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**26 June 2007**

## **Why is our Heritage important?**

There has been publicity lately about this issue of “Heritage.” What is heritage? And why has such a big deal been made of it? An argument may be that there are more important things for us, as a Metro to worry about. Why worry about protecting old buildings?

Heritage includes a lot of elements- it is all the things that have shaped you, your community and Port Elizabeth today. The “built heritage” is visible and we see it all around us as we travel through the Metro. These are many of the old buildings, monuments and streets that make parts of Uitenhage or Bethalsdorp or Central special. They are often the parts of our city that tourists visit and take photographs of. Heritage buildings are important because they help to define a town's character and uniqueness. They help make our Metro different from any other city in South Africa (and the world.)

But it is not just about old buildings. It is not just the old buildings that make some of the places in our Metro special. It is the ordinary houses too. And the streets, and the views, and the open spaces and, most important, the people – from the present and the past. Places change all the time. Sometimes places are prosperous and well looked after and sometimes they are not. This is what makes our Heritage dynamic. We live in a vibrant and constantly changing city. Our cultural heritage also includes local songs and stories, paths and parks, means of travel and what people do to live. It is all the elements of the lives of the people of our city.

## **Why is our Heritage is worth protecting?**

Is it worth trying to protect the old buildings and streets of our Metro? Is it worth collecting the stories of our city and its people? We think so. And we think that most of the people of the Metro think so as well. People like to live and work in attractive places. Historic places, or places associated with past events, families or traditions provide variety in our streetscapes, colours and atmosphere of our surroundings. Its these places that gives our Metro its specialness.

Heritage is not only interesting to historians, academics or people who come from outside the community. It affects how people feel about and look at their own place. A Heritage that is well looked after can be a boost for our economy and status in the country. Attractive streets and suburbs, historic landscapes, museums and historic buildings are a big draw for tourists, visitors and new inhabitants.

Protecting the historic environment is not about saving everything old at all cost. It is about striking a balance between renewal and retaining what is best from the past – those bits, which are valuable to us – and allowing for well, planned new development. Looking after our Heritage will benefit all of us. Do you know what your Heritage is?