

Bridge City, KwaZulu-Natal Trailblazers wanted

It is happening – ‘z’yakhipha’. A completed shopping mall, magistrates’ court and hospital are sure to increase confidence levels in Bridge City, discovers *Hillary Erasmus*.

Many are probably watching and waiting in the wings for the response of surrounding communities to the opening of Bridge City Mall. “Construction of the mall is on track for opening at the end of October,” says Cyril Gwala, director of development for Tongaat Hulett Developments.

The 40 000 m² mall, built by Grinaker-LTA and Enza Construction for Cowie Holdings, is the first building to go up in Bridge City, which is often confused as either just another sprawling shopping mall or housing scheme/estate. “This is a new type of development and it is taking a lot of hard work to get the market to understand what we envision,” says Brian Ive, development executive of Tongaat Hulett Developments and development manager at Effingham Development Joint Venture. “Clearly, the economic slump is not helping any one in terms of sales.” Tongaat Hulett is a partner in the Effingham joint venture with eThekweni Municipality to sell this mixed-use concept with a strong residential component, which is not the most desirable investment for developers right now.

“We are using a 60:40 percentage split for mixed-use purposes,” says Ive. “The floor area ratio (FAR) should comprise 1,5 retail and commercial offices with everything above that set aside for residential.” This is where developers tend to balk, according to André Duvenage of Architects Collaborative on the Bridge City design team. The reticence with regard to residential investments is one of two factors behind circumspect interest in the huge potential at Bridge City. The other is security. There seems to be nervousness about investing in a new town centre hemmed in by Inanda, Ntuzuma, KwaMashu (INK) and Phoenix. Despite this, Ive remains confident about the success of the project: “We believe the first mixed-use development will prove the strong demand for residential in this area”. Gwala aptly defines the calibre of entrepreneur suited to Bridge City: “We are looking for people who will be trailblazers”.

Negotiable ‘FAR’

So how is Effingham addressing these concerns, which will needle even trailblazers? “The FAR is not absolutely fixed,” says Ive. “We are willing to accommodate proposals and developers can make presentations to the local authority for a lower

residential ratio.” However, ultimately, the vision for Bridge City is one of an urban hub for living, working and playing – not merely a shopping-mall experience.

Security

“We are taking security very seriously,” says Gwala. There will be active security measures with 24-hour presence and CCTV cameras, as well as a “bobby on the beat”. Nevertheless some of the sophisticated developers and blue-chip clients have expressed concern about being in a development on the doorstep of a township, Gwala points out. “We have established a management association, which will be responsible for a secure and clean town centre.”

Reason for confidence

INK and Bridge City residents will have all forms of public transport on their doorsteps. The connectivity between Bridge City and the Durban CBD has been well thought-out together with the previous South African Rail Commuter Corporation. Space for a station has been included below the mall and trains will be running by 2011. The intermodal transport facility, comprising the rail station and the bus/taxi rank adjacent to the mall, will enhance the transport spectrum.

As Ive affirms, the retail and commercial potential of Bridge City is huge as the massive market of INK and Phoenix has long been under-serviced. The tremendous gap in mid-range, affordable housing in the area simply needs a pioneer with vision, according to Ive. The feeling is, when developers see the operational mall and cranes crowding the landscape for the construction of the magistrates’ court and hospital in 2009, they will begin to shake off their nervousness or reticence.

“People will see ‘z’yakhipha’ – it is happening,” says Gwala. “There is a lot of interest in the mall and I believe potential tenants will sit up and follow those already on board when they see the response of the INK community to the centre.”

Interest in the development was fervent until mid-2008 when building costs skyrocketed and interest rates rose, according to Simon Vines, an urban planner on the Bridge City design team. “Only big guys have capital now and they are quite fussy about how they invest.”

Key players

Effingham Development Joint Venture
eThekweni Municipality
Cowie Holdings
INK
Phoenix
KwaZulu-Natal province
Passenger Rail Agency of South Africa
Community Property Fund
Old Mutual Investment Group
Property Investments



Hillary Erasmus

Overview of opportunities

Under construction

Bridge City Mall
Intermodal transport rank

Imminent ‘hot’

construction opportunities

Dr Pixley ka Seme Hospital
Regional magistrates’ court
Bridge City Rail Station and railway line