

# AVIS DAM MANAGEMENT PLAN EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

## Greenspace and its objective

Greenspace is a voluntary non-profit, non-governmental organisation. Its main objective is to facilitate the development and maintenance of a system of urban open spaces which offers Windhoek residents and visitors diverse natural recreation opportunities and to preserve as far as possible, the aesthetically pleasing nature of the city.

The Avis dam is considered an important, and unique subsystem within that overall system of urban open spaces for Windhoek, because of its relatively undisturbed nature, and its proximity to the city. At present the dam and surrounding area house a representative example of 'Highland Savanna' flora and fauna, and provide valuable habitat for birds, mammals and other species. The area's relatively natural state provides a valued piece of nature-in-the-city for the hundreds of people who visit it each week.

## History, and legal status of the Avis dam

The dam itself was constructed in the South African colonial period and completed by the then SWA Administration for the Windhoek Municipality in 1933. The area became a park in 1939 and this status remained unchanged for almost 40 years. In 1980 the area was set aside as a temporary park in terms of sections 177 and 231 of the Municipal Ordinance 13 of 1963. Thereafter, the Parks, Recreation Grounds and Camping Site regulations of 1977 were made applicable to the area, with the exception that dogs were not restricted. Despite this past temporary legal status as a park, the area is currently zoned "undetermined" in the town planning scheme, which means that it can be used by the Municipality for any purpose it deems fit.

In 1997, the Windhoek City Council leased the area to Greenspace for one year; this period was subsequently extended in 1998 to 2030. The lease agreement excludes Erf 2882 [4 2150 hectare], and also allows the Municipality to take back any other part of the lease area it wishes for any purpose.

The area's strategic location at the edge of Windhoek, next to the only eastern route into the city via the international airport on the Trans-Kalahari Highway from Botswana and South Africa, together with its natural beauty, have made it a frequent target for commercial development, and commercial eco-tourism.

## Current commercial development proposals at the dam

Since the late 1980s, several proposals have been made to the Windhoek Municipality for commercial development near the Avis dam area, and even within it, on Erf 2882. Public concern in response to development proposals for erf 2882 prompted the establishment of Greenspace/Friends of Avis in 1994.

Since 2006, Erf 2882, and the area between the dam wall and the riding school have again been a focus of interest for commercial developers. Greenspace is currently a member of the Avis Development Committee, initiated by the City of Windhoek [CoW] to draw up development proposals for these two areas. Though these plans were submitted to the CoW in 2006, they were never tabled at a Council meeting. It also seems possible that CoW might remove erf 2882 from the Avis Committee's carefully-considered development proposals, and sell the erf privately for commercial development.

## Greenspace's development policy

Greenspace is not opposed in principle to development, commercial or otherwise, at or near the Avis dam. It is concerned that any development should not lessen, or damage, or destroy, those very qualities which set the Avis dam area aside from its urban environment, and which constitute its enduring appeal through seasons, and years.

The key attraction of the Avis dam is that it is, on balance, natural, unspoilt, unbuilt and quiet; as well as free, accessible and unrestricted.

### ***Commercial development should be on the periphery of the dam area, not in it***

Greenspace subscribes to the principle that any commercial development should be outside and adjacent to the lease area, with the exception of non-infrastructure development, such as visits led by tourist guides. Erf 2882 is considered a visual, and integral part of the Avis dam area's ambience, even if it is currently excluded from it on legal grounds. Greenspace thus argues that it should not be urbanized or commercialized.

Any type of peripheral commercial development should relate to the character of the dam: this would include recreation and eco-tourism.

### ***Development within the dam area***

- Within the lease area, a strict carry in – carry out policy applies
- All vehicles are restricted to parking areas.
- No permanent fixtures may be built within the lease area. Temporary fixtures should be discreetly located to ensure eco-blending.
- There should be no advertisements within the lease area
- Recreational pursuits should not make use of motors, or music radios.

### **Public participation in the area's management**

Greenspace was formed through a public initiative concerned about inappropriate commercial development at the dam, and has since then consistently pursued a policy of public consultation on, and supported research into, the dam's management. Any member of the public is welcome to attend the Friends of Avis Dam monthly meetings, and its annual general meeting. Greenspace is also a member of the Avis Development Area committee, which was established in 2004 by the City Council to obtain stakeholder input on development at or near the dam.

☺ *Greenspace is therefore confident that the principles which underpin this development plan, are a fair reflection of public opinion.*

### **Current management strategies**

The main objective of the management plan is to preserve and manage the Avis dam basin as an almost undisturbed natural open space - not a city park - and as a distinctive yet integral part of Windhoek's future urban open space system. It thus aims for the best possible reconciliation between recreation and protection of the natural environment without changing the area's character.

The current key issues which the management plan addresses are (1) Lease area boundary and zoning (2) Internal use zoning (3) Access (4) Security, and (5) Rehabilitation.

#### ***1. Definition of boundary***

The boundaries were defined in a plan attached to the original lease agreement. Greenspace should negotiate their finalization with CoW, including the re-incorporation of erf 2882 into the lease area. The rezoning of the lease area from "undetermined" to public open space should also be negotiated with CoW.

#### ***2. Internal use***

In principle, Greenspace supports multiple uses of the dam area [walking, hiking, dog-walking, horse-riding, cycling, fishing, birdwatching, non-motorised water sport, and fishing as examples], while trying to avoid imposing too many rules, regulations and restrictions on users. The aim is to foster instead, reciprocal consideration between human users, and between human and non-human users of the dam. This is to be achieved variously through ongoing user education via awareness-raising flyers, discussions with representatives of user groups, and the on-site presence of the eco-officer .

### **3. Access**

Entrances are currently restricted to (a) two formal entrances, and parking areas, for vehicles at the floodplain and dam-wall, and (b) multiple on-foot entrances. It may become necessary in the near future to exercise access control at the entrance next to the Scout house. Unauthorised vehicles of any kind are prohibited in the entire Avis dam area, except at parking sites.

If sponsorship can be obtained, a wheelchair path will be constructed from the sluice gate parking area to give access to the dam wall.

### **4. Security**

Greenspace is keenly concerned about security at the dam, and the management plan proposes various strategies to achieve a crime-free environment at the dam. Security guards provided by a reputable security firm are on duty each day of the week at the two parking areas, and also at designated points within the dam area along the main walking routes. They are in radio contact with each other, and have a panic button connection to ProForce as well. Individuals may also contact the City Police on tel 302302. Even so, Greenspace regrets that it cannot accept responsibility for individual safety.

### **5. Rehabilitation**

Rehabilitation plans include rationalization and rehabilitation of selected pathways, as well as vegetation management. Adoption of an entirely purist approach to alien vegetation is not recommended. Rather the approach is to remove only those species which definitely encroach upon habitat and prevent establishment of indigenous vegetation. Aliens which should be considered for eradication are cacti, prosopis, nicotiana. Re-introduction of *Aloe* species should be considered.

## **Future management options**

### ***On-site presence***

The management plan provides for the appointment of people such as volunteers and community game guards to assist with on-site management, and monitoring of the well-being of the dam and its human and non-human users. An eco-officer has been appointed on a part-time contract basis under this section of the management plan.

### ***Management body***

Priority should be given to the establishment of the Greenspace Avis Dam Nature Reserve Management Board of Trustees contemplated in the management plan. Its members should represent the Municipality, the lessee, any approved commercial developer/s, the trust fund manager, and user groups. Their term of office, and powers would be as set out in a formal constitution. Its remit would be the sensitive management of this area through the remaining years of the lease agreement [till 2030] and beyond.