// NEWS RELEASE   **07 September 2016**

Stellenbosch Municipality launches first Isabelo™ Smart Bench on Bergzicht Market, which backs onto a popular taxi rank in the heart of Stellenbosch

The Isabelo™ Smart Bench – a stand-alone, entirely solar-powered free Wi-Fi hotspot for public use complete with USB charging points, night lighting and easy seating – can now be found in Stellenbosch Municipality on the corner of Merriman and Bird street, on Bergzicht Market which backs onto a popular taxi rank.

This historically sensitive public space boasts a large protected River Red Gum tree (*Eucalyptus camaldulensis*) planted in front of the Heerenhuys in 1880. The Isabelo smart bench was positioned slightly north of the tree to help ensure it does not overshadow the solar panels, which power the smart bench.

"It is only fitting that Stellenbosch municipality – the innovation capital – should be the first municipality to collaborate with us, as our product brings with it a new form of urban innovation that focuses on placemaking and access to the internet in public spaces." says Louise Meek, managing director of Isabelo™.

In granting permission for the placement of the bench, BJG De La Bat, Manager: Spatial Planning, Heritage and Environment, comments: "It is my understanding that the smart bench will be erected as an innovative initiative of the Mayor of Stellenbosch in order to provide the public visiting Bergzicht Market with a Wi-Fi signal. As such the bench can be viewed as a new form of street furniture and is therefore welcomed."

Vernon Bowers, Stellenbosch Municipality Manager, comments: "Stellenbosch, in early 2012, became the first town in Africa to offer free Wi-Fi to its residents. The municipality wanted to position itself as the innovation capital of South Africa by offering free Wi-Fi. The very purpose of the Wi-Fi project is to empower the most disadvantaged communities by providing access to the Internet. This will, for example, enable job seekers and school children respectively to apply for jobs and conduct research for their studies. Partnering with the Isabelo project is therefore a natural progression. The Isabelo™ smart bench helps us to further advance these goals and it's positioning near a busy taxi rank ensures that the more disadvantaged people benefit from the free Internet in a convenient manner."

The Isabelo™ smart bench is a locally designed product, which was created as a mechanism to address socio-economic challenges faced in cities through the provision of free Wi-Fi in public spaces.

"The Isabelo™ smart bench is so much more than just a bench… it is a place where prosperity can happen. It is an accessible social connection point for people to interact with each other, as well as get connected to the Wi-Fi. Through the installation of the Isabelo™ smart bench, we hope to create safe, vibrant, inclusive public spaces where everyone feels welcome." says Adriaan Hugo, Isabelo's lead industrial designer.

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