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Dream house deluged in sewage

SCHALK MOUTON

TJ MAKOENE has spent most of his life building his house, investing in it bit by bit.

But everyday Makoene, a resident of Rockville, in the Temba township of Hammanskraal, is forced to live with the stench of sewage in the air, thanks to the sewerage plant less than 50m away from his home.

Makoene owns one of the 80 or so houses across the road from the Temba waste-water treatment plant that is currently being expanded by the City of Tshwane to treat sewage from areas such as Mabopane and Soshanguve, almost 30km away.

For years, he and other home owners have had to wash and dry out their houses because of the sewage that frequently floods them during heavy rains.

"I started to live here in 1970," said Makoene.

Makoene, 70, and his wife converted a two-room brick house into one with three bedrooms, a dining room, a lounge, a visitors' room and a kitchen. He recently spent almost R250 000 on home improvements.

'The home owners were not consulted about the plant'

The Temba settlement was established in the early 1970s, when the apartheid government forcibly removed people from Marabastad, in Pretoria.

In 1988, the Bophuthatswana government built the sewerage plant.

"We have already invested in our house; we could not sell," Makoene said.

He and his neighbours believe that their rights have been ignored.

"A public participation process has never been conducted and our clients have never been consulted," said Anjuli Maistry, an attorney with Lawyers for Human Rights.

Maistry is working on an application for a court review of the process by which the expansion of the sewage works was approved, on behalf of the Rockville Residents' Committee, of which Makoene is chairman.

"The environmental impact assessment for the expansion does not comply with certain requirements," Maistry said.

Alternatives for the project should have been considered, he contends, such as expanding the Babelegi waste-water treatment plant, located in an industrial area a kilometre away from Rockville.

Environmental Affairs spokesman Albi Modise said the environmental impact assessment was approved in 2009, but did not say on what basis.

Neither the City of Tshwane nor the Department of Water Affairs responded to questions put to them by The Times.