

Welgevonden Estate

Where it all started

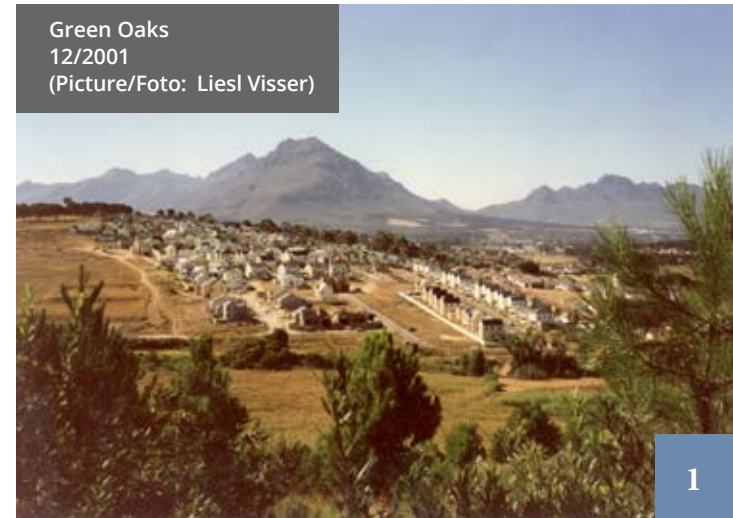
The start of the Welgevonden residential township development in Stellenbosch can be a number of dates going as far back as 1989. It can also be in a number of development stage manifestations. However, the most logic date would be 29 January 1998 – the date when the Western Cape Government approved the development.

But, things didn't happen in the same simple way as it may sound.

The very beginning

Gys de Klerk from Dennis Moss Partnership – a Stellenbosch-based multi-disciplinary practice that integrates the disciplines of architecture, urban design, landscape architecture and integrated development planning – has more details.

“Around 1989 Hugo Lamprechts and Johan Laubscher, two property developers in Stellenbosch, bought the land on the northern side of



View from Chestnut Lane / Uitsig vanaf Chestnutlaan
05/1996
(Picture/Foto: Liesel Visser)



and adjacent to Cloetesville's February Street. Their plan was to develop the Green Oaks residential township, a non-gated development of around 142 houses in that area. They appointed Dennis Moss Partnership in 1993 to do the town planning for the development."

De Klerk points out that urban development on Stellenbosch's northern urban perimeter was something unheard of at the time. This

resulted in a low market demand for the Green Oaks erven and sales were slow. In order to give the development a certain curb appeal, the developers then built a dedicated access road leading from the R44 to Green Oaks past what's today known as Squirrel Close.

"Although Dennis Moss Partnership provided the master plan for the Green Oaks development, together with certain architectural guidelines, owners were allowed a certain leeway when it came to the design of their homes," says De Klerk. "For this reason there is no real consistency today in the appearance of some of the older houses in what was then known as Green Oaks, now a part of Welgevonden Estate."

The momentum changed in 1995 when a Malaysian investor group – Sunway Credo – bought the majority shareholding in the

Green Oaks development. With more capital available now, landscaping commenced on a bigger scale, more plots were sold and more houses built. This momentum accelerated substantially in 1996 when the Sunway Credo board of directors accepted a proposal from Dennis Moss Partnership to extend the scale of the development. The essence of the proposal was to acquire the bigger portion of land that today is covered by Welgevonden Estate, Klein Welgevonden and Weltevreden Hills (previously known as Stellenvista) and to develop this extended area as an integrated residential development with the bigger part of it being a gated community. Dennis Moss Partnership did the master planning for this development.

Things slowed down temporarily due to pressure from a certain grouping in the Stellenbosch community who objected to the proposed

development on grounds that it would encourage urban sprawl into agricultural land. However, a part of the land had already been zoned at the time for residential purposes and, after an appeal process, the Western Cape Government ruled in favour of the developers on 29 January 1998 and the development could continue. And this is why it would make sense to view this date as the official birth of the Welgevonden residential township development.

International disaster struck during that period when the Asian market collapsed, a financial crisis also referred to as the Asian Meltdown. This forced Sunway Credo, with its roots in Malaysia, to review their involvement in the development and they decided to sell the project to Absa. The transaction was finalised in June 1999, when Absa Property Development (Pty) Ltd (Absa PropDev) trading as Absa Devco, took over the development.

July 2004 - View from above the R44 entrance towards the dam.



November 2004 - A general view of the building activities.



Absa Devco

Sakkie de Klerk (not related to Gys de Klerk) – project manager for Absa Devco – remembers:

“We were able to immediately get the ball rolling after we’d bought the Welgevonden residential development from Sunway Credo. All approvals were already in place. This development, in the end, would comprise of 973 single title erven in what today is known as Welgevonden Estate, 10 sectional title apartment blocks as well as a commercial property in an area to the south east of the estate known as Klein Welgevonden, and 13 smallholding erven against the hill to the north west of the historic Weltevreden Estate, at the time named Stellenvista.”

(The 13 smallholding erven in the Stellenvista development had later been subdivided into 50 residential erven and the area’s name changed to Weltevreden Hills.)



Sakkie de Klerk points out that the already existing Green Oaks development with around 142 erven had been incorporated into Welgevonden Estate at the time. (Residents, today, often refer to this part of the estate as “Old Welgevonden”.) This process presented some difficulty, though. With Welgevonden Estate being a gated development, it was not possible to incorporate all the Green Oaks properties into the security environment due to the geographic location of some of them. This led to the Green Oaks residences in February Street and Hendrikse Street remaining on the outside of the security fence. However, the approval for the Welgevonden development stipulated that these properties were to remain a part of the Welgevonden Home Owners’ Association’s (WHOA), even though they

were not physically located within the boundaries of Welgevonden Estate. To compensate for the fact that these properties did not have the same benefits as those on the estate itself, it was decided that these owners would pay levies at a reduced rate. To further compensate, some of these properties obtained official access to the estate via doors that were built into the walled perimeter fence between these properties and the estate itself – the so called ‘green doors’.

De Klerk also refers to Squirrel Close (a single title development consisting of 17 erven earlier known as the Rugby Institute) that already existed in the Klein Welgevonden area at the time and also had to be incorporated into the bigger township area. Again, it wasn’t possible to include this development within the perimeter of the estate itself.

Apart from Stellenvista, all of the above entities initially were to be a part of the township’s home owners’ association, namely the Welgevonden Home Owners’ Association. Stellenvista had a separate constitution and home owners’ association right from the start, while Squirrel Close later on established an independent home owners’ association.

Absa Devco's primary role was the construction of the civil infrastructure for the development (including roads, water supply, sewerage, electricity, security fencing and systems, fountains and private open spaces) and to market and sell the individual erven. For Welgevonden Estate the buyers were either individuals who built their own homes or mostly developers who bought a number of stands to develop and sell afterwards. Although Absa Devco didn't have a role to play in building projects as such, the company did build a number of houses to the left of the R44 entrance gate to create a show area where potential buyers could get a feel for what the completed development would be like.

In Klein Welgevonden, Absa Devco merely sold the commercial erf and the erven zoned for apartment blocks to developers who then developed the properties themselves.

During the development era Absa Devco, as the owner of the bulk of the erven, had the majority vote on the WHOA Executive Committee (Excom). In practice this meant that Absa Devco could go about without restriction as far as its development activities on the estate were concerned. Although trustees were elected from Welgevonden Estate owners and an Excom functioned according to the Welgevonden Home Owners' Association constitution, Absa Devco as the majority owner still had the say when it came to the normal business of Excom. This changed only in 2007 when 90% of the erven had been sold, with Excom now in a position to manage the affairs of the association in an autonomous manner.

Right from the start Absa Devco retained Dennis Moss Partnership's services as the town planners who created the unique aesthetic

design that the Welgevonden development had become renowned for. Excom, furthermore, also appointed this firm to give guidance and approve all new building plans according to the development's architectural directives and



design guidelines.

"The development stage certainly had its share of challenges," says Sakkie de Klerk. "For various reasons the Green Oaks development was a slow starter right from the start and we had

to work hard to change this in order to create the required demand for sales in the new, bigger development." Perhaps this was part of the reason why Absa Devco in some instances provided for more than what had been specified in the plans for the development. An example of this is taking sole responsibility for building the connecting road between the north-western entrance facility and the R304 at an additional expense starting at a foreseeable R5 million, but concluding at around R12 million, according to De Klerk.

Sakkie de Klerk is more than satisfied with how the project fell into place. His biggest compliment for his role as project manager came recently when someone who didn't know about his involvement, referred in his presence to Welgevonden as the best development of its kind that he ever came across. This, for De Klerk,

was an ultimate acknowledgement for his input and dedication.

Others who remember

Cheryl Brand – employed by PFS Trust, Welgevonden Estate's managing agent at the time – played a key role during the development phase. Not only did she perform a liaison role between Excom, the managing agent, the developer and Dennis Moss Partnership, but with a hands-on approach she became an unprompted and spontaneous project manager, taking care of everything that could affect the estate from a managerial viewpoint. This ranged from making sure that builders toe the line while doing work on the estate and performing site and building inspections, to getting to know and supporting the new residents as their new homes reached completion and they moved in.

"Although it was hard work that required lots of energy, I enjoyed every moment of it," says Brand. "I was out on site, worked with wonderful people and able to experience the satisfaction of seeing how the development grew and how the planning on paper realized on the ground."

For Brand one of the many key success factors during the development phase was the fact that the statutory requirements for establishing a home owners' association had been in place right from the start. She refers to the constitution, the rules, the architectural directives and design guidelines and other administrative procedures that made things clear and set the standards to be adhered to.

Her sentiment is echoed by Nic van Rensburg who was an Excom member and chairman

during the development stage. “The fact that the paperwork had been done meticulously and that the statutory requirements were in place, meant that we could focus on the job to be done,” says Van Rensburg.



Van Rensburg explains that the role of the trustees at the time to a large extent focused on

understanding the detail of the project, to be on board with the developer and, where necessary, being the watchdog to act in the interest of the Welgevonden Home Owners’ Association. “The developer did walk the extra mile for us but, to get there, we actively contributed towards building relationships in order to create a mutual understanding and a spirit of cooperation. And there were times when we did have our differences with the developer, but were able to sort them out for the benefit of the overall project and the future of the estate,” says Van Rensburg.

Conclusion

The above is by no means a comprehensive history of the early stage of the Welgevonden township development. The aim was merely to record insights from some of those who were originally involved to gain perspective on how

things developed from being farming land, to the wonderful urban development that Welgevonden has become today.

We relied mainly on personal interviews to obtain the content for this article. We haven’t even touched the magnitude of records that are available for detailed research.

And talking about the charm of Welgevonden, we’ll never be able to do justice to it unless we also look at the delightful people who live here, those who give the development its warm persona. But that’s a good story for another time!

DID YOU KNOW?

- Erven sold for under R60 000 in Welgevonden Estate during the initial stages of the development.

September 2005 - Construction of the link road with the R304



June 2006 - View from Disa Close towards Weltevreden



- Before that, in 1995 still during the Green Oaks development, a house in Red Oak Lane was sold for R65 000.
- Landscaping expenses on Welgevonden Estate amounted to more than R4 million.
- During the early stages, Absa Devco monthly funded the food for the resident geese on the Welgevonden dam.
- Absa Devco planted the plum tree orchard next to the R44 entrance to enhance the area with this notable feature.
- Part of the Welgevonden development entailed upgrading the water reservoir on the high ground in Cloetesville.
- A special sewerage pump station was built to manage the flow of sewerage from the estate.
- Welgevonden Estate residents had to rub shoulders (mud guards?) with construction vehicles at the R44 entrance as the only access point to the estate during the first part of the project. The second entrance and the

link road to the R304 were only completed in 2006.

- A certain Jampies Olivier ran a small convenience store in what could be described as an oversized Wendy house in the open field located along Hendrikse Street, where Stone Square had been built later. Welgevonden residents stopped there to buy general merchandise, ranging from essential groceries to newspapers and the wood for Sunday's braai.
- Dennis Moss Partnership was instrumental in the rezoning of the original public streets in the development to private streets. They also contributed largely towards the Stellenbosch Municipality accepting responsibility for the maintenance of Welgevonden Estate's civil infrastructure (water supply infrastructure, streets, sewerage, storm water drainage, etc.) except for the paved sections on the streets and Welgevonden Estate's distinctive street lights. This exceptional arrangement is nowadays something of the past when it comes to gated communities.
- The Welgevonden residential township development was a huge capital injection for Stellenbosch. It furthermore established the northern area of the town as a sought-after address for investment.

