

CONTEXT STUDY



Alexandra History and Planning

Alexandra was established in 1912, before the 1913 Land Act, and thus was one of the few areas where black people could own land. It originally belonged to a farmer who named it after his wife.

Plans and Struggle

In 1916 when there were about 30,000 people in Alexandra, market garden plots with brick houses were a frequent sight on properties that sloped down to the Jukskei River.

In the late forties, after the Second World War, shack living began. Under apartheid, the main



Figure 28
Alexandra during the “struggle” years.
(Source - ARP web site).

strategies were the reduction of population growth and the control of movement. Since Alexandra was a valuable labour pool to serve Johannesburg’s northern suburbs it was never the intention to remove it completely.

During the forties and the fifties the residents of Alexandra were actively involved in the liberation struggle. A few significant events were the 1942 bus boycott, the 1956 women’s marches against the extension of the pass law, and in 1957 again, a bus boycott against price increase.

In the sixties, the idea of a “hostels city” with no families was mooted, but after establishing three of them the plans were shelved.

In 198, a Master Plan was prepared. The plan, described Alexandra as a “Garden City”, divided into suburbs, business areas, light industry, a sport complex and parks. Since it required a huge demolition of houses, the plan was not implemented.

In February 1986, the “Alexandra six day” violent uprising occurred, it was mainly to reject the Black Local Authorities and force the resignation of the councillors.

The period from 1991 to 1992, was one of political turmoil in which people died or were injured as

a result of local struggles in the Township.

This period was followed by widespread peace initiatives, which finally led to the first democratic election held on April 17, 1994, in which Nelson Mandela became the first democratically elected black president of South Africa. (Source: ARP web site: About Alexandra, History of Alexandra)

Demographic characteristics

Over 4.6km long and 3km wide, it is officially estimated 360,000 people while unofficial estimation rise to 500,000 people. Divided to a basic grid of 300m long and 100m wide, the Township consist of approximately 4,060 formal houses and 34,000 shacks (ARP summit review, 2004).

employment, an average income of R200-R1500 amongst those who do work, over 70% of unskilled residence, more than 93% of household heads with only matric or below, the investment in social infrastructure is crucial.

Since its establishment, Alexandra is a multi culture society which reflects all local tribes and languages, with growing international squatters from Swaziland, Lesotho, Mozambique, Zimbabwe and so on, who find a fertile ground for easy accommodation close to Johannesburg.

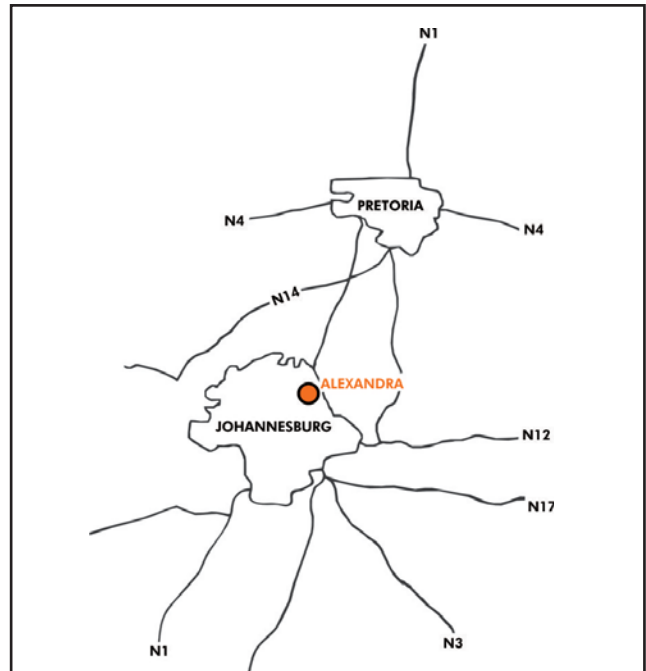


Figure 29
Central Gauteng Province.

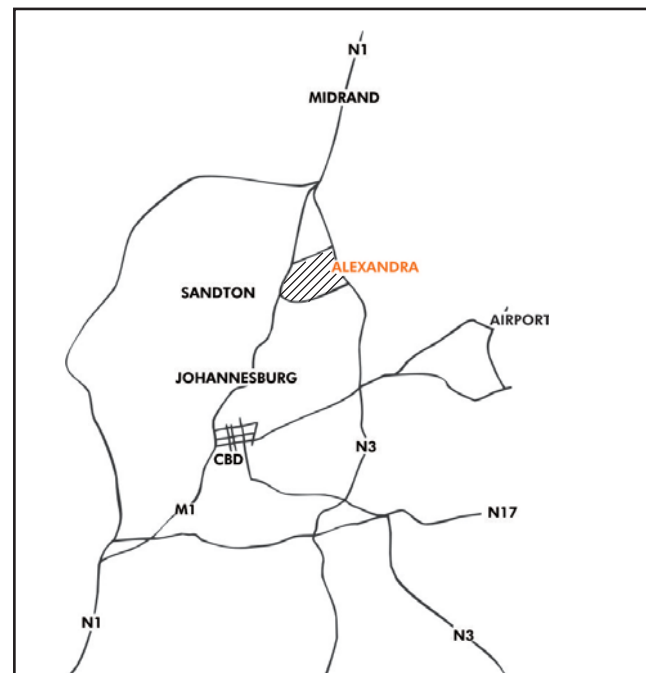


Figure 30
Johannesburg area. Alexandra is based on the northern side, well connected and accessible.

First, the struggle and distrust, which became part of people's daily lives, must be converted into a feeling of trust, where public spaces are visible and well accessible (despite security constrains).

Second, the lack of control over one's own life should be a basis for community participation in the design process, as well as the daily running of the Centre. Third, the high rates of unemployment and poverty should be recognised in a concept that trains people and creates economic conditions for their development.



Figure 32
Aerial topographical map.

Location

Based in the northern part of Johannesburg, Alexandra is a central location for its people who work at surrounding neighbourhoods and for its main vehicular routes.

Bordered by the M1 highway in the west, N3 highway from the east, Marlboro Drive to the north and London Road to the south, the Township is well connected and accessible to its surroundings.

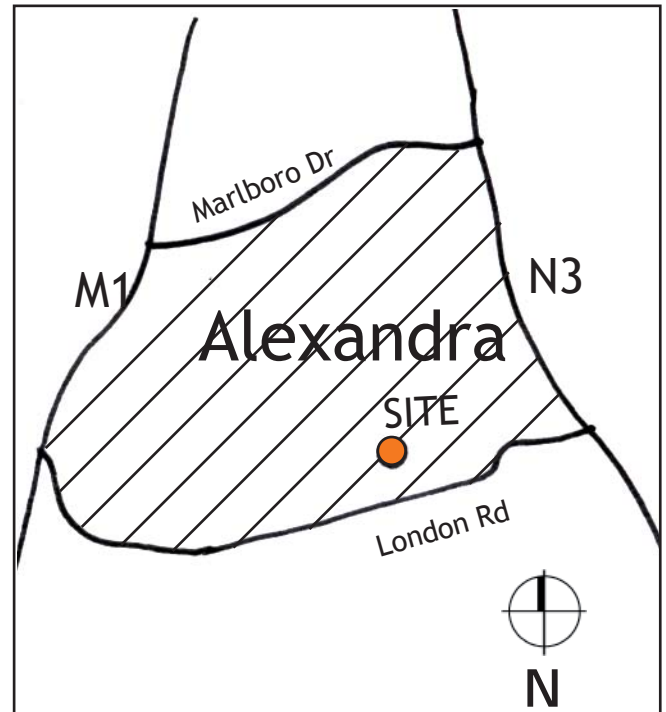


Figure 31
Alexandra's layout.
A Map of Alexandra showing its central and accessible location.

Alexandra Renewal Project (ARP)

The ARP is an urban renewal project which aims to fundamentally upgrade living conditions and human development potential within Alexandra. Established in March 2001, the seven-year project, budgeted at R1.3 billion, is now midway through its implementation.

The project is a joint venture between National, Provincial and Local Government. Divided into four clusters, it deals with Economic Development, Social Development, Physical Development and Precincts.

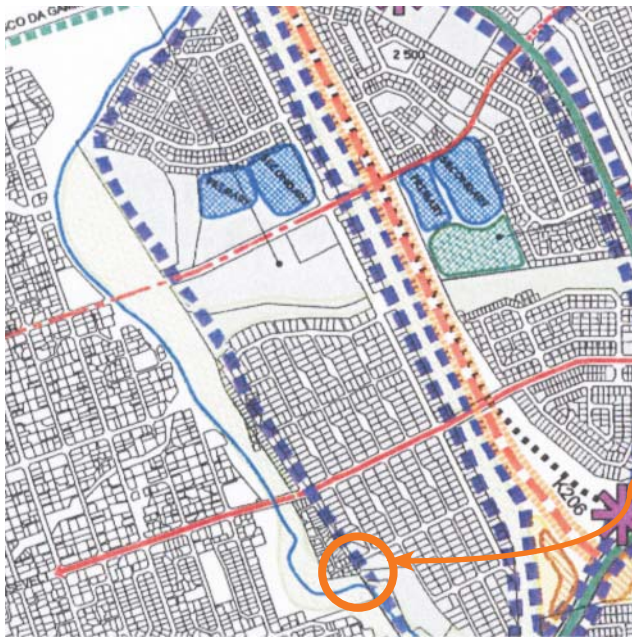


Figure 34
East Bank Precinct Housing and green Areas Development as planned by the ARP. Intensive cleaning and development of the Jukskei River. Medium/high density housing (2-4 storeys).

Amongst the hundreds of projects which the ARP runs, are: the upgrading of London Road and Roosevelt Street to make a better connection between the M1 Highway and the N3 Highway and thus a better connection between Old Alexandra and East Bank; a residential and commercial development of East Bank with its new K 206 road as a high density (3-4 storeys) residential area and a development of the Jukskei River as a green strip of outdoor activities.

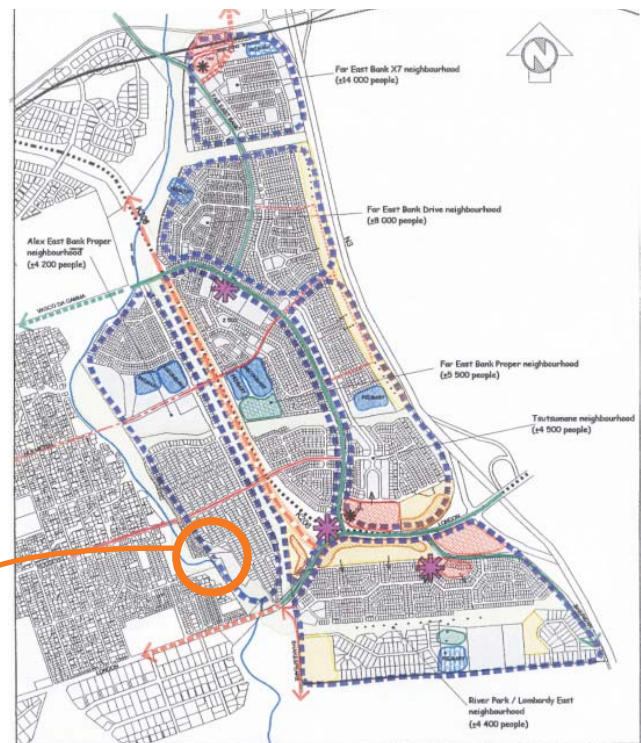


Figure 33
East Bank's Development map as planned by the ARP. London Rd. and Roosevelt St. connect the two banks. Community nodes are located in main junctions. The K206 Road creates a new spine for the East Bank.

Site Documentation

Location - Alexandra, Johannesburg

Domain - Alexandra East Bank

Plot - 1. Vacant part of TB settlement (informal) precinct

2. Vacant municipal area

Street - Corner of Springbok and Impala

Surface - 2820 m²

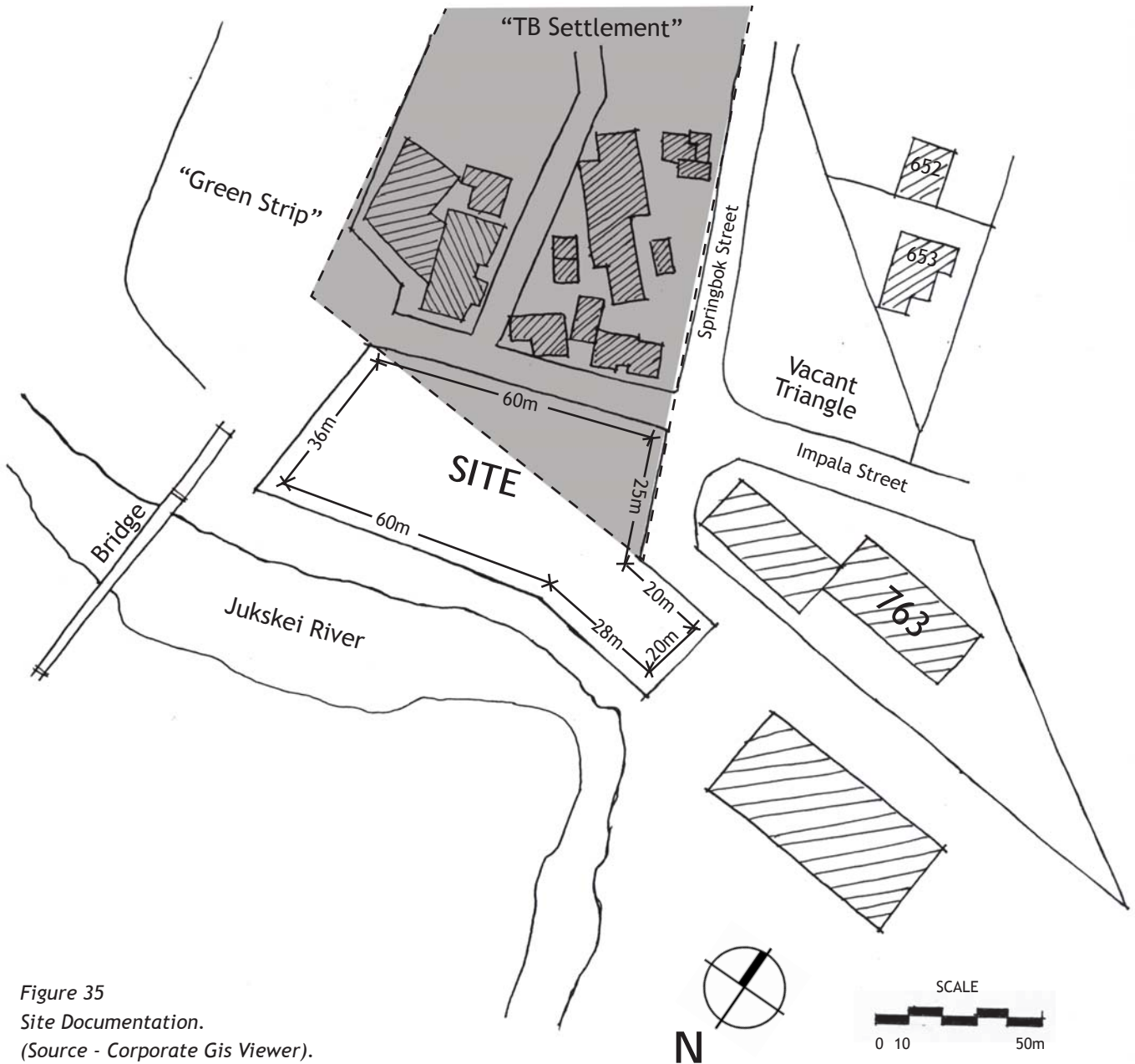


Figure 35
 Site Documentation.
 (Source - Corporate Gis Viewer).

Site Location and Characteristics

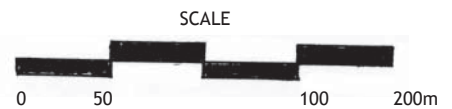


Figure 36
Regional air photo - Alexandria.

Regional Analysis

Adjacent to the East Bank Community Centre (which includes a community hall, clinic, electricity pay point, swimming pool and sport fields), the Art Centre will expand the services offered by the complex into which it will be incorporated, thus creating a unique focal point for local art.

Located between Old Alexandra, with its unique cultural texture and the new East Bank, currently undergoing advanced urban development of trade and housing, the complex has exceptional potential concerning the integration of the two neighbourhoods, varied services to needs of different population groups and a focus and informal meeting point for assorted population. The centre is also an integral part of the new environmental development strip near the Jukskei River, which includes various facilities for formal and informal outdoor communal activities. Combined with the pedestrian bridge (linking the river banks for pedestrian movement), the Centre thus lies in the heart of an active and vibrant area with potential for a large variety of events.



Figure 37
Functional regional map.
The Site in relation to regional functions and characteristics.

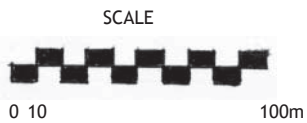


Figure 38
 Site Location.
 (Source - Corporate gis Viewer).

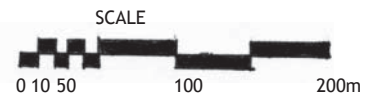
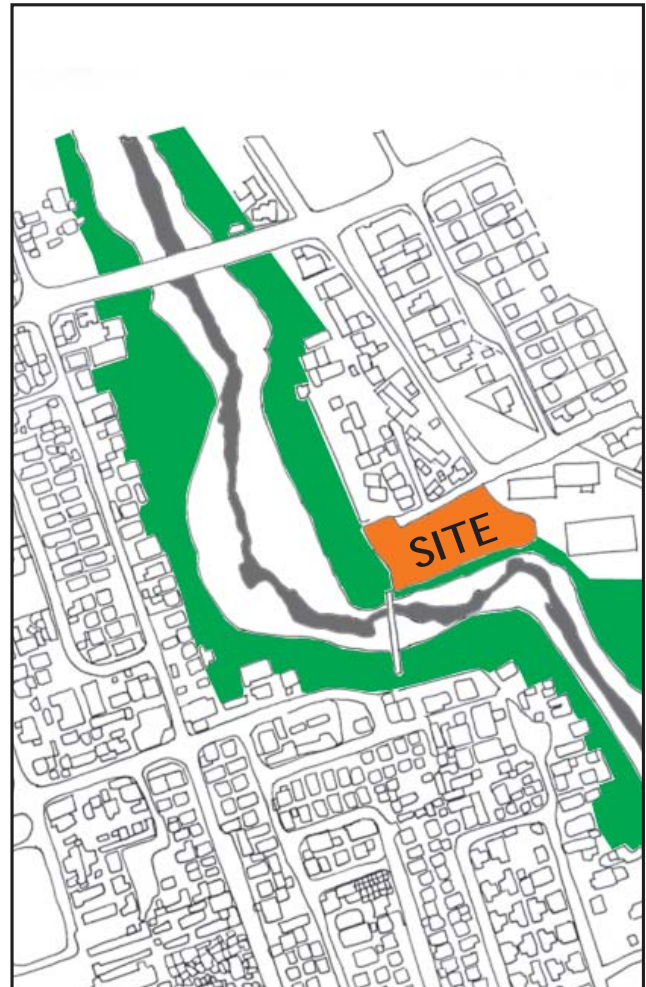


Figure 39
 The green strip development alongside the Jukskei River.

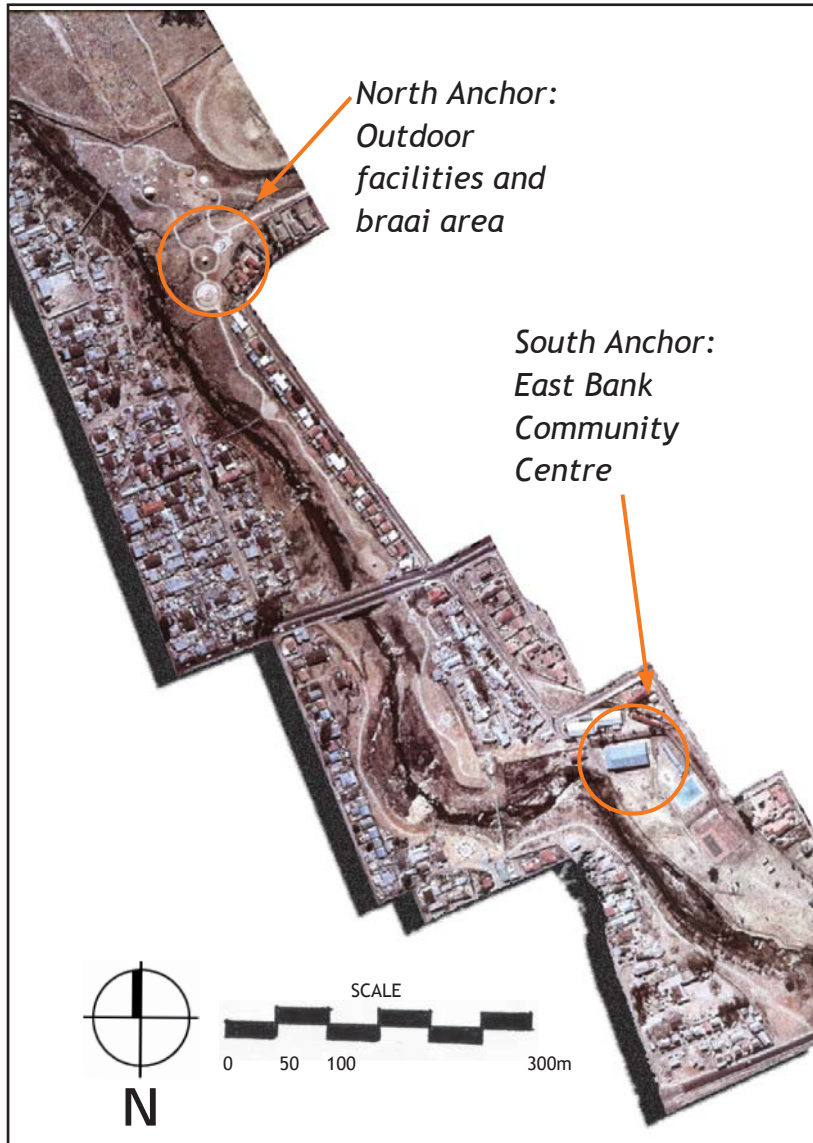


Figure 40
The Jukskei River corridor, with its two anchors. The river's edge in the Eastern side is wider (20-30m) and enables a main pedestrian path and space for outdoor activities.

Moreover, the Centre is easily accessible to passengers. It is situated between London Road, a central transportation axis which is destined to serve as a commercial hub from the south and Roosevelt Street, which is also a major route connecting neighbourhoods, in addition to being a street for informal trade from the north.

The Centre is thus accessible to the public, both in vehicles and on foot.

Finally, as it is close to three primary schools from as the southwest and two high schools in East Bank - the Centre can naturally be used for learners' after school activities.

Housing



Figure 42



Figure 43



Figure 44

Old Brick Houses

- Built since the establishment of Alexandra
- Spread all over Old Alexandra
- Originally belong to the owner
- Monthly rental between R1 - R50

Shacks

- Built mainly from the late forties
- Placed into vacant spaces
- Reflect the ongoing legal/illegal immigration
- No rental payment

East Bank Houses

- Built in the new development of East Bank
- Owned by local residents
- Monthly rental between R100 -R300
- Relatively high socio-economic level

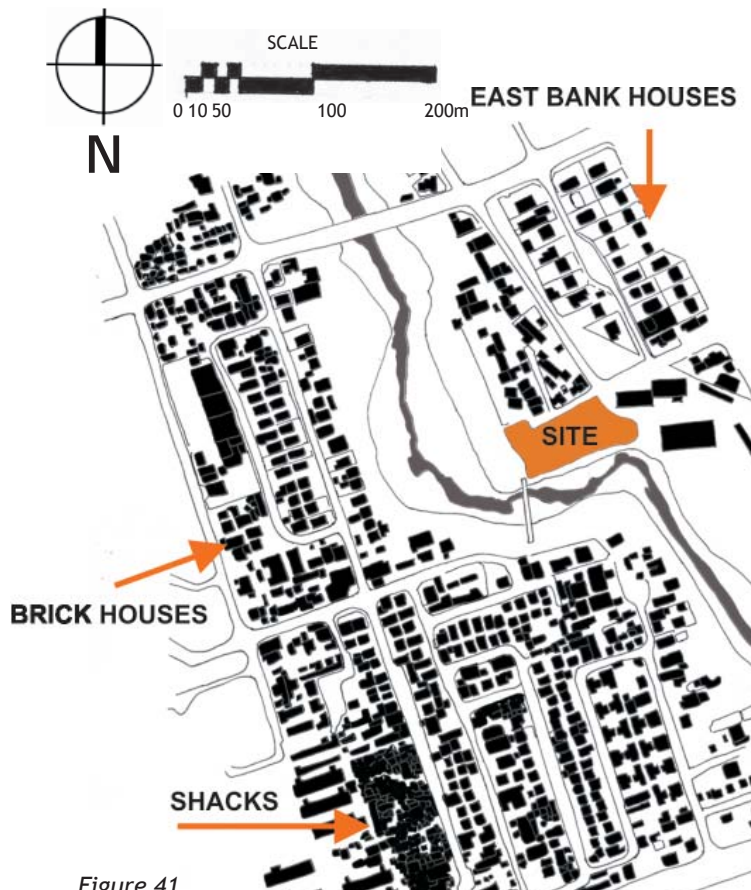


Figure 41

Housing around the site.

Regional grid and housing types within the area.

The site is located within a mixture of classes and cultures. Thus, the Centre should provide different functions and mainly different spaces, which can be relevant for each of the surrounding populations. Training facilities should also be flexible, to adapt to different levels of skilled (East Bank) / non skilled (Old Alexandra) people.

As it aims to strengthen the existing East Bank Community Centre, the Art Centre should be closely linked to it. In addition, while locals in a focal crossroad, it should be accessible from all entrances. The “urban entrance” is defined as the main entrance of the Centre because of its vehicular access and the pedestrian movement to the East Bank Community Centre. Still, its centrality requires a multi access approach where people can naturally move into the centre.

Movement System

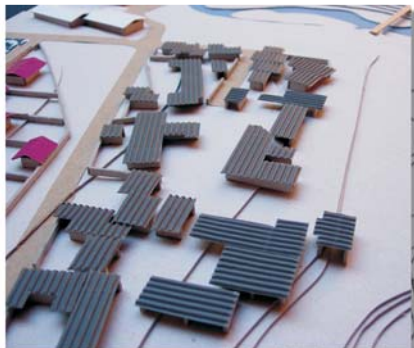


Figure 45
The natural entrance links the green strip into the site.

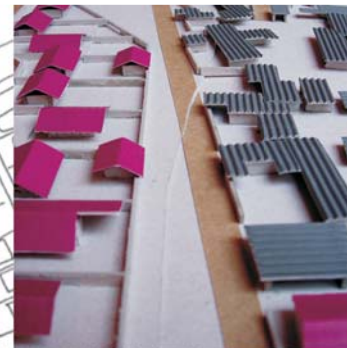


Figure 46
The urban entrance links the main Roosevelt Street to the site.

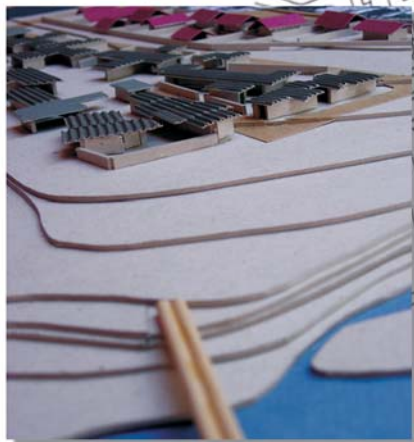


Figure 47
The bridge. Main movement from old Alexandra to East Bank (workers, students).

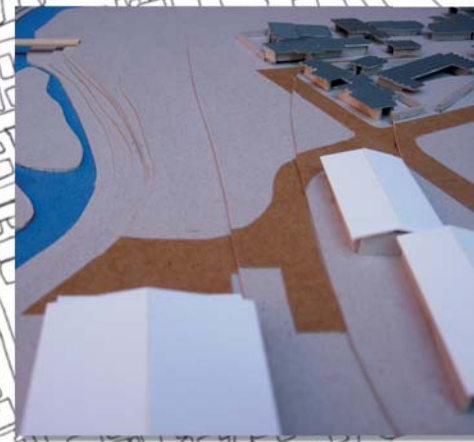


Figure 48
Eastbank Community halls.
Internal Connecting with the site.

East Bank Community Centre

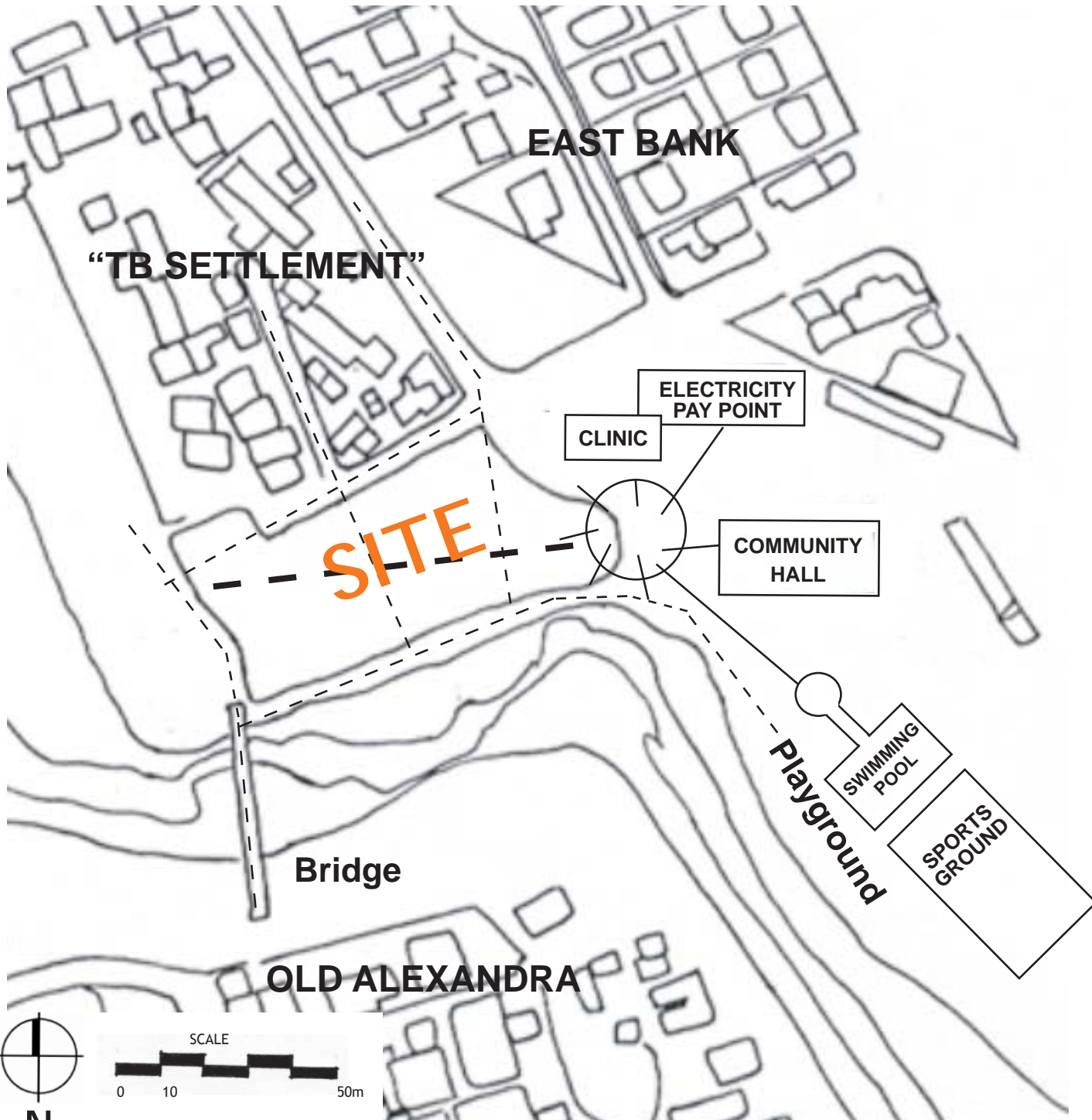


Figure 49
East Bank community centre.

The Municipality runs East Bank Community Centre.

With the exception of the swimming pool, which serves the entire Alexandra community, this complex only serves the surrounding neighbourhoods. It includes a sports field, multi purpose hall, clinic and electricity pay point. It is located on the Jukskei River East Bank, close to the pedestrian bridge and Roosevelt Street.

According to the graphs showing the use of the Community Centre one may conclude as follows:

1. The Community Hall (800m²) is used mainly for large functions. Thus, a medium sized hall (100m²-120m²) in the Art Centre would be suitable for activities of smaller groups (10-15 persons) in order to respond to various community needs, as part of the operational concept.
2. The open space between the Community Hall and the new Centre, together with the waiting area of the East Bank Clinic, could be used as a semi shaded gathering point, outdoor play ground (basketball, soccer) and as an exhibition

area. This node would be a connecting hinge between the existing Centre and the new Art Centre.

3. Security operation - a front main guardroom will be located near the Art Centre entrance. This location has excellent control over the access to East Bank Community Centre and the new Art Centre. It will also make efficient use of the existing two guards who now stand in front of the Clinic and the Community Hall.



Figure 50
East Bank clinic seen from the site.

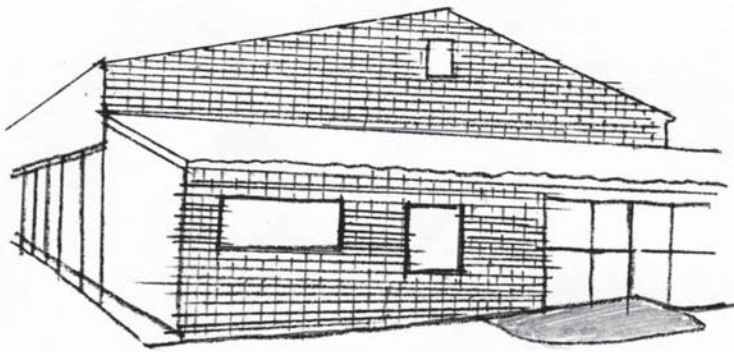


Figure 54
Community Hall.
 The main hall operates mainly on weekends for weddings, funerals, functions, etc. During the week it is used as a dancing studio and for other community activities.

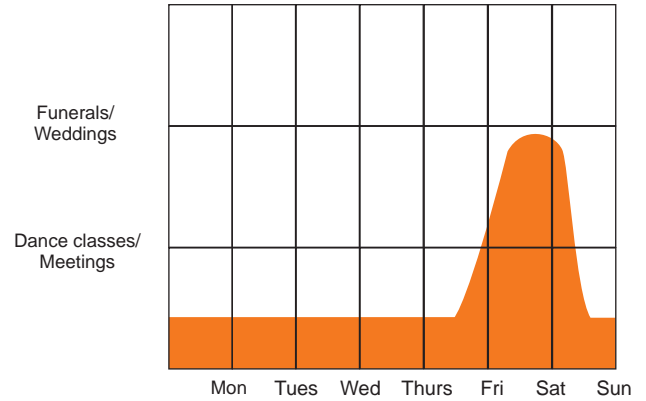


Figure 52
Community hall graph.
 Weekly uses of the community hall.



Figure 51
The swimming pool.
 The swimming pool (adult and children) operates during the summer season for approximately six months, from October until March. It serves mainly youth from all over Alexandra who come mainly after school ends, and also younger children who come during the morning.

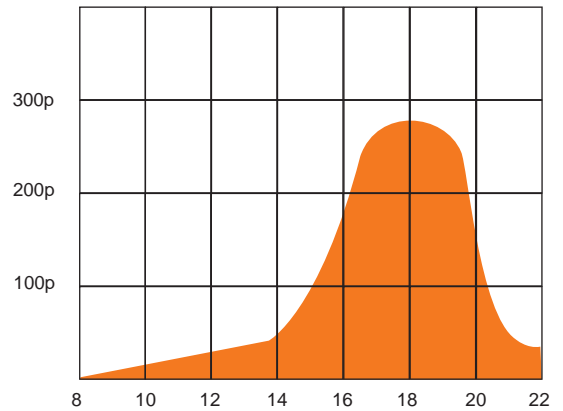


Figure 53
Swimming pool - daily use by hours
 8000-10 000 people per month (October - April).

The Site



Figure 55
The site. A view of the site from the West Bank of the Jukskei River. To the south, the site faces the river. From the west, the connection with the bridge.



Figure 56
*The green strip.
 The green strip north to the site.*



Figure 57
*Viewpoint.
 A view to the western edge of the site.
 Two existing trees mark the end of the ramp and the main view point from the site to Old Alexandra and the green strips playground.*



Figure 58
Pedestrian bridge.
The pedestrian bridge over the south edge of the site.

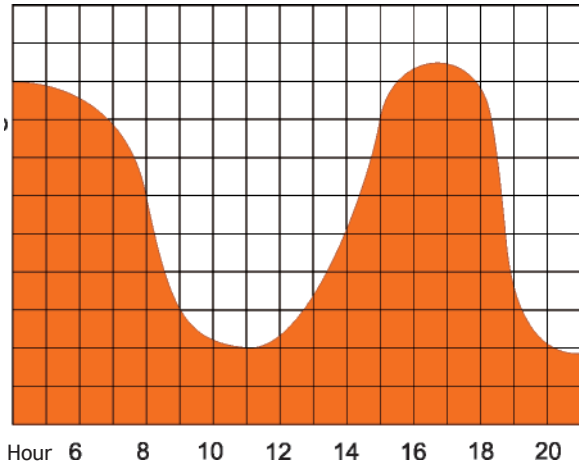


Figure 59
Pedestrian bridge graph.
Daily pedestrian movement over the bridge.
Approximately 1200 - 1500 per day.

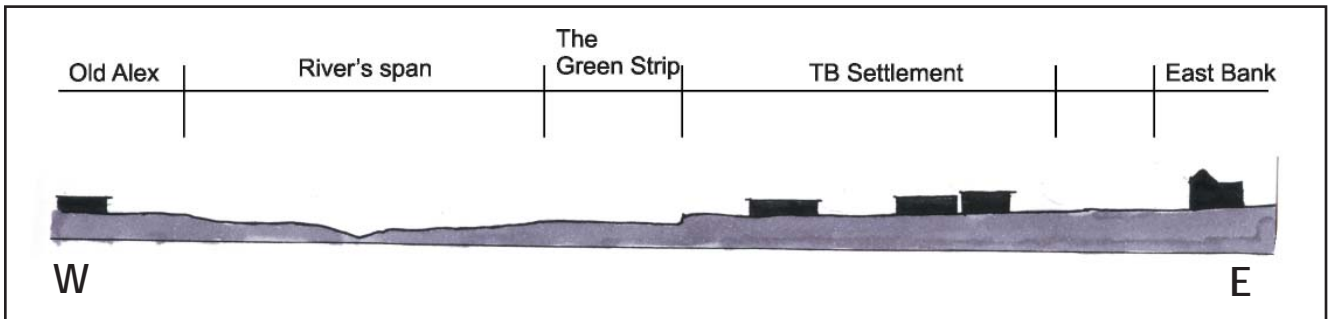


Figure 60
Site Section (w-e).
Typical section through the neighbourhood.

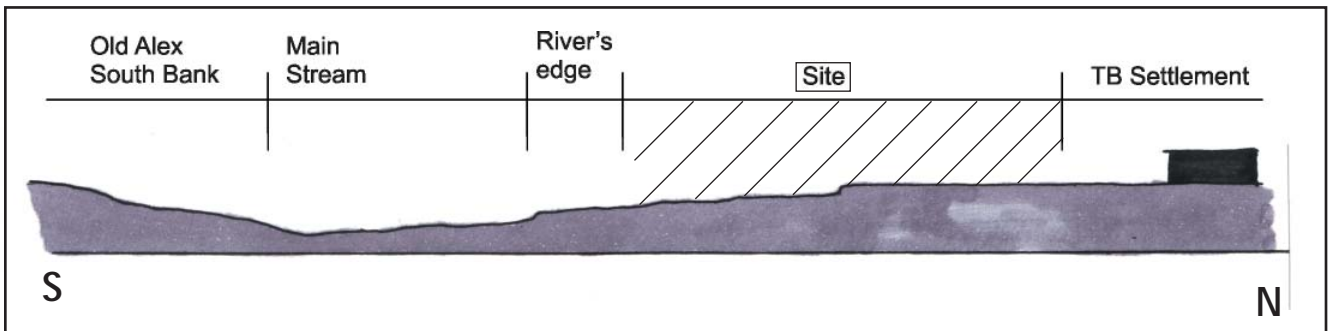


Figure 61
Site section (s-n)
Section through the site.

Local children's games on the site and its surrounding houses. The internal street of "TB settlement" is used as a local and secure open space for the children. The design aims to move the activities into the main square by providing different kinds of activities for children.



Figure 62
Local games.
Children play in the street. The house walls define a secure edge and form an intimate area for these activities.

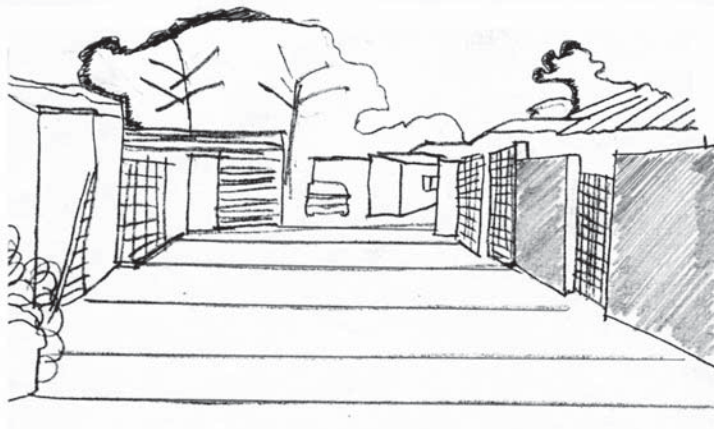


Figure 63
Internal street,
The internal street in "TB Settlement".



Figure 64
Marabaraba.
A concrete block approx. 80x80x80cm serves as a platform to play "Marabaraba".

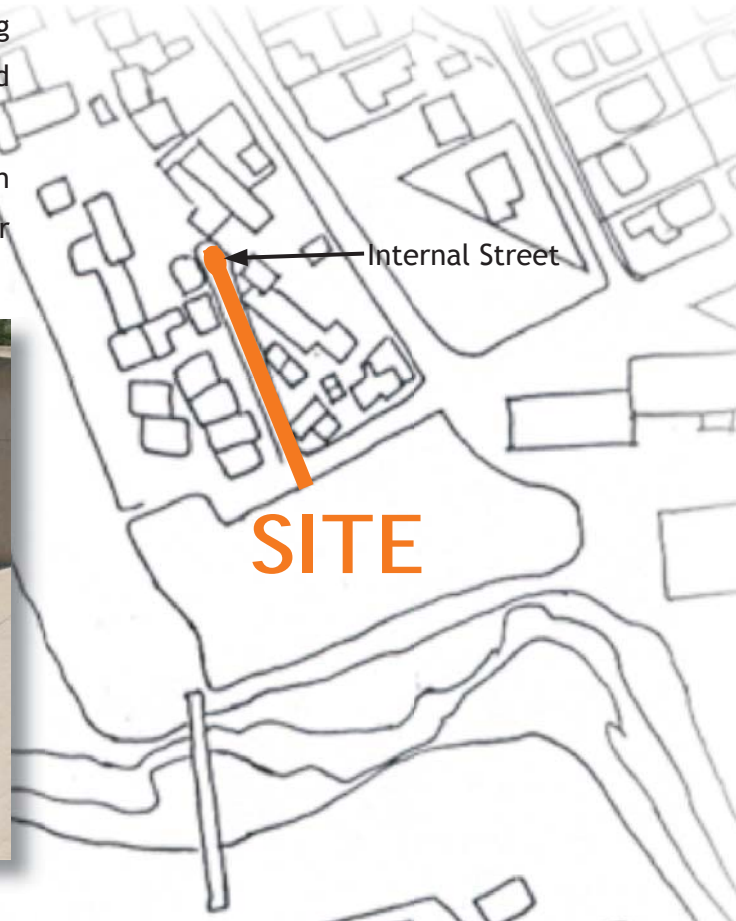




Figure 65
Saturday prayers.
Saturday prayers at the vacant “triangle”. The Triangle is used as a temporary open space church. That vacant space could be useful for outdoor activities under a simple roof. The area will be a transportation node where people come to the centre and wait to be picked up.



Figure 66
Taxi rank.
The main taxi rank in the corner of Twentieth and Rooth St. 200m from the site. It operates as a pick up point to Johannesburg CBD and its suburbs. It is still a reasonable distance for people to get to the centre.

The Jukskei River

The River flows through Johannesburg and continues through Alexandra until finally spilling into the Hartbeespoort Dam.

Water pollution - In the last decade, many efforts were made in order to remove tons of solid waste from the river and to educate the community for more environmental awareness.

The river's major pollution is caused by sewage within the Johannesburg precinct and by the two tributaries spilling into the river from Old Alexandra area (further down the river). This polluted water caused a high level of pollution within the Hardbetspoordam.



Figure 67
Until 2002, the 1:50y flood line was the official measurement for the building line. Since 2002, it has changed to the 1:100y flood line. As can be seen in the diagram, the 1:100y flood line covers many residential areas.
(Source - ARP Infrastructure)



Figure 68
Gabions works at the Jukskei River. About 2/3 of the stabilizing work in the river is already completed. The next phase of implementation includes the area which is bordering with the site.
(Source- ARP infrastructure)

Figure 69
The Jukskei river today. A view of the bridge and Old Alexandra can be seen.



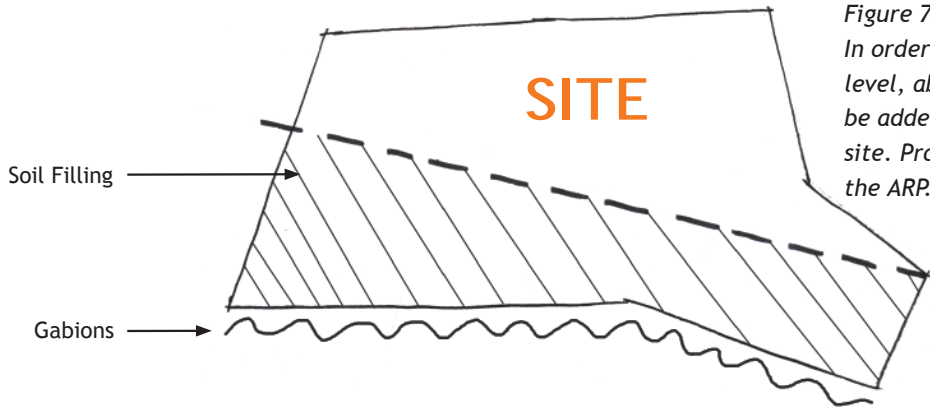


Figure 70
In order to keep the site on the same height level, above the flood line, soil needs to be added at the lower southern part of the site. Proposed Gabions works to be made by the ARP.

Air pollution - A huge amount of vehicles pollution from the Johannesburg area is swept down the Jukskei River's valley because of its topographic shape. Together with coal fuel used by the people to cook and heat, the outcome is a cloud of pollution over Alexandra. In order to cope with this phenomenon, the ARP department tries to educate the community to use electricity and gas equipment, rather than coal. The air pollution monitoring beam, located on the East Bank clinic's roof is used to measure pollution levels in the valley.



Figure 72
Ablution unit.
Local abluition unit supplied by the authorities.

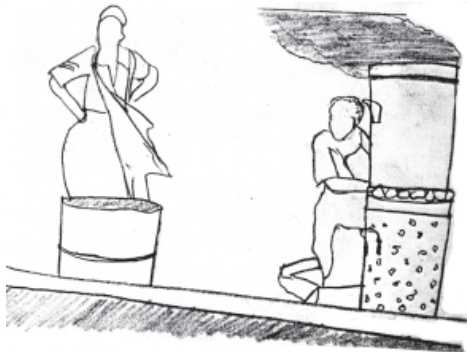


Figure 71
Coal usage.
Along Alexandra's streets - using coal for cooking meals/snacks.

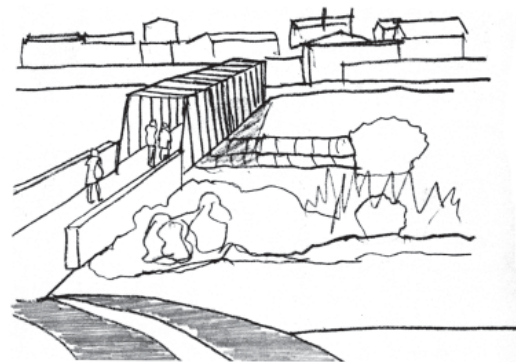


Figure 73
The bridge
The pedestrian bridge towards Old Alexandra.

Scrap Metal and Street Art

Scrap metal is part of every courtyard. Whether it is to fix the roof, or support the wall, or to express art abilities, it is a crucial part of everyday life.



Figure 74
Backyard of a brick house in old Alexandra. Iron sheets for the roof, tyres to hold it and a stock of materials in the backyard.



Figure 75
Local road sign to inform the people of a permanent improvised garage.



Figure 76
Scrap metal sculpture on the green strip alongside Jukskei River.



Figure 77
Local locksmith workshop near the site.

In order to encourage local small businesses, the ARP established a programme, which enables car mechanics to rent a well equipped garage on an hourly basis, with minimal rental costs. When a client arrives, the mechanic can take the vehicle to the garage while he pays only for the time using the place. This concept can be implemented in other sectors as well.



Figure 78
A local craftsman in Old Alexandria. Most of the arts and crafts activities happen in the streets.
(Source - ARP website).



Figure 79
Pedestrian community. Students leaving East Bank High School on their way home. An average walk of 20 - 50 meters.

Street Graffiti

Every wall is a potential screen for paintings. It may be the local way to hide and blur the security bars and to express the people's feelings.



Figure 80
Street graffiti.

Security Concept

The Centre is supposed to serve the community as a gathering area for art activities as well as other activities. In order to transmit a new message of openness and trust amongst the people, it should follow a few stages of rehabilitation.

The rehabilitation process relies on a symbiotic relationship between the population and the

authorities, in order to establish a place, which gives the people a feeling of belonging and responsibility, rather than isolated centres responding only to security constraints.

The principle can be summarized as such:

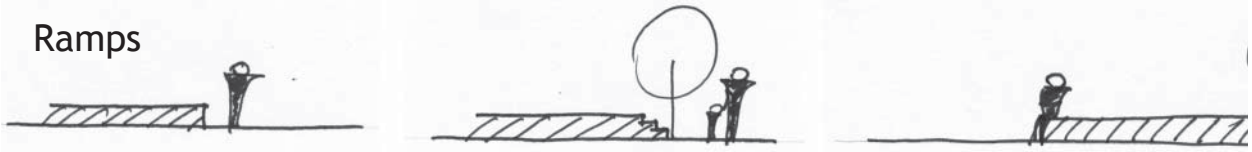
Encourage trust, as if there is no crime.

Fight crime, as if there is no trust.

Architectural principles of trust:

1. Defining the public areas by soft edges such as ramps/steers/benches/trees and other street furniture instead of walls.

Ramps

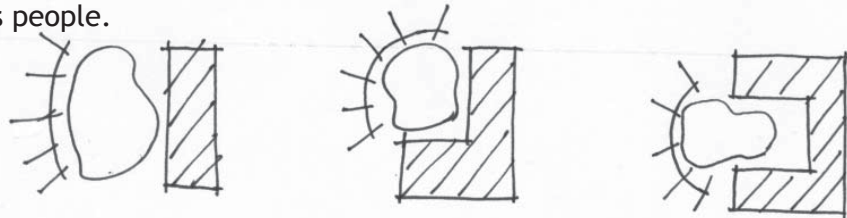


2. Using transparent glass for the front of the building in order to make their activities visible to the public.

3. Gradual approach to the centre, from the public (street), through the semi-public (square) till the private (workshop), creates an openness feeling on the one hand and responds to security needs on the other hand.

4. Creating an understandable plan, avoiding hidden spaces, presenting its activities to the public and visibly inviting its people.

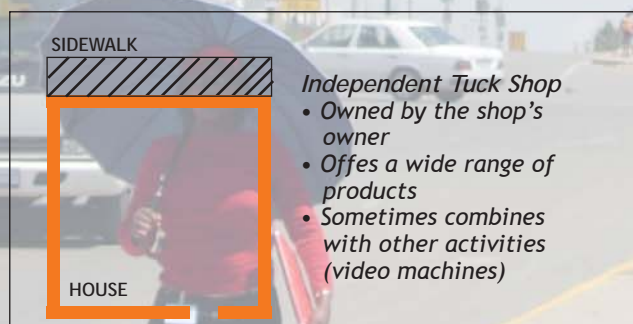
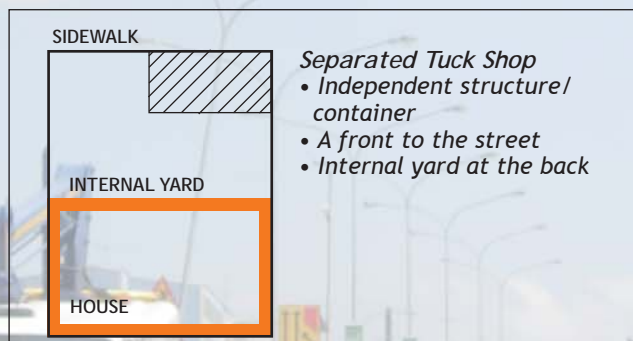
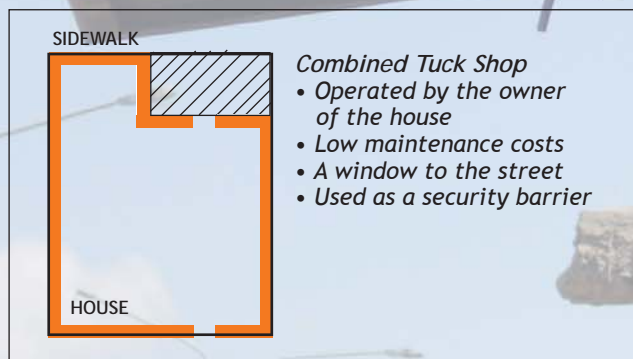
Square



By designing a centre which truly follows the principles mentioned above, the symbiosis process of “trust reduces suspicion”, begins.

Tuck Shops

One of the most common phenomena of commercial adaptability are the tuck shops, spread alongside main streets, easy to establish and maintain and respond to the need of simple and functional income, the tuck shop is the outcome of the people's daily life struggle. Many times it serves as a security barrier when it's location in front of the house provides another security barrier.



Most of the tuck shops are located on the edges of pavements. This emphasises the immediate relationship between street activity and the shop. Therefore, the design principle should consider close and immediate links between the street and the occurrences in the Centre. Often the tuck shop either responds instantly to a temporary need, or closes down when not required. Therefore, providing basic and equipped spaces within the Centre could be a useful platform for both artists' workshops and art shops. To protect clients from the sun, tuck shops commonly use corrugated sheet metal attached to steel/timber frames. This simple but effective system can be used in the Centre.

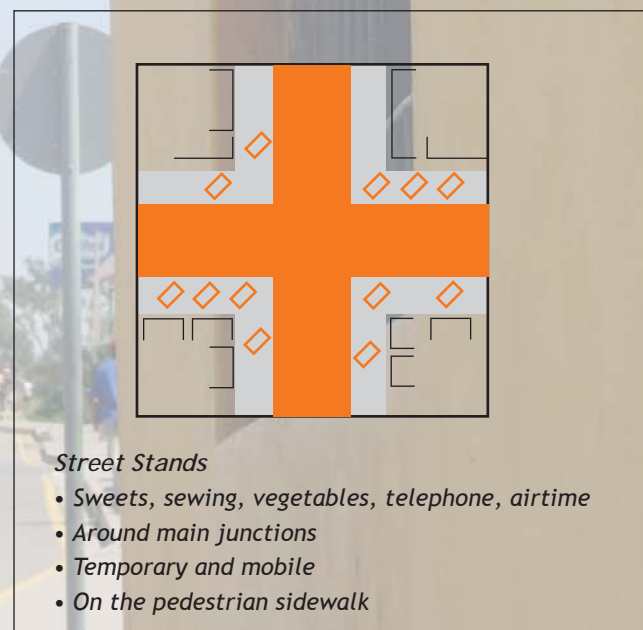


Figure 81
Tuckshop characteristics.