

First Nations leaders, LLPT sign heritage social compact for River Club redevelopment

A historic social compact was signed at the River Club redevelopment site yesterday between the Western Cape First Nations Collective Trust (FNCT) - a coalition of the Cape's First Nations leaders - and the Liesbeek Leisure Properties Trust (LLPT).



Members of the First Nations Collective gather around Jody Aufrichtig (LLPT), Chief !Garu Zenzile Khoisan (FNCT), Mayor Dan Plato and Queen Katrina Esau of the San.

The social compact is a model of co-operation between the Khoi and San collective and the private property owner to commemorate and celebrate the rich history and heritage of the First Nations on the site, for the sake of future generations. The important occasion was also attended by Cape Town Executive Mayor Alderman Dan Plato.

The FNCT represents the vast majority of senior Khoi and San leaders and their councils, including those of the Gorinhaiqua, Gorachouqua, Cochoqua, Korana, Griqua Royal Houses, San Royal House of N!In#e, and other indigenous structures including those affiliated to the National Khoi-San Council and the Khoi Cultural Heritage Development Council. The LLPT was also honoured to receive Queen Katrina Esau of the San — who is one of the last fluent speakers of the N!uu language in the world — after she made the journey from Upington to attend the ceremony.

First-of-its-kind partnership to celebrate First Nations' history

The social compact was concluded after extensive and constructive engagement between the FNCT and the developer and embodies a first-of-its-kind partnership between the private sector and the First Nations. Importantly, it also fulfils the commitments made by the LLPT to the First Nations in the development process which, after rigorous public participation, has been approved by the City of Cape Town and the Western Cape Government.

As a result of undertakings in the social compact, for the first time ever in Cape Town, the public will be able to access resources that celebrate, memorialise, and educate people about First Nations' history, as well as their living oral traditions and customs. The social compact further sets out several heritage features which are to be constructed or conserved as part of the redevelopment for the future generations of the First Nations.

These include an undertaking by the LLPT to construct a dedicated Cultural, Heritage and Media Centre, which will be operated and managed by the First Nations. In addition to celebrating and educating the public about First Nations' history, the FNCT will be able to generate revenue from the operations of the Centre, which will be used to further promote the interests of First Nations people in the Western Cape going forward.



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The LLPT has also undertaken to construct an indigenous garden, heritage eco-trail and garden amphitheatre to function both as sites of memory, and living cultural practice and celebration. The plants in the indigenous garden will be selected by a specialist botanist with expertise in First Nations botany, and will include medicinal plants traditionally utilised by First Nations peoples. Likewise, the heritage eco-trail will exhibit natural features of cultural importance, to further public knowledge about First Nations heritage and culture. The amphitheatre, too, will serve an important public education role as it becomes the primary site for First Nations cultural events and performances.

"This social compact serves to preserve and build upon the resources of knowledge so that descendants of First Nations people will have a place in our city that celebrates them as well as their ancestors. The inclusion of First Nations history and culture here, in the River Club redevelopment, solidifies First Nations people's presence in the history of our country," said Executive Mayor Dan Plato.

Economic boost

“Not only will our important history be acknowledged, but this development will also be a significant boost to our city’s economy in the wake of the devastation of the pandemic. It strikes that crucial balance between honouring the heritage of our people, rebuilding our economy, and rehabilitating the damaged natural environment,” Plato concluded.

Representing the FNCT, Chief !Garu Zenzile Khoisan said, “We as the First Nations have fought a battle for almost three decades. We have gone everywhere, even to Presidents of this country. But what we did here at the River Club was an act of radical reconciliation.”

The LLPT said it looks forward to delivering a world class mixed-use development that will not only celebrate the First Nations’ rich heritage and history, but will also provide over 6,000 critical job opportunities, developer subsidised inclusionary housing and safe recreational spaces for surrounding communities.

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