

# Walmer — A Location under threat

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ONE of the more blatant examples of the Government's desire to impose residential segregation is the proposal to move 60-year-old Walmer Location. It is an enclave of 4 000 to 6 000 black people on the outskirts of Port Elizabeth's white suburbs and is home to a settled and integrated community with a low crime rate. Some residents are third or fourth generation and are unwilling to leave their ancestor's graves.

The initial reasons given for the move by Mr Louis Koch, Chief Director of East Cape Administration Board was that Walmer Township, second oldest in Port Elizabeth, was too old and uneconomical to be viable; that it was in the wrong position in overall town planning; that it would be adversely affected by a projected freeway and that residents *should no longer be deprived of participation in the development of the sprawling giant on the other side of town.*

Walmer residents scoffed.

'Where are they going to throw us now?' asked one woman cynically.

'This will be my second move,' said another wearily. 'First I was moved from Salisbury Park when that became white. Now they expect me to move all over again.'

Walmer Location, with uneven roads, meagre street lighting and a proliferation of backyard shacks, has a village charm. Trees, creepers, trellised vines, old-fashioned cluster roses, street vendors, donkey carts and boys cluttering the streets with soccer balls lend it an air of informal permanence.

Last year a succession of packed meetings of township residents rallied in support.

A Save Walmer Committee was

formed, an umbrella organisation of churches and various groups including the Black Sash. The committee's detailed objections to the move received an unbelievable official answer that buffer zones were to be inserted all around the new highway, its adjoining road and access roads, reducing 64 hectares to one hectare!

When the point was made that people should not make way for buffer strips — 'We are more important than buffer zones,' said Father Welile Kani, resident Anglican priest — buffer zones were dropped from the armory of official arguments.

The new departmental line was that the area was too small for redevelopment and too shoddy to remain as it was. It was officially conceded that removal would *bring hardship to most of the women in domestic service nearby.*

Residents would be required to move to Zwide 4, 22 km and three bus rides away and learn to live with increased costs and added inconvenience. The Chamber of Commerce publicly warned that the move would result in *increased unemployment and unnecessary strain on public transport.*

Residents dread the increased rentals at Zwide for houses that for many would be a poor exchange since the Zwide structures lack ceilings, floors and proper insulation. Compensation would be given for owner-built houses but would not be paid to occupiers of concrete board-owned houses where improvements have been made over the years and which are electrified and of a higher standard. (Electrification at Zwide will cost R900 to R1 000 per household.)

The only advantage for such householders would be flush sanitation and a tap in the house.

Opponents of the removal — significantly the Urban Foundation — believe these amenities could be brought to people who do not want to relinquish proximity to places of work, clinics, supermarkets and shopping centres. Many of these people find it convenient to walk to work at the airport, army barracks, houses, shops and garages.

Board officials maintain it would *be cheaper to rehouse residents in new houses than redevelop the area which has deteriorated after many years of threatened removal and official refusal of requests (by churches, municipality and employers) for permission to build permanent structures.*

One factor the Government has not taken into account in this ideological cost-accounting is the wish of the residents of Walmer Location and the anger of the 12 000 families on a hopeless housing waiting list in PE's black townships. Presently at Zwide 4 are shack settlements where people live who have little hope of getting a house.

Doubtless it would be easier for ECAB to contain all black people in one giant administrative bloc. But for a board that complains of shortage of land for development and asks white householders to employ domestics, it is ironical that prime land is willingly relinquished and people made redundant.

• Even more ironical is that some Walmer lodgers who moved to Zwide were unable to pay the rent and reverted to shack dwelling.