Chapter 1
Introduction

The proposed project aims to transform the selected site and buildings to new use, along with the restoration and reuse of historical buildings. In effect, this amounts to a recycling and improved use of existing resources. For this reason, the contextual precedent was given serious consideration in the design process. Together they are indicative of the extent to which the proposed project and its conceptualisation of urban design, public space, and the built environment reflect the values put forward by the design philosophy.

The study was initiated by a matrix investigation of historical sites around Hatfield (fig. 1.01), analysing their constraints and opportunities.
Background

The phenomenon of urbanisation in South Africa is a fairly recent occurrence, and has markedly occurred over the past 50 years (Dewar 2000:209). Urbanisation among the black population is even more recent. It is estimated that around 45% of the country’s population is urbanised (Republic of South Africa 1996). This number is quickly growing as more people relocate to the cities.

Dewar (2000:209) argues that the unsustainable nature of our cities is clearly demonstrated by the social and environmental consequences that stem from it. One way of bettering the condition is through a process of urban densification. It should be said that densification in itself is not a sufficient condition for improving the urban context. It has to be used in conjunction with other positive structural changes.

A combination of forces has resulted in the three spatial characteristics of low density, fragmentation and separation which characterise South African cities. The result is an urban context where separation of land-use, urban elements, and racial and class groups leads to mono-functionality rather than a mix of uses. Traffic congestion is increasingly becoming a daily occurrence. Poverty and inequality are exaggerated even more since it is the poor who are most affected. Lilly is both inconvenient and expensive for the many who cannot afford to own a car. Public transport is inefficient and often non-existing, and many households are effectively trapped in remote and isolated settings.

Despite large numbers of people spending most of their time in public spaces, the quality of these spaces are almost collectively poor. Conran (1963:22) has described this well when he said that “the overwhelming impression is that when you get there, there’s no there, there.” Building structures in general fall to define, protect or give scale to the public spatial environment.

Research questions

The following research question is posed:

What can be done to improve the urban experience and historical reference at the selected site?

In addition, a number of sub-questions are posed:

a. How can Rissik Station, which is centrally located in terms of the Hatfield Grid, the Ga-Riet station, University of Pretoria and office and diplomatic services in the area, be rehabilitated into a truly responsive public amenity?

b. In what way can the negative image of the site, when measured against the character of the area, be overcome so it positively contributes to the Hatfield area as a whole?

c. How can the memory of Rissik Station be preserved?

Assumptions and delimitations

a. It is assumed that the area will in future serve a broader user group with multi-cultural properties.

b. The feasibility of the proposals put forward by the Hatfield Development Framework are applicable.

c. This thesis does not attempt to address urban regeneration in its entirety.

d. Dealing with the nature and degree of the significance of intangible heritage at the Rissik Station proved to be difficult.

e. Available information resources were limited to interviews and old photographs.

f. The existing plans of Rissik Station could not be located by many researchers.

Structure of the study

The thesis is structured around a number of chapters. Chapter Two investigates the Macro context of Pretoria.

Hatfield as study area was chosen for both its potential and its inadequacies. Its physical attributes, historical importance and its critical role in the urban context are discussed in Chapter Three. Chapter Four investigates the selected site on a micro context level. The functioning of the transport locally and internationally is investigated in Chapter Five.

Chapter Six deals with the design philosophy and approach to creating a successful public space, while precedents are critically analysed and alternatives are explored in Chapter Seven. This helps to set up requirements and guidelines for the design intervention. The conclusions drawn from these chapters serve as generators for the functional design process.

In Chapter Eight, design strategies are defined and consequently employed. The progression of the design from the general concept to specific end product is visually illustrated. The study concludes with the technical investigation contained in Chapter Nine.