



HISTORY: Aside from family graves, the Randjesfontein equestrian estate in Midrand consists of 360 properties and over 25km of horse trails

Gautrain runs into Randjesfontein poser

Residents take legal action over proclamation of land

ANNA COX

RESIDENTS of Randjesfontein could stop the Gautrain in its tracks.

Tests were supposed to start in October on the 1km section of track that runs through the equestrian estate in Randjesfontein - between the Gautrain's Midrand and Centurion stations.

But residents are taking legal action to stop the tests as they claim the land over which the train will run has not been correctly proclaimed by the Gautrain team.

Although the Gautrain has proclaimed the reserve, the negotiated settlement they

team made a technical error in the documentation given to the custodians of the horse trails, the Joburg Property Company (JPC).

"Gautrain now requires the consent of the custodians, and error, which must be done in order for the proclaimed rail reserve to be legal," said Midrand councillor Annette Deppe.

The residents, she said, had instructed the JPC that they would not give consent to correct this technicality until the Gautrain team recognises their claim to compensation and implements an already-proclaimed settlement they

have with the province. The Randjesfontein equestrian estate consists of 360 properties and more than 25km of horse trails, which are entrenched in all title deeds.

"The Randjesfontein community through its ratepayers association, known as Randjesfontein Country Estates (RCE), has been co-operative and willing to negotiate with Gautrain since the train started looking for land for the rail reserve in 2003," said Deppe.

The RCE repeatedly stated that the community required land to reinstate the horse trails lost to Gautrain. The RCE went to the then

BIG PLANS: Residents are keen to get a parcel of land called the Homestead, which has old Voortrekker buildings, upgrade the rundown buildings and turn it into an indoor arena, restaurants and sports fields.



MEC of transport and public Works, Ignatius Jacobs, to negotiate their settlement. He agreed that a land swap was the best solution for all.

There is a parcel of land within the centre of the estate called the Homestead that has old Voortrekker buildings constructed during the Anglo-Boer War era. Residents are keen to get the land, upgrade the run-

down buildings and turn it into an indoor arena, restaurants and sports fields.

The Erasmus family, who lived there, used to allow the post riders that rode between Joburg and Pretoria to stay overnight, thus the name Halfway House. When they sold the last remaining section of their farm, they insisted that Randjesfontein remain an

ident, as the Midrand council had the means to establish a community centre and to become the custodians of this well-preserved historic site.

When Midrand was moved into the jurisdiction of Joburg, the Homestead became the property of the City of Joburg. It is currently being used as a depot by City Parks.

"The land-swap deal was a win for the city as they have allowed it to become dilapidated over the past 15 years and had tasked the JPC to get rid of it in 2002. To restore the buildings would cost about R15 million at today's prices - money that the city does not have," said Deppe.

The land swap deal was also a win for the province, she said, as it was the most cost-effective option.

The Homestead is valued at around R4.5m, the same value that provincial valuers put on the horse trail servitude section to be removed from the 17 residents of Randjesfontein who live directly bordering the railway line. The residents

have received an independent valuation for the damage to the owners in the rest of the estate of an amount of R25m, and this could run as high as R60m.

"The land-swap deal is a win for the Homestead itself as this very neglected property forms part of the heritage of the estate, and the community of Randjesfontein have the willingness to restore the property," Deppe said.

At the time, Jacobs tasked his team to make the land swap happen and to partner the RCE in the tourist development of the Homestead. The deal required that the city make a donation of the Homestead to the Department of Public Works so that the province could become the owner of the Homestead.

"However, then things went wrong, MEC Jacobs moved office and the Gautrain team seemed to be completely unaware of any deal. Residents have requested meetings with province and have sent a letter of demand to the premier, but have been ignored."