

LANSMARTERIA

Is South Africa about to embark on the creation of a smart city that's going to change the way citizens live and thrive?



BY: **TAMSIN OXFORD**
PICTURE: **CROSSPOINT PROPERTY INVESTMENTS**

In his Gauteng State of the Province address in February 2020, Premier David Makhura used the word ‘smart’ a great deal. Smart technologies for capturing groundwater and reusing water waste, smart mobility solutions for Gauteng, a smart and knowledge-based economy, and the development of a new smart city in Lanseria, said the Premier.

According to Makhura, the building of this smart city will be one of multiple projects designed to bring in more than R60 billion to the western corridor and the region. The project has been endorsed by the President and has seen some impressive private sector support. Nedbank has bought into the idea of the smart city, with Poovendran Naidoo, executive head for Business Banking Product and Interactions at Nedbank, stating that it will take private-public partnerships to get the project off the ground and achieving what it’s setting out to do.

But what exactly is this smart city planning to achieve?

In a recent CNBC interview, CEO of Lanseria Airport Rampa Rammopo revealed that the concept had been under discussion since 2009 – the gears of government grind slowly – and is now finally moving towards the next steps of its evolution. The goal is to build a 24-hour smart city zone that’s going to drive job creation and economic development alongside igniting growth in the local communities. For Rammopo, it will take engagement with the community to another level as a catalyst for the area. It will also be playing a role in building the status and capabilities of Lanseria Airport in terms of a dedicated freight operation alongside other development plans that will form part of a comprehensive master plan for the smart city.

In his presentation, Makhura outlined the size of the project – a massive slice of landscape that extends from Lanseria to Hartebeespoort Dam (approximately 17km as the smart crow flies) – and the goal to achieve its intelligent aims in the next 10 years.

MEGA PROJECTS

“The Lanseria Airport City is one of 19 ‘Mega City’ developments and part of the Mega Projects programme of the Gauteng Department of Human Settlements (GDHS),” says Gavin Noeth, senior consultant, projects and infrastructure at CMS RM Partners. “The

programme is claimed by the GDHS to be a R100 billion economic corridor investment.”

The goal of the smart city is to take South Africa into the Fourth Industrial Revolution and towards a knowledge-based economy while also driving economic growth in the region and potentially changing the face of poverty and lack of infrastructure in the area. However, is this really the right project for right now?

“There is some doubt as to whether South Africa is ready for such a progressive initiative and whether we shouldn’t be focusing on solving our more pressing problems first,” says Bernice Swanepoel, manager, strategic consulting, JLL Sub-Saharan Africa. “How can we propose to spend in excess of R500 billion on smart city projects when such a large portion of our citizens remain without adequate shelter, healthcare or education?”

The funding of the project is a fair question. According to Noeth, the typical funding for this type of project is a mixture of property development finance, equity and several types of grant funding. Crosspoint Property Investments was selected as the developer for this particular smart city and it has partnered with the Public Investment Corporation (PIC) to develop 5 088 277m² of commercial floor space in a business precinct and 50 000 residential units in a residential precinct.

“According to *SA Commercial Property News*, the Western Corridor Development, of which the Lanseria Smart City forms the

bulk, will unlock more than R25 billion in investment,” adds Swanepoel. “Government will be funding the development of the bulk infrastructure, including sewerage, water, electricity, roads and digital infrastructure.”

5G-READY

The Premier did reveal in his speech that this particular smart city is designed to be 5G-ready, green, and capable of pulling power from renewable sources. This, at least, answers the question as to how any intelligent city can thrive in a country marked by Eskom’s ongoing failure to deliver reliable power. It’s expected that the Lanseria Smart City will include a variety of eco-services such as rainwater harvesting and solar energy production and that it will be leverage alternative power sources to bolster the flagging electricity service provider. It has been suggested that these will include converting waste and installing electricity micro-grids and to attempt to get half the power for the area from these types of renewable resources.

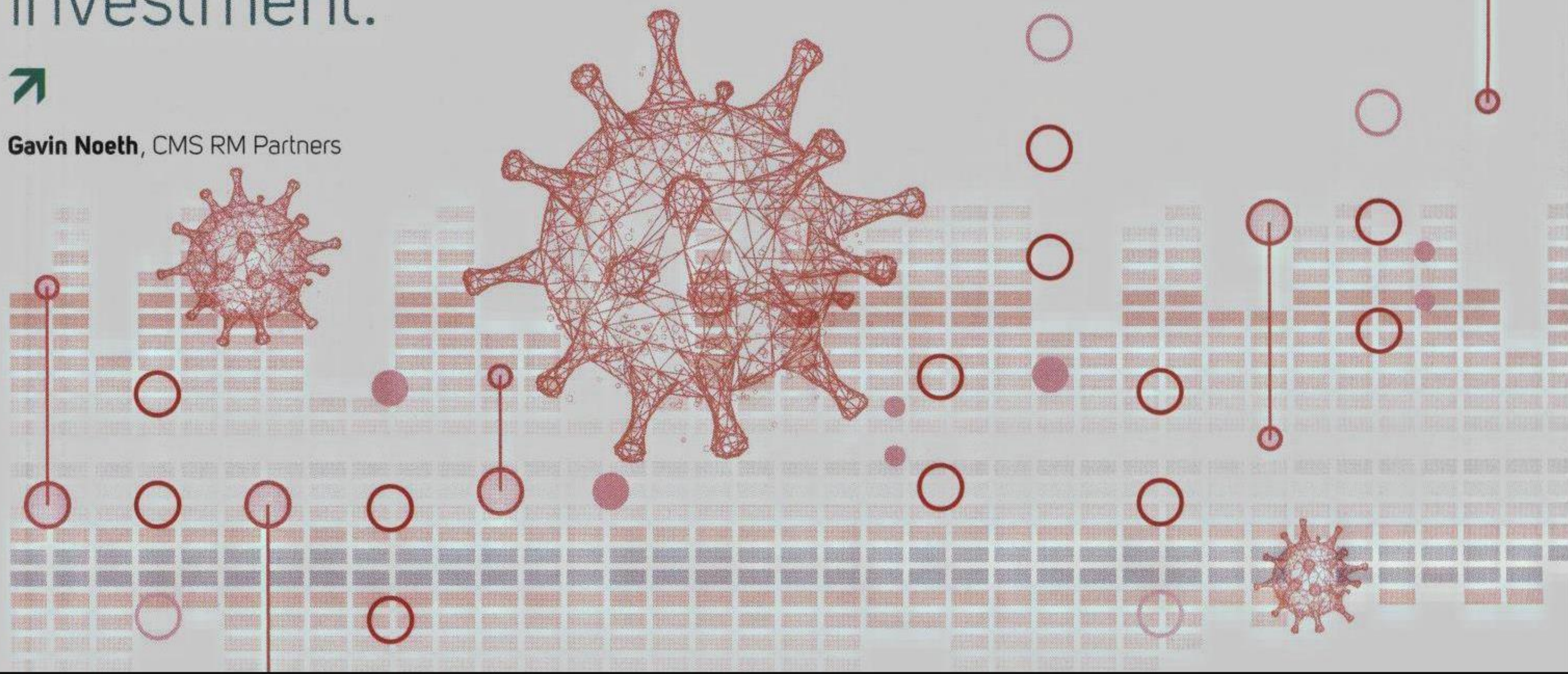
“It remains doubtful that the city will be able to provide all its electricity needs via solar power alone,” says Swanepoel. “Particularly if it’s to incorporate a large expanse of more than five million square metres of commercial functions. In all likelihood, it will remain reliant on Eskom and vulnerable to loadshedding.”

This is going to play a big role in the type of intelligence that’s embedded into the smart

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Gavin Noeth, CMS RM Partners



city. A lack of reliable power can fundamentally affect services if they're all high-tech and high-end and permanently plugged into a power socket. That said, smart cities are not just about voice-activated lifts, they're about intelligent design that uses the space and capabilities of the area to achieve more, with less. This will be particularly necessary given that the city needs to cater for more than just one class of citizen.

"This smart city aims to deliver more than 800 000 low-income housing for RDP, veterans and social housing, and high-income housing units, within 30 residential developments spread across five post-apartheid city development corridors in Gauteng," adds Noeth.

POST-APARTHEID CITY

The South African government has described the Lanseria Smart City project as one that is truly post-apartheid, a city that's capable of rising above the past and creating a space for societal and economic change. It's an impressive goal and one that's reflected in the choice of housing that's been put forward for the mega build. The Gauteng Infrastructure Funding Summit paper on Investing into

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Bernice Swanepoel, JLL Sub-Saharan Africa

Gauteng Infrastructure states that the mega project will have a high-density, mixed-use residential area driven by the economy of the airport and commercial infrastructure. The project is broken down into two precincts – the first is the Three Towers Development for mixed use and high-density residences, the second is the Central Business District Development that spans around 90 hectares and includes both commercial and residential units.

When the project first became public knowledge, it was suggested that the first signs of life would be apparent in the next three to five years. However, since then, the

coronavirus has entered the conversation and brought almost every gear in the country to a grinding halt. It's unlikely that this smart city will see the speed of development previously anticipated, and that speed was already glacial.

"Given the fact that it took a year for the nation to actually realise the President was serious about his intention to develop smart cities, I don't foresee any actual development taking place within the next three to five years," says Swanepoel. "Moreover, given the harsh economic climate and the added strain of Covid-19, this deadline could be pushed out even further." ■

