



# The struggle to keep Princess Vlei from being developed is a success story worth sharing

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*Princess Vlei, which was under threat from developers wanting to erect a massive shopping complex on this pristine and environmentally sensitive area. Picture: Ian Landsberg/African News Agency (ANA)*

Environmental issues sometimes don't get the media coverage they deserve, so I therefore share with the readers of the Cape Argus an awesome experience about the triumph of people and nature over greed.

The struggle against building a mall on environmentally sensitive land on the banks of the Princess Vlei was truly a worthy struggle.

Years ago, the community of Cape town, across all dividing lines, stood together to save Princess Vlei.

The annual report of the Princess Vlei Forum tells us of the reversal of racialised neglect by the tremendous work of restoration of indigenous species such as the Cape Flats sand fynbos. A total of 1025 plant units were introduced, and 26 species were planted of which four are on the Red List.

Three species in critically low numbers were bulked up, and 34 indigenous trees were planted, including the white milkwood tree.

The Princess Vlei Park is a testimony to civic-led conservation in post-apartheid South Africa. Other developments included infrastructure to make this space a welcoming place for the citizens of the Southern Suburbs and afar.

The new braai facilities draw hundreds of people to the park, where families gather to celebrate special events or people come to just enjoy nature.

The recently installed children's play facility as part of the people's plan for the restoration of the open space has been welcomed, and people once denied such facilities are now able to have family time in a beautiful environment.

Plans are going ahead for a track around the vlei to enable a weekly Park Run.

The vlei is now a recognised breeding place of leopard toads. Hundreds of schoolchildren participated in planting at the vlei and forming guardian Princess Vlei clubs.

The investment by the forum of more than R84000 in community education and awareness programmes will bear fruit for generations to come.



*Residents and organisations protest on Prince George Drive to stop the construction of a mall at the Princess Vlei site. Picture: Tracey Adams/African News Agency (ANA)*

Children are learning to protect nature and youth have been reconnected with the beauty of mother nature. This progress is to be celebrated as a testimony of what a deprived, marginalised community can achieve in the noble struggle to return the land to the people. The hard-working members of the forum deserve our appreciation and eternal gratitude for their efforts to reclaim our heritage.

The forum requires at least R500m a year to ensure that this area is protected and managed responsibly. We noted the funds invested from ward councillor Kevin Southgate's ward allocation for the development of infrastructure, and look forward to more financial commitment from the City of Cape Town.

We can all help to preserve this wonderful heritage site by making a financial contribution.

I would encourage conservationist and our community to read the full report on the Princess Vlei Forum's website [www.princessvlei.org](http://www.princessvlei.org) or write to [imagine@princessvlei.org](mailto:imagine@princessvlei.org)

*\* Philip Bam is a community activist from Grassy Park and retired executive director at The League of Friends of the Blind.*

*\*\* The views expressed here are not necessarily those of Independent Media.*

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