

## uMnini Thusong Centre

uMnini, KwaZulu-Natal

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 Contractor: Motheo Construction  
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In changing times, an architect's design can never be considered a finite product. With this in mind, it was the designer's intention to provide a built environment that would satisfy both the basic functions of the uMnini Thusong Centre public facility, and aspire to an architecture that is experimental and embraces a model for improvement and sustainability. These main design drivers gave rise to structures that would support the changing climatic, economic and social needs in this previously disadvantaged rural community at uMnini on KwaZulu-Natal's South Coast.

The buildings are positioned on a vast open site bounded by the sea on the east and small built structures dotted on the adjoining

land parcels. The site was released to the Ethekwini Municipality by the tribal Ngonyama Trust.

The uMnini Thusong Centre initiative forms part of the broader national presidential programme that seeks to provide 'one-stop shop' facilities housing various local and provincial government public services. In addition, the initiative recognises the lack of social amenities in these communities by providing hall and gathering spaces, while supporting local businesses through the cross-subsidisation of market facilities.

The size of the site and its exposure to prevailing sea winds and harsh sun angles called for an architecture that was more

fragmented, defensible and responsive to the human need for enclosure and perceptions relating to scale. The buildings are thus expressed as simple blocks arranged around shared courtyards of varying proportions to denote the hierarchy and use of spaces.

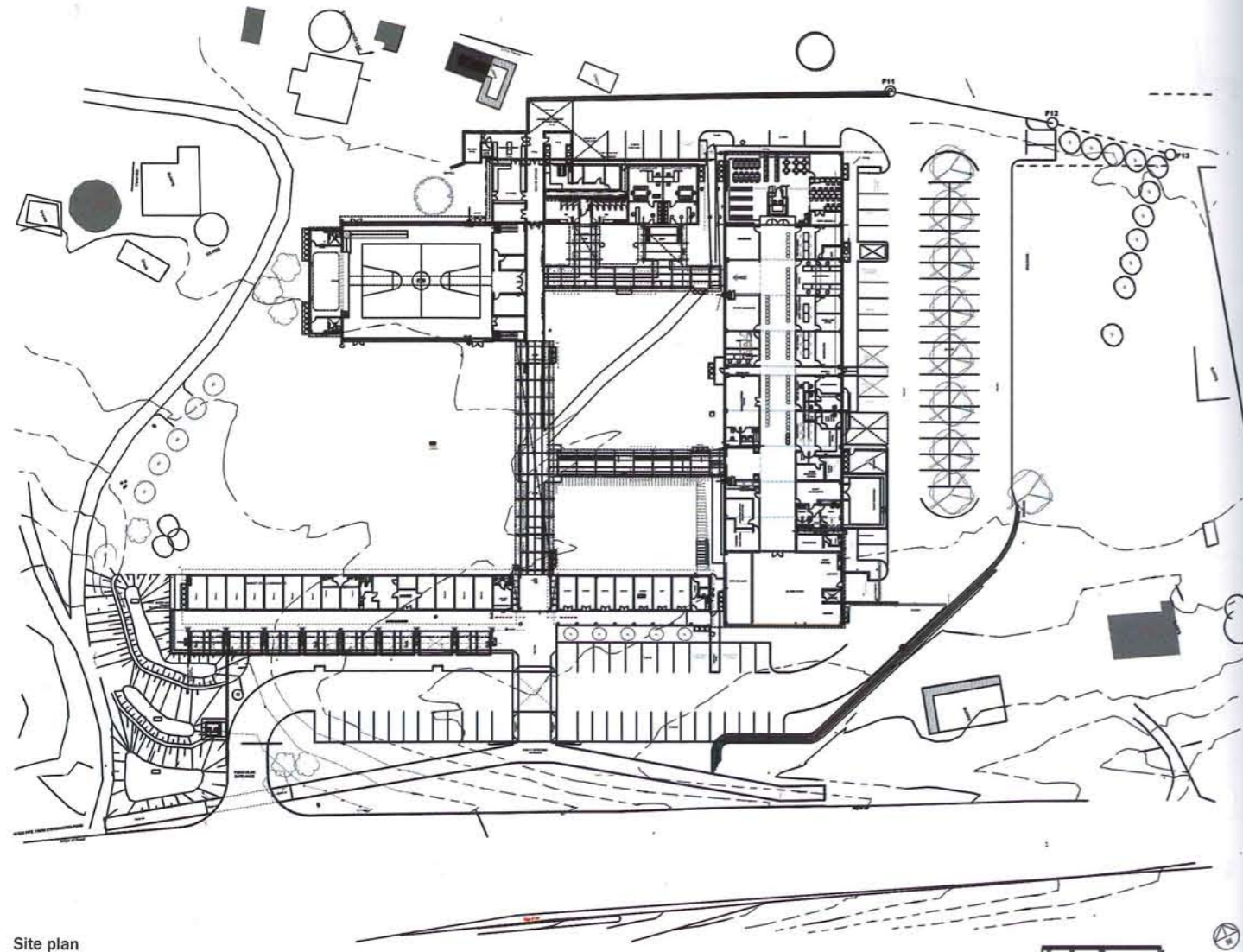
On the concept of courtyards, it was envisaged that these could later be developed as community vegetable gardens or play areas for children with well-designed play equipment, and used for outdoor events. This would tie in with the long-term vision for the centre to provide opportunities for employment for local people in the area.

Much has been invested in improving the centre's energy consumption and carbon

off-set. A large portion of the funding was set aside for intelligent mechanical lighting supported by large panels of south light glazing that bring in natural daylight and allow reflected lighting internally. Electricity is supplied by photovoltaic panels with a back-up supply off the main grid.

Trees and robust planting have been selected to complement the buildings and soften the external spaces.

Further efforts to conserve energy and reduce operational spending can be seen in the selection of robust, locally sourced materials such as face-brick and steel, natural ventilation through the use of 'whirlybird' ventilators and fixed aluminium louvre panels.



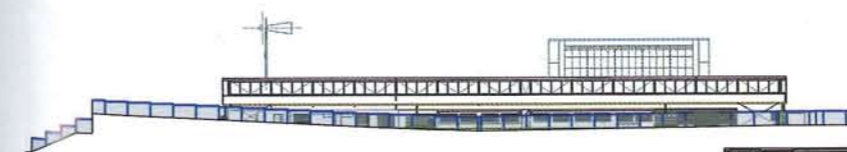
Site plan



South-west elevation



North-west elevation



South-east elevation

