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MTN cellphone masts - the controversy continues

Last Wednesday they arrived in Graaff-Reinet with a full delegation to meet the locals in the Town Hall

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GRAAFF-REINET — Late last year, residents of Graaff-Reinet were suddenly alerted to plans by the mobile phone provider MTN to erect two more cellphone base stations in the residential areas of 5 Donkin Street and 188 Cradock Street on private properties.

What started as a project to improve the sketchy MTN customer experience ended up in public relations nightmare. When the Camdeboo town planner, Ndumiso Camngca, called for a public participation meeting in December, there was one notable absence: neither the project applicant MTN nor any of its contractors or consultants were present.

Angry residents demanded explanations and drafted two memoranda with detailed concerns

ent consultant, appointed by MTN, to represent his multinational consulting company from Stellenbosch. They took an attentive audience of some 20, mostly senior citizens from the Horseshoe, through their technical presentations:

Why is it necessary? Why are these the most suitable locations? And why citizen's health concerns in relation with cellphone base stations close to schools are completely unfounded.

Their presentations were well prepared and accessible. However, when it came to technical details of the base stations, the small print became more and more illegible.

Nevertheless, they were also here to listen. Concerns were raised about the image of ugly plastic trees in a heritage town, cellphone masts opposite B&Bs, technical issues were discussed and questions asked. Nobody in the audience denied the need for good cellphone reception, but there are also other

sensitive places in town?

That is where the guys from MTN again lost the plot. The consultant passed the bucket to the property manager, he in turn to the radio engineer. Eventually it was the only company absent (Eriksson) that could answer this crucial question. Had they really studied alternatives and looked for less sensitive environments? No answer.

MTN promised to get back to the now

