

Construction to begin on R430m studio project

September 29 2008 at 11:15AM

By Anel 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 Faure development was first mooted in 2003 and is more than two years behind schedule. Completion of the first phase is set for early 2010, 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 R30-million 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 Videovision Entertainment, Marcel Golding's Sabido Investments, the Rico Trust, the Helderberg Chamber of Commerce, and the provincial trade and investment agency Wesgro.

Dekker said: "This is a 10-year, multimillion-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 R30-million 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 sound 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.

anel.powell@inl.co.za