

Biodiversity in golfing at Heron Banks

SASOLBURG. - Golfing has developed into an extremely popular sport world-wide, resulting in a growing demand for new facilities.

Within South Africa, this has positively benefited the economy. However, the downside is their negative impact on their surrounding environments. The negative environmental effect of golf courses has resulted in a demand for alternative low-impact courses. Such a course is being developed at Heron Banks Golf and River Estate in Vaalpark.

The site, situated along the Vaal River, was severely impacted through previous land usage with the natural hydrological flow being impacted by sand mining, Eucalyptus plantations (gum trees), dirt tracks and informal agriculture.

Part of the development plan was to assess and plot all natural areas that had survived the impacts and incorporate these into the design philosophy. The flood-plain, which had been cut off from its water source, would be rehabilitated to reinstate its wetland values.

These wetlands were designed and constructed to represent nature's dynamic adaptation through ecological succession, allowing the reconstructed environments and habitats to mature and evolve with time. What started out as a weed-infested, highly modified site now forms one of the few remaining natural biodiversity havens within the region.

The external biodiversity consultants Local Biodiversity Solutions were engaged to realign wetlands and redesign the structure of wetlands to accommodate the restoration of local biodiversity.

Comprehensive study

A comprehensive biodiversity study was conducted of the site and the surrounding areas, including stretches of the Vaal River. Based on the findings, habitats were designed and integrated into the golf course design, which would provide for lost micro-climates and habitats. The project incorporated over 2km of restored habitat. No foreign soil was brought onto site and the natural clay-deposits were used within the wetlands to help attenuate water.

On-site plant rescue operations were instated to ensure that no locally indigenous species were lost. The wetland habitats ranged from shallow mud flats for wading species, through to nesting embankments. Only vegetation found within the specific vegetation type in a five-kilometre radius were planted within the wetland and riparian system. The area's ecological function was reinstated, resulting in the return of high numbers of animal and bird life. The wetlands now provide habitats to a resident Goliath Heron, Spoonbills, numerous Cormorants, Ibises and an abundance of migrants from distant continents.

The ecological principles have been applied to the aesthetics of the entire site and, as a result, the would-be flowerbeds (verges and entrances) have been created to form part of the restored ecosystem functioning as ecological corridors - providing connections to the estates' natural habitats. These principles have also been incorporated into the management strategy for both the estate and golf course.

Stand prices start at R775 000 and premium quality building packages at R1 996 000, stand included. Bond registration and conveyancing fees are included in the price. All buildings packages have been architecturally designed, but buyers may use their own architects, in compliance with Heron Banks' architectural and landscape guidelines. The three-bedroom sectional title townhouses start at R1 820 000.

* For more information, contact Theo Steyn on 083 627 3215 or Robbie Lance on 083 637 9930 or visit www.heronbanks.co.za or www.sahletoons.co.za.

This is how the site looked after clear-up work started, but it was still severely impacted through previous land usage.



This is Heron Banks' site today after the first phases of ongoing restoration work.



New rates bill dire news for already struggling market

The new Municipal Property Rates Amendment Bill is dire news for an already struggling property market according to Seeff chairman Samuel Seeff.

"It is quite evident that the ramifications of the bill have not been thought through nor have the likely effects on the South African consumer been considered," comments Seeff.

"South Africa traditionally has a high ratio of renters, especially in recent years as access to credit remains restricted and most people are forced to rent," continues Seeff.

"Given the high demand for rental properties, rentals in many residential areas are already high.

"While the intention of the Bill is to penalise those in the privileged position of owning an additional property, it is likely to have the opposite effect with the already cash-strapped consumer having to foot the additional cost."

Seeff also believes that the proposed bill is likely to also severely impact already sluggish property sales, as he says: "Investors will think twice before acquiring additional properties, especially at this time of low buyer confidence. The acquisition of holiday or retirement homes in, for example, coastal and inland areas will also be negatively impacted should this Bill be promulgated."

The effect of the new Bill would be that owners of secondary properties would have to pay commercial rates - which are more than double that of residential rates - on their additional properties. The Bill would mean there is no incentive to purchase a second or even third home.

* For more information, contact Seeff national publicist Gina Meintjes on 021 481 1044 or 079 886 4802, email gina.meintjes@seeff.com.

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