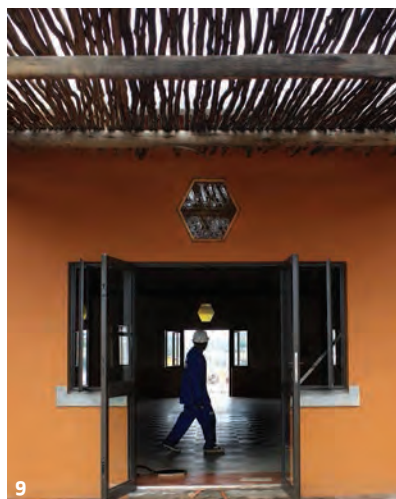


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migrancy, HIV, poverty, and so we knew where we were heading but decisions regarding specific requirements were made during construction and after completion. This led to a design philosophy of “hotelling” the centre – a series of standard, free-standing units that could be configured internally to suit the specific requirements.

DESIGN

The layout emerged quite naturally – the new church on the corner presenting an opportunity for something of a landmark, the Care Centre along the eastern boundary, the existing church converted to a permanent pre-school occupying a central, secure position and parking, and training centre on the municipal-owned site. An east-west public walking path connected the church, training centre and the existing municipal hall, and a north-south route connected the care centre buildings with a central/celebratory “square” at the intersection north of the church. Orientation and passive design were



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considered extremely important with all occupied spaces located on the north and walls and roofs heavily insulated – 50mm isoboard in the brickwork cavity and 100mm Thermguard (recycled newspaper) above ceilings. Unreliable and expensive municipal services led to intensive rainwater harvesting for cleansing, toilet flushing and gardening, and energy-saving lighting throughout. Solar thermal water heaters were used

7 Church interior
8 Training centre
9 Church – west elevation

for training centre showers. A training/catering kitchen was included and a public basket ball/action soccer pitch was built adjacent to the training centre.

CONCLUSION

The project spanned over the period of the economic meltdown in Ireland and Europe which meant that funding was always insecure, and the “on and off” nature of the project which “died” at least four times over the early years made any community consultation fraught. Due to extreme budget cuts towards the end, many of the “nice to haves” were never completed. The vagaries of NFP and NGO funding make a satisfactory process and result very difficult.

Client: Respond! Housing Association (Larer Sivile! A locally based NFP)
Contractor: Owen Peters Construction
Engineers: Arup – Craig Laing, Jack Emerton
Quantity Surveyor: Mike Royal QS
Programme: Begun December 2007, completed November 2011