

Athlone Power Station's redevelopment hits roadblock

Cape Town's ambitious plans to transform the long-defunct Athlone Power Station into a flagship green energy hub are facing a major setback, as a provisional heritage protection order placed on the site by Heritage Western Cape (HWC) threatens to stall the development indefinitely.



Source: Wikipedia.

The City of Cape Town, which has been exploring the redevelopment of the site since the iconic cooling towers were demolished in 2010, now finds itself entangled in a legal and bureaucratic dispute that pits sustainable development goals against historical preservation.

The provisional protection order, issued in 2022, covers not just the old power station structure but also adjacent land including a wastewater treatment plant, a refuse transfer station, and even a section of the N1 highway.

According to HWC, the entire precinct holds cultural and historical significance and must be preserved or carefully assessed before any new development is allowed.

In a bid to move the project forward, the City has filed a case in the Western Cape High Court, challenging the legitimacy of the heritage order. Officials argue that while some components of the site may hold historical value, the blanket protection of the entire area is excessive and counterproductive.

Environmental protection measures

The City, meanwhile, reports efforts to secure the site, limit environmental harm, restore structural integrity and undertake a comprehensive environmental clean-up.

"The City has done a considerable amount of work to secure the site and ensure that there's minimal environmental impact. To further secure the site, the city intends to remove and restore the structural

integrity of some of the structures in addition to conducting an environmental clean-up," City Mayor for Energy, Xanthea Limberg, [said](#).

For residents of Athlone and surrounding areas, the debate feels personal, with some [having advocated](#) back in January 2024 for the site to be used for housing instead.

Heritage Western Cape, however, is standing its ground. Although its spokespersons are unable to comment directly due to the matter being *sub judice*, HWC has previously stated that the Athlone precinct represents an important piece of the city's industrial and social history.

The power station, operational from the 1960s until its decommissioning in 2003, was central to Cape Town's electricity supply for decades and is viewed by heritage advocates as a landmark worth preserving at least in part.

The City of Cape Town continues to make it clear that it will not abandon its renewable energy ambitions and insists that it remains committed to working within legal frameworks.

However, unless the heritage protection order is overturned or amended, the future of the Athlone redevelopment hangs in the balance.

As South Africa continues to grapple with energy insecurity, the stakes are high. The Athlone power station transformation could become a beacon of green innovation—or a cautionary tale about red tape in the face of climate urgency.

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