

## Relaunching of the Ernest Oppenheimer Park

15 April 2011

Address by the Executive Mayor of the City of Johannesburg, Clr Amos Masondo, on the occasion of the relaunching of the Ernest Oppenheimer Park, Inner City – Johannesburg

Programme Director

MMC for Development Planning and Urban Management: Clr Ross Greeff

Members of the Mayoral Committee

Fellow Councillors

City Manager: Mavela Dlamini

Managers and Officials

Members of the Inner City Charter Partnership Forum

Distinguished Guests

The Community in the Greater Inner City

The Media

Ladies and Gentlemen

Programme Director, it is indeed a great honour and privilege for me to share this day with you and to be part of this very important event – the re-launch of the Ernest Oppenheimer Park.

This re-launch enables us to celebrate both the old and the new. The early history that speaks to the genesis of Joburg and the modern transforming city that seeks to embrace all its people. It reminds us of Joburg's mining roots that started with the first gold rush in the mid-1880s. And reinforces our quest to build a Johannesburg that is united, democratic, non-racial, non-sexist and prosperous.

Sir Ernest Oppenheimer only settled in Johannesburg late in his life, but by that time his family name had already become associated with the growth of the South African mining industry through the two companies he built – the De Beers Consolidated and the Anglo-American Corporation.

Programme Director, originally, this site was the venue for the Standard Theatre – a place where the early mining pioneers came to be entertained. In later years, it was redeveloped into a park within the City CBD – perhaps best known for its "leaping bokkies" – or the "Impala Stampede" which has now been restored and relocated to the Anglo American headquarters in Main Street.

We also see this re-launch as an important part of the City's urban renewal effort – the regeneration and revitalisation of the Johannesburg Inner-City.

Programme Director, many of us are aware that in the late 1980's and the early 1990's, the city experienced an exodus of business people and other stakeholders away from the inner city to the north. This was a period that was characterised by crime and grime and other similar related ills. But very few will contest the fact that we have gone a long way to address these challenges. Interventions such as the development of Gandhi Square, Mary Fitzgerald Square, Mandela Bridge, the Main Street pedestrian upgrade and the Constitution Hill Precinct are but a few examples.

Later, this month we will also see the opening of a refurbished Chancellor House, the venue where our iconic struggle icons, Nelson Mandela and Oliver Tambo established their law firm. This will reinforce the good work done thus far and ensure that the Inner City remains an attractive investment proposition.

Programme Director, in 2007, the City of Johannesburg, together with a wide range of stakeholders, developed an 'Inner City Charter' which outlines commitments by various stakeholders. Part of these speak to the regeneration of public spaces, public art and the promotion of culture and heritage. The various works of art that are placed here celebrate our heritage as expressed by sculptors and other visual artists.

Programme Director, through the Johannesburg Development Agency the City has launched a number of strategic initiatives that seek to stimulate development and act as a catalyst for regeneration. This includes amongst others, a network of pedestrian friendly routes supported by good quality public open spaces that link people to the public transport interchanges and the range of public and private amenities in this part of the Inner City. The introduction of a circular route for the Rea Vaya Bus Rapid Transit system has also enhanced access.

The upgrade of the Inner City core began with the Retail Improvement District (RID) project. This area is bounded by Jeppe Street in the North, Commissioner Street in the South, Harrison Street in the West, and Von Brandis Street in the East.

The Johannesburg Development Agency began by upgrading the lighting in this area, and produced an urban design framework that identified public environment upgrading projects for implementation. The upgraded Ernest Oppenheimer Park and a food court on Kerk and Von Brandis Streets were amongst the first projects to be tackled.

This park lies at the centre of the Inner City core, immediately adjacent to the Rissik Street Post office and is strategically located on the pedestrian link between Park Station and Gandhi Square.

As it can be seen, we have successfully managed to blend the old with the new. A new herd of cast iron "bokkies" have been settled on a plinth and a replica of the Ernest Oppenheimer Diamond, said to be the most beautiful rough stone ever discovered, is a prominent feature.

We have also added a basketball court to cater for the many children who live in this area but have very few opportunities for play. The amphitheatre provides a quiet venue for people to relax or can even be used for small gatherings. Public ablutions were built to cater to the general public and hawkers who are active in this area.

In our immediate vicinity is the Rissik Street Post Office, built in 1897, but which has sadly been the victim of a number of major fires. It is currently undergoing a facelift in line with the City's policy on preservation and heritage. We are looking forward to the Post Office going back to its architectural heritage and being restored to its former glory.

Johannesburg may have been founded as a mining town, grew into the continent of Africa's most prominent centre of commerce, economic growth, culture, entertainment and creative excellence. But like a human being, its heartbeat and spirit need to be properly nurtured as we move into the future. To do this effectively we need a partnership. This city belongs to all of us.

Programme Director, please allow me to present to you a booklet entitled Johannesburg Inner City – Common Vision, Shared Successes - that captures in summary the following:

work done in the Inner City in the past ten years (history)

regeneration in action; and

results and lessons learnt.

Finally, let me take this opportunity to extend my congratulations and appreciation to all who have contributed towards the revitalisation of this park: the Department of Development Planning and Urban Management, the Johannesburg Development Agency, and a number of creative artists, consultants and contractors. You have succeeded in bringing the story of Joburg to life through this quaint park.

Let me also acknowledge the critical role played our partners in the Inner City Charter Partnership Forum in making the inner city the success that it is and will continue to become.

You make Joburg Great!

Thank you.