

Large investment in infrastructure boosts eThekwin

One of the largest infrastructure investments by the eThekwin Municipality since the 2010 FIFA World Cup, a new 100ha mixed-use precinct development referred to by the developers as 'a city', recently launched in the west of the eThekwin Municipal area. Its first phase: a new retail, recreation and community destination, Westown Square, is now open and trading. Here is its story.

 Gareth Griffiths  Fundamentum Property Group



Strategically located in Shongweni, between Durban and Pietermaritzburg along the N3 highway and within easy reach of King Shaka International Airport, Westown is positioned to become a new growth node in the region's urban landscape. It is being developed by the Fundamentum Property Group (www.fundamentum.co.za).

A new retail and lifestyle destination

At the heart of the precinct is Westown Square, a 48 500m² shopping, dining and lifestyle destination that forms the cornerstone of the broader Westown development. The square's architectural language balances modernity with contextual sensitivity, blending sustainability and placemaking principles with rural inspiration.



Westown Square features two distinct architectural typologies

- 1 A contemporary retail mall environment that incorporates lightweight building envelope technology and passive climate control features.
- 2 A standout structure known as the Barn, which reinterprets the form and function of this traditional farm building.

The Barn: where community and culture converge

"At the heart of Westown Square, the Barn redefines the 'food court' concept, blending modern marketplace, community, culture, and commerce under one architecturally striking, barn-inspired roof. Designed as a vibrant destination within a destination, The Barn is a hub where local artisans, food entrepreneurs and creatives thrive", says Cara Reilly, the marketing and communication executive at Fundamentum.

Keeping the look and feel that is authentic to the organic growth of typical town centres of the past, the layout is designed and executed as irregular, with varied forms and spaces.

Encircled by the main mall and overlooking the town square, the Barn acts as the social anchor of Westown Square. Its design creates a lively public realm that encourages community engagement. A 'high street' interface with various side streets and lanes, converges on the square to create a vibrant gathering space.

The Barn, despite closely resembling a true-to-life barn, manages to merge with the retail-centric look of the mall, thanks to the central town square that lies between both structures.



Designed for function and form

Designed by two architectural firms Boogertman & Partners and MDS Architects both appointed by the developers, the architecture draws inspiration from the rural landscape and traditional town layouts. These are interpreted in a modern manner and by using contemporary materials.

Commenting on the design and project execution, architect Geoffrey Richards at Boogertman and Partners says the building typology is based primarily on a concrete frame structure with masonry infill panels and steel roof structure over three trading levels. The result is a GLA (gross leasable area) of 48 500m².

The look and feel of the architecture references the rolling hills, sugar cane fields, and traditional farmstead buildings arranged around a courtyard. Elements such as timber fencing, steel portal frames, and the contours of hills influence the façades and roofing. A diverse material palette creates distinct spaces and softens the modern aesthetic, enhanced by abundant greenery and landscaping.

Accessibility is prioritised through tactile paving, braille signage and universal design features.

Materiality

Reilly explains that intentionally natural and raw material finishes were selected to create a modern but aged effect.

Hence, a layered material palette of raw concrete, timber, metal and brick delivers a tactile aesthetic that's both contemporary and grounded.

Elements such as timber fencing, steel portal frames, and the contours of hills also influence the facades and roofing.

Prioritising sustainability

Westown Square integrates a host of sustainability features

- Rooftop solar panels reduce grid dependency
- Rainwater harvesting systems support irrigation and ablution facilities
- Natural ventilation and open-air walkways reduce reliance on air-conditioning
- Solar-powered night lighting and timer systems support energy efficiency
- Abundant landscaping offers passive cooling and urban greening.

Landscape architecture its execution

The landscape architecture, led by Uys & White Landscape Architects, is integral to the precinct's identity. It connects the built form to its environment while softening architectural lines and enhancing pedestrian appeal.

Rehabilitated sugar cane fields surrounding the precinct are being repurposed and transformed into a green belt featuring equestrian trails, running paths and cycling routes. These aim to transform Westown into a holistic lifestyle destination.

In line with its drive to become a community hub, landscaped pavements and cycle lanes ensure accessibility, while rehabilitated sugar cane fields will form an expanded green belt with equestrian, cycling and running trails lie beyond Westown Square.

Shongweni's unpredictable climate informed the creation of sheltered walkways, enclosed courts and adaptable indoor-outdoor spaces to ensure comfort throughout the year.





BOOGERTMAN + PARTNERS ARCHITECTS

WESTOWN SQUARE

Inspired by Shongweni's natural landscape and cultural heritage, Westown Square reimagines the mall as a vibrant town square, blending contemporary form with timeless character. Designed by Boogertman + Partners in a joint venture with MDS Architecture, Westown Square sets a new benchmark for community-focused retail architecture, where people and their experiences are at the heart of every design decision.



STELLENBOSCH/
CAPE TOWN

T +27 21 879 1501 / +27 21 930 9210
mail@boogertmanct.co.za

DURBAN

T +27 31 267 1888
mail@boogertmandbn.co.za

JOHANNESBURG/
PRETORIA

T +27 11 790 1600
mail@boogertmanjhb.co.za

LONDON

T +44 7353 927 082
andrew@boogertman.co.uk

NAIROBI

T +254 73 639 9361
mail@boogertman.co.ke

www.boogertmanandpartners.com | materialising tomorrow

 **Partners** Boogertman



Looking ahead: a vision for urban living

Once fully realised, Westtown aims to feature over 20 000 residential units and extensive public green spaces and recreational trails. As a mixed use development it has plans for both commercial and further retail zones as well as logistics and warehousing hubs.

By placing sustainable urban design, local context and community engagement at the centre of its development ethos, the developers say that Westtown is poised to become one of South Africa's most forward-thinking new urban precincts. **T**

Professional team

Developer: Fundamentum Property Group

Project managers: Orion Project Managers

Architects: Boogertman & Partners and MDS Architects

Landscape architects: Uys & White

Quantity surveyors: MLC

Main contractor: Stefanutti Stocks Building (KZN)

Roofing/cladding steelwork contractor: Impact engineering