

Development takes off

STAFF REPORTER

THE FIRST phase of the North Gate development, adjacent to Kamfers Dam, which includes 630 residential apartments and a shopping mall, will start immediately following a decision by the Northern Cape Department of Tourism, Environment and Conservation to uphold its authorisation of the development.

The developers of the R1,6 billion-project, Group 1, yesterday welcomed the decision, pointing out that the environmental authorisation had been granted for all 6 406 residential properties (single and general), a shopping mall, schools, places of worship, local authority properties and public open spaces.

"The authorisation is subject to conditions imposed by the Department of Tourism, Environment and Conservation, as well as the Northgate Environmental Management Plan (EMP)."

Group 1's Joe Loedolff confirmed yesterday that phase one (Triangle Estate), consisting of a shopping mall and 630 residential apartments, will now proceed.

"Complex 1 and 2 have been reserved for local sales, with complex 3 and 4 having been sold out to investors all over southern Africa, who see excellent returns in the rental market in Kimberley."

The first complex of 72 two-bedroom units will be completed by March next year.

"Being fully committed to sustainable long-term development, and affordable housing solutions, we are thrilled that at last the people of Kimberley will be given access to middle income, affordable housing in a market which has been manipulated and priced out of reach of so many of the ordinary citizens of the city," Loedolff said yesterday.

The authorisation has, however, attracted less favourable comments



from environmentalists, with several organisations slating the decision to allow a massive development so close to a world-important conservation site.

Mark Anderson from Birdlife South Africa said yesterday the organisation was "disappointed but the decision was not unexpected".

"We have requested the reasons for the decision and once we have received these, we will study them and then consult with our lawyers regarding our next move and possible further action."

He added that the decision was disappointing, considering that

Kamfers Dam was an internationally important site.

"It is one of only four sites where flamingos breed in Africa and one of only six in the world. The Department of Tourism, Environmental Affairs and Conservation is mandated to conserve the natural environment in the Northern Cape, yet it is able to approve a massive development in such close proximity to an internationally-important conservation site."

The Save the Flamingo Association is also awaiting information before deciding on the way forward.

Jahn Hohne, chairperson of the association, said yesterday: "It is simply outrageous that the original Kamfers Dam conservation area, spatially planned and designated as such by the local authorities, can be ignored to the detriment of nature and the environment."

"The North Gate development encroaches into the planned original conservation area by approximately 1 500 metres."

He also questioned how it was possible to develop over 6 000 housing units "without a proven and effective sewerage and waste water processing infrastructure in place and without an approved Environmental Impact Assessment to pump the treated effluent to another environmentally sensitive site".

"As the notifications that the appeals were overturned were received without detailed reasons, the Save the Flamingo Association will require further information to decide on the way forward."

Francois van Wyk, ACDP Northern Cape leader, yesterday also questioned the decision by MEC for Economic Affairs, Tourism, Environment and Conservation, David Molusi, to give the go-ahead for the North Gate development project.

Van Wyk said he wanted to know why the decision was "pushed through just before the national elections next week, when it is clear that there are still major environmental issues that need to be resolved".

"Did the ministry really evaluate all the inputs by the different stakeholders, especially the precautionary measures to protect the flamingos which have become a major tourist attraction and a precious provincial asset?"

"We hope that election promises by the ruling party is not the reason for Molusi's decision."

"We do not want to lose future investments and tourist attractions in our Province due to bad decisions made by the current ruling party," Van Wyk said.