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MESSAGE FROM THE MUNICIPAL MANAGER – TOURISM IS CHANGING

Prior communication from the Tourism Manager, Mr Shaun Visser in regard to the closure of the tourism office seems to create the impression that this was a last minute decision by me in my capacity as Municipal Manager acting in concert with Councillor Francois du Rand, the councillor nominated to represent council on tourism matters. The previous statement is inaccurate, creates a misperception and should be disregarded as an official communication. Mr Visser and staff was appointed for the period of one year commencing at the beginning of January 2018, as a transitionary period with the full knowledge that this was not going to be renewed so that a new tourism initiative could be launched. That he seeks to vilify my role in the closure of the tourism office in the communication is an unfortunate choice.

In May 2018 a report was put to the Swellendam Municipal Council to reconstitute the way Tourism is managed in Swellendam. This decision paved the way for the process to redesign Tourism Services and how it functions in Swellendam. It is common cause that previous attempts by Tourism Organisations (in whatever form under whosever's leadership) did not yield the desired outcomes that the broader industry and sector expected. If this is not the case then I am happy to stop the current process and we revert back to what was in place before this decision.

In May 2018 a decision was taken that the current contracts would be allowed to run its course till the end of year of 2018. There was no ambiguity in this decision. The contracts and services as set out does not make mention of 2019, nor does it even suggest that 2019 will continue as 2018. As matters stand we are days away from this new reality.

To help carve out this path, Swellendam Municipality appointed Destinate to help craft this path with us. This path starts with understanding what our consumers, media and tourism sales channels think about us, it asks tough questions so that we can co-craft a new strategy, with new targets, new ideas and a new plan. The first sessions have been held and feedback has been largely positive. A report is out for comment. This is the first of many reports. As stakeholders you are encouraged to engage with the reports, attend the workshops and help craft this new way.

Part of this new way means being honest with ourselves about the performance of the past. If we agree that we should be further than we are as a town then we must embrace the change that we wish to make. And this means shutting down or closing off the past. This is an unfortunate reality. Change is an inevitable part of life. It happens whether we're ready or not. One of the secrets of living is to learn to handle the changes we find coming our way. It is possible to learn to set our sail so that the winds of

change blow us in the direction we choose rather than onto the rocks. Even though we often fear it, change is one of the few things guaranteed in life. In fact, many business gurus argue that businesses now face increased levels of dynamic change due to stresses in our economies, societies and natural world leading to increased volatility in the business environment. And my personal favourites are “Change is inevitable. Growth is optional.” — John C. Maxwell followed by progress is impossible without change, and those who cannot change their minds cannot change anything. George Bernard Shaw. I do not wish to seem unkind but how are we expecting to go forward if we hold onto the past ways of doing and being.

It is against this backdrop that I wish to advise that this decision to shut down the tourism information function as we currently know it was taken as far back as May 2018 when the item to restructure was tabled and approved at council. The last 6 months was the finalisation of the last contract. If this does not constitute sufficient notice then I do not know how much additional time is necessary. At the same time the 3 year service level agreement with the STO (Swellendam Tourism Organisation) ended. All of these indicators must surely have demonstrated that we were serious about these changes.

The project we launched with the appointment of Destinate seeks to carve out a new future for tourism in Swellendam. This means trying new and different things that helps to secure more visitors visiting Swellendam, more often for a wider variety of activities, using more digital and more diverse platforms. This is not possible within the ambit of the current tourism function. It was never intended that the current tourism function would simply continue without disruption.

It is therefore in some respects a sad day as it means that we have to part ways with the old and familiar and to no longer have a physical presence as we have come to know it. But it is also an exciting day as it means embracing a new tomorrow, an opportunity to start afresh and to try new things and ideas unhindered and unencumbered by the past. I simply ask that you have faith in the new process and participate and engage and we co-design and co-craft the new future together.

For further enquires please note that my office will act as a reception for tourism related enquiries. This is an interim measure as I do not believe that information dissemination as it is currently done will continue for much longer. Please call 028 514 8500. Please refer people to www.visitswellendam.co.za for online information and The Good Life in Swellendam on facebook. I note that more than 200 listings appear on Lekkeslaap, Trip advisor and other online platforms. So various services are available online and the remaining tourism booklets will be distributed to coffee shops and other places as an alternate solution in the interim.

Sincerely

ANTON GROENEWALD
MUNICIPAL MANAGER
12 December 2018