

## NATURES VALLEY, Bitou IDP Budget

November 2023

### INFRASTRUCTURE ITEMS TO BE CONSIDERED FOR INCLUSION IN 2024/2025 IDP BUDGET

The items listed below represent the issues which the NVRA have identified as being of major concern to the ratepayers of Natures Valley and which require consideration by Bitou Municipality in preparation of the IDP Budget for 2024/25.

#### Summary

##### 1. Water supply

- Reservoir upgrade. **Urgent.**
- Solution required for saltwater contamination of drinking water. **Urgent**
- Township water reticulation survey results required.

##### 2. Sewerage Management

- Regulations to permit Septic Tanks in NV. **Urgent**
- Honeysucker service needs improvement. **Urgent**

##### 3. Public Toilets

- Toilets at Beach Path 1 to be upgraded.
- Toilets at Blue Flag beach to be upgraded and maintained. **Urgent**
- Toilet facilities at entrance to NV to be considered.

##### 4. Roads

- Complete the paving of roads. Edge breakdown and ongoing potholing is embarrassing. **Urgent**
- Lagoon parking access road collapsing and breaking up. **Urgent**
- Lagoon parking gravel road requires grading and filling. This is a public road and is almost unusable for some vehicles. **Urgent**

##### 5. Road safety

Must be designed for very large population increase over holiday periods.

- Additional speed humps required to ensure safety of pedestrians and cyclists. **Urgent**
- Reduce speed limit from 40Kmh to 30 Kmh. **Urgent**
- Install signage, warning of children and cyclists. **Urgent**

##### 6. Electrical Infrastructure

- Relatively new mini-substations are corroding badly. No maintenance. **Urgent**
- Switch gear required to complete electrical ring main.

##### 7. Organic Waste Disposal

- Provide chipper in NV to reduce Bitou costs and improve efficiency in dealing with green waste.

The majority of the urgent needs do not require large budgets or significant capital expenditure and have been raised for consideration for many years. Organisation and commitment to the ratepayers, by various municipal departments is all that is required.

**Background and details associated with the above summary is contained below.**

## 1. WATER

### **Upgrading of storage reservoir**

- Meetings during the year have clarified the municipality's design of the proposed upgraded reservoir and we understand that a tender is out for commencing construction next year (2024). We note that expenditure on this item has been budgeted for some years, but each year it gets shifted out. We trust that now that the design has been completed, this work will commence in 2024 as planned.
- The NVRA have some concerns about the amount of temporary storage which is proposed during demolition and construction. The proposed temporary storage of 20KI may be adequate for meeting the demand during off peak periods although even then the WTW transfer pumps would be working hard to keep the tanks topped up. If construction continues during the Dec-Jan peak period, the temporary storage would definitely be inadequate. We ask that this aspect of the design be re-assessed once the construction program becomes clear.

### **Township Pipe Reticulation**

- The pipeline reticulation system in NV consists of 70-year-old asbestos cement piping which has become brittle and prone to regular failure. The sizing of the pipelines and perhaps the configuration of the reticulation means that the water pressure at the west end of the valley drops very low during the peak demand periods.
- At meetings with the Water Dept during 2023, the NVRA were advised that an engineering survey of the existing reticulation has been conducted. Drawings of the existing reticulation would hopefully assist the municipality in planning for the upgrade and progressive replacement of the system and the NVRA would appreciate allocation of funds for such upgrade to appear on the IDP Budget.
- The NVRA are also concerned about the ability of the system to provide an adequate and reliable water source in the event of a fire in the village. The review of the reticulation should take this into account and drawings of the system, clearly showing the position of Fire Hydrants must be made available to the NVRA.

### **Saltwater Contamination of Drinking water**

- Significant problems have occurred in the recent past with salt contamination of the drinking water in NV. This was the result of the salt water in the estuary being allowed to rise above an agreed safe level and flooding back into the fresh-water intake "pool" in the Grootrivier above the bridge. Preventing this flooding back will not always be possible, as a result of a slow rise in sea levels and the combination of storms and spring tide conditions. Apart from inconvenience to ratepayers and visitors, such contamination results in significant costs to the municipality to decontaminate the water treatment plant, the reservoir and the entire water reticulation system serving the township and provide a temporary supply of potable water.
- We note that an engineering assessment of the WTW on the Groot Rivier was undertaken in Oct 2023 and the issue was raised with the engineers involved in the assessment. We look forward to the engineer's report resulting in the allocation of funds for protecting the NV water supply from salt water contamination.
- We ask that the feasibility of building a low weir in the Grootrivier be investigated, to protect the freshwater pool from flooding in the estuary and that budgeting for this be included in planned upgrades to the WTW.

## 2. SEWERAGE

### Water-borne sewerage

- Natures Valley functions without a water-borne sewerage system. Medium term and long-term plans need to be formulated and budgets allocated to rectify current problems and cope with increasing occupancy levels in the village. The most recent study, undertaken by Aurecon and Bitou Municipality in 2017 at significant expense, resulted in a recommended solution which relied on pumping raw sewage from NV to Kurland Village. There has been no subsequent indication from the Municipality that such a system will be included in the budget. The NVRA are of the opinion that the recommended solution is unnecessary, prohibitively expensive, as well as energy and maintenance intensive. We recommend that a realistic approach be adopted by the municipality in the medium term by accepting and encouraging the use of septic tanks in those areas of the village with good soil permeability, combined with conservancy tanks on properties which are not suited to septic tanks and the associated soak-aways.

#### **Exemption from regulations requiring the elimination of Septic Tanks**

- Current municipal building regulations require the installation of a conservancy tank to be included as part of the plan approval process. The inevitable outcome of this unsustainable approach is that the management of sewage disposal becomes totally dependent on the municipal honeysucker service. This service has always been erratic, but Dec/Jan 2022/23 proved just how unrealistic this option has become and without the dedication and communication skills of the NV Superintendent, Bitou Municipality would probably be subject to legal action. The unreliability of the honeysucker trucks and the lack of effective management of the service make this a totally unviable option for NV. The NVRA strongly believes that a rational approach has to be adopted, allowing the ongoing use of septic tanks where these are proven to be effective.
- As part of the process of reaching a viable and sustainable solution to the management of sewage generated in NV, the NVRA reached an agreement in principle (in 2015) with Bitou Municipality to allow the ongoing installation and use of septic tanks in suitable areas in NV (Percolation Test procedure). This agreement was never officially ratified, however the NVRA regard this as the only rational approach to the management of sewerage in NV, until a long-term solution (other than conservancy tanks) is implemented.
- Draft documents reflecting this “in principle” agreement have been sent to the Municipality on numerous occasions and can be made available on request. Meetings have been held during this year with the Head of Water and Sewerage in Bitou (Mr Eddie Oosthuizen) and we believe there is a good understanding of the unsustainability of the current insistence on Conservancy Tanks. We need the co-operation of Council to reach a resolution on this absolutely critical issue.
- Either the proposed procedure to assess the acceptability of Septic Tanks is adopted and ratified, or an effective honeysucker service has to be GUARANTEED. This is very unlikely and would probably not be worth the paper it is written on as the service is plagued by unexpected breakdowns.
- Even if the number of Conservancy tanks remains at the current level, a large number of properties (approx. 102) are dependent on the honeysucker service and tanker availability. Maintenance and administration of the service has to be improved, to even satisfy this limited demand. The current half-baked service is likely to result in a revolt by owners against paying rates for a sewerage service. We request that during peak season, two honeysuckers are dedicated to servicing properties in NV. Approx. 400 owners are paying rates on a monthly basis for a service which is essential for 2 or 3 months of the year and then it cannot be relied upon. There is then a significant additional charge for those who use the honey sucker service, which cannot be depended on to arrive when needed.
- In years past, this poor honeysucker service has resulted in overflowing tanks being diverted to the stormwater system by owners, causing serious pollution in the Groot River estuary.
- Septic Tanks with soakaways, do not present this pollution threat.

### **3. PUBLIC TOILET FACILITIES**

#### **Public toilets at Beach Path No 1 (Shop end of NV)**

- Beach Path No 1 is heavy utilised by residents, visitors, tourists and fishermen from adjoining communities as it is the entry point to a particularly interesting section of the beach as well as to hiking trails and rock fishing sites. The public toilets located at this busy point are therefore heavily utilised, but are generally in a poor state and not a good advert for the village or the municipality. We intend submitting some proposals for improving these facilities and ask that the municipality give serious consideration to these ideas, in the interest of improving the impression gained by all users that the municipality and the NV community do care.  
(See attached sketch proposal)

#### **Public Toilets at Blue Flag Beach**

- An important component of qualifying for a Blue Flag Beach is to have decent toilet facilities as well as a clean beach, clean water and lifeguards on duty. Unfortunately the toilet facilities at the NV Blue Flag Beach are very basic and poorly maintained. Windows are broken, doors do not fit properly and cannot be closed for real privacy. The toilets are constructed from timber and do come in for abuse during the off- season, however there is no real effort to ensure that they are in good condition and well-serviced when the holiday season arrives and they are heavily utilised.
- We ask that the municipality give these facilities the attention which warrants all the self-praise about hosting a Blue Flag Beach.

#### **Public toilets at the entrance to Natures Valley**

- Workers travel to NV daily and gather at the entrance to wait for transport home. The bush adjacent to the river is being used as a toilet as there are no convenient public toilet facilities available. This practise has resulted in proven pollution of the Groot River estuary.
- Some years ago, plans were drawn up for a suitable facility and these could resurrected.
- Servicing of these facilities could be handled in the same way that the other public toilets are managed.
- The provision of properly serviced public toilet facilities is essential to alleviate the pollution problem, as well as ensure the dignity of those who come to work in NV.

### **4. ROADS**

#### **Upgrading of roads to prevent ongoing degradation.**

- Half of the tarred roads in NV were resurfaced about 2 years ago, which has made a big impact. However, those sections of the roads which were not re-paved continue to break up badly along the edges with large potholes forming. These receive no attention as they are not in tarred surfaces.
- Considering the rates and taxes which are paid by the residents, this situation is unacceptable, and we ask that the resurfacing project be budgeted for and completed without delay.
- In the interim, the broken edges and potholing needs to be dealt with quickly and effectively.

#### **Lagoon Parking Access Rd**

- The brick paved section of Lagoon Road is in urgent need of repair as the bricks are deteriorating and potholes forming alongside the paved area. Repaving of this approx. 200m long section is urgent and the road level should be raised to prevent the ongoing deterioration caused by flooding.
- The municipality have been approached on numerous occasions to assist with this problem with no meaningful response. This section of road is heavily utilised as it provides access to the lagoon parking area which is busy throughout the year. At a meeting with Roads Dept in Oct 2023 we were advised that action would be taken to improve the situation this year but a long term solution is urgently required and needs to be included in the IDP Budget.

### **Lagoon Parking**

- The gravel surface lagoon-side parking area is an important asset from a tourist perspective and is heavily utilised throughout the year. Maintaining the unpaved surface in an acceptable condition is an ongoing battle which has been shared over the years between the Municipality and SANParks. Over the past year the battle appears to have been lost, with no responsibility being taken by either party to assist with maintenance. It is now in very poor condition and is becoming a poor advert for all parties involved.
- Being unpaved, subject to flooding due to rain and continuous traffic it needs regular grading, refilling and compaction. A routine maintenance plan is urgently required.

### **Stormwater drainage**

- The drainage of stormwater from the roads and adjoining sidewalks is very poor in a few areas. The NVRA have a photo record of the current drainage problem areas. A meeting was held with the Roads Dept recently (Oct 23) where the problem areas were identified, and possible solutions discussed. We are aware of one owner who has made written contact with the Roads Dept regarding the routine flooding of the entrance to their property in St Georges Ave. Promises have been made, but no effective action taken to date.
- The parking areas outside the shop at the West end of NV are regularly flooded. This area is heavily utilised by the public and many offshore tourists stop off here to use the beach, go on hiking trails etc. These drainage issues could also be easily resolved and perhaps they were at some stage, but there is no attention to maintenance.
- It is unfortunate that when these matters are reported by the Municipal Superintendent in NV, he receives little useful response or assistance. There is a total lack of urgency by the municipality in resolving these relatively straightforward stormwater management issues.

### **Public parking areas**

- The public parking areas at beach entrances and particularly in the vicinity of the shop, where they are heavily utilised throughout the year, are in a very poor state and some form of environmentally acceptable hard surfacing is needed to prevent ongoing potholing and a generally run-down appearance. The current situation gives a negative impression to ratepayers, visitors and overseas tourists.

## **5. ROAD SAFETY**

### **Safety of Pedestrians and Cyclists**

- The safety of pedestrians and cyclists in NV, particularly during the holiday seasons, is of major concern as a result of speeding vehicles. There was an incident in Dec 2022 when a young child was knocked off her bike and injured by a passing vehicle. The roads in NV are generally about 4 m wide and in most of the areas there are no sidewalks. It is only a matter of time before a very serious injury or fatality occurs. The NVRA are of the opinion that the only effective way to slow the traffic is to introduce additional speed humps.
- In the recent past, Bitou municipality have been unhelpful in assisting on this front and private funding has been sought to improve the situation with some success (four private humps were built in 2017). Those humps which were built by the municipality over the years are not maintained and have become an eye-sore (except for those areas where the roads have been repaved).
- A recent survey by the NVRA has identified where additional humps are required (11) and where existing humps need to be repaired. A map showing our needs in this respect can be made available. A meeting was held with the Roads Dept in Oct 2023 and we were advised that there is no budget allocation for additional speed humps. We request that this be regarded as an urgent matter for which IDP budget provision must be made.

## 6. ELECTRICITY

### Completion of electrical infrastructure upgrade and maintenance

- Two new mini-sub and ring main switchgear were installed in NV late in 2015. An additional Mini-sub/switchgear remains to be installed near Arum St to complete the ring-main. This was promised in 2015 but there has been no further progress.
- The mini subs in the township receive no maintenance and are showing signs of corrosion which will inevitably shorten their lifespan. New units installed after blow-ups about 5 years ago are looking 20 years old. This shows a lack of any attempt to take care of valuable infrastructure and a waste of ratepayer's money.

## 7. WASTE MANAGEMENT

### Organic Waste disposal

- Organic waste arising from garden maintenance and verge clearing in NV has to be carted to the new disposal facility in Plettenberg Bay on the N2.
- Before the municipal superintendent was appointed in 2017, street verges were mowed, and overhanging branches pruned by the Parks Dept of Bitou Municipality. Much of this work has been taken over by the Superintendent who is still dependent on the Parks Dept to transport the clippings out of the Valley.
- The community would benefit greatly if a chipper could be allocated to NV to allow the superintendent to chip vegetation on the spot and deposit it into a skip which could be used by the local community or collected by the municipality, emptied for composting in Kurland and returned to NV. Such an arrangement would greatly reduce the frequency and cost to the municipality of collecting unprocessed organic waste.
- Numerous requests have been made for the Superintendent to be provided with the necessary tools and equipment to undertake the effective management of vegetation encroachment in NV and we would appreciate it if these requests could be seriously considered. Relatively minor expenditure could result in significant savings to the municipality. The following items of equipment would greatly enhance his ability to perform the necessary tasks; lawnmower, branch lopper and pole-mounted trimmer. You can be sure they would be well looked after and locked up at the end of each day.

### Prepared by:

NVRA Infrastructure sub-committee

Signed:



**D.C. Blaine**

Chairman, NVRA