**PRESS RELEASE**

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 **World Cup football fans feel the benefit of LivCom Awards**

A greener, leafier Johannesburg will welcome fans to the forthcoming FIFA World Cup, thanks to a project recognised and supported by the United Nations-backed International Awards for Liveable Communities.

Greening Soweto first came to international attention when it received a merit gold award and a £10,000 bursary, in the natural built project category at the prestigious Liveable Communities (LivCom) Awards, in London in November 2007.

LivCom is a United Nations-backed initiative recognising those cities and municipalities which make an effort to create liveable spaces for their inhabitants.

The award’s judges spotted the lasting legacy implications of a plan to turn the dusty streets of Soweto into a green oasis and saluted it for "planting trees and catalysing environmental action in the service of the Earth and for the benefit of humankind".

At the start of the Johannesburg project one hundred trees were planted in a single day at the newly completed Orlando West Park, in Soweto to celebrate Global Community Day.

"This initiative of Greening Soweto is to transform the dry, dusty streets of Soweto into a vibrant green community, in a way that enhances the lives of all the residents and those who visit Soweto," said Luther Williamson, the managing director of the City utility, speaking at the planting.

"Our mission is to plant 200 000 trees in Soweto by capitalizing on the momentum of the 2010 FIFA World Cup™ in order to turn the suburb into a green oasis on par with other developed suburbs in Johannesburg."

With the football spectacular just around the corner, Johannesburg has worked hard to prepare for the fans and players expected in the city. It is the primary host city of the cup, with two host stadiums - Soccer City and Ellis Park. LivCom’s award back in 2007 recognised Greening Soweto as an important part of these preparations and made the £10,000 bursary prize in support.

LivCom Chief Executive Alan Smith said: “This kind of project fits entirely the profile of a successful example of a community coming together to make a lasting, beneficial change. The LivCom Awards, are a United Nations-backed programme to recognise and pass on the lessons of this kind of world leadership at grass roots level. What was particularly exciting to the awards judges was that long after the final whistle in the 2010 World Cup, the Greening Soweto project will benefit residents for generations.”

About the project

When heat rises from tarred roads, trees act as a natural coolant – vital in a city like Johannesburg. They also convert carbon dioxide that is released from cars, one of the greenhouse gases, into oxygen. An acre of trees, on average, can store 2,6 tons of carbon pollution annually and generate enough oxygen daily for 18 people. A mature, fertile tree produces as much oxygen in a season as 10 people inhale in a year.

Where there is no shade, the air temperature can rise to 35°C. Such heat can cause cities to be five to nine degrees warmer than surrounding areas. Trees can also reduce noise levels.

Orlando West Park caters for the young and old - there is play equipment and a braai area which has a great view. It is next to Orlando Stadium, which has been rebuilt to serve as a World Cup venue.

Many of the residents around Mlamlankunzi - as Orlando West is fondly known - are pleased with their park.

David Seleo and Martin Deire, who live across the road from the park, said: "We are very proud of City Parks for doing something like this for the community. It keeps all of the children away from the streets and it is safe here because there are also security guards who take care of the kids while they play."

The park has 24-hour security guards who look after the park and make sure it is kept clean and that there is no vandalism. It also has specific opening times - from Monday to Friday it is open from 2pm to 6.30pm, and on the weekends it is open from noon to 6.30pm.

"My friends and I travel about 10 minutes to get to the park and we have never had the guards tell us not to play here. This park is the greatest thing that has happened for us. Now we are able to play in a safe place and have lots of fun," said Kamogelo Kasakang.

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# The LivCom Awards were launched internationally in 1997 and are endorsed by the United Nations Environment Programme and the scheme is run as a UK Registered Charity.

# LivCom Awards are made in three categories covering Whole City, Sustainable Projects and a Bursary Award which sees match funding of £10,000 go to the winning project. Last year’s winner in this category was Chrudim, Czech Republic for the regeneration of a recreation area.

A new country has been represented at the LivCom Awards in each of the past eleven years, and now more 50 countries are regularly represented. Political delegates confirm that being exposed to the presentations of cities from other countries and cultures has provided many policy ideas that could be effectively introduced in their own community.

To take part in the awards, communities need to register by 31 May 2010 and contribute written submissions by 30 June. Initial judging will take place during the summer before the announcement of this year’s finalists