

**MEMORANDUM FROM THE GRAHAMSTOWN RESIDENTS’  
ASSOCIATION (GRA) TO MAKANA MUNICIPALITY ON  
CURRENT PROBLEMS IN INFRASTRUTCTURE AND SERVICE  
DELIVERY.**

**Background**

The power and water cuts in recent months have awakened fears that Grahamstown’s infrastructure is indeed beginning to disintegrate. While there has been a significant and laudable rollout of new infrastructure to previously-neglected areas, this has not been integrated with new developments and the increasing demands for water provision, electricity reticulation and waste management. In addition existing ageing “inherited infrastructure”, as described by our Mayor, is not being adequately maintained and there appears to be no coordinated plan for spending on vital maintenance, nor for capital provision to keep abreast of demands. There are also growing concerns over the quality of water, and the often-inadequate provision and control of the electricity supply. The University, schools, tourism, Arts Festival, and businesses - the mainstays of our economy - are being seriously affected, along with confidence in the future viability of Grahamstown and the Makana Municipality.

December’s events and the public outcry at the recurring lack of focussed disaster management, and once again the municipality’s initial failure to communicate with its constituents, are fresh in our memories. Four areas of concern are examples of the ongoing nature of the problems:

1. The disastrous electricity substation explosion of 2005, due to not heeding consulting engineers’ critical warnings about essential maintenance that needed to be carried out immediately.
2. The old Howieson’s Poort water pumps and motors, which have failed repeatedly over the past three years, for which the costs of unsatisfactory repairs must now be approaching the original estimated expenditure of recommended replacement.
3. The ageing refuse removal and vehicle fleet, where the costs of repairs and downtime have long exceeded the cost to replace them.
4. The neglect of appropriate town planning procedures, resulting in ad hoc developments which put unpredicted pressures on infrastructure, roads and services.

## **Proposal**

The GRA urges Makana Municipality to act swiftly and proactively to avoid further disasters, and suggests that some of the nearly R1million of Vuna Award money could be beneficially applied to initiate such action.

Engaging top level Consulting Engineers to provide a “Due Diligence” report would be a first step. There is an urgent need to audit the state and extent of Grahamstown’s existing infrastructure in order to assess how this measures up to our current requirements for proper service delivery; and what resources do we need and have to do this? What are our laid-down procedures for operations, and for forward planning, and are they being complied with? The municipality’s recent ISO Certification must surely lay down clear requirements in these areas? What are the current budget priorities, and what should they be to ensure existing sustainable service delivery as well as projected future growth? It is imperative to develop a costed programme for critical preventative maintenance and recapitalisation of the town’s key infrastructure.

Identification of service providers with the appropriate technical and municipal experience would be essential, as would access of Government support via the Municipal Infrastructure Grant provisions. In line with President Mbeki’s exhortations, we should harness that vital expertise still available in retired and previously-employed persons who have moved out into other sectors. Many of these people are custodians of desperately-needed “Institutional Memory” that has been lost in recent years, and could contribute positively to rectifying the precarious situation.

In presenting this submission the GRA is seeking not to criticise but to make constructive input. We call for all to acknowledge that, given the understandable urgency to address past imbalances, we have not planned and provided sufficiently for the future, or even for the here and now. Our new Democracy has undoubtedly achieved a great deal, but it is now imperative that we recognise past mistakes of prematurely employing many inexperienced and unqualified people, and that we make adequate future provision for the gains that have been made to be sustainable.

We earnestly call on the Mayor, the Municipal Manager and Councillors to address these very real concerns of residents and business people as a matter of urgency, and thereby to signal that a stable future for Makana is assured.

***Grahamstown Residents’ Association***

2 February 2007