

Centurion New wave

Centurion has, up until five years ago, been a 'sleeping giant' in terms of development and now it seems there is no stopping this construction hot spot, *Andrea Badenhorst* discovers.

Centurion is described by local developers as one of the fastest-growing urban areas in the country with excellent infrastructure and loads of potential attributed to its central location, and highly sought-after residential, and commercial and retail, developments. It all began in 1985 with the development of the city around the man-made Centurion Lake. What followed was a stream of shopping centres, commercial office and housing developments around the first phase known as Centurion Boulevard. Still a highly-popular attraction, the Centurion Mall has extended substantially since its early beginnings and includes an amphitheatre used regularly for music concerts and other festivals.

Ample access

According to Console Tleane, spokesperson for City of Tshwane Urban Planning, the development of the Gautrain station in the core area will greatly improve transport as well as unlock future development opportunities. A total of three stations will be constructed in Tshwane (Centurion, Pretoria and Hatfield).

The distance between Tshwane and Johannesburg will be covered in less than 35 minutes at a speed of 160 km/h.

Geological challenges

"One of the development constraints in the area is the high presence of dolomite, which is particularly susceptible to sinkhole formation," says Tleane. "To overcome the geological challenges of constructing on dolomitic soil in Centurion, the construction team for the Gautrain has applied several breakthrough engineering methods. One method is piled raft foundations; used for the first time in South Africa. Once complete, Viaduct 5 will carry the elevated alignment through Centurion. It stretches over the John Vorster Interchange, crossing the N1 in the south, and continues through Centurion to the Jean Avenue Interchange; crossing the Ben Schoeman highway in the north.

Central cauldron

M&T Development recognised Centurion as a major growth node some years ago and has been on an aggressive property-acquisition drive in the area. "We believe development in Centurion and interest shown in the area is largely due to its central location – midway between Pretoria and Sandton with good access from the highway and the future Gautrain, which will run through and stop in a number of places in the Centurion area," says John Cole, commercial properties, M&T Development. "Centurion is also sought after residentially as it is perceived as relatively 'rural' and provides facilities for people to live work and play. We will also continue to be heavily involved over the long term from a residential and commercial perspective." M&T Commercial is focusing on the Eco Park development and Polokwane highway in Centurion. At the time of writing, Eco Park consisted of a 20 000 m² retail centre (Eco Boulevard), a 13 000 m² décor centre (Eco Décor), 1 200 housing units and 45 000 m² of completed office space. Under construction is an additional 60 000 m² of office space due to be completed by mid-2009. John Cole says an additional 5 000 m² is at planning stage together with an additional 2 000 housing units. This will also include showrooms and recreational areas such as parks. "To enable the success of the developments, M&T has also been involved in the construction of new roads in the area." M&T is also the developer of the Earl's Court mixed-use development on John Vorster Drive, adjacent to the Makro and John Vorster interchange. "In total, this development will comprise 40 000 m² of retail space, 60 000 m² of offices and showrooms, as well as a hotel and residential apartments," says Cole. Phase 1 of Earl's Court was completed at the end of 2007 and includes the construction of a new 500 m² Virgin Active and new premises for Sportsmans Warehouse and Golfers Club. "The next phase of the retail section is now under construction along with the revamp of the existing Value Centre and new access routes," adds Cole. This phase of the construction and the new roads are due for completion by May 2009.

Key role players
City of Tshwane Urban Planning
M&T Commercial Development
Abland
VCR Properties
Centurus Holdings
Retail Africa



City of Tshwane



Abland

Unlocking more potential

The Gautrain station, at the core of the CBD, is unlocking development opportunities in Centurion, which offers a unique combination of destinations for business, residential, industry and leisure, including the growing tourism and sports-tourism industries.



Abland

Watch out for tenders

Developments to look out for include residential properties, especially around the Gautrain station. More tenders are expected to be issued from January 2009.

BOILING ZONE



Abland

Retail expansion



Andrea Badenhorst

Road relief – Olievenhoutbosch Drive

The construction of Olievenhoutbosch Drive in Centurion, between Nelmapius Drive through Eco Park to John Vorster Drive, was completed and opened for traffic on the December 5 2008. Already conceptualised and identified as an important mobility route by the City of Tshwane in 1998, the new road will not only stimulate further development in the area, it will, most importantly, alleviate significant traffic congestion experienced by motorists in the local area. The road was constructed by M&T at a cost of just over R32-million. According to John Cole of M&T Development, Olievenhoutbosch Drive is being implemented in phases. M&T has already entered into negotiations with the City of Tshwane to investigate co-funding the construction of the section of Olievenhoutbosch Drive, between Main Road in Irene, to the R21 freeway. "This phase will bring welcome relief to the residents of Irene who are, at this stage, only dependent on Nelmapius Drive," says Cole. In addition to other road upgrades, M&T has also constructed a bridge over the N1 Freeway, linking Witch Hazel Avenue with Lenchen Road.

Photographs by Hilary Erasmus



Recycling rubble

Earthworks on the site of Riverside Office Park were well under way in October 2008. Rubble from the old water park and club will be crushed and recycled in use for the parking lot of the area.

New office park off John Vorster

Also planned for construction at Earls Court, at the beginning of 2009, is a new office park component adjacent to John Vorster Drive. It will comprise a variety of landmark offices geared for large corporate businesses, accommodation, office suites for professionals and medium-sized businesses. This portion of the development will also have a high street, public piazza and square to facilitate coffee shops and entertainment facilities. There could also be a hotel on the high street. It is anticipated that phase, with construction beginning in February 2009, to take approximately four years. "We are already seeing a lot of interest in this development from national retailers and corporate business," says Cole. "It is expected to become a major destination in the heart of Centurion."

Global attraction – convention centre planned

The Centurion CBD is a major focus point for development. On March 29 2007, Tshwane

considered an application for the Tshwane International Convention & Entertainment Centre. The project will be a public-private partnership. "This development is planned for construction in close proximity to the Lakeside Shopping Centre in Centurion. The ultra-modern auditorium will have capacity to accommodate at least 10 000 delegates and a number of hotels will be established within the new complex," says Tleane. Development is likely to take place on the corners of John Vorster and Hendrik Verwoerd.

It is not clear at this stage when construction will begin. The development is serving as a medium for the economic revival of the heart of the city.

"The City of Tshwane has also recently received two to three applications for residential and corporate development at the Gateway development," adds Tleane.

Office build peaks

Commercial, industrial and residential property developer, Abland, has also set its sights on the

Centurion area. The 22 000 m² Riverside Office Park is planned for 2009 and the 23 000 m² West End Office Park for 2010. An office tower – the 22 000 m² De Baken Tower Offices – is on the cards for the year 2011. This tower will be strategically located directly opposite the Gautrain station in Centurion. "Centurion is an ideal location for development with its central location between Pretoria, Midrand and Johannesburg, as well as its close proximity to the N1 and N14 freeways," confirms Willem van der Westhuizen, responsible for marketing at Abland. "The area is also rich with good schools and is the ideal location for business."

Route 21 Corporate Park is a high-security business park located on the border of Centurion and Pretoria East. The first phase of the park is now almost 90% developed and includes mostly "A-grade" office developments with very stylish office buildings. There are also small components of neat industrial and warehousing in the park, which is conveniently located on local and regional taxi and bus routes. "We are situated on the border of

Riverside Office Park



Abland

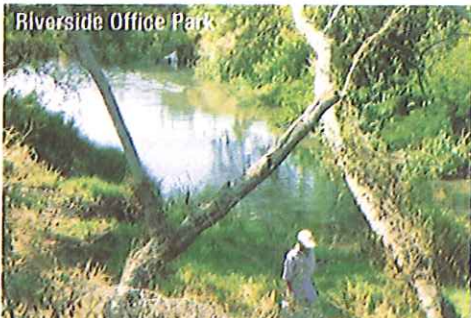
2 Office build

West End Office Park



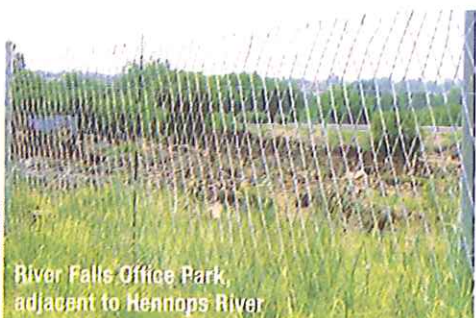
Abland

Riverside Office Park



Hilary Erasmus

3 The river comes with it



Andrea Badenhorst

River Falls Office Park, adjacent to Hennops River

Centurion and Pretoria East; excellent accessibility to the N1 and R21 highways," says Org Geldenhuys of Abacus Divisions, a Centurion-based property company with interests, services and a portfolio of properties in the commercial and leisure sectors of the market.

Mabopane-Centurion Development Corridor

"The proposed PWVA link from Johannesburg to Mabopane is a high priority on the list for the City of Tshwane," he says.

The construction of this road will facilitate even further development in Western Centurion. This is also known as the Mabopane-Centurion Development Corridor (MCDC).

"Since one of the areas of focus of the municipality is the revitalisation of the economy in the western part of the metropolitan area, the municipality is actively involved in the MCDC; viewing it as a flagship development project."

According to the City of Tshwane website, the MCDC is located on the western, south-western and northern fringes of the city, which puts it in the middle of the economic hub of South Africa and southern Africa; making it ideal for enterprises and investors to tap into the potential of the large consumer markets available in Pretoria, Johannesburg and the Witwatersrand.

Airports to expand

Tleane says the close proximity of Tshwane to modern airports, and important rail and road links, makes it an ideal location for business, tourism, imports and exports. "The Wonderboom Airport is situated alongside the MCDC. The possibility of using it as an

international freight airport is being investigated. Tshwane will also be implementing a mass rapid transit system – a high-quality, customer-orientated bus service that will deliver fast, comfortable and low-cost urban mobility in the Tshwane CBD by 2010. This will, typically, involve busway corridors on segregated lanes, as well as modernised bus technology."

Another project on the cards is the upgrading of the Waterkloof Air Force Base into an aerospace hub. Waterkloof is an airbase of the South African Air Force (SAAF). It is situated on the outskirts of Pretoria and is the SAAF's busiest airbase to the south of Pretoria, near Centurion.

Opportunities for further development

Van der Westhuizen says developments to look out for in Centurion include some residential properties, especially around the Gautrain station, and more tenders are expected to go out in January 2009. Abland was responsible for the recently-completed Centurion Mercedes Centre, as well as the Centurion Lifestyle Centre with its first phase completed in May 2008. Centurion Lifestyle Centre is situated on the corner of Lenchen and Old Johannesburg roads. The Lifestyle Centre will offer services, convenience, bulk groceries, home décor, home improvement, DIY and sport. It is estimated Phase 2 is due for completion in 2009 and will be able to accommodate an additional 53 shops in 22 000 m².

"Developers tend to use the same project teams in specific areas for construction as they are familiar with the local area as well as all the relevant counsel contacts," says Van der Westhuizen.

Retail expansion

Phase 1 of the Centurion Lifestyle Centre is now complete and Phase 2 is due for completion in 2009 with an additional 22 000 m².

Office build

The 22 000 m² Riverside Office Park is planned for 2009; the 23 000 m² West End Office Park for 2010; the 22 000 m² De Baken Tower Offices for 2011 – directly opposite the Gautrain station in Centurion; and Earls Court.

The river comes with it

Developers of office parks on land along the Hennops River will be expected to take responsibility for the maintenance of the river banks and clearing a public walkway.