

Report Groningen site visit 20 April 2013

We gathered on the vacant site of the former sugar factory in one of the buildings that has not been demolished.

A copy of the *Groningen, Masterplan 2008-2020* was available for anyone interested and all participants for Groningen will be able to download a digital version via the competition web site.



Tjerk Ruimschotel, supervisor of urban design at the municipality of Groningen, first said a word of welcome and then went on to present the European 12 site as he had done during the information market in Rotterdam (see www.euopan.nl).

Groningen is a city very much interested in architecture, keen on making architectural statements. Buildings such as the Gasunie (Alberts en Van Huut) and the Groninger

Museum (Alessandro Mendini, Philippe Starck, Michèle de Lucchi and Coop Himmelb(l)au) however, are not only architectural statements they also have urban significance.

The European 12 site not only involves an urban study or strategy, here, too, the outcome of the competition should expressly result in a real building for the project site: a visualisation of something that can be built.

The entrepreneurs on the strategic site are eager to see the surrounding area upgraded, they would like better access to the area on the northern side, and they are themselves also developing initiatives. They have proposed placing a large red rocking chair at the entrance, but the municipality would prefer more professional proposals.

After the presentation the company climbed onto the roof of the other building via the outdoor and indoor stairs to gain a good view of the European site.

Although the sugar factory grounds are not part of the European assignment, it raised many questions. Groningen submitted a design for the area – with a green connection to the city – as a location for the Floriade world horticultural exhibition organised once every ten years by the Netherlands, but it was not awarded the event. That plan also included a bridge from the sugar factory grounds to the European 12 project site. A similar connection will most certainly be desirable in the future, as the factory site has poor accessibility.



The sugar factory will not return, the company has a new location further away from the city. The municipality of Groningen held a competition of ideas for the sugar factory grounds among the inhabitants of Groningen and it resulted in a wealth of suggestions for the use of the site. At present there is no central point where food enters the city. There is interest in making the relationship between food and

food production more manifest. This will possibly take shape on the sugar factory site. As soon as municipal decision procedures have taken place about the future use and layout of the site (possibly by mid May 2013), the European participants will be informed – given the connection with the competition location. The soil on the sugar factory site is not polluted. The effluent processing areas are indeed still wetlands but these will continue to dry up. The sediment that was deposited there is completely organic and it will be absorbed by the soil. The (provisional) designated use of the manure-spreading networks for effluent-processing areas is as a wildlife zone.

Presently there is no underground development on the sugar factory site.

In order to reach the European 12 intervention site, cyclists and walkers were obliged to make a long detour. By boat Hoendiep cannot not be reached from the city centre owing to the low railway bridge. The single track that now runs over the bridge might perhaps be doubled in the future and that may also be the moment to raise the clearance level. It is possible to travel by boat from the site in a northern direction to the Van Starckenborghkanaal canal, through which open water can be reached. Nevertheless, houseboats on the quayside of Hoendiep are not inconceivable.



The connection from the site to the city centre and in the opposite direction is difficult for both pedestrians and motorists so improving this connection is desirable. The response to the query as to the significance of Stadspark for the inhabitants of Groningen was that the park is popular, especially in the summer. There is little to do there in the winter.



The municipality owns the European site, the adjacent plots are split up and are all privately owned. There is no nuisance from factories or industry in the vicinity.

There is a rectangular stretch of water to the west of the bend in Hoendiep. This was formerly the sugar factory harbour and now has no function, but it could, for example, be turned into a yacht basin.

Regarding the suitability of the site for data storage, the site has good Internet connections and a smart grid pilot project is being carried out in Hoogkerk, a few kilometres to the west.

The project site is highly suitable for geothermal energy. The heat present in the earth can be used for heating homes and businesses. This is a subject of concern among the inhabitants of Groningen, including the *Grunniger Power* cooperative organisation, comprising people who promote sustainable living and run their own power company. The reply to the question as to whether it was possible to build without requiring planning permission was that this is still provisionally possible in the project site because this was formerly a factory site.



Finally one of the visitors requested 3D drawings of the area. The municipality agreed to inquire if these existed and – if so – to make them available to the participants.



This concluded the official part of the site visit. The municipality recommended that the visitors – totalling more than fifty – take a further look at the surroundings to gain an impression of the strategic site.

European Nederland
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