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Sandton buildings are going green

Move to return to the feeling of the leafy suburb of yesteryear by using modern, user-friendly methods, writes PENNY HAW

A HUNDRED years ago Sandton was considered the "market garden" of Johannesburg. About 50 years later, Barry Bristow, then head town planner for the area, allegedly described Sandton as a "community of 30,000 whites and 15,000 horses". Since then Sandton has evolved into a major financial and commercial hub, most notably with the opening of Sandton City in 1973 and the relocation of the Johannesburg Stock Exchange from the Joburg CBD in 2001.

These days many of SA's biggest companies are headquartered in Sandton, including several banks and law firms. With the addition of the Sandton Gautrain station in 2010 the area's popularity has grown and several significant new developments are under way. And, although the area will never again be a leafy suburb, many of the new developments aim to "green" Sandton the 21st-century way.

In December, Liberty Holdings and Pareto (with 75% and 25% ownership respectively) approved a R450m investment for the refurbishment of the Sandton Twin Towers office complex on 5th Street.

Restoration of the building, which forms part of the Sandton City complex, began on January 14 with initial work on the external façade and the demolition of existing finishes. A centrally located glass atrium will link the two towers from top to bottom and the complex will be renamed Atrium on 5th. Other enhancements include a redesigned lobby and lift area that will incorporate glass and marble finishes, as well as a green living wall.





Abland's mixed-use development was awarded a 4-Star Green rating. Below left: The Atrium on 5th, which forms part of the Sandton City complex.

"Our vision is to create the first 4-Star Green Star SA rated commercial building in the Liberty Portfolio," says Giles Pendleton, MD of developments at Liberty Properties.

"To achieve this we are complying with various requirements from the Green Building Council of SA (GBCSA). This includes following a specified methodology whereby we keep records of what we recycle or salvage, how we dispose of building waste from the refurbishment and so on.

"Achieving this vision is ambitious, given that we are refurbishing an existing building and not building a new one. We want to demonstrate that achieving the green rating on an existing building can be done."

The anticipated date of completion of Atrium on 5th is at some time in the final quarter of 2014.

Meanwhile, not far away on the corner of Alice Lane and 5th Street, property development company Abland was recently awarded a 4-Star Green rating by the GBCSA for the design of its R1.7bn mixed-use development, which is a three-phase project the company owns with Standard Bank and Pivotal Property Fund.

The redeveloped site involves the construction of three new office towers linked by a central landscaped plaza. The first 18,000m² building, which borders on Fredman Drive, is currently under construction, and will be completed and occupied by August. The second complex, situated on the Alice Lane side of the property, will provide 16,000m² of space that will be ready for occupation in September 2014. The final building will be completed in 2016.

"This is the first building that Abland has attempted to obtain a (green) rating on," says Lorraine McHugh, marketing co-ordinator at Abland.

"The rating was given after just one round of questions by the GBCSA, which is unheard of. We obtained all 52 points that we targeted — 45 points are needed for a 4-Star Green rating. It is one of very few multitenanted commercial buildings to be Green Star rated," she says.

Location to amenities such as public transport and facilities within the building, such as the gym and coffee shops, play a significant role in achieving the Green Star SA rating.

The complex is designed to maximise natural light and provides green features such as energy-efficient lighting and air-conditioning systems. It will be finished with paints, adhesives and carpets that are low in volatile organic compounds.

The building will also be one of the first in SA to negotiate a "green lease", which, says Abland, is vital to ensure that green buildings live up to their promise and operate at optimum levels.

But, while in Sandton four stars are the rating du jour, just down the road in Rosebank Standard Bank recently achieved a 5-Star Green SA rating. Bank employees — about 5000 of them — are due to move into a R2bn "green building" in May.

The glass-walled building, on the corner of Oxford and Bolton roads, consists of two buildings with nine and 11 floors respectively. It has a R40m gas-powered energy-saving trigeneration plant that will allow the bank to light, heat and cool the building, saving 10% to 15% in energy costs.

The building also has facilities to capture rainwater, which should reduce water demand by 50%.

But the cherry on the top are the 422 indigenous trees to be planted in and around the complex, which promise to put the leaves back into the leafy suburb of yesteryear and make "green" really green.