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Aengus Residents see a bright future for Johannesburg

Johannesburg's city centre will receive a major boost from developments associated with the 2010 World Cup, creating a cleaner, more secure and more liveable city.

Aengus Property Holdings MD Richard Rubin said his company had recently conducted a survey into city living amongst the residents of its lifestyle buildings and respondents had been overwhelmingly positive about the future of the city. Aengus is a major investor in the rejuvenation of the city centre, and has developed four up market apartment buildings in Johannesburg already.

He said the majority of respondents saw growth and great improvement in the city, and saw Johannesburg as being a world class city in 10 years time, with the 2010 Soccer World Cup seen as a major catalyst in this process.

"Because the Ellis Park precinct – a key venue for the World Cup - is on the border of much of the residential development, there will certainly be an investment spike for players owning property in the city. With that will hopefully come an improvement in infrastructure like transport," Rubin said.

The respondents believed positive change would be affected in terms of a more developed infrastructure, and saw Johannesburg becoming a fully functional city. "They see it as being comparable to the likes of Paris and London within the next decade," Rubin adds.

The responses also indicated that city dwellers are benefiting from an improved economy with greater job opportunities, more businesses and greater profits. Other comments included use of words such as "multi-cultural", "cosmopolitan" and "the 'in' place to be".

There were however, some negative responses, with 15% of those surveyed still saying Johannesburg would be as full of crime and illegal immigrants, in 10 years time, as it is now.

Gavin Meskin, operations director at Aengus believes there is a lot of work to be done before Johannesburg truly becomes a world-class city. "We need to develop our infrastructure and transport systems, reduce crime and control illegal immigrants – all of which is slowly starting to happen".

He said like any other city, Johannesburg would experience a "tipping point" when the mainstream of investors would follow early adopters into the city centre. This was the case in Soho in New York and Chelsea in London. But Meskin cautioned that at the moment, Johannesburg does not have enough green areas, sports facilities and restaurants for the mainstream to invest meaningfully in the city.

The survey indicated that 85% of respondents lived in Johannesburg City Centre for the convenience. This included being close to transport, schools, shops and accessibility to surrounding areas.

"What permeates the results is convenience," Rubin said. "Living in the city is conducive to this particular demographic's lifestyle. Many people who live in the city don't have

vehicles and rely on public transport. The convenience of city living means they can walk to work and save on transport costs”.

Because Johannesburg’s city centre was never intended to host residential developments, Rubin said it would take some time to strike a balance between business and residential buildings. “We are seeing a slow, but definite move towards more ‘lifestyle’ investment like retail, restaurants and gyms starting to move into the city”. He said this investment was becoming increasingly well supported by the banks, allowing more developers to invest in the city.

Rubin said there was a widely-held misconception that the city has a high crime rate. “There is crime all over Johannesburg and the city is no different,” he adds.

Nevertheless, 38% of respondents to the survey identified improved safety and security as the biggest improvement they wanted to see Johannesburg make. “Respondents want more CCTV cameras positioned around town, and more visible and more frequent police patrols. They want the issue of crime addressed,” Rubin said.

The second biggest need residents identified was the need for the city to be cleaner. Survey results show that they thought the city needed more rubbish bins that were regularly emptied and more cleaners. The respondents also felt that all hawkers and street vendors needed to be moved to a central point to alleviate the problem of litter as well as crime around the city.