

Construction set to begin on city's R430m Hollywood-style studio project

AMEL POWELL

THE new head of Cape Town Film Studios, formerly known as Dreamworld, says "nothing will go wrong now" with the R430-million project.

Nico Dekker, the former head and chief executive officer of Table Mountain Motion Picture Studios who has been appointed to head Cape Town Film Studios, says construction is to begin on phase one at the end of next month.

"I can't foresee any obstacles and I have looked at it very carefully," said Dekker.

The Phase development was first mooted in 2001 and is more

than two years behind schedule. Completion of the first phase is set for early 2009, and "maybe even be earlier if we have good fortune", Dekker said.

A waiting list for future property owners and tenants has been opened.

Cape Town Film Studios chair Anant Singh said the tenant mix would be "best suited to meet the demands of the industry and the productions that use the studios".

Dekker said his biggest challenge would be to "turn around negative perceptions".

The project has had a chequered history, from delays in

the approval of statutory planning approvals to threats by the City of Cape Town to withdraw R20m for bulk infrastructure because of concerns about the viability of the project.

"I was initially sceptical, but now I am totally convinced. The site is right, the shareholders are right."

The studios are owned by a team of shareholders, including Singh's Television Entertainment, Marvel Golding's Sable Investments, the Fico Trust, the Helderberg Chamber of Commerce, and the provincial trade and investment agency Wegco.

Dekker said: "This is a 16-

year, multi-million rand project that has no equal in South Africa. It is the greatest investment in the South African film industry to date."

Relations with the city council were "in a good position", as everyone stood to benefit from the project.

The city council released the R20m needed for bulk infrastructure in January paving the way for construction to begin.

The development would provide South Africa's first custom-built Hollywood-style studios. There was international and national interest in the studio complex.

Phase one is to comprise

four mixed stages of varying sizes, production offices, and workshop space.

Singh welcomed the appointment of Dekker, stating that his "extensive experience" in managing a profitable studio would be invaluable.

Dekker said the development of a self-sufficient, fully integrated film city was being modelled on the United Kingdom's Pinewood Studios.

The contract for the construction of the internal boulevard has been awarded and the winner of the contract for civil engineering services is to be announced shortly.

amel.powell@ia.com