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STELLENBOSCH  
HERITAGE FOUNDATION

## **Input of the Stellenbosch Heritage Foundation in the public participation process for a new spatial development framework for Stellenbosch**

We, as the Stellenbosch Heritage Foundation, support the concept and current process for a new spatial plan for Stellenbosch. This makes it necessary for us to comment on what we believe Stellenbosch is, and what it could be.

Stellenbosch is situated on the border of a metropolis, but still has a clear and progressively vibrant small-town character, with an outstanding university in the town centre. It is surrounded with scenic beauty, is close to the sea and an international airport, and has a concentration of business innovation and wealth. It is a privileged town, with assets that should enable it to compete well with towns of similar size in South Africa and elsewhere in the world.

It is also a town in crisis. Like many other towns and cities, it cannot provide basic services of an acceptable and sustainable standard to all its residents. Lack of political consensus and a low level of trust across different neighbourhoods make it difficult to introduce innovation, at a time when new technology and general economic and societal changes need new forms of public policy for towns, to attract talent and to remain competitive.

The unresolved problems in Stellenbosch need more than the resources that any local authority actually has. Yet much goodwill, knowledge and resources are available. We suggest that many small ideas and actions can collectively provide the power to make a big difference in our response to those problems and in planning, designing and also delivering the future of the place where we choose to live.

We want to support the Municipality and the community in this process, to find local solutions that are smart and sustainable.

## Contextual issues

A spatial plan that works depends on contextual issues that are not strictly part of the plan, but are nevertheless relevant. If such issues are neglected, the process may be at risk.

## Integration of processes

The spatial development framework is based on ideas of good neighbourliness and on the belief that it is possible to have stable, equitable and long-term management of the commons, those assets in which we all share, for the benefit of the community. We favour this approach, even though many studies and observations contradict such optimism. The ecologist Garret Hardin and others have pointed out that, when a resource is held jointly, self-interest encourages individuals to deplete it, so that people, rather than protecting the asset, will usually tend to undermine the collective long-term interest by over-exploiting it. To restrain short-term interest we need communal, common sense plans that appeal to our better selves.

The zoning scheme, for instance, as an instrument for allocating rights and deciding how human beings live in relation to one another spatially, was a result of conflict between social classes around the principle of private property. In South Africa, this social and legal construct has had a complicated history, especially during the previous century when rights were at times allocated, transferred or withheld unfairly. The spatial development framework, which aims to ensure long-term planning for the good of everyone, has to work in coordination with the zoning scheme, which focuses on acquired rights and short-term use.

As a rule, there does not have to be and should not be excessive tension between the spatial development plan and economic development plans or other sectoral implementation plans relating to transport or services. If excessive tension does develop in the case of Stellenbosch, it is against what is normally expected and needs special attention.

The integrated development plan (IDP) is a central management document. It should ideally be a project management plan for long-term direction, yet it is often reactive, because short-term needs are urgent. We argue that it is possible to do the right things urgently, and still do it efficiently and in a sustainable manner.

## Strategic perspectives

We generally support the strategic perspectives that have been proposed by the Municipality for the spatial development framework: interconnected nodes; car-free living; inclusive economic growth; optimal land use; guarding of resources; security of food and agriculture and preservation of built heritage and landscape. Systemic problems should be dealt with first, however, so that these strategies will not be obstructed.

## Vision

The vision formulated by the Municipality on which development plans should be based, namely that Stellenbosch strives to be the innovation capital of South Africa, is a worthy aim and should be supported.

We would, however, caution that significant gaps between the ideal and practice remain. Few of the support service systems in the Municipality are currently integrated. Deep in the system, there also are more pervasive bugs in the form of processes, practices and myths that will continue to frustrate growth and renewal unless they are dealt with systematically and comprehensively.

In planning to be a smart and innovative town, actual performance is everything. The honour of becoming the innovation capital cannot simply be claimed; it must be earned through effort and by attention to detail.

## Process

We support the inclusive process proposed for the new integrated development plan; we have campaigned for such an inclusive approach and methodology for some time.

Involving the community is necessary, and also smart. It is worthwhile to liberate the energy and talent of civil society, even if it may be slow and time consuming.

An inclusive process is a challenge, given the political fragmentation and low levels of trust in Stellenbosch. It is, however, no use to try to avoid it. We, as a community, need to engage, accommodate and transform. It is not sustainable to continuously use politics or race to retreat into our fixed positions. We need to use all the strength of our communal power and

human ability to think, reason and understand to create conditions for connecting and for imagining new possibilities.

## Power relations

Every community is a fine network of power relations. It is normal. Yet we suggest that any long-term community plan should also carefully consider the power to affect situations. Are there any special formal or informal bans or distortions?

## 1. Urban Design Framework

Spatial design should be an open process, informed by best design practices, but nevertheless taking place from the bottom up.

The design of the spatial design framework should not be reserved for urban designers, just as the design of roads, railways and infrastructure should not be reserved for engineers. Both spatial and infrastructure development should be purposeful cross-disciplinary.

Our own interest in urban design and planning is informed by the work of Jan Gehl, Jane Jacobs, Lewis Mumford, Christopher Alexander, Christian Norberg-Schulz, Calvin Campbell, Michael Conzen, Jeremy Whitehand and Graeme Evans. In Stellenbosch, we value the perspectives of, amongst others, Martin Kruger, Piet Louw, Simon Nicks, Fabio Todeschini and Mark Swilling and his co-authors in *Sustainable Stellenbosch*.

## Urban design today

In *Massive Small*, Kevin Campbell, a practical and influential urban designer, refers to massive small as the operating programme for smart urbanism. Some of the main ideas of the best current practices include:

- Look at a city or town as an organism, rather than as an artefact, as we used to do. Leave cities to develop. Take care of the conditions for growth, and they will grow.
- In looking for growth, politicians and officials often focus too much on “wow”, and neglect the fabric of place. Fabric of place endures. Cities that focus on fabric of place hold out better against economic collapse, and support growth longer.
- A big city plan is the power of many small actions that are allowed to happen.

- Smart cities depend on smart citizens. Focus on people (the organism) as much as on infrastructure (the artefact). Cities that attract talent sustains growth.
- The resilient city grows from the ways in which talent and the society are liberated. The city that can grow and develop results from the ability of the city (as organism, system, idea) to survive.
- Smart urbanism is condition making. The best way to ensure smart cities and growth is not to try to build it top-down. Smart cities and growth happen when leaders and city managers focus on creating conditions for growth. To allow the latter to happen, city managers must first deal comprehensively and systematically with problems in the system.

## Thinking global, acting local

Translated to Stellenbosch, these best practices imply:

1. Adapt the approach to development plans. Let the master plan suggest and enable, rather than prescribe and determine. Allow the system to manage itself as much as possible, and to learn from its actions.
2. We still need big ideas, but can implement many small actions in the meanwhile.
3. City managers need to have partners from across civil society and political parties. We must start the process, and be very serious about it. Measure the number and quality of partnerships across civil society, professions and business that can achieve results, which the Municipality on its own cannot achieve.
4. The big policies that make transformation possible are town competitiveness; stable communities; and sustainable development. Each of these needs innovation and attention to detail to realise change.
5. If Stellenbosch strives to be an innovation capital it should compare itself with competitive knowledge-intensive towns elsewhere with regard to creating conditions that attract talented people.
6. To build a stable community, create conditions and spaces where people can enjoy a dignified life. If we merely rely on numbers when we provide low-cost housing, we forget

that we deal with future communities. When we think smart, and allow people to be involved, we can create conditions for belonging; and for a strong and resilient civil society.

7. The present pattern of growth in Stellenbosch is not sustainable. We have not worked out the cost on the environment and the economy of the urban sprawl, the largely opportunistic spreading of living areas, and the services, such as public transport, which we have to do without because of that cost. We need to measure the true cost of urban sprawl urgently.
  
8. The present pattern of growth of the University of Stellenbosch is not sustainable for the town of Stellenbosch. The University can and should grow, and should be a leading university on the continent. It is, and should be, seen as a core asset and an essential part of life in Stellenbosch. It is not growth itself, but the specific current pattern of growth that creates problems for the town, and is also a barrier to bottom-up transformation of Stellenbosch. In the recent past, the University has grown much faster than the town, without providing accommodation and infrastructure for the growing mass of students. The cost of rented living space in the town centre in Stellenbosch is the highest in the country. The relation of rent to ownership is also skewed, if measured against other towns and cities. The majority of lower- to middle-income workers who earn their salaries in Stellenbosch live elsewhere. Young working people and young families, especially those previously disadvantaged, therefore do not become part of the fabric of the town. This distortion of the normal housing cycle and key obstacle to gradual integration and transformation will eventually cost the town dearly.
  
9. If growth and planning in Stellenbosch continue as at present, it will be very difficult to reach densities that make it possible to introduce integrated public transport. The reality in Stellenbosch is that the normal housing cycle is broken. Apartments that are normally taken up by young working people and couples are taken by students, the workforce lives in other towns. Stellenbosch cannot wait for an eventual increase in intensities to influence the provision of public transport. We must look at alternatives right now or the town will lose its attractiveness to visitors and local residents. If local taxi operators are able to innovate, and to adopt available new technologies, they could be part of a solution.

10. It is important to determine what the real economic drivers for Stellenbosch are, and to ensure that these drivers remain sustainable. We suggest that both knowledge, which includes the university, new technology businesses and big company headquarters, and higher end tourism is crucial to the sustainable existence of Stellenbosch. If it is well managed, it could provide sustainable growth for a long time. If we lose the unique fabric the Stellenbosch landscape, by not doing what is appropriate, we will lose the town.
11. Finally, measure. Planning and policy making in Stellenbosch is too often based on arguments that are not appropriately quantified. We will be ready to adapt our own arguments if calculations provide new evidence. We suggest that the Municipality quantify core issues, such as points 5 - 10 above, using ESER or such frameworks.

## 2. Further lessons from local incidents

Four recent local incidents provide foreground for local spatial development considerations.

### Khayamandi, 14-15 March 2013

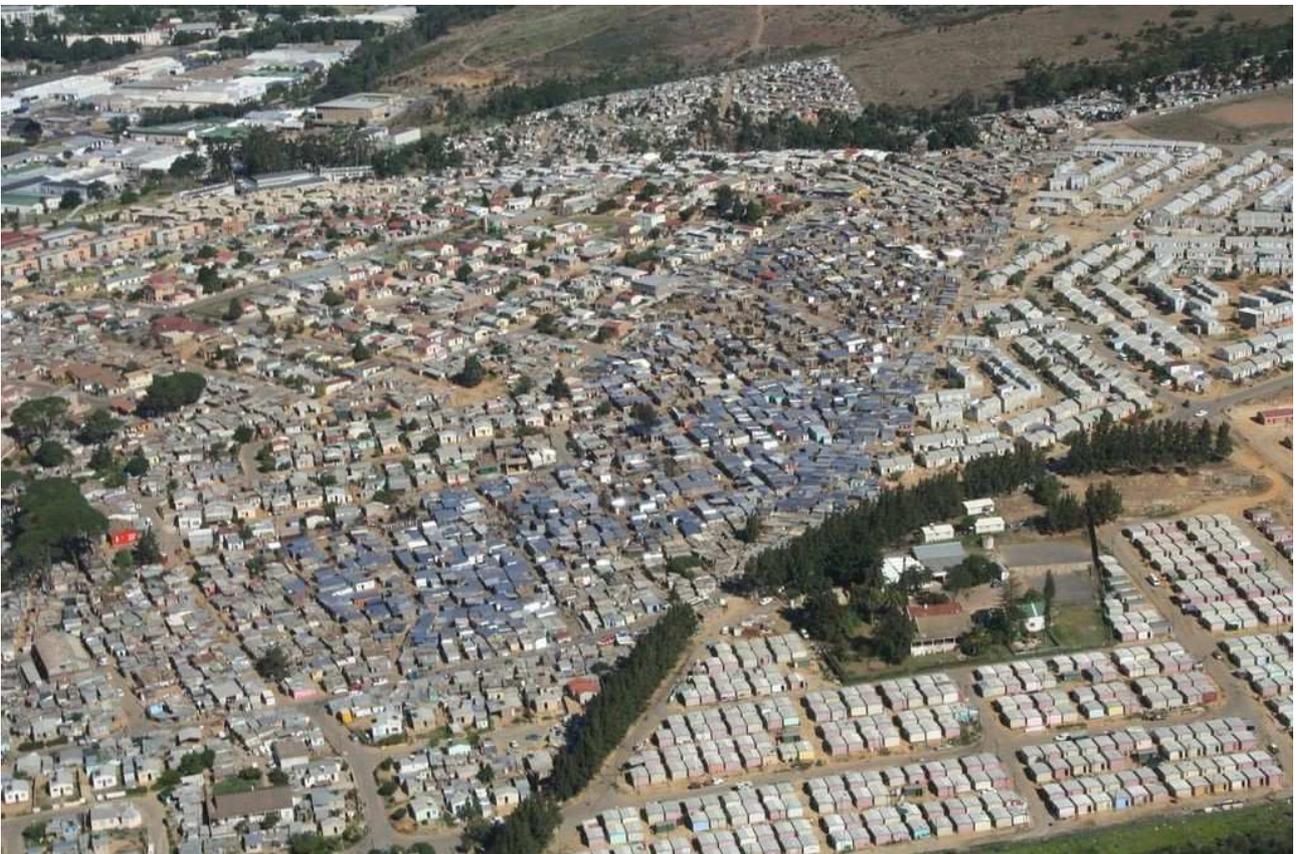


In a fire in Khayamandi on the night of 14-15 March 2013, 1341 informal houses were destroyed. Emergency services had barely commenced giving aid when inhabitants started

clearing up and rebuilding.



Within a week 65% of the houses were rebuilt. These simple facts reflect great adversity and hardship, but also resilience.



Inhabitants who collaborated in the urgent rebuilding did so because they needed shelter. Their actions also were an indication of some underlying anxiety about their claim to the land on which they had settled. Those inhabitants who delayed building were also aware of the possibility of losing precious square meters or parts of square meters to adjacent neighbours.

By rebuilding with urgency and in haste, many mistakes were repeated. The new structures are as prone to future fires as those that were destroyed. Land use did not improve. Without some rebuilding, it will be as difficult as before to provide services. It will also be as difficult as before to transfer titles, which could be a way to create wealth.

How then should the energy of residents be directed to reduce the risk of fires and other dangers; to create more dignified living conditions; and also provide community space? What is the plan that should inform this? Which process or processes should be implemented? What is the role that local government and citizens could play to ensure immediate improvement in living conditions without abandoning any long-term plans for improvement?

The obvious change of the idea of eradication of all shacks to thinking about incremental upgrading carry a heavy emotional load, not only for residents, but also for officials for whom the present process constitute a manageable administrative process. Yet all the statistics show that this mode of housing delivery is neither adequate, nor sustainable. When walking or driving through Khayamandi to the northern end, where the Municipality is now building new houses, one is visually confronted by the overwhelming shortcomings of the political and planning ideas that still drive housing provision.

Upgrading, rather than eradication, is part of the National Development Plan. Yet for re-blocking and other upgrading initiatives to work, the administrative process of housing delivery must become a human process, involving the community and local partnerships. It requires a multi-disciplinary approach, which is difficult to handle, much more so where the levels of social capital and trust are low.

Yet it is the clearly sensible way to give communities a sense of ownership. We suggest that immediate, massive and continuous improvement is possible if the community is helped with relevant technical assistance to plan and improve their environment. We must do it.

## Church Street: change of direction

The Municipality planned to make Church Street in the town centre pedestrian friendly as long as twenty years ago, shortly after street cafes were “allowed” in the area. Several plans and designs emerged in the years that followed, but none was implemented. Every time the plan met with resistance; every time the plan was just too big.

In 2012 a group of property owners in Church Street started the Church Street initiative, which was aimed at making the environment pedestrian and cycle friendly, sociable and well managed. They appointed a task team and a facilitator and had talks with all owners and stakeholders, including the Municipality. The plan for the project was broken down into small sections, and its implementation is being carried out as a series of tests, such as changing the direction of traffic towards the historic church at the upper end of the street. If any change does not work, it can be reversed without substantial capital cost.

It is early days for the Church Street project. Yet, the street today is one of the most vibrant streets in the Western Cape – a long-term plan is being implemented, without significant cost (in capital funding or in time) to the Municipality.

Other landscapes, such as the Rhenish Complex, the Braak and Mill Square (Meulplein), which are not used to potential and need urgent maintenance could, with similar partnerships, be made available to all in the community and unlocked as assets that benefit all.



## R44 between Somerset West and Stellenbosch

Recent proposed improvements on the R44 between Somerset West and Stellenbosch is, amongst others, an indication of provincial led regional planning that is not integrated with local planning to provide conditions for sustainable growth. Money available for infrastructure improvements could be used more efficiently if there is more flexibility and co-operative consultation between national, provincial and local authorities. Such extensive high-cost proposals should further avoid silo thinking and functioning also by having fully engaged multi-disciplinary professional teams, rather than teams dominated by one profession.

## Development in the Weides

In recent years the Weides changed from a suburban neighbourhood to a neighbourhood characterised by rapid development of high-density student housing. This development followed on the exploitation of a presumed zoning regulation gap first by one developer, and then by others. Some, but not all, of the new developments were innovative and sensitive to the fabric of the neighbourhood. As a whole the new development of the neighbourhood was largely opportunistic. It did not help in solving key problems in the town, such as traffic and the disruption of the housing cycle. It rather added to the disruptions. Some residents of nearby neighbourhoods, such as Ida's Valley and Cloetesville, also felt let down by the Municipality, as they were once informed that development of housing schemes were on hold, as municipal infrastructure was at capacity, yet significant redevelopment occurred in the Weides. New development in the Weides should have been led by municipal planning and good urban design principles; instead it was to a large degree reactive, ad hoc approvals by officials under pressure.

## 3. Applying the lessons

Stellenbosch is still largely thought of as a town, though it is in many measures already a city.

It is not advisable, or possible, to resist growth in Stellenbosch, or to deny that it will happen. To imagine that the town may somehow be frozen in space and time, is to risk isolation, social instability and even massive destruction. To ensure sustainable growth, that will build on the fabric of place, and allow for diverse and liveable neighbourhoods, we may need to embrace the idea of Stellenbosch as a city, in identity part of both the Cape Town metropole and the greater wineland district.

Aerial views of Stellenbosch show how the land size of the town grew almost tenfold in the past seven decades. Yet even with large influx and areas of high density the indications are that the population density is today still lower than it was in the seventeenth century. Urban sprawl consumes land and Stellenbosch, as most of South Africa, does not yet have a model that requires new development to contribute adequately towards solving the traffic and infrastructure needs that follow. We subsidise a type of development that has become financially and ecologically unaffordable, while we should rather create conditions for development that will attract talent, and accommodate talent, and yet normalise the housing cycle, and contribute towards integrated urban transport and infrastructure.

To create conditions for sustainable growth, which may solve some of the unintended consequences of the opportunistic growth of previous decades, we need exploratory scenarios for the long term, as well as flexible policies and processes for the meanwhile. Thus: bold and imaginative scenarios, that could nevertheless be researched, tested and continuously adapted, within a set of clear, simple rules that embody principles for smart, sustainable growth. Stellenbosch has the assets, in land, in desirability, in location and in people to achieve growth that embrace the best principles of smart, sustainable urbanism, and to ensure that our joint resources are managed fairly and sustainably.

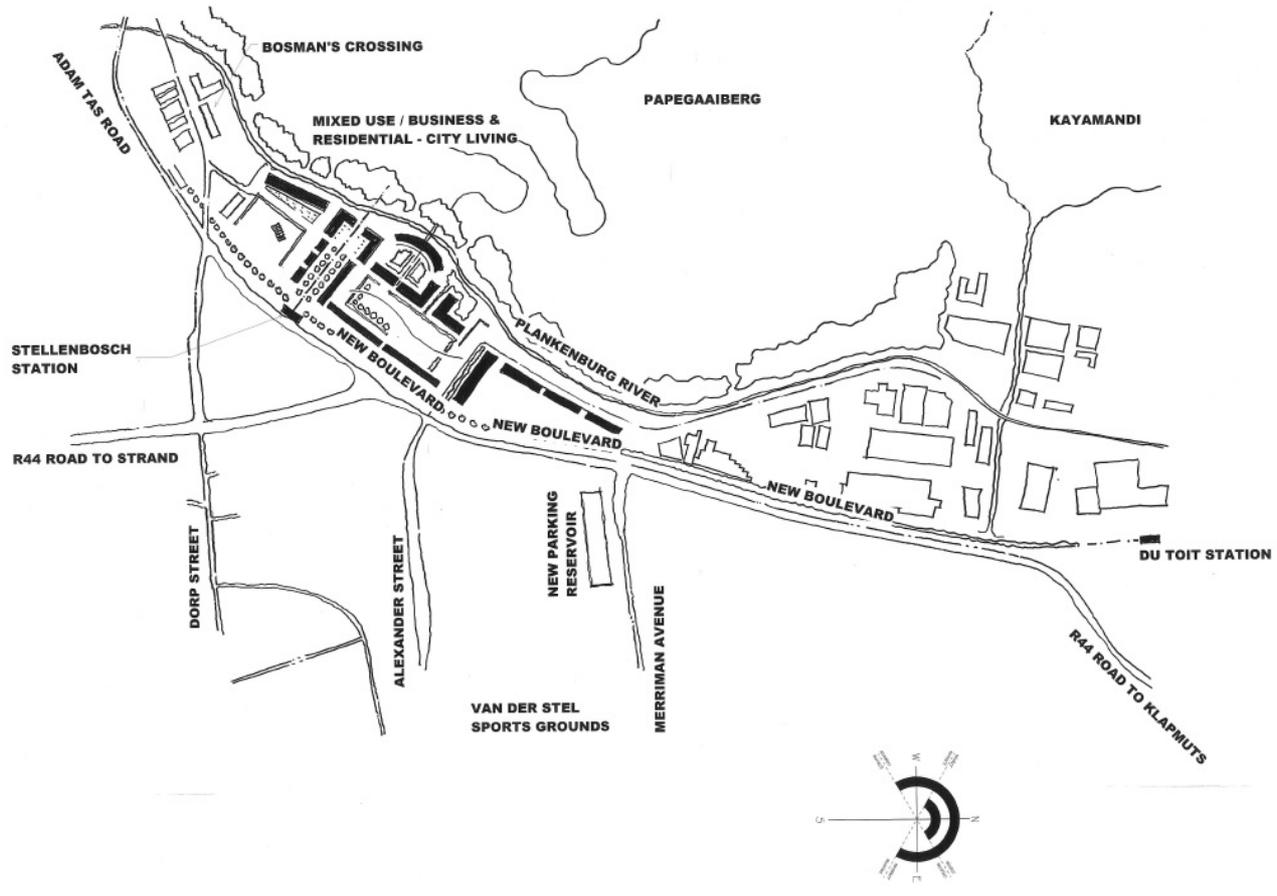
As an illustration, we offer a brief, speculative outline for one scenario, which we stress, will need to be vigorously researched and tested against other scenarios and also key principles.

### **Illustrative, speculative scenario outline**

The railway line and also the adjacent routes for traffic passing through Stellenbosch constitute an enclosing western boundary for the historical core. It is also one of the barriers that prevents integration of outlying neighbourhoods. If the railway line is dropped one level through town, from entrance to exit, with national and provincial funds such as those that have been made available for upgrading of routes to Stellenbosch, it could provide conditions for developing a smart, sustainable, high-density, multi-use district between the present railway line and the Plankenberg river and along Merriman Avenue to Bird Street.

Better use of the railway line, with light local carriages and a number of railway stations, and complemented by underground parking, solutions for through-traffic will enable the gradual

and planned development of a high-density district that runs from the Droë Dyke south of Stellenbosch Farmers Winery to Khayamandi and Cloetesville, with light industrial nodes towards Koelenhof in the north. It will also enable further public transport nodes leading up-town (in which taxi owners using smart technology could, and should, play a role) as well as a pedestrian friendly historic town centre.





To Klipheuwel N2

To Klapmuts  
Wellington N2

Cloetesville

Khayamandi

To Pniel /  
Franschhoek

**Stellenbosch  
Historic Core**

Coetzenburg

Strand Road R44

To Bellville

Droë Dyke

Railway Line

To Somersets West

A high-density, multi-use district with adequate public transport and development conditions that ensure smart green architecture and urban design would also stimulate economic activity and upgrading in and integration of Khayamandi and Cloeteville.

A planned high-density, multi-use development district could be an improvement on largely opportunistic densification or sprawl. It is unlikely that responses to keep the town either small or predominantly sub-urban will normalise the housing cycle, relieve congestion on the roads, fund maintenance of infrastructure, preserve heritage or provide basic services of an adequate and sustainable level to all residents. At the same time we should assume that there will be unintended consequences even of scenarios that seem to be smart and sustainable. That is why we need to create extensive scenarios, that can be investigated with due diligence.

In trying to imagine our future, which is what long-term spatial planning is, we need to respect the existing fabric of place, whilst also imagining and embracing our potential for change and growth.

#### 4. Applying spatial development principles

An innovative spatial development framework, that could withstand opportunistic pressure on our common interests, will enable the Municipality to grow into the role that smart municipalities have in the new world economy, that of facilitator and enabler rather than of contractor and enforcer.

Stellenbosch needs an innovative long-term spatial development plan. Yet it is only in implementation that ideas and innovation make a difference to the lives of people. We need a plan and clear, simple rules, but also a focus on the many small actions that creates the power for significant change.

We suggest the community at large should support the city managers to:

- Facilitate and manage many small actions to get to the big plan – it is our future, we must make it work.
- Discuss and work with the “meanwhile”, while we plan and implement the sustainable future – it is difficult to jump from the present to the ultimate future.
- Focus on ways to use and unlock the talent and potential of the community.

- Start projects as explorations, or tests - small changes that will make a big difference.
- Take tourism, a key economic driver, to grass roots. Take tourism seriously, and enable expansion of the number and diversity of destinations.
- Create conditions that will attract talent and accommodate talent.
- Innovate city management. De-bug the system systematically and comprehensively. A system that works and simple, powerful rules allow city managers to create self-organising systems and delegate power to communities.

Our core proposals, for clear simple rules to manage our joint resources fairly and sustainably, and for freedom that will allow the many small changes that will make a big difference, are bold, but grounded in common sense. We need a bias towards action to just do it.

The Stellenbosch Heritage Foundation promotes sustainable heritage conservation and innovative architecture and urban design. It has been active as an independent non-profit organisation since 1959.

Today's best innovations will endure as our future collective heritage.

[www.stellenboschheritage.co.za](http://www.stellenboschheritage.co.za)