

# A new face for Newtown



Newtown's old Potato Sheds will become the newest part of the revamped cultural arc.



By LUCILLE DAVIE

**N**EWTON, the busy fun spot of the inner city, is about to get another beautiful facelift!

A number of years ago the Cultural Arc was proposed. It stretches in a curve from Constitution Hill, through Braamfontein and down to Newtown – the city's Cultural Precinct.

But it has been slow in spite of the fact that it already has many exciting venues – the Market Theatre, Museum Africa, the Sci-Bono Discovery Centre, the SAB World of Beer, the Dance Factory, the Bassline nightclub, and Mary Fitzgerald Square, where big concerts

happen every year.

Now, the Potato Sheds, behind Museum Africa, the city's first indoor fresh produce market, is to be re-vamped in a R850-million development, to be called the Newtown Junction.

On the cards are a hotel, retail and office space, and a possible call centre, to give Newtown a much-needed nudge. Developers Atterbury Properties are to begin construction this year.

Newtown came about after the removal of thousands of people, following a devastating bubonic plague outbreak in 1904. People were moved to Klipspruit; Soweto's first suburb, and the then sub-

urb, Brickfields, was razed to the ground, and Newtown was born.

Many buildings in Newtown are council owned, and selling them to the private sector for development is a long process, involving re-zoning and lots of paperwork. Many of the old buildings are protected by the Heritage Foundation – a fact that has slowed the Newtown Junction development, admitted director, Coenie Bezuidenhout.

But some development has taken place. The three-storey office building, Central Place, went up in 2005. This attracted A-grade office development in AngloGold Ashanti with its conversion

of the Electric Workshop in 2007.

Development was promoted with the building of the Nelson Mandela Bridge in 2003, together with new on and off ramps from the M1, directly into Newtown. The city council has come on board – the square has undergone several upgrades, the latest softening its edges with grassy patches.

"There is a quiet buzz in Newtown all the time," said Sharon Lewis of the Joburg Development Agency.

But what Newtown can look forward to most is the newly announced national arts and culture subsidy – a serious boost to what it offers Joburgers.