

TERRESTRIAL BIODIVERSITY COMPLIANCE STATEMENT

RIETFONTEIN CEMETERY

THE PROPOSED EXTENSION OF THE RIETFONTEIN CEMETERY ON THE REMAINDER OF
FARM MIER NO. 585, NEAR RIETFONTEIN
DAWID KRUIPER LOCAL MUNICIPALITY, NORTHERN CAPE PROVINCE.



PREPARED FOR:

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17 March 2023

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Dawid Kruiper Municipality (Northern Cape Province) needs to expand various cemeteries within their Municipal area. This includes the proposed extension of the cemetery at Rietfontein. The existing cemetery at Rietfontein is about 2.5 ha in size, located about 750m east of Rietfontein, just north of the R31 as one drive towards Rietfontein. The proposed extension will enlarge the cemetery (doubling it in size) eastwards and will also be about 2.5 – 3 ha in size. Both the existing as well as the proposed cemetery extension is located on the remainder of the farm Mier no. 585 (Municipal land), a large open piece of land, used for livestock grazing (mainly goats and sheep) by the local community. A desktop study and field investigation were performed to assess the terrestrial biodiversity within the proposed study area and to identify the ecological characteristics and sensitivity of the site.

VEGETATION TYPE & STATUS	According to the South African vegetation map (2018) (Mucina & Rutherford, 2006), the study area would originally have been covered by Kalahari Karroid Shrubland (Figure 5). Kalahari Karroid Shrubland are classified as “ Least Threatened ” in terms of the “ <i>Revised List of ecosystems that are threatened and in need of protection</i> ” (GN 47526 of 18 November 2022).
HABITAT CONDITIONS AND DIVERSITY	The veld itself and the landscape are homogenous with little variation over the site itself. The vegetation is described as a sparse open shrubland with a grassy bottom layer. The veld and landscape did not contain any rocky outcrop, watercourses or any other biophysical feature that might have resulted in special habitats for fauna or flora (Refer to Heading 4.1).
LAND-USE	The proposed development will impact on a small area of natural veld used for life-stock grazing by the local community. The biodiversity summary for the Mier Municipality (which includes Rietfontein) states that 99.6% of the Mier Municipal area is still covered by remaining natural veld, none of which are vulnerable or endangered. The development is of such a small scale in terms of the larger property on which it is located, that it is highly unlikely to have any significant impact on the current land-use .
VEGETATION ENCOUNTERED	The vegetation encountered can be described as an open shrubland (up to 1.5 m high) with a grassy bottom layer in the open areas very similar in appearance to some forms of arid grassland (Photo 1 – 6). Species diversity was very low, and the impacts of the recent 7-9 year drought period was still clearly visible in the veld. Many of the larger shrubs had not yet recovered and no herbaceous species was observed (Refer to Heading 3.1 & 4.2). In terms of botanical significance, it was only the presence of several NCNCA protected <i>Boscia foetida</i> individuals within the site that was identified as of any potential significance (Refer to the Protected plant species underneath). <u>In terms of vegetation, it is considered highly unlikely that the proposed development will contribute significantly to the loss of vegetation type or associated habitat.</u>
THREATENED AND PROTECTED PLANT SPECIES	No red-data or nationally protected plant species were observed within the proposed footprint. However, one plant (<i>Boscia foetida</i>), protected in terms of the NCNCA (Refer to Table 2). About 30 of these plants is likely to be impacted by the proposed development. Because of its deep and extensive root system search & rescue is not a viable mitigation option (plants rarely survive replanting – Personal observations). On the other hand, the surrounding veld shows the same densities of <i>Boscia foetida</i> plants scattered throughout the larger farm portion. Most of the plants observed were also scrubby multi-stemmed individuals. The plant is used as supplementary fodder for goats during dry spells and are used for nesting purposes by smaller birds. Thus, although the proposed development will impact on a number these plants, they are still very well represented in the surrounding veld and because of the small size of the development footprint the impact should be negligible (Refer to Heading 4.4). <u>According to the DEA Screening tool report, the relative plant species theme sensitivity is considered of low sensitivity, which is supported by the findings of this assessment.</u>
MAMMALS, REPTILES &	The nearby Kgalagadi Transfrontier Park is renowned for its predators and seasonal movement of large herbivores such as blue wildebeest, springbok, eland, and red

AMPHIBIANS

hartebeest. Up to 62 mammal species, 274 birds (of which 78 are resident throughout the year), 48 reptiles (including 17 snake species) and 7 amphibians had been recorded in the park. The Dawid Kruiper Municipal area is known for its game farming and as favourite hunting destination. Indigenous game species are mostly concentrated within these game farms, but some migratory species will roam the surrounding areas.

Apart from a few insects (e.g., Cicada's) and nest of one of the smaller bird species (now neglected), the only evidence of animals on the site was livestock droppings. No evidence in the form of tracks, faeces or even burrows of any other indigenous fauna (e.g., small game) were observed within the footprint area, although it is expected that reptile's (like gecko's, agama's, skinks, and snakes) and small game will occur in the larger area. The veld was very homogeneous and habitat variety or diversity within the footprint area is low to very low. The lack of rocky hills or outcrops within the development area would preclude a variety of species from the site. There are also no suitable habitats for amphibian species within the footprint area.

The proposed development of the proposed cemetery extension is unlikely to have any significant impact on free roaming mammals, reptiles, or amphibians, especially since it is located so near to the town of Rietfontein.

AVI-FAUNA

The animal species theme sensitivity is considered **medium sensitive** because the proposed site falls within an area in which the **Bateleur/Berghaan** (*Terathopius ecaudatus*) might be encountered. The Bateleur is considered **endangered** in South Africa with a suspected population size reduction of more than 50% over the past three generations. According to the distribution map for the Bateleur in SA, based on records of the SA Bird Atlas Project, there is very low percentage (0.1 – 2.5%) change that the Bateleur will be encountered in the Rietfontein area (Hockey *et. al.*, 2005). In fact, the nearest observations for this bird were made into the Kgalagadi Transfrontier Park and along the Molopo River (near Askham). The proposed cemetery enlargement will impact a relatively small section of land. There are no suitable nesting sites for the bateleur within the proposed footprint. Although the bateleur may hunt over the larger area it is highly unlikely that the proposed development will have any significant impact on the breeding or feeding patterns of this bird (Refer to Heading 4.5.2).

With regards to this project the sensitivity rating should be low sensitive.

CONSERVATION PRIORITY AREAS

According to the Northern Cape critical biodiversity areas maps, the proposed cemetery expansion area will overlap a critical biodiversity area (CBA 2) as identified within the 2016 Northern Cape CBA maps (Figure 6). The CBA areas in this case aims at the protection of the wetland systems (and a surrounding buffer zone) associated with the Southern Kalahari Salt Pans of Hakskeen Pan. The proposed extension will be located to the east of the existing Rietfontein cemetery, which will place it even further away from the occasional wetland area to the west of the existing cemetery. Although the proposed footprint will still be located within a 100 m of an occasional wetland area, it does not overlap the inundation area associated with the occasional wetland area.

The proposed footprint will be very small (2 – 3 ha) and will have minimal additional impact on ecosystem connectivity. The existing cemetery is already serviced with access roads, which will be the same used for the proposed extension. In terms of overall environmental impact, it is considered unlikely that moving the proposed extension footprint out of the CBA will result in any significant environmental gain. As a result, the additional impact on the CBA is considered of low sensitivity.

WATER COURSES AND WETLANDS

There are no watercourses or wetlands identified within the study area. An episodic wetland is located to the west of the existing cemetery (which is located on the edge of this wetland). The proposed extension is away from this wetland area.

MAIN CONCLUSION

According to the **NEMA EIA Sensitivity** scan for the site generated on 15/02/2023 by PB Consult the Terrestrial Biodiversity Theme Sensitivity is **VERY HIGH SENSITIVE** because of it being located within a CBA 2.

The Terrestrial biodiversity assessment (Table 9) aims to take all the discussion under Section 4 into account, including the small scale of the proposed project, the fact that the vegetation is not vulnerable or endangered as well as all the other reasons discussed throughout this document.

According, Table 9 the main impacts associated with the proposed development will be:

- A Low impact on a critical biodiversity areas (CBA 2);
- A Low impact on protected plant species.

Because of the small scale of the activity even the cumulative impact given in Table 9 remains Low.

It is considered highly unlikely that the development will contribute significantly to any of the following:

- Significant loss of vegetation type and associated habitat.
- Loss of ecological processes (e.g., migration patterns, pollinators, river function etc.) due to construction and operational activities.
- Loss of local biodiversity and threatened plant species.
- Loss of ecosystem connectivity.

As a result, the Terrestrial Biodiversity Theme Sensitivity for the proposed project should be LOW.

WITH THE AVAILABLE INFORMATION IT IS RECOMMENDED THAT THE PROJECT BE APPROVED.

DETAILS OF THE AUTHOR

This is a specialist report compiled by Peet Botes from PB Consult.

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INDEPENDENCE & CONDITIONS

PB Consult is an independent entity with no interest in the activity other than fair remuneration for services rendered. Remunerations for services are not linked to approval by decision making authorities and the company have no interest in secondary or downstream development because of the authorization of this project. There are no circumstances that compromise the objectivity of this report. The findings, results, observations and recommendations given in this report are based on the author's best scientific and professional knowledge and available information. The author reserves the right to modify aspects of this report, including the recommendations if new information become available which may have a significant impact on the findings of this report.

RELEVANT QUALIFICATIONS & EXPERIENCE OF THE AUTHOR

Mr. Peet Botes holds a BSc. (Hons.) degree in Plant Ecology from the University of Stellenbosch (Nature Conservation III & IV as extra subjects). Since qualifying with his degree, he had worked for more than 20 years in the environmental management field, first at the Overberg Test Range (a Division of Denel) managing the environmental department of OTR and being responsible for developing and implementing an ISO14001 environmental management system, ensuring environmental compliance, performing environmental risk assessments with regards to missile tests and planning the management of the 26 000 ha of natural veld, working closely with CapeNature (De Hoop Nature Reserve).

In 2005 he joined Enviroscientific, an independent environmental consultancy specializing in wastewater management, botanical and biodiversity assessments, developing environmental management plans and strategies, environmental control work as well as doing environmental compliance audits and was also responsible for helping develop the biodiversity part of the Farming for the Future audit system implemented by Woolworths. During his time with Enviroscientific he performed more than 400 biodiversity and environmental legal compliance audits.

During 2010 he joined EnviroAfrica in order to move back to the biodiversity aspects of environmental management. Experience with EnviroAfrica includes NEMA EIA applications, environmental management plans for various industries, environmental compliance audits, environmental control work as well as more than 70 biodiversity & botanical specialist studies.

Towards the end of 2017, Mr Botes started his own small environmental consulting business focusing on biodiversity & botanical assessments, biodiversity management plans and environmental compliance audits.

Mr. Botes is a registered Professional Botanical, Environmental and Ecological Scientists at SACNASP (South African Council for Natural Scientific Professions) as required in terms of Section 18(1)(a) of the Natural Scientific Professions Act, 2003, since 2005.

DECLARATION OF INDEPENDENCE

THE INDEPENDENT PERSON WHO COMPILED A SPECIALIST REPORT OR UNDERTOOK A SPECIALIST PROCESS

I Petrus, Jacobus, Johannes Botes, as the appointed independent specialist hereby declare that I:

- act/ed as the independent specialist in this application;
- regard the information contained in this report as it relates to my specialist input/study to be true and correct, and
- do not have and will not have any financial interest in the undertaking of the activity, other than remuneration for work performed in terms of the NEMA, the Environmental Impact Assessment Regulations, 2014, as amended, and any specific environmental management Act;
- have and will not have no vested interest in the proposed activity proceeding;
- have disclosed, to the applicant, EAP and competent authority, any material information that have or may have the potential to influence the decision of the competent authority or the objectivity of any report, plan or document required in terms of the NEMA, the Environmental Impact Assessment Regulations, 2014 and any specific environmental management Act;
- am fully aware of and meet the responsibilities in terms of NEMA, the Environmental Impact Assessment Regulations, 2014 (specifically in terms of regulation 13 of GN No. R. 326) and any specific environmental management Act, and that failure to comply with these requirements may constitute and result in disqualification;
- have ensured that information containing all relevant facts in respect of the specialist input/study was distributed or made available to interested and affected parties and the public and that participation by interested and affected parties was facilitated in such a manner that all interested and affected parties were provided with a reasonable opportunity to participate and to provide comments on the specialist input/study;
- have ensured that the comments of all interested and affected parties on the specialist input/study were considered, recorded and submitted to the competent authority in respect of the application;
- have ensured that the names of all interested and affected parties that participated in terms of the specialist input/study were recorded in the register of interested and affected parties who participated in the public participation process;
- have provided the competent authority with access to all information at my disposal regarding the application, whether such information is favourable to the applicant or not; and
- am aware that a false declaration is an offence in terms of regulation 13 of GN No. R. 326.

Note: The terms of reference must be attached.



Signature of the specialist:

PB Consult (Sole Proprietor)

Name of company:

18 March 2023

Date:

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ABBREVIATIONS

BAR	Basic Assessment Report
CBA	Critical biodiversity area (in terms of the 2017 City of Cape Town Biodiversity Network)
DENC	Department of Environment and Nature Conservation
EA	Environmental Authorization (Record of Decision)
EAP	Environmental assessment practitioner
ECO	Environmental Control Officer
EIA	Environmental impact assessment
EMP	Environmental Management Plan or Program
EMS	Environmental management system
EN	Endangered
ESA	Ecological support area (in terms of the 2017 City of Cape Town Biodiversity Network)
LT	Least Threatened
NEMA	National Environmental Management Act, 1998 (Act no. 107 of 1998)
VU	Vulnerable

1. INTRODUCTION

Dawid Kruiper Municipality (Northern Cape Province) needs to expand various cemeteries within their Municipal area. This includes the proposed extension of the cemetery at Rietfontein. The existing cemetery at Rietfontein is about 2.5 ha in size, located about 750m east of Rietfontein, just north of the R31 as one drive towards Rietfontein. The proposed extension will enlarge the cemetery (doubling it in size) eastwards and will also be about 2.5 – 3 ha in size.

Both the existing as well as the proposed cemetery extension is located on the remainder of the farm Mier no. 585 (Municipal land), a large open piece of land, used for livestock grazing (mainly goats and sheep) by the local community.

The proposed footprint will impact on remaining natural veld (which will have to be cleared for the development). According to the vegetation map of South Africa (2012), only one vegetation type will be impacted, namely Kalahari Karroid Shrubland, a vegetation type that is considered “Least Threatened” in terms of the revised national list of ecosystems that are threatened and in need of protection (2022). However, both the existing cemetery and the proposed extension are located in an area identified as critical biodiversity areas (CBA 2) within the 2016 Northern Cape critical biodiversity areas maps (Holness & Oosthuysen, 2016).

The DEA Screening tool report, identified various areas of potential environmental sensitivity, of which the following will be discussed in this report:

- The relative Animal species theme sensitivity is considered of medium sensitivity;
- The relative Plant species theme sensitivity is considered of low sensitivity;
- The relative Terrestrial Biodiversity theme sensitivity is considered of **VERY HIGH SENSITIVITY**.

The relative Aquatic theme (low sensitivity), Archaeological and cultural heritage theme (**VERY HIGH SENSITIVITY**) and Palaeontology theme (Medium sensitivity) are not discussed in this report.

The vegetation in the Northern Cape is just starting to recover from the recent drought period (which lasted more than 7 years). Municipal or Communal land in the Northern Cape, especially those in the immediate vicinity of small settlements and towns are almost always used for livestock grazing (mainly goats, sometimes sheep) by the local community (an open land policy). As a result of the grazing practices and other anthropogenic impacts, the remaining natural veld surrounding these settlements or small towns are usually degraded to some extent.

1.1. LEGISLATION GOVERNING THIS REPORT

EnviroAfrica was appointed the Dawid Kruiper Municipality to facilitate the NEMA EIA application for the proposed project. PB Consult was appointed by EnviroAfrica to conduct a terrestrial biodiversity scan of the proposed footprint area.

This is a ‘specialist report’, compiled in terms of:

- The National Environmental Management Act, Act. 107 of 1998 (NEMA);
- The “Protocol for the Specialist Assessment and Minimum report content requirements for environmental impacts on terrestrial biodiversity” in terms of Sections 24(5)(a) and (h) and 44 of the NEMA (Government Notice No. 320 of 20 March 2020).
- The National Environmental Management: Biodiversity Act, Act 10 of 2004, which allows for the conservation of endangered ecosystems and restriction of activities according to the status of the ecosystem;
- The National Forest Act, Act 84 of 1998, which provide a list of protected trees species in SA;
- The Northern Cape Nature Conservation Act, Act 9 of 2009, which provide extensive lists of protected fauna & flora species in the Northern Cape.

1.2. TERMS OF REFERENCE

The terms of reference for this appointment were to:

- Evaluate the proposed site(s) to determine whether any significant botanical or other terrestrial biodiversity features will be impacted as a result of the proposed development.
- Determine and record the position of any plant species of special significance (e.g. protected tree species, or rare or endangered plant species) that should be avoided or that may require “search & rescue” intervention.
- Locate and record sensitive areas from a terrestrial biodiversity perspective within the proposed development footprint that may be interpreted as obstacles to the proposed development.
- Make recommendations on impact minimization should it be required
- Consider short- to long-term implications of impacts on biodiversity and highlight irreversible impacts or irreplaceable loss of species.

1.3. ACTIVITY DESCRIPTION

The Dawid Kruiper would like to apply for the extension (enlargement) of the existing Rietfontein Cemetery, by formally extending the cemetery eastwards. The existing cemetery is about 2.5 ha in size. The extension will double the size of the cemetery (by adding an additional 2.5 – 3 ha to the cemetery).

The activity will lead to the transformation of about 2.5 – 3 ha of land covered by Kalahari Karroid Shrubland (a vegetation type not considered vulnerable or endangered). The extension will impact on Municipal property (a small portion of the much larger farm Mier no. 585).

2. STUDY AREA & APPROACH

2.1. LOCATION & LAYOUT

Rietfontein is a small town in the Dawid Kruiper Local Municipality of the Northern Cape province of South Africa. It is located on the R31 about 90 km east of Askham (10km north of Philandersbron), almost on the border between South Africa and Namibia (Figure 1).

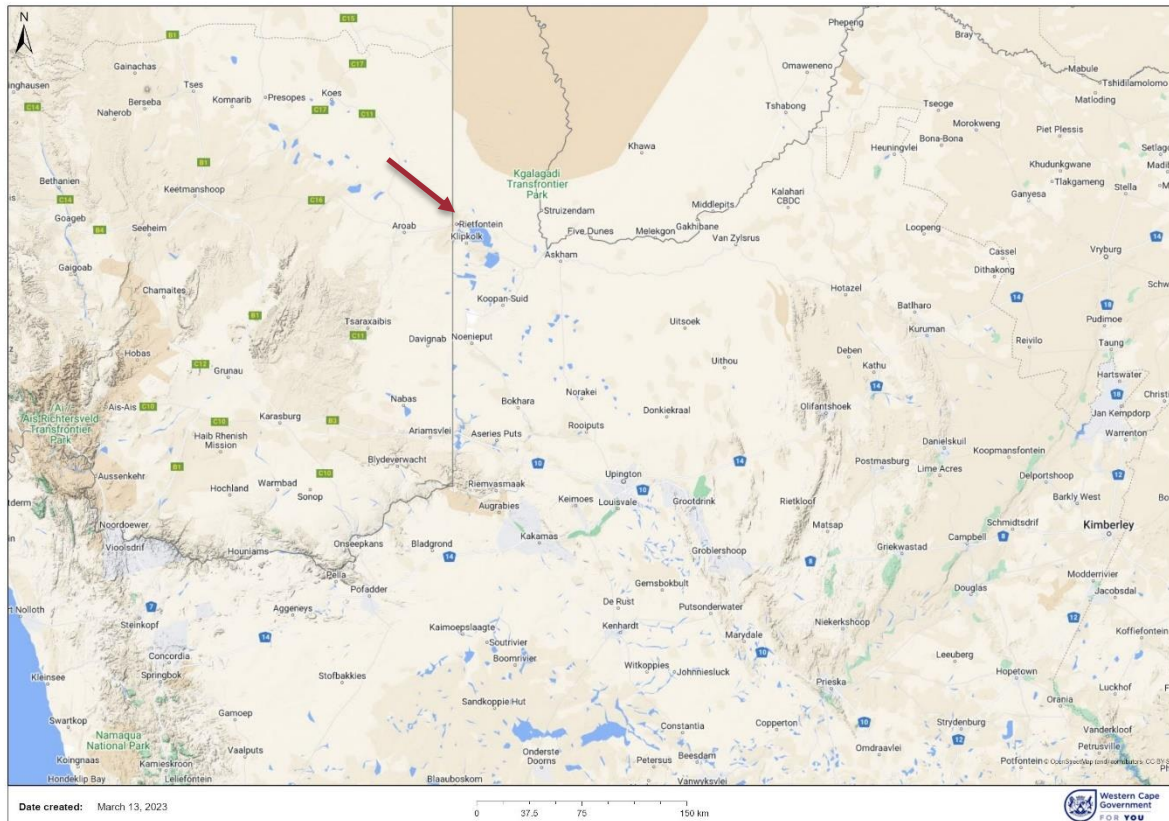


Figure 1: A map showing the location of Rietfontein, in the Northern Cape Province

The existing cemetery at Rietfontein is about 2.5 ha in size, located on the farm Mier no. 585, about 750m east of Rietfontein, just north of the R31 as one drive towards Rietfontein from Groot Mier (Askham). The proposed extension will extent the cemetery (doubling it in size) eastwards (Table 1) and will also be about 2.5 – 3 ha in size (Figure 2). The existing cemetery borders to the west on a small intermittent flood plain which links with Hakskeen Pan. The proposed new cemetery, will be located east of the existing cemetery and thus further away from this intermittent flood plain.

Table 1: Approximate co-ordinates for the corners of the proposed extension (WGS 84 format)

DESCRIPTION	CO-ORDINATE
Northwest corner	S26° 44' 39.4" E20° 02' 18.9"
Southwest corner	S26° 44' 45.0" E20° 02' 18.6"
Southeast corner	S26° 44' 44.8" E20° 02' 24.4"
Northeast corner	S26° 44' 39.1" E20° 02' 24.1"

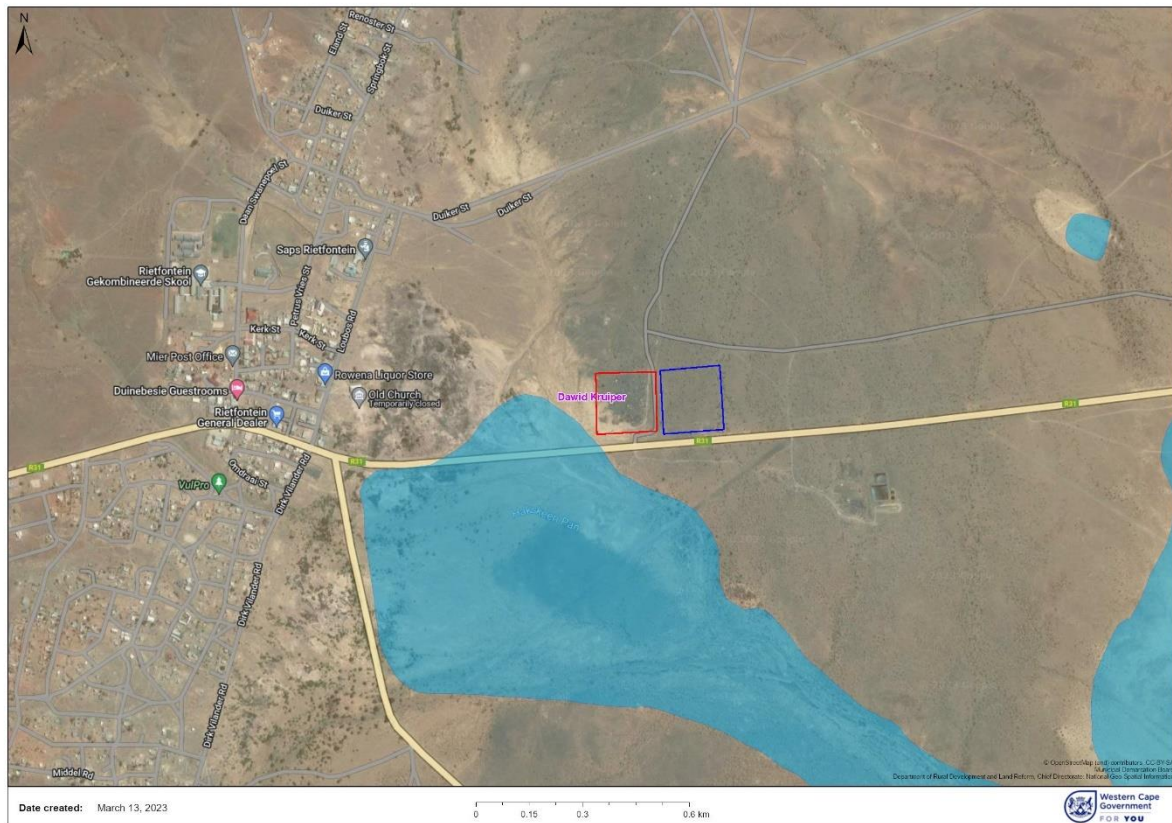


Figure 2: Google image showing the existing Rietfontein cemetery (red), the proposed new extension (blue) in relation to Rietfontein and the tributaries to Hakskeen Pan.

2.2. CLIMATE

Climate in this part of the Kalahari is essentially continental with almost no effect of the ameliorating influences from the oceans. Rainfall is low and unreliable, peaking in December to March. Droughts are unpredictable and often prolonged. Summers are hot and winters cold with temperature extremes ranging from -5°C in winter to 43°C in summer. However, rainfall intensity can be high (e.g., episodic thunderstorm storm events). Rietfontein has a semi-arid climate, with hardly any rains. Still the average rainfall is given as 268 mm, although on average it is dry for more than 258 days a year (<https://www.besttimetovisit.co.za/south-africa/rietfontein-3498186/>).

Figure 3: Average temperature and rainfall for Rietfontein (<https://www.besttimetovisit.co.za/south-africa/rietfontein-3498186/>)

	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
Temperature (°C)	28	27	26	21	18	14	14	17	22	24	26	28
Precipitation (mm)	29	29	24	29	9	21	11	8	12	25	33	38

2.3. TOPOGRAPHY

The proposed footprint is relatively small and located on an almost level plain at about 840m above mean sea level. Topography and slope are not expected to have any significant effect on fauna and flora species encountered.

2.4. GEOLOGY & SOILS

According to Mucina and Rutherford (2006) and the SANBI Biodiversity Geographical Information System, the geology and soils for this area is described as Cenozoic Kalahari Group sands and small patches also on calcrete outcrops and screes on scarps of intermittent rivers (mekgacha). Dwyka Group tillites outcrops found in places. The soils are deep, red-yellow, apedal, freely drained, with a high base status, typical of Ae land type. No special soils or geology features (e.g. quartz patches or broken veld), which could support special botanical features, were observed during the site visit (or are expected).

2.5. APPROACH & METHODOLOGY

The first step of the study was to conduct a desktop study of the study area and its immediate surroundings. Spatial information from online databases such as SANBI BGIS and Google Earth were used to evaluate the site in terms of vegetation, obvious differences in landscape (e.g., variations in soil type, rocky outcrops etc.) or vegetation densities, which might indicate differences in plant community or species composition, critical biodiversity areas and other terrestrial biodiversity features as identified in the DEA screening tool. This information was used to prepare a study area map, which is used as a reference during the physical site visit.

Plant species lists (of the expected plant species for this vegetation type) were prepared and species of special significance were flagged (for the site visit).

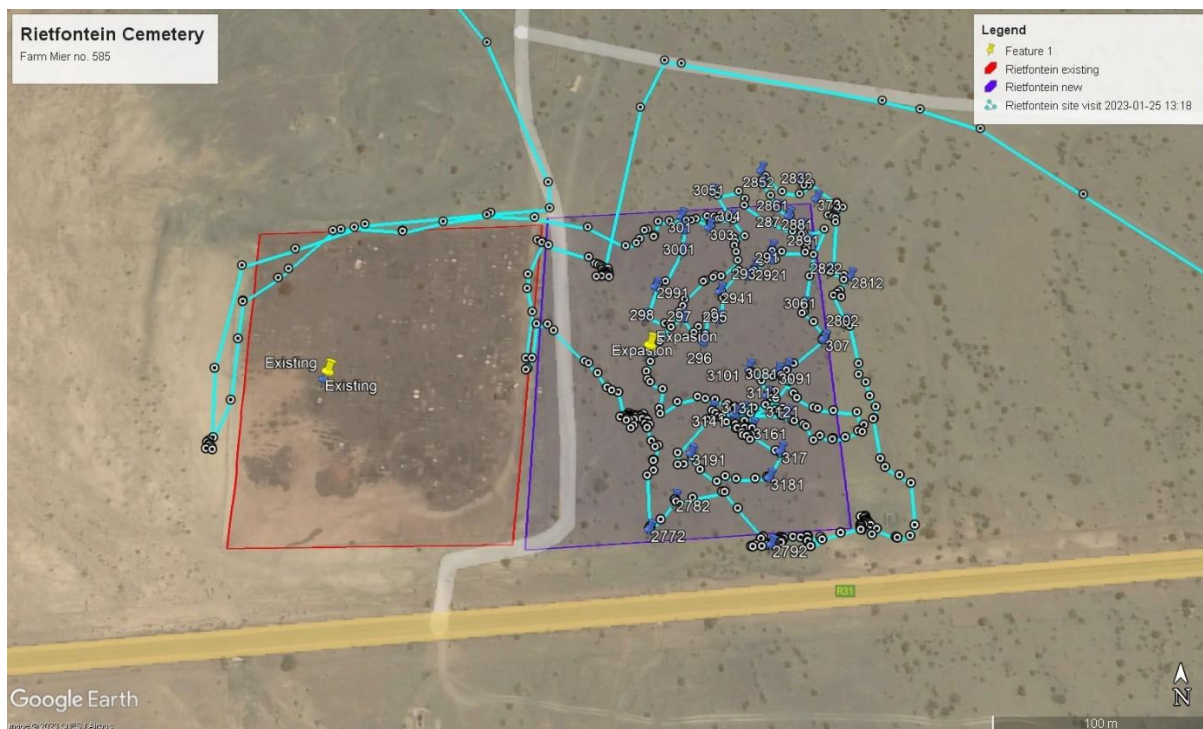


Figure 4: Google overview, showing the study area (expansion) and the routes walked during the site visit.

A one day site visit was performed on the 24th of January 2023. The site assessment survey was conducted by walking the site and sampling the vegetation, using a modified approach, based on the

Braun-Blanquet vegetation survey method (Werger, 1974). During the site visit terrestrial features and plants of specific significance was, marked, and photographed (Figure 4). A hand-held Garmin GPSMAP 62s was used to track the sampling route and for recording waypoints of locations of specific importance. During the survey notes, and photographic records were collected. The author endeavoured to identify and locate all significant botanical features, including special plant species and or specific soil conditions which might indicate special botanical features (e.g., rocky outcrops or heuweltjies) and watercourses.

2.5.1. ASSUMPTIONS AND UNCERTAINTIES

The findings are based on a one-day site visit (not long-term repetitive sampling), which means that it is likely that some plant species might have been missed (not visible or in flower). The timing of the site visit was reasonable (within the summer rainfall period). However, the recent drought (together with current land-use activities – grazing) clearly had an impact on vegetation cover. Even though a fair stand of grasses was observed (which indicated recent rains), the shrub component was still recovering and very few herbs or annuals was observed. However, essentially all perennial plants were identifiable and a good understanding of the status of the vegetation and plant species in the study areas were obtained and confidence in the findings are high. There should be no limiting factors which could significantly alter the outcome of this study. It is unlikely that a full botanical assessment will result in any additional findings that would have a significant impact on the outcome.

3. DESKTOP ASSESSMENT

3.1. BROAD-SCALE VEGETATION EXPECTED

According to the South African vegetation map (2018) (Mucina & Rutherford, 2006), the proposed footprint enlargement will only impact on one vegetation type, namely Kalahari Karroid Shrubland (Figure 5). Mucina & Rutherford (2006) describe this vegetation as occurring in the Northern Cape Province, typically forming belts alternating with *Gordonia* Duneveld on the plains northwest of Upington, through Lutzputs and Noenieput to the Rietfontein/Mier area. It is described as a low karroid shrubland on flat, gravel plains, where Karoo-related elements (shrubs) meet with northern floristic elements, indicating a transition to the Kalahari region and sandy soils.

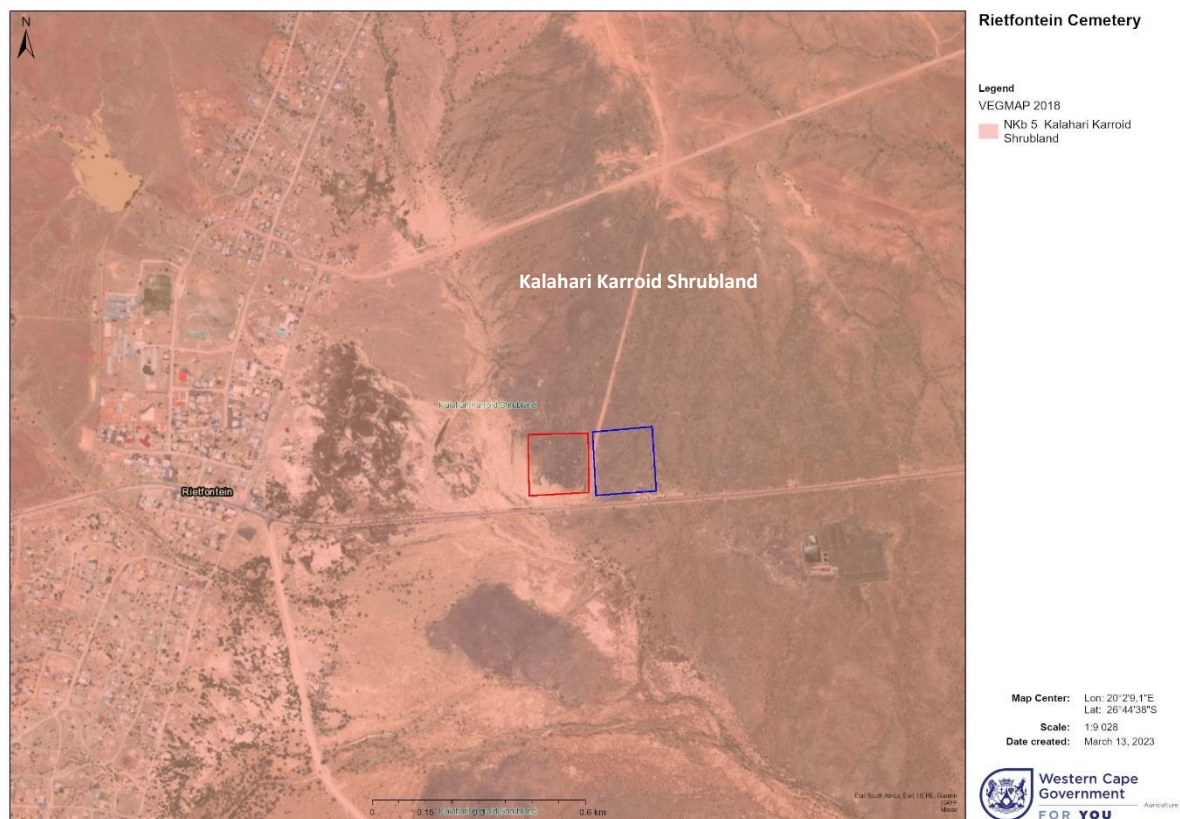


Figure 5: Vegetation map of South Africa (2018), showing the expected vegetation type (CapeFarmMapper)

Kalahari Karroid Shrubland has been classified as “**Least Threatened**” in terms of the “*Revised List of ecosystems that are threatened and in need of protection*” (GN 47526 of 18 November 2022), promulgated in terms of the National Environmental Management Biodiversity Act, Act 10 of 2004. However, very little of this vegetation type is statutorily conserved (apart from a small portion within the Augrabies Falls National Park). Very little of this vegetation had been transformed, but these belts were often the preferred route for early roads, which promoted the introduction of alien invasive species.

3.2. ECOLOGICAL DRIVERS & FUNCTIONING

Kalahari Karroid Shrubland is part of the Nama-Karoo Biome, which is a large arid landlocked region on the central plateau of the western half of South Africa, extending into Namibia. It is flanked by the Succulent Karoo to the west and south, desert to the northwest, arid Kalahari Savanna to the north, Grassland to the northeast, Albany Thicket to the southeast and small parts of Fynbos to the south. In South Africa, only the Desert Biome has a higher variability in annual rainfall and only the Kalahari Savanna greater extremes in temperature. The Nama-Karoo receives most of its rainfall in summer, especially in late summer (Mucina *et. al.*, 2006).

Climate is essentially continental and with almost no effect of the ameliorating influences of the oceans. Rainfall is low and unreliable, peaking in March. Droughts are unpredictable and often prolonged. Summers are hot and winters cold with temperature extremes ranging from -5°C in winter to 43°C in summer. However, rainfall intensity can be high (e.g. episodic thunderstorm and hail storm events). This coupled with the generally low vegetation cover associated with aridity and grazing pressure by domestic stock over the last two centuries, raises the potential for soil erosion. In semi-arid environments such as the Nama-Karoo, nutrients are generally located near the soil surface, making it vulnerable to sheet erosion (Mucina *et. al.*, 2006).

In contrast with the Succulent Karoo, the Nama-Karoo is not particularly rich in plant species and does not contain any centre of endemism. Local endemism is very low, which might indicate a relative youthful biome linked to the remarkable geological and environmental homogeneity of the Nama-Karoo. Rainfall seasonality and frequency are too unpredictable and winter temperatures too low to enable leaf succulent dominance (as in the Succulent Karoo). It is also too dry in summer for dominance by perennial grasses alone and the soils generally too shallow and rainfall too low for dominance by trees. But soil type, soil depth and local differences in moisture availability can cause abrupt changes in vegetation structure and composition (e.g., small drainage lines support more plant species than surrounding plains) (Mucina *et. al.*, 2006).

In terms of status, very little of the Nama-Karoo has been transformed and the dominant land use is farming with small stock, cattle and game. Farms are fenced, but generally large (because of the low carrying capacity). The **biggest threat to this vegetation remains domestic livestock grazing pressure**. Grazing by livestock, particularly during the summer growing season, reduces the perennial grass component, while prolonged droughts kill a high proportion of perennial plants, rapidly changing vegetation composition in favour of short-lived species with soil stored seed banks. Overgrazing after drought periods can delay vegetation recovery, which will worsen the effect of subsequent droughts.

3.3. CRITICAL BIODIVERSITY AREAS & ECOLOGICAL CORRIDORS

The Northern Cape CBA Map (2016) identifies biodiversity priority areas, called Critical Biodiversity Areas (CBAs) and Ecological Support Areas (ESAs), which, together with protected areas, are important for the persistence of a viable representative sample of all ecosystem types and species as well as the long-term ecological functioning of the landscape (Holness & Oosthuysen, 2016). The 2016 Northern Cape Critical Biodiversity Area (CBA) Map updates, revises and replaces all older systematic biodiversity plans and associated products for the province (including the Namakwa District Biodiversity Sector Plan, 2008). Priorities from existing plans such as the Namakwa District Biodiversity Plan, the Succulent Karoo Ecosystem Plan, National Estuary Priorities, and the National Freshwater

Ecosystem Priority Areas were incorporated. Targets for terrestrial ecosystems were based on established national targets, while targets used for other features were aligned with those used in other provincial planning processes.

Critical biodiversity areas (CBA's) are terrestrial and aquatic features in the landscape that are critical for retaining biodiversity and supporting continued ecosystem functioning and services (SANBI 2007). The primary purpose of CBA's is to inform land-use planning in order to promote sustainable development and protection of important natural habitat and landscapes. CBA's can also be used to inform protected area expansion and development plans.

- **Critical biodiversity areas (CBA's)** are areas of the landscape that need to be maintained in a natural or near-natural state in order to ensure the continued existence and functioning of species and ecosystems and the delivery of ecosystem services. In other words, if these areas are not maintained in a natural or near-natural state then biodiversity conservation targets cannot be met. Maintaining an area in a natural state can include a variety of biodiversity-compatible land uses and resource uses.
- **Ecological support areas (ESA's)** are areas that are not essential for meeting biodiversity representation targets/thresholds but which nevertheless play an important role in supporting the ecological functioning of critical biodiversity areas and/or in delivering ecosystem services that support socio-economic development, such as water provision, flood mitigation or carbon sequestration. The degree of restriction on land use and resource use in these areas may be lower than that recommended for critical biodiversity areas.

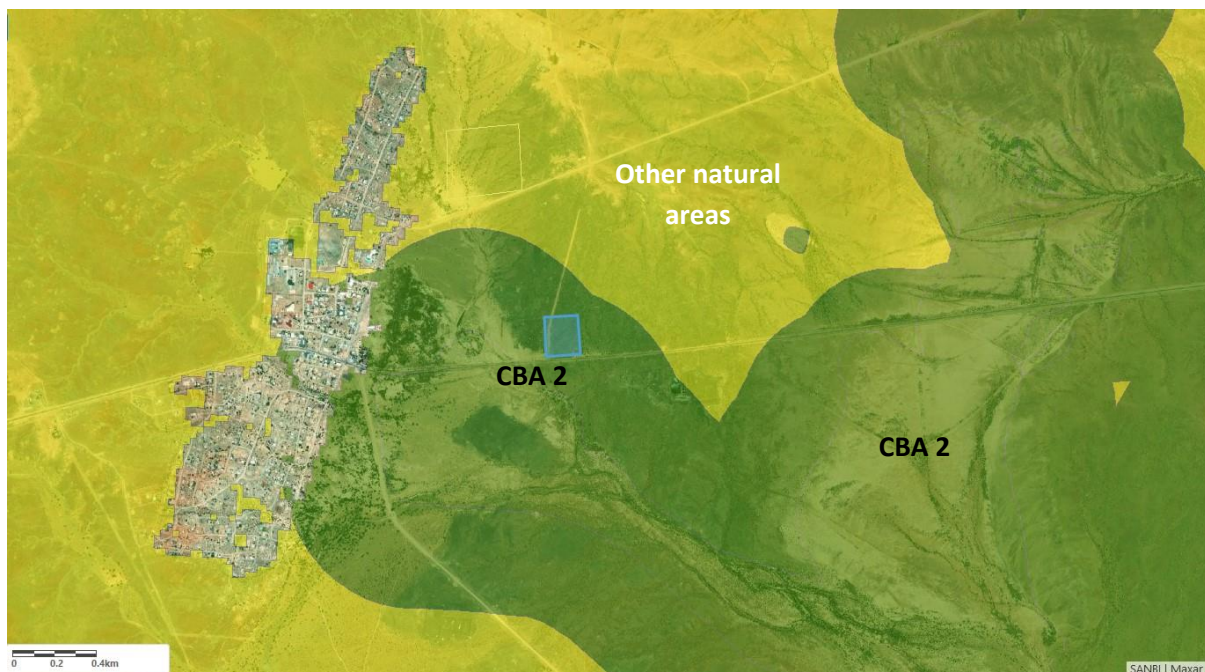


Figure 6: Northern Cape CBA map (2016) showing the study area and associated critical biodiversity areas

According to the Northern Cape critical biodiversity areas maps, the proposed cemetery expansion area will overlap a critical biodiversity area (CBA 2) as identified within the 2016 Northern Cape CBA maps (Figure 6). The CBA areas in this case aims at the protection of the wetland systems (and a surrounding buffer zone) associated with the Southern Kalahari Salt Pans of Hakskeen Pan.

3.4. POTENTIAL IMPACT ON CENTERS OF ENDEMISM

According to Van Wyk & Smith (2001) the proposed development will not impact on any recognised centre of endemism. The Gariep Centre is located to the south (quite a distance away), associated with Augrabies, Pella and Onseepkans along the border of South Africa and Namibia, while the Griqualand West Centre of Endemism starts to the east of Upington Northern Cape Province.

3.5. NATIONAL LANDUSE AND COVER

According to the 2014 National Land Cover Map of South Africa, the proposed cemetery will impact on remaining natural veld. The biodiversity summary for the Mier Municipality (which includes Rietfontein) states that 99.6% of the Mier Municipal area is still covered by remaining natural veld, none of which are vulnerable or endangered (<http://bgis.sanbi.org/LUDS/Home/Municipality/214>).

The proposed cemetery is in the Nama Karoo Biome (Northern Bushmanland), which is used mainly for livestock grazing and or game farming. There are no intensive agriculture practices within or near the footprint, because of the lack of irrigation water.

4. SITE SENSITIVITY VERIFICATION

Because of its aridity and unpredictable rainfall patterns, the Nama-Karoo region (in which this site falls) favours free moving herbivores such as gemsbok, ostrich and springbok, nomadic birds and invertebrates with variable dormancy cued by rain. Plant defence against herbivores and seed adaption for dispersal by mammals are relatively uncommon, except along rivers and seasonal pans, suggesting the transient nature of herbivores, except near water where they would have lingered longer. During the 19th century the vast herds of migratory ungulates indigenous to this biome have been replaced (almost completely) by domestic stock. Once farmers started fencing their properties into camps (following the Fencing Act of 1912), stock numbers were dramatically increased with dire consequences to plant diversity. Grazing during and immediately after droughts periods is regarded as a major cause of detrimental change in vegetation composition and were ultimately responsible for the decline of large numbers of palatable plants (Mucina *et. al.*, 2006).

The following sensitivity evaluation is based on expected terrestrial features of significance identified through the desktop studis and personal observation made during the physical site visit.

4.1. SIGNIFICANT LANDSCAPE FEATURES

The proposed development footprint will result in a long term or permanent impact on a relatively small area of natural veld. The veld itself and the landscape are homogenous with little variation over the site itself. The vegetation is described as a sparse open shrubland with a grassy bottom layer. The veld and landscape did not contain any rocky outcrop, watercourses or any other biophysical feature that might have resulted in special habitats for fauna or flora. Small game and reptiles are likely to occur in the larger area surrounding the town but will be limited within the proposed footprint

because of its proximity to the town with its associated anthropogenic activities.

4.2. VEGETATION ENCOUNTERED

The vegetation encountered can be described as an open shrubland (up to 1.5 m high) with a grassy bottom layer in the open areas very similar in appearance to some forms of arid grassland (Photo 1 – 6). The soils were mostly flat gravel plains with sandy patches in between. Species diversity was very low, and the impacts of the recent 7-9 year drought period was still clearly visible in the veld. Many of the larger shrubs had not yet recovered and no herbaceous species was observed.

The open shrub layer was usually dominated by either *Boscia foetida* (stink-bush) or *Phaeoptilum spinosum* (brittle-thorn) forming shrub clumps in association with several other smaller species growing within the larger shrubs or along its edges. They included the caustic bush, *Asparagus cf. pearsonii*, *Cynanchum viminale*, *Calicorema capitata* (bloubasbos) and *Kleinia longiflora*, . Along the southern fence line (next to the R31) a few larger *Vachellia hebeclada* (trassiedoring) individuals was observed, while the slender sparsely branched, *Parkinsonia africana* tree, and the alien invasive *Prosopis* tree, was occasionally observed within the site.



Photo 1: Typical vegetation encountered on the site. Shrubs consisting mostly of *Boscia foetida* and *Phaeoptilum spinosum* dominating the shrub layer (in association with various other shrub species) and a grassy bottom layer in between.



Photo 2: Looking from west to east over the site. Note the grassy bottom layer and the sparse shrub layer.



Photo 3: Some of the larger *Boscia foetida* individuals encountered to the northeast of the site.

The grassy bottom layer included several *Aristida*, *Enneapogon*, *Eragrostis* and *Stipagrostis* species. Most of the *Aristida* and *Enneapogon* species observed are considered disturbance indicators, which is likely the result of long-term livestock grazing in the vicinity of the town.



Photo 4: *Vachellia hebeclada*, to the south of the proposed footprint (not the R31 to the right of picture).



Photo 5: Another typical view over the site – looking from the south to the north.



Photo 6: Looking from north to south over the middle of the site.

4.3. FLORA ENCOUNTERED

Table 2 gives a list of the plant species encountered during this study. It is important to note that the species list is based on a one-day site visit and it is likely plant species (especially annuals and geophytes) might have been missed. However, the author is confident that a good understanding of the vegetation was achieved and confidence in the findings is high. Species diversity was very and still showed signs of the recent 7-9 year drought period. No red-listed plant was observed, but one species protected in terms of the NCNCA was observed.

Table 2: List of plant species observed within the proposed development footprint.

NO.	SPECIES NAME	FAMILY	STATUS	LOCATION
1.	<i>Aptosimum spinescens</i>	SCROPHULARIACEAE	LC	Occasionally observed in the grassy bottom layer.
2.	<i>Aristida congesta</i>	POACEAE	LC	Small grass
3.	<i>Aristida adscensionis</i>	POACEAE	LC	Small grass
4.	<i>Asparagus cf. pearsonii</i>	ASPARAGACEAE	LC	Wiry shrub/climber within the shrub clumps.
5.	<i>Boscia foetida</i>	BRASSICACEAE (CAPPARACEAE)	LC	About 30 scruffy multi-stemmed shrubs observed within the footprint.
6.	<i>Cynanchum viminalis</i>	APOCYNACEAE	LC	Frequently observed on the edges of the shrub clumps
7.	<i>Calicorema capitata</i>	AMARANTHACEAE	LC	A short spiny dwarf shrub encountered on the edges of the shrub clumps
8.	<i>Enneapogon desvauxii</i>	POACEAE	LC	Small short perennial grass.
9.	<i>Eragrostis rigidior</i>	POACEAE	LC	Broad leaved perennial grass.
10.	<i>Kleinia longiflora</i>	ASTERACEAE	LC	A medium large hairless, many stemmed, stem succulent.
11.	<i>Parkinsonia africana</i>	FABACEAE	LC	Almost exclusively associated with water courses.
12.	<i>Phaeoptilum spinosum</i>	NYCTAGINACEAE	LC	Scattered throughout, relatively common.
13.	<i>Stipagrostis uniplumis</i>	POACEAE	LC	Medium sized grass.
14.	<i>Vachellia hebeclada</i> (=Acacia hebeclada)	FABACEAE	LC	Occasionally found along the southern boundary of the site (next to the R31).

4.4. THREATENED AND PROTECTED PLANT SPECIES

South Africa has become the first country to fully assess the status of its entire flora. Major threats to the South African flora are identified in terms of the number of plant taxa Red-Listed as threatened with extinction as a result of threats like, habitat loss (e.g. infrastructure development, urban expansion, crop cultivation and mines), invasive alien plant infestation (e.g. outcompeting indigenous plant species), habitat degradation (e.g. overgrazing, inappropriate fire management etc.), unsustainable harvesting, demographic factors, pollution, loss of pollinators or dispersers, climate change and natural disasters (e.g. such as droughts and floods). South Africa uses the internationally endorsed IUCN Red List Categories and Criteria in the Red List of South African plants. However, due to its strong focus on determining risk of extinction, the IUCN system does not highlight species that are at low risk of extinction but may nonetheless be of high conservation importance. As a result, SANBI uses an amended system of categories to highlight species that may be of low risk of extinction but are still of conservation concern (SANBI, 2015).

Red list of South African plant species: The Red List of South African Plants online provides up to date information on the national conservation status of South Africa’s indigenous plants (SANBI, 2020).

- No red-listed species was observed during the study.

NEM:BA protected plant species: The National Environmental Management: Biodiversity Act, Act 10 of 2004, provides for the protection of species through the “Lists of critically endangered, endangered, vulnerable and protected species” (GN. R. 152 of 23 February 2007).

- No species protected in terms of NEM: BA was observed.

NFA Protected plant species: The National Forests Act (NFA) of 1998 (Act 84 of 1998) provides for the protection of forests as well as specific tree species (as updated).

- No species protected in terms of the NFA was observed.

NCNCA Protected plant species: The Northern Cape Nature Conservation Act 9 of 2009 (NCNCA) came into effect on the 12th of December 2011, and provides for the sustainable utilization of wild animals, aquatic biota and plants. Schedule 1 and 2 of the act give extensive lists of specially protected and protected fauna and flora species in accordance with this act. NB. Please note that all indigenous plant species are protected in terms of Schedule 3 of this act (e.g., any work within a road reserve).

- **One species protected in terms of the NCNCA was observed, namely *Boscia foetida* subsp. *foetida*.**

4.5. FAUNA AND AVI-FAUNA

No fauna or avi-fauna screening was done as part of this study, but observations were made during the site visit. The site itself is relatively near to the town of Rietfontein, next to the existing cemetery. Long term livestock grazing, and the effects of the recent 7-9 year drought had left its impact on the

veld.

However, according to the **NEMA EIA Sensitivity** scan for the site generated on 15/02/2023 by PB Consult the:

- Animal Species Theme Sensitivity is **MEDIUM SENSITIVE** because of the potential presence of one bird species (The Bateleur) discussed under Heading 4.5.2;
- Terrestrial Biodiversity Theme Sensitivity is **VERY HIGH SENSITIVE** because of it being located within a CBA 2. The CBA is discussed under Heading 3.3.

4.5.1. MAMMALS REPTILES AND AMPHIBIANS

The nearby Kgalagadi Transfrontier Park is renowned for its predators and seasonal movement of large herbivores such as blue wildebeest, springbok, eland, and red hartebeest. Being classified as a very dry savanna; animals here are all perfectly adapted to survive. Up to 62 mammal species, 274 birds (of which 78 are resident throughout the year), 48 reptiles (including 17 snake species) and 7 amphibians had been recorded in the park. The Dawid Kruiper Municipal area is known for its game farming and as favourite hunting destination. Indigenous game species are mostly concentrated within these game farms, but some migratory species will roam the surrounding areas.

Apart from a few insects (e.g., Cicada's) and nest of one of the smaller bird species (now neglected), the only evidence of animals on the site was livestock droppings. No evidence in the form of tracks, faeces or even burrows of any other indigenous fauna (e.g., small game) were observed within the footprint area, although it is expected that reptile's (like gecko's, agama's, skinks, and snakes) and small game will occur in the larger area. The veld was very homogeneous and habitat variety or diversity within the footprint area is low to very low. The lack of rocky hills or outcrops within the development area would preclude a variety of species from the site. There are also no suitable habitats for amphibian species within the footprint area.

The proposed development of the proposed cemetery extension is unlikely to have any significant impact on free roaming mammals, reptiles, or amphibians, especially since it is located so near to the town of Rietfontein.

4.5.2. AVI-FAUNA

The animal species theme sensitivity is considered medium sensitive because the proposed site falls within an area in which the Bateleur/Berghaan (*Terathopius ecaudatus*) might be encountered. The Bateleur is considered **endangered** in South Africa with a suspected population size reduction of more than 50% over the past three generations. In addition, the population is estimated to number less than 1 000 mature individuals and a continuing decline of at least 20% is expected within the next 2 generations (27 years) (Taylor, 2015). This species is restricted to sub-Saharan Africa and found throughout South Africa, Namibia, Botswana, Zimbabwe and southern Mozambique (Simmons, 2005) where there is no thick forest. It requires open grassland and acacia savannah. According to the distribution map for the Bateleur in SA, based on records of the SA Bird Atlas Project, there is very low percentage (0.1 – 2.5%) change that the Bateleur will be encountered in the Rietfontein area (Hockey *et. al.*, 2005). In fact the nearest observations for this bird was made int the Kgalagadi Transfrontier

Park and along the Molopo River (near Askham).

Bateleur eagles spend 8-9 hours each day in the air looking for food. Their diet includes antelope, mice, birds, snakes, carrion, lizards and especially road kills. It is mainly a scavenger, although about a third of its time is spent hunting, feeding on a variety of animals. It usually hunts aerially, sometimes flying to veld fires, as it feeds on animals killed by the heat or fleeing from it. They tend to build a relatively small if **sturdy stick nest in a large tree** and lay only a single egg (Hockey *et. al.* 2005).

The proposed cemetery enlargement will impact a relatively small section of land. There are no suitable nesting sites for the bateleur within the proposed footprint. Although the bateleur may hunt over the larger area it is highly unlikely that the proposed development will have any significant impact on the breeding or feeding patterns of this bird.

With regards to this project the sensitivity rating should be low sensitive.

5. IMPACT ASSESSMENT METHOD

The concept of environmental impact assessment in terms of the National Environmental Management Act, Act 107 of 1998 (NEMA) and the Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) was developed to identify and evaluate the nature of potential impact to determine whether an activity is likely to cause significant environmental impact on the environment. The concept of significance is at the core of impact identification, evaluation and decision making, but despite this the concept of significance and the method used for determining significance remains largely undefined and open to interpretation (DEAT, 2002).

The objective of this study was to evaluate the remaining biodiversity of the study area to identify significant environmental features which might have been impacted as a result of the development. The Ecosystem Guidelines for Environmental Assessment (De Villiers *et. al.*, 2005), were used to evaluate the botanical significance of the property with emphasis on:

- Significant ecosystems
 - Threatened or protected ecosystems
 - Special habitats
 - Corridors and or conservancy networks
- Significant species
 - Threatened or endangered species
 - Protected species.

5.1. DETERMINING SIGNIFICANCE

Determining impact significance from predictions of the nature of the impact has been a source of debate and will remain a source of debate. The author used a combination of scaling and weighting methods to determine significance based on a simple formula. The formula used is based on the

method proposed by Edwards (2011). However, the criteria used were adjusted to suite its use for botanical assessment. In this document significance rating was evaluated using the following criteria.

Significance = Conservation Value x (Likelihood + Duration + Extent + Severity) (Edwards 2011)
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5.1.1. CRITERIA USED

Conservation value: Conservation value refers to the intrinsic value of an attribute (e.g. an ecosystem, a vegetation type, a natural feature or a species) or its relative importance towards the conservation of an ecosystem or species or even natural aesthetics. Conservation status is based on habitat function, its vulnerability to loss and fragmentation or its value in terms of the protection of habitat or species (Refer to Table 3 for categories used).

Likelihood refers to the probability of the specific impact occurring because of the proposed activity (Refer to Table 4, for categories used).

Duration refers to the length in time during which the activity is expected to impact on the environment (Refer to Table 5).

Extent refers to the spatial area that is likely to be impacted or over which the impact will have influence, should it occur (Refer to Table 6).

Severity refers to the direct physical or biophysical impact of the activity on the surrounding environment should it occur (Refer to Table 7).

Table 3: Categories used for evaluating conservation status.

CONSERVATION VALUE	
Low (1)	The attribute is transformed, degraded not sensitive (e.g. Least threatened), with unlikely possibility of species loss.
Medium/low (2)	The attribute is in good condition but not sensitive (e.g. Least threatened), with unlikely possibility of species loss.
Medium (3)	The attribute is in good condition, considered vulnerable (threatened), or falls within an ecological support area or a critical biodiversity area, but with unlikely possibility of species loss.
Medium/high (4)	The attribute is considered endangered or, falls within an ecological support area or a critical biodiversity area, or provides core habitat for endemic or rare & endangered species.
High (5)	The attribute is considered critically endangered or is part of a proclaimed provincial or national protected area.

Table 4: Categories used for evaluating likelihood.

LIKELIHOOD	
Highly Unlikely (1)	Under normal circumstances it is almost certain that the impact will not occur.
Unlikely (2)	The possibility of the impact occurring is very low, but there is a small likelihood under normal circumstances.
Possible (3)	The likelihood of the impact occurring, under normal circumstances is 50/50, it may or it may not occur.
Probable (4)	It is very likely that the impact will occur under normal circumstances.
Certain (5)	The proposed activity is of such a nature that it is certain that the impact will occur under normal circumstances.

Table 5: Categories used for evaluating duration.

DURATION	
Short (1)	Impact is temporary and easily reversible through natural process or with mitigation. Rehabilitation time is expected to be short (1-2 years).
Medium/short (2)	Impact is temporary and reversible through natural process or with mitigation. Rehabilitation time is expected to be relative short (2-5 years).
Medium (3)	Impact is medium-term and reversible with mitigation, but will last for some time after construction and may require ongoing mitigation. Rehabilitation time is expected to be longer (5-15 years).
Long (4)	Impact is long-term and reversible but only with long term mitigation. It will last for a long time after construction and is likely to require ongoing mitigation. Rehabilitation time is expected to be longer (15-50 years).
Permanent (5)	The impact is expected to be permanent.

Table 6: Categories used for evaluating extent.

EXTENT	
Site (1)	Under normal circumstances the impact will be contained within the construction footprint.
Property (2)	Under normal circumstances the impact might extent outside of the construction site (e.g., within a 2 km radius), but will not affect surrounding properties.
Surrounding properties (3)	Under normal circumstances the impact might extent outside of the property boundaries and will affect surrounding landowners or –users, but still within the local area (e.g., within a 50 km radius).
Regional (4)	Under normal circumstances the impact might extent to the surrounding region (e.g., within a 200 km radius), and will impact on landowners in the larger region (not only surrounding the site).
Provincial (5)	Under normal circumstances the effects of the impact might extent to a large geographical area (>200 km radius).

Table 7: Categories used for evaluating severity.

SEVERITY	
Low (1)	It is expected that the impact will have little or no affect (barely perceptible) on the integrity of the surrounding environment. Rehabilitation not needed or easily achieved.
Medium/low (2)	It is expected that the impact will have a perceptible impact on the surrounding environment, but it will maintain its function, even if slightly modified (overall integrity not compromised). Rehabilitation easily achieved.
Medium (3)	It is expected that the impact will have an impact on the surrounding environment, but it will maintain its function, even if moderately modified (overall integrity not compromised). Rehabilitation easily achieved.
Medium/high (4)	It is expected that the impact will have a severe impact on the surrounding environment. Functioning may be severely impaired and may temporarily cease. Rehabilitation will be needed to restore system integrity.
High (5)	It is expected that the impact will have a very severe to permanent impact on the surrounding environment. Functioning irreversibly impaired. Rehabilitation often impossible or unfeasible due to cost.

5.2. SIGNIFICANCE CATEGORIES

The formal NEMA EIA application process was developed to assess the significance of impacts on the surrounding environment (including socio-economic factors), associated with any specific development proposal to allow the competent authority to make informed decisions. Specialist studies must advise the environmental assessment practitioner (EAP) on the significance of impacts in his field of specialty. To do this, the specialist must identify all potentially significant environmental impacts, predict the nature of the impact, and evaluate the significance of that impact should it occur.

Potential significant impacts are evaluated, using the method described above, to determine its potential significance. The potential significance is then described in terms of the categories given in Table 8. Mitigation options are evaluated, and comparison is then made (using the same method) of potential significance before mitigation and potential significance after mitigation (to advise the EAP).

Table 8: Categories used to describe significance rating (adjusted from DEAT, 2002)

SIGNIFICANCE	DESCRIPTION
Insignificant or Positive (4-22)	There is no impact, or the impact is insignificant in scale or magnitude because of low sensitivity to change or low intrinsic value of the site, or the impact may be positive.
Low (23-36)	An impact barely noticeable in scale or magnitude because of low sensitivity to change or low intrinsic value of the site or will be of very short-term or is unlikely to occur. Impact is unlikely to have any real effect and no or little mitigation is required.
Medium Low (37-45)	Impact is of a low order and therefore likely to have little real effect. Mitigation is easily achieved. Social, cultural, and economic activities can continue unchanged, or impacts may have medium to short term effects on the social and/or natural environment within site boundaries.
Medium (46-55)	Impact is real, but not substantial. Mitigation is both feasible and easily possible but may require modification of the project design or layout. Social, cultural, and economic activities of communities may be impacted, but can continue (albeit in a different form). These impacts will usually result in medium to long term effect on the social and/or natural environment, within site boundary.
Medium high (56-63)	Impact is real, substantial, and undesirable, but mitigation is feasible. Modification of the project design or layout may be required. Social, cultural, and economic activities may be impacted, but can continue (albeit in a different form). These impacts will usually result in medium to long-term effect on the social and/or natural environment, beyond site boundary within local area.
High (64-79)	An impact of high order. Mitigation is difficult, expensive, time-consuming or some combination of these. Social, cultural, and economic activities of communities are disrupted and may come to a halt. These impacts will usually result in long-term change to the social and/or natural environment, beyond site boundaries, regional or widespread.
Unacceptable (80-100)	An impact of the highest order possible. There is no possible mitigation that could offset the impact. Social, cultural, and economic activities of communities are disrupted to such an extent that these come to a halt. The impact will result in permanent change. Very often these impacts are un-mitigatable and usually result in very severe effects, beyond site boundaries, national or international.

6. SITE SENSITIVITY DISCUSSION

The proposed development footprint will result in a long term or permanent impact on a relatively small area of natural veld (2 – 3 ha in size). The proposed footprint will link with the existing Rietfontein cemetery and is located relatively near to town.

HABITAT CONDITIONS AND DIVERSITY: The veld itself and the landscape are homogenous with little variation over the site itself. The vegetation is described as a sparse open shrubland with a grassy bottom layer. The veld and landscape did not contain any rocky outcrop, watercourses or any other biophysical feature that might have resulted in special habitats for fauna or flora.

LAND-USE: The proposed development will impact on a small area of natural veld used for life-stock grazing by the local community. The biodiversity summary for the Mier Municipality (which includes Rietfontein) states that 99.6% of the Mier Municipal area is still covered by remaining natural veld, none of which are vulnerable or endangered. The development is of such a small scale in terms of the larger property on which it is located, that it is **highly unlikely to have any significant impact on the current land-use.**

VEGETATION: Kalahari Karroid Shrubland are classified as “Least Threatened” in terms of the “Revised List of ecosystems that are threatened and in need of protection” (GN 47526 of 18 November 2022). The vegetation encountered can be described as an open shrubland (up to 1.5 m high) with a grassy bottom layer in the open areas very similar in appearance to some forms of arid grassland (Photo 1 – 6). Species diversity was very low, and the impacts of the recent 7-9 year drought period was still clearly visible in the veld. Many of the larger shrubs had not yet recovered and no herbaceous species was observed (Refer to Heading 3.1 & 4.2). In terms of botanical significance, it was only the presence of several NCNCA protected *Boscia foetida* individuals within the site that was identified as of any potential significance (Refer to the Protected plant species underneath).

In terms of vegetation, it is considered **highly unlikely that the proposed development will contribute significantly to the loss of vegetation type or associated habitat.**

THREATENED AND PROTECTED PLANT SPECIES: No red-data or nationally protected plant species were observed within the proposed footprint. However, one plant (*Boscia foetida*), protected in terms of the NCNCA (Refer to Table 2). About 30 of these plants is likely to be impacted by the proposed development. Because of its deep and extensive root system search & rescue is not a viable mitigation option (plants rarely survive replanting – Personal observations). On the other hand, the surrounding veld shows the same densities of *Boscia foetida* plants scattered throughout the larger farm portion. Most of the plants observed were also scrubby multi-stemmed individuals. The plant is used as supplementary fodder for goats during dry spells and are used for nesting purposes by smaller birds. Thus, although the proposed development will impact on a number these plants, they are still very well

represented in the surrounding veld and because of the small size of the development footprint the impact should be negligible (Refer to Heading 4.4).

According to the DEA Screening tool report, the relative **plant species theme sensitivity** is considered of **low sensitivity**, which is supported by the findings of this assessment.

FAUNA AND AVI-FAUNA: No evidence in the form of tracks, faeces or even burrows of any other indigenous fauna (e.g., small game) were observed within the footprint area, although it is expected that reptile's (like gecko's, agama's, skinks, and snakes) and small game will occur in the larger area. The veld was very homogeneous and habitat variety or diversity within the footprint area is low to very low. The lack of rocky hills or outcrops within the development area would preclude a variety of species from the site. There are also no suitable habitats for amphibian species within the footprint area (Refer to Heading 4.5.1).

The animal species theme sensitivity is considered **medium sensitive** because the proposed site falls within an area in which the **Bateleur/Berghaan** (*Terathopius ecaudatus*) might be encountered. The Bateleur is considered **endangered** in South Africa with a suspected population size reduction of more than 50% over the past three generations. According to the distribution map for the Bateleur in SA, based on records of the SA Bird Atlas Project, there is very low percentage (0.1 – 2.5%) change that the Bateleur will be encountered in the Rietfontein area (Hockey *et. al.*, 2005). In fact, the nearest observations for this bird were made in the Kgalagadi Transfrontier Park and along the Molopo River (near Askham). The proposed cemetery enlargement will impact a relatively small section of land. There are no suitable nesting sites for the bateleur within the proposed footprint. Although the bateleur may hunt over the larger area it is highly unlikely that the proposed development will have any significant impact on the breeding or feeding patterns of this bird (Refer to Heading 4.5.2).

With regards to this project the sensitivity rating should be low sensitive.

CRITICAL BIODIVERSITY AREAS: According to the Northern Cape critical biodiversity areas maps, the proposed cemetery expansion area will overlap a critical biodiversity area (CBA 2) as identified within the 2016 Northern Cape CBA maps (Figure 6). The CBA areas in this case aims at the protection of the wetland systems (and a surrounding buffer zone) associated with the Southern Kalahari Salt Pans of Hakskeen Pan. The proposed extension will be located to the east of the existing Rietfontein cemetery, which will place it even further away from the occasional wetland area to the west of the existing cemetery. Although the proposed footprint will still be located within a 100 m of an occasional wetland area, it does not overlap the inundation area associated with the occasional wetland area.

The proposed footprint will be very small (2 – 3 ha) and will have minimal additional impact on ecosystem connectivity. The existing cemetery is already serviced with access roads, which will be the same used for the proposed extension. In terms of overall environmental impact, it is considered unlikely that moving the proposed extension footprint out of the CBA will result in any significant environmental gain. **As a result, the additional impact on the CBA is considered of low sensitivity.**

6.1. TERRESTRIAL BIODIVERSITY IMPACT ASSESSMENT

The following table rates the significance of environmental impacts associated with the proposed development. It also evaluates the expected accumulative effect of the proposed development as well as the No-Go option.

Table 9: Impact assessment associated with the proposed activity

Impact assessment								
Aspect	Mitigation	CV	Lik	Dur	Ext	Sev	Significance	Short discussion
Geology & soils: Potential impact on special habitats (e.g. true quartz or "heuweltjies")	Without mitigation	1	1	4	1	1	7	No special habitats observed.
	With mitigation	1	1	4	1	1	7	N/a
Landuse and cover: Potential impact on socio-economic activities.	Without mitigation	2	4	4	1	1	20	Permanent transformation of approximately 3ha of land, covered with indigenous vegetation, used for life-stock grazing
	With mitigation	2	4	4	1	1	20	No mitigation possible.
Vegetation status: Loss of vulnerable or endangered vegetation and associated habitat.	Without mitigation	2	5	5	1	1	24	Permanent transformation of approximately 3ha of land, covered with indigenous vegetation (least threatened).
	With mitigation	2	5	5	1	1	24	No mitigation possible.
Conservation priority: Potential impact on protected areas, CBA's, ESA's or Centre's of Endemism.	Without mitigation	3	5	5	1	1	36	Permanent transformation of approximately 3ha of land, covered with indigenous vegetation, within a CBA 2.
	With mitigation	3	5	5	1	1	36	No mitigation possible.
Connectivity: Potential loss of ecological migration corridors.	Without mitigation	3	5	5	1	1	36	Permanent transformation of approximately 3ha of land, covered with indigenous vegetation, within a CBA 2.
	With mitigation	3	5	5	1	1	36	No mitigation possible.
Protected & endangered plant species: Potential impact on threatened or protected plant species.	Without mitigation	2	5	5	1	1	24	One NCNCA protected species (NT) was observed within the property. About 30 individuals will be impacted.
	With mitigation	2	5	5	1	1	24	No mitigation possible.
Cumulative impacts: Cumulative impact associated with proposed activity.	Without mitigation	3	5	5	1	1	36	Permanent transformation of approximately 3ha of land, covered with indigenous vegetation (not threatened), within a CBA 2.
	With mitigation	3	5	5	1	1	36	No mitigation possible.
The "No-Go" option: Potential impact	Without mitigation	2	4	4	1	1	20	The property will continue to be used for life-stock, which is might also lead to detrimental environmental impact over time (e.g., overgrazing).

Impact assessment								
Aspect	Mitigation	CV	Lik	Dur	Ext	Sev	Significance	Short discussion
associated with the No-Go alternative.	With mitigation						0	

According to the **NEMA EIA Sensitivity** scan for the site generated on 15/02/2023 by PB Consult the Terrestrial Biodiversity Theme Sensitivity is **VERY HIGH SENSITIVE** because of it being located within a CBA 2.

The Terrestrial biodiversity assessment (Table 9) aims to take all the discussion under Section 4 into account, including the small scale of the proposed project, the fact that the vegetation is not vulnerable or endangered as well as all the other reasons discussed throughout this document.

According, Table 9 the main impacts associated with the proposed development will be:

- A Low impact on a critical biodiversity areas (CBA 2);
- A Low impact on protected plant species.

Because of the small scale of the activity even the cumulative impact given in Table 9 remains Low.

It is considered highly unlikely that the development will contribute significantly to any of the following:

- Significant loss of vegetation type and associated habitat.
- Loss of ecological processes (e.g., migration patterns, pollinators, river function etc.) due to construction and operational activities.
- Loss of local biodiversity and threatened plant species.
- Loss of ecosystem connectivity.

As a result, the Terrestrial Biodiversity Theme Sensitivity for the proposed project should be **LOW**.

6.2. TERRESTRIAL BIODIVERSITY SENSITIVITY MAP

The proposed site is very homogenous in vegetation cover and landscape. No specific sensitive area had been identified, which should be protected, mitigated or regarded as a no-go area. As a result no sensitivity map is included.

7. RECOMMENDATIONS

The proposed development site is not considered sensitive in terms of terrestrial biodiversity. As a result, impact minimisation should focus on mitigation measures during construction (and operational) phases, of which the overriding goal should be to clearly define the final layout and to minimise the disturbance footprint.

- All construction must be done in accordance with an approved construction and operational phase Environmental Management Plan (EMP), which must be developed by a suitably experienced Environmental Assessment Practitioner.
- A suitably qualified Environmental Control Officer must be appointed to monitor the construction phase in terms of the EMP and any other conditions pertaining to specialist studies.
- Before any work is done the footprint must be clearly demarcated. The demarcation must aim at minimum footprint and minimisation of disturbance.
- A Northern Cape Nature Conservation Act permit must be **obtained for the removal of the *Boscia foetida*** species on site.
- All alien invasive species within the footprint and or within 10 m of the footprint must be removed responsibly.
 - Care must be taken with the eradication method to ensure that the removal does not impact or lead to additional impacts (e.g., spreading of the AIP due to incorrect eradication methods);
 - Care must be taken to dispose of alien plant material responsibly.
- Indiscriminate clearing of any area outside of these footprints may not be allowed.
- An integrated waste management approach must be implemented during construction.
 - Construction related general and hazardous waste may only be disposed of at approved waste disposal sites.
 - All rubble and rubbish should be collected and removed from the site to a Municipal approved waste disposal site.

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APPENDIX 1: CURRICULUM VITAE – P.J.J. BOTES

Curriculum Vitae: Peet JJ Botes

Address: 22 Buitekant Street, Bredasdorp, 7280; **Cell:** 082 921 5949

Nationality: South African

ID No.: 670329 5028 081

Language: Afrikaans / English

Profession: Environmental Consultant & Auditing

Specializations: Botanical & Biodiversity Impact Assessments

Environmental Compliance Audits

Environmental Impact Assessment

Environmental Management Systems

Qualifications: **BSc** (Botany & Zoology), with Nature Conservation III & IV as extra subjects; Dept. of Natural Sciences, Stellenbosch University 1989.

Hons. BSc (Plant Ecology), Stellenbosch University, 1989

More than 20 years of experience in the Environmental Management Field (Since 1997 to present).

Professional affiliation: Registered Professional Botanical, Environmental and Ecological Scientist at SACNASP (South African Council for Natural Scientific Professions) since 2005.

SACNASP Reg. No.: 400184/05

BRIEF RESUME OF RELEVANT EXPERIENCE

1997-2005: Employed by the Overberg Test Range (a Division of Denel), responsible for managing the environmental department of OTB, developing and implementing an ISO14001 environmental management system, ensuring environmental compliance, performing environmental risk assessments with regards to missile tests and planning the management of the 26 000 ha of natural veld, working closely with CapeNature (De Hoop Nature Reserve).

2005-2010: Joined Enviroscientific, as an independent environmental consultant specializing in wastewater management, botanical and biodiversity assessments, developing environmental management plans and strategies, environmental control work as well as doing environmental compliance audits and was also responsible for helping develop the biodiversity part of the Farming for the Future audit system implemented by Woolworths. During his time with Enviroscientific he performed more than 400 biodiversity and environmental legal compliance audits.

2010-2017: Joined EnviroAfrica, as an independent Environmental Assessment Practitioner and Biodiversity Specialist, responsible for Environmental Impact Assessments, Biodiversity & Botanical specialist reports and Environmental Compliance Audits. During this time Mr Botes compiled more than 70 specialist Biodiversity & Botanical impact assessment reports ranging from agricultural-, infrastructure pipelines- and solar developments.

2017-Present: Establish a small independent consultancy (PB Consult) specialising in Environmental Audits, Biodiversity and Botanical specialist studies as well as Environmental Impact Assessment.

LIST OF MOST RELEVANT BOTANICAL & BIODIVERSITY STUDIES

- Botes, P. 2007: Botanical assessment. Schaapkraal, Erf 644, Mitchell's Plain. A preliminary assessment of the vegetation in terms of the Fynbos Forum: Ecosystem guidelines. 13 November 2007.
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- Botes, P. 2012(i): Askham (Kameelduin) proposed low cost housing, Mier Municipality Residential Project, Northern Cape. A preliminary Biodiversity & Botanical scan in order to identify significant environmental features (and to identify the need for additional studies if required). 1 November 2012.
- Botes, P. 2013(a): Groot Mier proposed low cost housing, Mier Municipality Residential Project, Northern Cape. A preliminary Biodiversity & Botanical scan in order to identify significant environmental features (and to identify the need for additional studies if required). January 2013.
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- Botes, P. 2018(i): Steynville (Hopetown) outfall sewer pipeline – Proposed development of a new sewer outfall pipeline, Hopetown, Northern Cape Province. Botanical assessment of the proposed footprint. 8 October 2018.
- Botes, P. 2019(a): Lethabo Park Extension – Proposed extension of Lethabo Park (Housing Development) on the remainder of the Farm Roodepan No. 70, Erf 17725 and Erf 15089, Roodepan Kimberley. Sol Plaaitye Local Municipality, Northern Cape Province. Botanical assessment of the proposed footprint (with biodiversity inputs). 15 May 2019.
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- Botes, P. 2020(c): Boegoeberg housing project – Botanical assessment of the proposed formalization and development of 550 new erven on the remainders of farms 142 & 144 and Plot 1890, Boegoeberg settlement, !Kheis Local Municipality, Northern Cape Province. 1 July 2020.
- Botes, P. 2020(d): Komaggas Bulk Water supply upgrade – Botanical assessment of the proposed upgrade of the existing Buffelsrivier to Komaggas BWS system, Rem. of Farm 200, Nama Khoi Local Municipality, Northern Cape Province. 8 July 2020.
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- Botes, P. 2020(f): Opwag housing project – Botanical assessment of the proposed formalization and development of 730 new erven on Plot 2642, Boegoeberg Settlement and Farm Boegoeberg Settlement NO.48/16, Opwag, !Kheis Local Municipality, Northern Cape Province. 16 July 2020.
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APPENDIX 1: DEA SCREENING REPORT
