

If you can pay, you can stay By Bav Mortimer

St Francis is not for the working class. It is an area for those who own homes and for those who wish to holiday here.

And because of these real facts, there is no affordable accommodation to be had for any class besides the landed gentry.

As an elderly lady in her 80s who lived in a beautiful home here for nearly 40 years, and who knew Leighton Hulett, who founded St Francis Bay 60 years ago, says: 'St Francis Bay was never meant for employees. It was for wealthy, retired people and for those who wanted to take vacations in this idyllic spot. And the new parts of St Francis Bay, such as Santlame and the canals, were initially built for the rich and famous.'

Early this century there were plenty of business people who came here hoping to run small businesses, to retire here, have a peaceful lifestyle, where their children could grow up and have a better life than in the city jungles. Many survived, some died exceptionally well and rose to the upper class heights, others folded and disappeared. Many of the businesses in existence a decade

ago are no longer around.

And in the digital age, as St Francis Bay has become more renowned globally, more people have wanted to live here, retire here or holiday here. This has placed huge demands on accommodation. And where there is a shortage, the prices rocket. Home owners have put their monthly prices for permanent rentals way out of the reach of most people, lowly clerks, shop assistants or artisans.

There is no accommodation for these people. Builders have told this newspaper over the past 13 years that the price of building costs means builders need to get a return and cannot afford to offer cheap, affordable accommodation for the working class. Plus the strict building rules in this St Francis area prohibit high rise flats for employees. Townhouses can be built but the prices charged will be beyond the reach of the workers.

There is no life for those working here is sometimes intolerable. There are some horror stories.

The majority of employees either stay in the townships or neighbouring towns and they have to commute here. There are taxis and lift clubs catering for their transport needs. But the long trips and queues of cars leaving and arriving at the start and end of working hours, means they may as well be in the cities but being able to work nearer to their homes.

There has been a past decade been about 2-3 dozen modest homes available for rental on the market. Those who have been able to pay for these homes have often spent half of their income at least to have a roof over their heads in the town. So saving has been impossible. Most tell of moving every two years when the houses have been sold or when the owners decide to retire in their own homes. Every time one moves, there are breakages and huge losses of

furniture.

Those tenants who can afford the local rents say they are sometimes paying to live in substandard homes. Unless tenants rent through the few organised estate agencies who solve problems, those who deal with home owners direct, sometimes endure difficult living conditions.

Tenants cannot complain, they have to suffer in silence, know that there is nowhere else for them to move to, while at the door is a long queue of wannabe tenants waiting for them to vacate!

But for the past 20 years there were at least homes available for a 'middle class' tenant anymore.

The rise of the windfarms has seen the middle management of these new industries snap up all the affordable accommodation in the R4000-R6000 range in the area. This trend started last year June and with more and more wind farms cropping up, the situation is exacerbating.

The real situation of affordable accommodation is that there is currently nothing under R10 000 a month and most business workers don't even take that amount home in any month, plus many shops don't even make that turnover in the winter months. So these highly priced homes to rent stay unlet for longer, then during season the owners are persuaded to rent them out at a minimum of R2000 a day.

As for affordable accommodation, places like small garden cottages are like jewels and almost as pricey... tiny bachelor flat-lets with enough room to swing a cat that have basic furniture (so you cannot bring your own) and that forbid pets, are going for R3500 with electricity – and these are even out of the reach of the average employee who takes home R4000-R5000 a month in wages. And the prices are escalating as home-owners dream of rich pickings they can make out of the dearth!

And many tenants have resorted to compromising by having to give up their dear pets. And if they cannot find homes for them, have to put their pets down! The heartaches endured are relentless.

Daily there are desperate requests for accommodation to let on FB for people who have jobs lined up for the festive season in this St Francis area, but there is absolutely no room to let in for them unless they can afford the R2000 and upwards a day holiday lets.

Then there are stories abounding such as building developers from Gauteng wanting to apply to do huge housing developments in St Francis. And they want to bring about 13 middle management employees to rent here over the construction period. "Oh no!" they are told. "You cannot do that. There is nowhere for employees to stay in St Francis!"

And the current no accommodation for employees syndrome is only going to get worse, most agents agree. They are forecasting a huge hike in the price of houses as a result.

Just imagine the accommodation shortage that could arise if Thyssup is chosen as the next site to build two or three nuclear reactors! In Lepalela/Medupi, which was once a plateland one-horse *dorpie* called Ellisras, where 60 years ago, there used to be a grimy, seedy hotel, a boersaal, a kooip, a post office and one or two tiny shops, plus a few small shack-like homes, rentals of houses are in 2015 going for around R20 000 per month! And the town is booming!

It has been predicted that if Thyssup doesn't happen, the St Francis of the future could eventually be a huge residential complex, rentals of houses by the landed gentry, to which hundreds of workers commute to and from each working day from neighbouring towns.

Food for thought... or action?

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See how many words you can make from the letters.

No words to be less than four letters. Every word has to contain the middle, bold letter. The goal is to find the nine letter words. No plural nouns, capital letters, slang, or foreign language words (except those accepted in the English dictionary) This month's goal: 30 words excellent; 20 words good; 15 words fair. Apologies. Last month we gave the incorrect solution. The correct solution is on p12

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