



CITY OF CAPE TOWN
ISIXEKO SASEKAPA
STAD KAAPSTAD

District Six

Public Realm Strategy

Concept and Background Note

Contents

1) Executive summary	2
2) Public space and its role in our lives	3
Why is the public realm important?	3
3) Healing is a global challenge	4
4) District Six and the role of the public realm	7
Why is the public realm important to District Six specifically?	7
5) Vision statement	11
6) Project Seasons and Public Participation Programme - for Public Realm Strategy	12
A new season for District Six	12
Stakeholder groups	13
7) Conclusion	14

1) Executive summary

Public space is important for all of us on so many levels. The Covid-19 restrictions have highlighted our desire for shared spaces, places where we meet, exchange and share life. As part of a wider global move towards healing our planet, the healing of our country and the urban spaces where this plays out are critical if we want to make a real difference. A new way of acting in these public spaces is part of a worldwide focus for those involved in the public realm.

The ‘universal call to action to a) end poverty, b) protect the planet and c) ensure that all people enjoy peace and prosperity by 2030’, is not something that happens out there. It starts here, with our communities, in our city.

We cannot comprehend the pain and hurt that was caused in District Six due to the forced removals.

The Pain of Forced Removal

The trauma felt as a result of ‘removing’ the people of District Six is far beyond what anyone can comprehend!



Trauma!

...like ripping a tree from its roots...
...like killing its life source....

We cannot turn back the clock or undo what has already been done, but we can make a difference, together. By working with all stakeholders, in the public realm, we hope to show that there is hope and identity for all! In working towards this goal, we gain a deeper appreciation for our diverse people and cultures.

The proposed District Six Public Realm Strategy is not aiming to compete with any vision, direction or process such as the Housing Programme or any heritage declaration processes. It is a sincere proposal that aims to promote new growth by working with the spaces and places in District Six – where we remember the past, where we share in the present and work together towards a future that is worth it!

2) Public space and its role in our lives

Why is the public realm important?

Public Realm is a term used to describe the publicly owned places and spaces that are free and open to everyone. The public realm generally includes the spaces between buildings and within buildings that are publicly accessible, such as streets, squares, forecourts, parks and open spaces.

What makes a great public space? Some would suggest social interaction, comfort, ease of access and the manner in which it connects to the wider urban context. There seems to be a general understanding that public spaces bring with them a right to common passage, i.e. without any cost to the visitor and freedom of speech or action provided that this is respectful. Government owns public spaces on behalf of the public.

We tend to under-estimate the role of a public space as a common ground for making human connections. During a crisis or emergency, people usually gather in public spaces (e.g. fire, earthquake, etc.). The current Covid-19 crisis, is forcing us to keep our social distance, and has even heightened our need for public spaces. Just being among other people has a calming effect. So in truth, loneliness is a sign of lack of community and a knock-on effect is the rise of anti-social behavior including gangs which offer a sense of belonging, at a cost.

In the South African context, where our nation is in the process of healing the hurts of the past, public spaces can play an important role in bringing communities together – a place where we can plant memories of the past, realities of the present and a vision for the future, like a young seedling. For many, their memory of the past played out in the public realm:

- meeting with friends and neighbours over the fence
- hanging out with friends in the park or on the street
- demonstrating in public spaces when shared issues boiled over

Our memory of the past is rooted in the experiences we had in the community where we grew up. We remember the different characters, the aunty that had the rollers in her hair, the uncle that always sat in front of his garage with the 'wireless' blaring out his music. We miss that. We miss a sense of community and while we are trying to make a new future, the desire for that sense of community will always stay strong – we need that sense of belonging.

Public spaces could offer a place where we not only remember the past, but also heal, and share all that which makes us members of our community.



3) Healing is a global challenge

Our city, like so many others around the world, is growing at an unprecedented rate. Rapid urbanisation offers many challenges and urban sustainability is used as a catchall phrase. What does it really mean, and how do we enable our city to achieve sustainability?

All United Nations Member States adopted the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), as well as the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in 2015. Some might know this as the universal call to action to end poverty, protect the planet and ensure that all people enjoy peace and prosperity by 2030. The goals and targets are universal, meaning they apply to all countries around the world, not just to the poor countries. Although the driving factor is the impact of climate change on all of us, especially developing countries like South Africa, it is about understanding that all elements of the urban and natural environment have an impact on each other and if we do not care for our land and our people, we will not survive.

The SDGs are a collection of 17 goals designed to be the road map for how to achieve more sustainable urban and natural environments for us all. See the SDG diagram below:

SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS



The overriding goal for us as city makers is SDG11: 'Sustainable cities and communities'. This refers directly to developing cities and human settlements that are inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable.

SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOAL 11

Make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable



The SDG Knowledge Platform¹ notes among other things the following: “Most cities have struggled to ensure that their populations have convenient access to open public spaces (defined as spaces within 400 m walking distance of their residence). Based on data from 220 cities in 77 countries in 2018, only 21 per cent of the population had convenient access to open public spaces. However, these results do not necessarily mean that there is an inadequate share of land dedicated to open public spaces in these cities, but rather that their distribution across urban areas is uneven.”

This state of affairs highlights the need to strengthen efforts to protect and safeguard our cultural and natural heritage – these usually play out in public spaces and places, also known as the public realm. Urban planning and management can protect and safeguard our cultural and natural heritage, something that is critical for us in District Six.

Another element is the provision of universal access to safe, inclusive and accessible, green public spaces. According to SDG11 indicator 7.1, public spaces are broadly associated with several benefits such as increases in property values, retail activity multiplication, effective and efficient transportation and mobility, city attractiveness, enhanced safety, social cohesion, equality, health and well-being. This speaks directly to the safety of urban spaces (SDG 11, Indicator 7.2). Levels of safety in a city affect the level of accessibility and inclusivity, particularly for vulnerable urban populations including women and children, older persons, and persons with disabilities.

As we can see, the public realm is not a nice to have or just a local issue, but a key element towards ensuring sustainable cities and communities worldwide. However, public spaces comprise more than just the people who use them. It is also made up of non-human elements: the land, the trees, animals and birds using it, in fact it is where we can connect with the natural environment.

SDG15, “Live on land,” is another important element of creating a more sustainable future for us all and refers to protecting, restoring and promoting sustainable use of terrestrial ecosystems, sustainably managing forests, combating desertification, as well as halting and reversing land degradation and biodiversity loss.

SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOAL 15

Protect, restore and promote sustainable use of terrestrial ecosystems, sustainably manage forests, combat desertification, and halt and reverse land degradation and halt biodiversity loss



¹ <https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/sdg11>

Our first thoughts go to places like the Amazon forests where large parts of the ecosystem have been destroyed through deforestation. The Amazon is the largest rainforest in the world, and in the last 30 years, it has lost nearly 20% of its area. A quick search on the internet's images shows the devastating visual impact! Some of the major effects of the deforestation are soil erosion/destruction where nutrients are lost through exposure to the sun's heat, the negative impact on the water cycle, loss of biodiversity and ultimately climate change.

A Greenpeace article² notes "The Natural Resources Defence Council has described clearcutting as "an ecological trauma that has no precedent in nature except for a major volcanic eruption".

Therefore, the ecological impact of deforestation of trees is equated to something that kills every bit of life. The trauma to the natural (and human) environment causes devastation and takes thousands of years to recover.

Now if that is what happens to nature if we forcefully remove large areas of trees, we can nearly comprehend how much emotional hurt was caused by the forceful removal of people from District Six.

If we do not start the healing process today, we will never know the fruit that could come from the return of the District Six community and the symbol of hope that this gives to so many. This speaks directly to SDG16: "*Peace, justice and strong institutions.*" From a local point of view, we must focus on promoting peaceful and inclusive societies, providing access to justice for all and building effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels.

SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOAL 16
Promote peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, provide access to justice for all and build effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels



This is possible through partnerships. Collaborating with each other at a local level, but also partnering with others to reach the global goals of achieving a more sustainable society. SDG17 talks about standing together and strengthening the means of implementation through various global partnerships, from community to financial support. We are still learning how to build on international relationship, but for now, we must start closer to home.

SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOAL 17
Strengthen the means of implementation and revitalize the global partnership for sustainable development



Let us start in District Six, in the public realm – where we meet each other, in the space we share.

² <https://www.greenpeace.org/usa/victories/kleercut-kimberly-clark-commits-to-end-deforestation/>

4) District Six and the role of the public realm

Why is the public realm important to District Six specifically?

We cannot comprehend the pain and hurt that was caused by the forced removals in District Six. Numerous books, articles and photos tried to relay the pain but we will never understand the devastating impact it had on a large portion of our society. Nothing can compare with it.

District Six Forced Removals



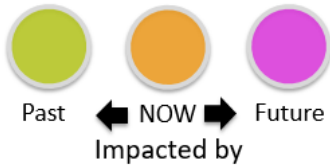
Seeing the pain and long-term side effects that deforestation has caused for the physical earth, we can only imagine the pain from the forced removals in District Six. People were uprooted and replanted all over Cape Town. Many have not survived the time since then to be returned to their home soil and only a few original inhabitants of District Six are still alive.

Woodland forceful de-forestation



As such, the tree and its roots resemble a metaphor for healing. It is a symbol for the past, present and the future together, with an emphasis on restoration.


THE POWER of T(H)REE



Can a tree be a metaphor for restoration/healing

It is made up of:

Foliage
- Fruit
- Roots



3 parts need each other!

This represents:

vision
Future
- Present Here NOW!
- Past
- history

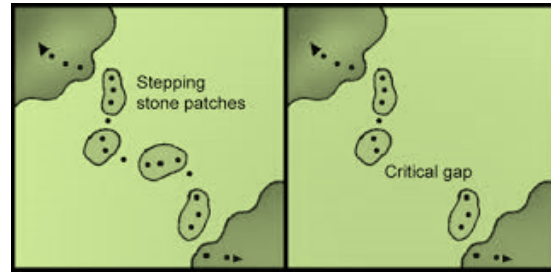
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The current focus of restitution in District Six is (rightly so) very much on the delivery of housing. However, despite being the most relevant focus, this is only one element of restitution and an opportunity lies in the re-establishment of a sense of community.

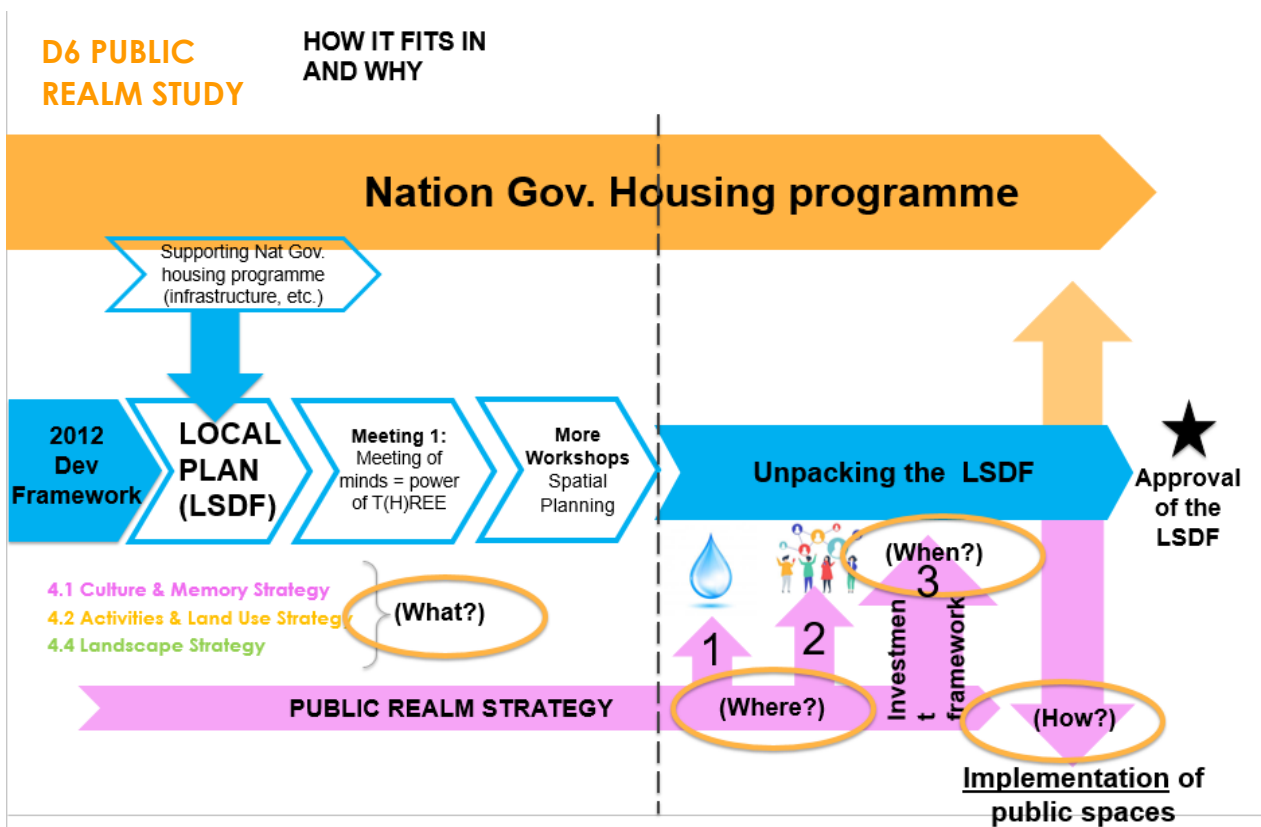


A sense of community does not exist just because there are houses, and it will not just return when houses are rebuilt. Communities develop and grow. We see it with newly developed areas where large pieces of land are developed for people who move in from different areas of the city and it takes years, if not decades, for a sense of community to develop. Claimants will return to District Six, and some have already, but there will also be other, new people moving in, while others will be utilising the area as tourists, students, pedestrians, visitors, etc.

Future public spaces and the links between them are critical in re-establishing the community, not just the houses. In ecological terms, we refer to **biodiversity and the 'stepping stones' principle**: in nature, 'corridor' and 'stepping stones' are terms used to describe actions that should be taken to enhance habitat connectivity in the urban environment. In natural areas, these happen spontaneously, but in urban areas, we must actively seek to promote these to ensure support for movement of animals, insects and plants. It results in a healthier natural environment. The same is true for the human environment. In essence, we are beings that need contact with others. We share, learn, grow and even depend on interaction with each other on one level or another. Public spaces, whether contained (square/plaza) or linear (corridor/street/lane) link people and activities with each other.



The current plans for District Six do refer to the urban and public realm and it is therefore not a foreign concept, but as the focus is so much on the housing elements, especially from the National Government perspective, we want to highlight the incredible opportunities for District Six in its public spaces. Public spaces played an important role in the old District Six. Due to limited space in houses, people used to spill out in the streets, telling stories, sharing dreams. This was the shared community space. Today this is still important and could offer so much. This also fits into the overall framework for the LSDF update for District Six. This relationship is shown below:



Think about the elderly living around key public spaces, where they can interact with others during the day. Groups of aunties gather and tell stories to those in the area about the past, the present and the future under a few old trees. The students can sit under a tree that was planted as a symbol of hope for a better future – a future where we appreciate people for who they are not what they are.



The 2012 draft Spatial Development Framework (SDF) for District Six was developed over two decades and still represents the hope that this area will once again be alive with people and enable old and new memories and a sense of belonging. In developing a supporting strategy for the public realm with the community and other stakeholders, we can highlight and promote that which is shared by hastening the delivery of the public realm.



5) Vision statement

The importance of an attractive, quality public realm is key to realising the proposed housing and other development opportunities and aims to foster community cohesion and economic success as an early phase of restitution. District Six could once again be an area where people really interact, with a variety of excellent public spaces, connected and attractive streets, and high-order facilities that can capitalise on the area's inherent strengths. It can be a unique canvas for public life and a firm basis for regeneration.

Could a vision for District Six be something along these line (to be defined by the community during the process):

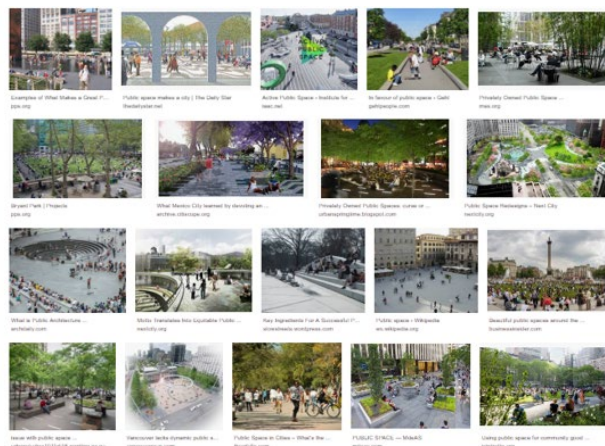


“Rebuilding the community of District Six from the roots up! This starts in public spaces and places that offers various opportunities for people to meet, have fun and relax in. These spaces are multifunctional and cater for various activities throughout the year. In doing this, District Six lives on as a living restitution gallery with beautiful public squares, parks and gardens, linked by active and vibrant streets; an example of a ‘true sense of community’ where life, people, memories and dreams intertwine with an exciting and dynamic education, heritage and tourism mix; placing people (with a focus on the pedestrian) and a sense of community first.”

The strategy will set out a vision and charter that can be signed by everyone with an interest in the future success of District Six. It will also set out a programme of public realm projects that can be developed over time.

The Public Realm Strategy will fit within, and build upon, the existing suite of documents and strategies produced.

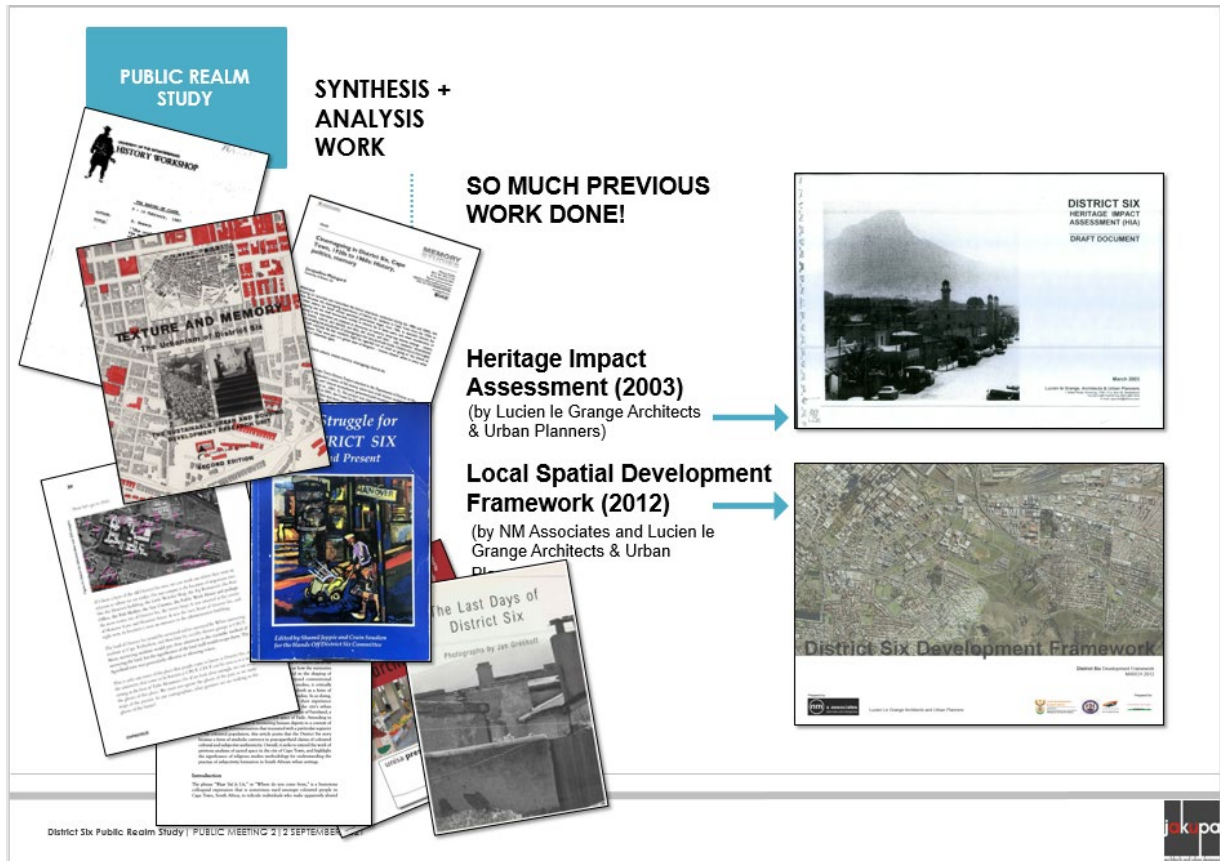
It will represent the outcomes from the collective thinking of the respective interest groups regarding the public realm that can be either used by the public sector to invest in public space but will also give guidance to private sector investment in the public realm.



1. = **Restore & Define** a sense of community through cultural support within public realm!
2. = **Connect** community through water, music and memories back into public spaces!
3. = **Support** where we can!

6) Project Seasons and Public Participation Programme - for Public Realm Strategy

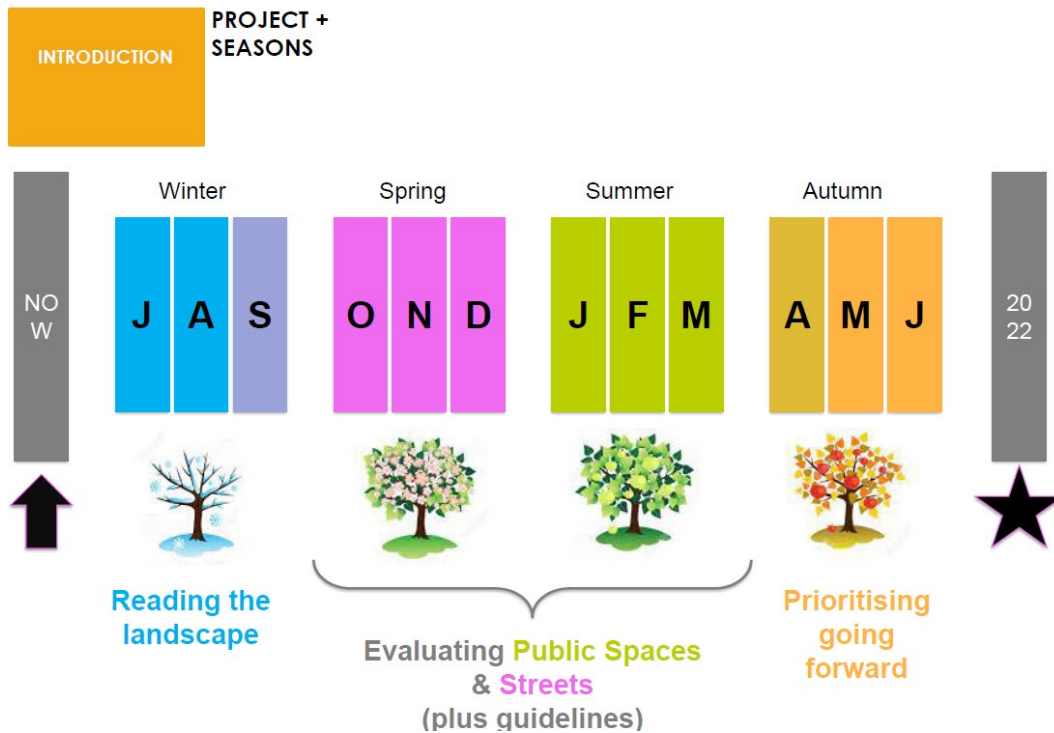
Following on from the previous sections, we felt it important to look at District Six with new eyes, yet still build on what has already been established with the communities of District Six over the years. It does not make sense to disregard this enormous amount of valuable information.



A new season for District Six

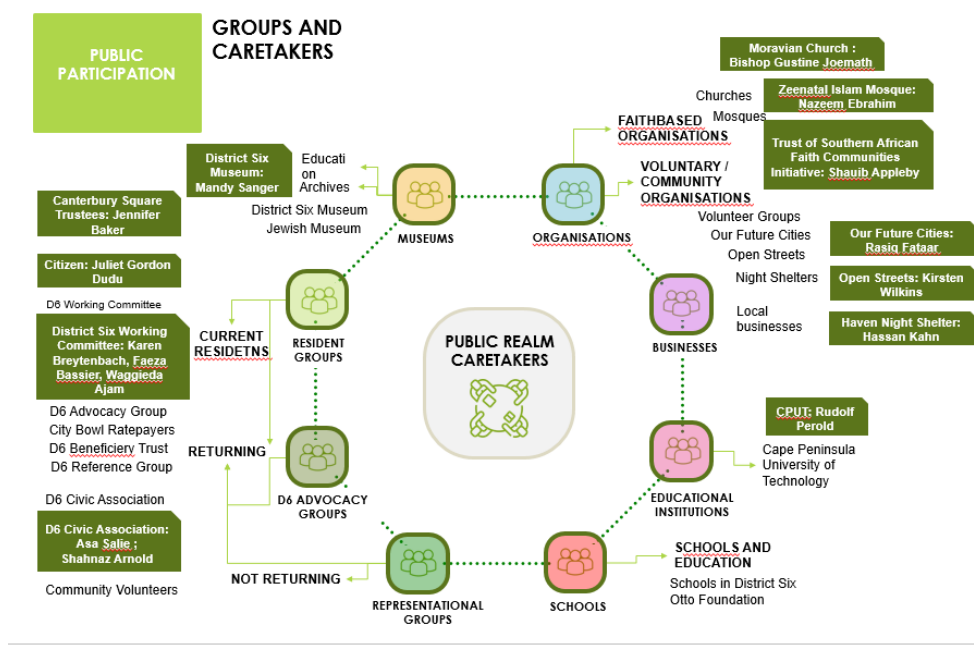
The first public meeting related to the Public Realm Strategy kicked off in June 2021. This virtual meeting highlighted the process of unpacking the public realm with the community and stakeholders of District Six. Like a tree that goes through several seasons, this process also has seasons to it. In the first season, there is not much visible action, but behind the scenes the consultants are looking at various available information pieces to get up to speed with the communities. This is called 'reading the landscape'.

With some spring signals coming for us in the whether the same happens with the participation, process and we are currently heading into a strong participation season that will take us up to the end of summer. Six co-design workshops is planned with the Caretakers in 'spring and summer' and following this the priorities in terms of the public realm in District Six will be compiled as a document that gives guidance to implementation (of the public realm) as part of the wider development process of District Six.



Stakeholder groups

Various concerned groups have been established to represent the claimants in pursuance of their claims and there have been some representative bodies that have been established in the redevelopment process for District Six. As such, public participation is a key part of this process. Below is a diagram of the current inclusion of representative bodies who have shown an interest in participating in this process.



7) Conclusion

This document is a starting point for considering the ideas about revitalising District Six, born from the work already done, but offering a narrative for healing, bringing people together and contributing to a better future for all.

It is only in making progress possible together that we will make this happen. Let us do it together!