

Creating space for the city of tomorrow

Executive summary of the inspiration memorandum
for the new Strategic Spatial Plan for Antwerp.





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“ 'Over the Ring' will have the same impact on the future development of Antwerp as 'City on the River' had in the 1990s

Introduction

The Strategic Spatial Structure Plan for Antwerp (s-RSA in Dutch), which sets out the future spatial vision for Antwerp, was published more than ten years now. The city is constantly evolving, we are faced with new technologies and challenges, the 'Over the Ring' project is the largest mobility and quality of life project of the coming century, entrepreneurship must once again have the space to flourish in the city, new economic business models are emerging and we must adapt to and arm ourselves against climate change. In addition, the population will only continue to grow. At the same time, people are also leaving the city for the city region. In the light of all the above, the time has come to renew our spatial vision for the future. This publication provides an overview of the collected ambitions, ideas and measures from the inspiration memorandum 'Creating Space for the City of the Future'. These ambitions are divided into three groups: the Vibrant residential city, the Smart network city and the Resilient landscape. The inspiration memorandum 'Creating Space for the City of the Future' will form the basis for the new Strategic Spatial Plan for Antwerp, which will be drawn up from 2019 onwards.

The vision in this summary document is the result of a comprehensive process, which involved various city departments, policy advisers, other authorities, Belgian and international experts as well as civil society and inspiring citizens. Their insights were collected during 15 thematic city debates. In addition, insights were gained from specific studies and learning projects. The learning projects vary in scale and nature, and are spread out across the city, from a 'Park and Ride' near Luchtbal to Nieuw Zuid. In so doing, we provided inspiration for the future vision and ensured progress on the ground. We are already building the city of the future today.

A steering committee with representation from the mayor, the aldermen and the various city company directors monitored the progress of this process. The result is an integrated vision for urban development, which is all about 'Creating Space for the City of the Future'.



“ The family apartment has qualities that are similar to those of a house

A vibrant residential city

We expect Antwerp's population to grow with 30,000 new families by 2030. This means that we will need to build an additional 30,000 new homes. Half of these homes are already planned in future, larger (urban development) projects. For the other half, we are counting on the continuity of the market, based on the current situation. Given that we have the amount of required new housing units under control, housing policy can concentrate fully on affordable and high-quality housing in a pleasant environment. This is enshrined in the Antwerp housing model, which must tackle the flight of residents to the suburbs and enable everyone to develop a residential career in Antwerp, from student age to beyond retirement.

The Antwerp housing model

Qualitative housing

Antwerp must develop a housing stock that can compete with the (detached) house-and-garden in the peripheral municipalities. Family apartments offer a good solution in this respect. These apartments have qualities that are similar to those of a house. They are spacious, have abundant light and generous outdoor areas, there is plenty of (bicycle) storage and they have inviting entrance halls and hallways. The city will create such units in its own projects, and it encourages the private market to do the same. The building code therefore imposes minimum quality requirements for the surface of the house, the external space, (bicycle) storage space, etc., It also prevents houses from being divided up into apartments and ensures that larger projects can be developed to provide for a housing mix.

By creating collective spaces, additional quality gains can be achieved. Residents are increasingly willing to share specific indoor and outdoor spaces with their neighbours, such as gardens, roof terraces, public common spaces, play areas for children, etc.

The city is perfectly suited to this style of living and working. Sharing space means building more compact and therefore cheaper housing, without having to compromise on quality. The quality of the existing building stock also needs to be improved. In addition to the existing renovation bonuses and subsidies, Antwerp's EcoHuis is also experimenting with ways of promoting collective renovation projects. The land and property policy of AG VESPA, under which rundown and vacant buildings are bought up and renovated into quality houses and family apartments, is used as an example to encourage private initiatives.

Affordable housing

City living is becoming increasingly expensive. Families often find cheaper homes that meet their housing requirements outside of the city, prompting them to leave the city and move to the city region. This is why more attention will be paid to affordable housing, which should not, however, be equated with downsizing. The house's surface area must be in relation to a feasible sale or rental price.

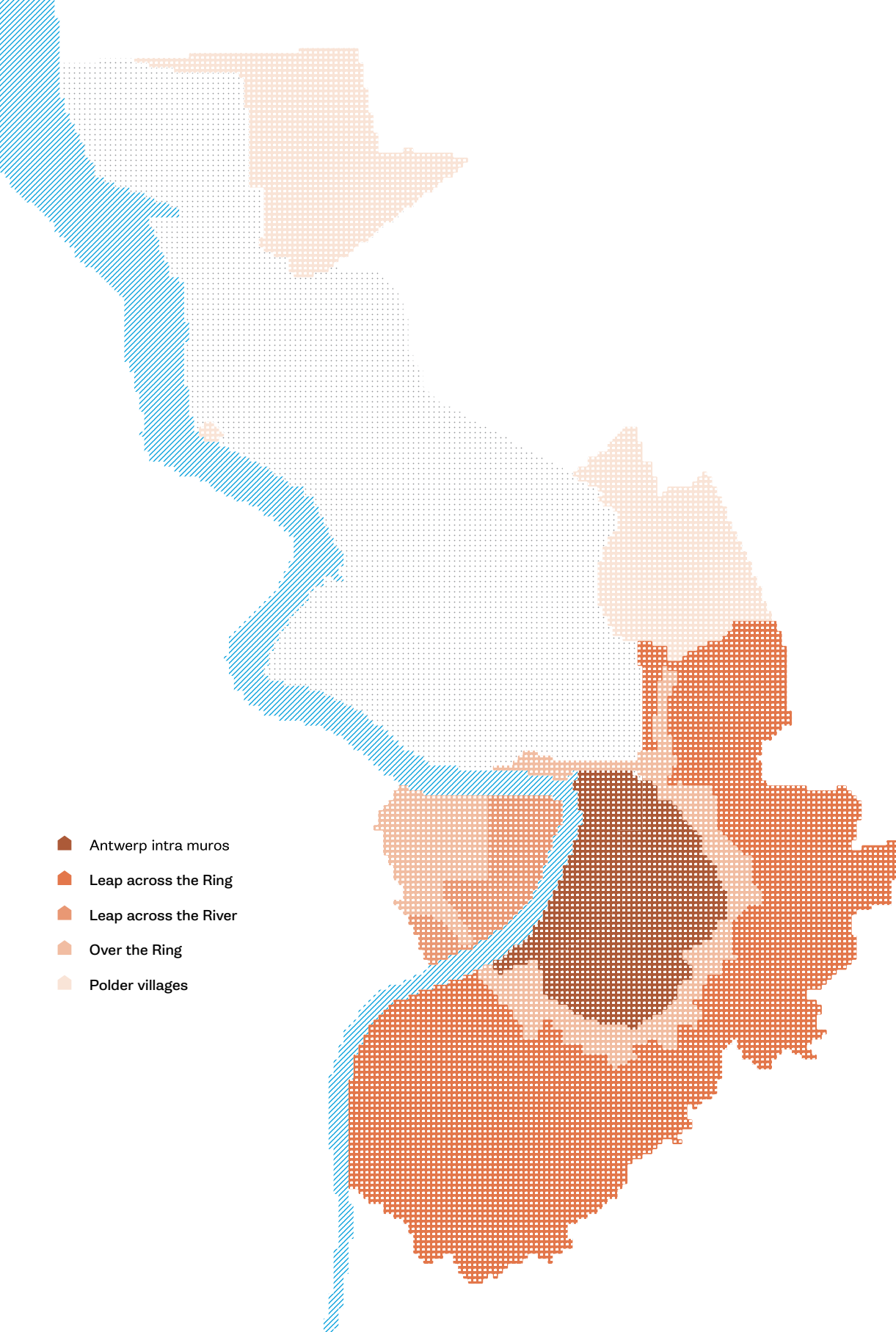
The city will develop new forms of financing for housing developments on its own land, based on leaseholds, so that the land remains the property of the city and homebuyers only have to purchase the house, saving a lot of money in the process. Another possibility is the development of housing companies. Residents then buy shares instead of a house, which give them a guaranteed and flexible right to reside in one of the company's units. There are various other possibilities in between, including offering 'lifelong housing'...

The city can also negotiate with developers to offer affordable homes, by imposing this as an urban development obligation when issuing planning permission, or by including it as a condition for the sale. Formulas that are inspired by the social rental office can motivate private owners to offer affordable rental properties.

Attractive neighbourhoods

Although people leave the city for financial reasons, they still enjoy living in the city because of the wide and varied array of amenities. Urban dwellers prefer leisure time to time wasted by commuting. Every home therefore needs to be close to schools, day-care centres, sports infrastructure, shops, parks, and cultural activities. The city closely monitors the available amenities: existing shortages are identified, and new ones are prevented. The government, private developers or partnerships between public and private players must work to eliminate any shortcomings. Due to the great need for amenities, we need to use space rationally, making optimal use of all the available opportunities. 'Broad' schools, multifunctional sports infrastructure, mixed housing projects, ... will all become the norm. Reusing underutilised or vacant spaces can also help eliminate shortages.

The atmosphere in the neighbourhood is also crucial. People prefer to live in quiet, safe, low-traffic, green and convivial neighbourhoods with clean streets. That is why the city will also pay attention to creating attractive public spaces that stimulate interaction and contribute to an 'urban village feeling'.



- Antwerp intra muros
- Leap across the Ring
- Leap across the River
- Over the Ring
- Polder villages

Gradual transformations

The city can be subdivided into five large spatial figures as the starting point for a nuanced and area-specific densification and renewal policy.

Antwerp intra muros: Weiterbauen

Antwerp intra muros continues to renew itself, with respect for the city's historical fabric in accordance with the 'Weiterbauen' concept. Punctual interventions in the public space and the built-up fabric are supplemented with large projects that give something back to the city. In addition, the cross-parcel building block projects method, which has created more air, light and public space in densely built neighbourhoods, will be continued and, where necessary, scaled up.

The Leap across the Ring road: the best of both worlds

The 20th century belt offers opportunities for new forms of urban renewal and smart densification. On the one hand, there is an extensive and diverse range of amenities available here, including green spaces, public transport, schools, etc. On the other hand, this area offers a fully-fledged alternative to the housing in the city region with its varied housing, thus combining the best of both worlds.

Potential densification areas are situated along public transport hubs, on the periphery of green areas, on larger and underutilised parcels. In this respect, it is crucial to apply a cross-parcel approach where possible, to stimulate the multi-faceted and collective use of space, to provide spacious family apartments and houses, and to roll out a network of small-scale, mixed service hubs at the neighbourhood level.

Landscape rooms in the Polder Villages

Berendrecht, Zandvliet, Lillo and part of Ekeren have characteristic 'village centres' with large green areas around them. These village centres, with narrow village streets, are not as densely built as other district centres. Densification is possible if this simultaneously strengthens the green-blue landscape, for example by providing sufficiently slow crossings and landscape vistas.

The areas around the centres are less suitable for densification. Land that has not yet been built on can still be built up, but the position of these buildings and their typology must strengthen the surrounding landscape, render it visible, open it up and connect it. As a result, these new buildings create 'landscape rooms'.

The Leap across the River: a plan-based approach

Linkeroever is a 'planned' part of the city. In 1933, an international design competition was organised. The partial implementation of the winning design resulted in the modernist, but also varied appearance of Linkeroever. At the end of 2016, the city architect organised a 'call for ideas' competition to gather input and inspiration for a strategic development vision. The tradition of master planning continues. Linkeroever will not be developed too hastily. In the short term, it will continue to position itself as a unique, green part of the city on the water, and as part of a regional landscape, from the river to beyond the Ring and the city's boundaries.

Over the Ring: the 21st century urban development project

'Over the Ring' was not just devised to improve mobility and liveability in the city. It has all the makings of the urban development project of the 21st century. The projects for covering the Ring road, which are part of the 'Over the Ring' programme, will turn the Ring road's current barrier effect into a unique opportunity to create a new city district that connects the other parts of the city with each other. Well-defined spaces that can be developed ensure urban growth remains contained within the city's boundaries. These densification projects interweave and/or connect the various parts of the city with each other, creating new 'facades' for them, which look out on the Ring Park. Any local shortages of greenery will be solved and the environment of the current and future neighbourhoods along the Ring can be improved.

“ **New forms of financing for the construction of housing must make living in the city more affordable**



“ Antwerp is ready
for the Scheldt Bridge

Smart network city

Antwerp has many assets: it has a world-class port, a huge maritime petrochemical cluster, it is the diamond capital of the world and is renowned for its fashion. Thanks to its heritage, its many museums, its pioneering urban renewal projects and trendy shops and restaurants, Antwerp is also a top tourist attraction. Moreover, Antwerp plans to become the leading smart city of Flanders. It can rely on various knowledge institutions to this end. The wide range of amenities has enabled Antwerp to further develop as a short-distance city. Proximity ensures less travel, closer cooperation and a stronger network. This has stimulated companies to consider an 'Antwerp-based entrepreneurial career', in which start-ups and growing companies, as well as established names, can all find the right location for their operations. A multimodal mobility policy ensures accessibility, offering ample mobility options to travellers and the logistics sector.

The short-distance city

Circular city

The city is committed to closing and shortening urban flows or cycles of energy, materials, drinking water and food, to achieve more efficiency, less waste and a healthy urban dynamic. In the field of energy, Antwerp is developing sustainable heating grids in new development areas and, where possible, also in existing districts. In order to achieve a smarter and more efficient use of materials, developers, from the design stage onwards, take into account the fact that buildings will be transformed over time, and ultimately demolished. In addition, building logistics can be organised more intelligently, at district, city and regional level. The city is also striving for a sustainable and circular water management model,

which includes reducing the use of drinking water. A good example is the plan for the reconstruction of the Gedempte Zuiderdokken, which includes improved water management. Buffered rainwater will be used by city road sweepers or purified to produce drinking water. Finally, food chains can also be shortened by focusing on urban agriculture, on roofs and in the larger parks and the surrounding countryside.

Data and technologies

We live in fascinating times, in which new technologies are being developed that can also have a major spatial impact. Antwerp is already rapidly developing into a smart city and is aiming to set the pace at European level. Smart technology helps find solutions to urban challenges such as mobility, air quality, climate change, energy supply, ageing populations and security. The result is a resilient city in which citizens, companies, bright young minds and visitors can count on an efficient administration and high-quality services. Sharing data via platforms such as 'Stad in Kaart (Mapping the city) and 'Stad in Cijfers' (City in Numbers)' reinforces collaboration and cross-fertilisation, launches creative solutions and stimulates the sharing economy.

**“ P+R buildings
are gateways
to the city**

Entrepreneurial company

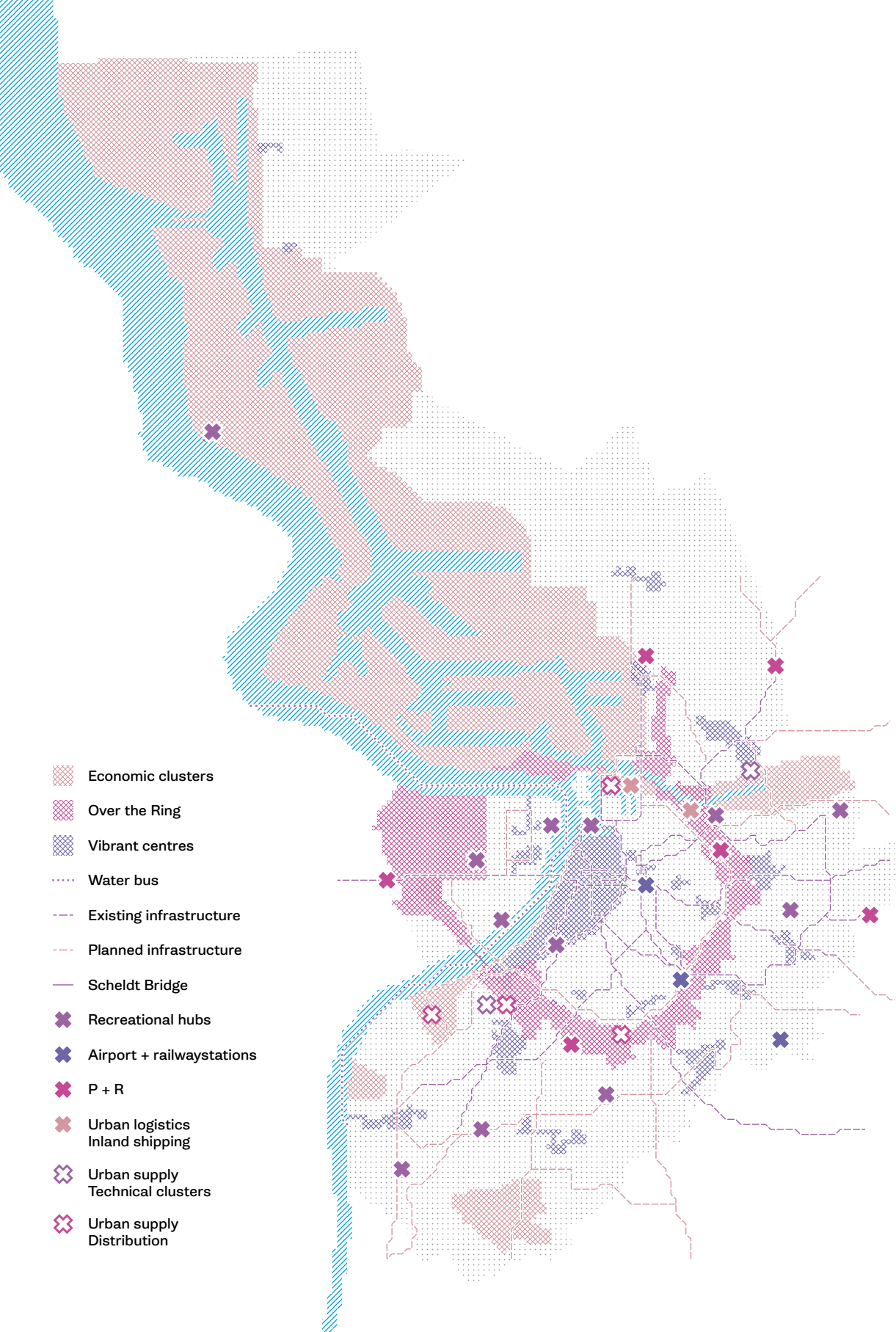
An active location policy is needed to facilitate a seamless 'entrepreneurial career' in the short-distance city. Growing companies sometimes have difficulty finding a suitable, larger location, while declining companies have excess space. By analogy with the housing company, an entrepreneurial company can be set up by the business community. In exchange for the contribution of their building or site, companies are guaranteed the availability of a suitable industrial space in the city, in line with their growth and contraction phases.

Temporary occupation can provide a solution to vacant and underutilised company buildings. This creates space for experimentation: start-up companies can test their business case before investing in a more permanent establishment. They are also the ideal locations for art, culture and recreation.

Neighbourhoods

The benefits of short distances filter all the way down to the neighbourhood level. Certain sites or buildings can be shared and allocated new functions through optimised organisational coordination. Shops can share their warehouses or workshops with each other and with the neighbourhood. These buildings can also be used as collection points for e-commerce.

Neighbourhood car parks on the outskirts of neighbourhoods can help reduce the number of parking spaces on residential streets. As a result, streets can become real public spaces, creating more room to talk, to play or to spend time. A clustering of parking spaces for residents and visitors could be an incentive for car-sharing. Solar panels on the roof of the car park buildings can then be used to charge parked (shared) electric cars.



The right link in the right place

Economic clusters

The port area is the largest economic cluster. Smaller clusters of business parks, office locations and educational campuses are scattered throughout the city. But this means more than simply grouping together facilities. Instead, clustering optimises the space and reciprocal processes by densifying and sharing. Functions and companies are stacked and built against each other. Space can be gained and collaboration be achieved by sharing amenities such as sports facilities, company restaurants, car parks, etc., also with the neighbourhood.

The areas of contact between the economic clusters and the surrounding fabric also offer potential. The interface between the city and port is a superb example, marking a transition from (large-scale) urban functions to industrial activity. In the area along the Albert Canal and the eastern docks of the Eilandje, efforts are made to achieve as much interweaving of economic development, urban development and urban distribution as possible.

Urban and district centres

The urban centres in the various districts form a belt of centres around the largest and oldest one: the historic city centre. They are characterised by the concentration of amenities such as shops, hotels and restaurants, cultural centres, libraries, district houses and monuments. New concepts are being studied for shopping streets that are blighted by vacant units, such as merging narrow parcels, partitioning deep parcels, or attracting other forms of enterprise such as the creative economy or local manufacturing companies.

Atypical district centres are located between the urban centres. They are often thematic and rather mono-functional, such as supermarkets or hospitals, but they represent an important place of interaction for the neighbourhood. By densifying these sites (through stacking) they acquire a more mixed programme, which reinforces their neighbourhood function. For example, houses can be built on top of the supermarket, the supermarket car park can be used for shared cars and bicycles, and neighbourhood hubs can be developed for urban distribution.

Strategic hubs

Strategic hubs are created by well-situated, multi-modal and accessible sites, that are linked to a multifunctional programme. A first group of hubs are the P+R buildings. They connect cyclists, cars, taxis, pedestrians and public transport as 'super links'. Additional functions such as the collection points of supermarkets, pubs and restaurants, meeting rooms, etc. ensure that they are also attractive places to spend time.

The city is also developing sustainable and efficient urban logistics hubs, together with private market players. The north and south of the city and along the Scheldt are ideal locations for distribution centres with multimodal processing. The city is raising the bar with the master plan for technical buildings. An operating base in the north and south will organise the logistics services of the city more efficiently.

The recreational hubs of culture, sports and leisure activities can operate on a local, urban and supra-urban level, such as the MAS, the Sportpaleis, Antwerp Expo, and the new M HKA. Given the ambition for renewal and densification in the areas outside the Ring, we need to examine what role these areas can play as recreational hubs, that can act as drivers for urban renewal. Finally, train stations and the airport are also important hubs. The airport is the ideal city hopper, connecting us with other cities.

Strategic connections

Connections between the left and right banks of the city (Linkeroever and Rechteroever) and between the urban centres are essential in the short-distance city. The water bus and the ferry boat connect neighbouring municipalities, the city and the port with each other on both banks. A bridge over the Scheldt for cyclists and pedestrians provides an additional physical and visual link between Linkeroever and the city centre.

The districts and neighbourhoods are being made more accessible and are connected with each other. This will be accomplished with the district tram, which forms a new tangential public transport axis, from Hoboken to Merksem. A similar concept will be executed near the Ring, with a light rail. In addition, the underground tram network will be further expanded into a fully-fledged metro network.

Over the Ring

In addition to the long-awaited third Scheldt crossing, the 'Over the Ring' project offers various opportunities on the regional scale, creating space for supra-local activities, e.g. an opera house or a football stadium, which reflect the diversity and richness of metropolitan life, as well as space for the economy.

Over the Ring's slogan is 'free and connected', and as such it aims to dismantle and smooth out barriers with multimodal and soft connections between districts and between neighbourhoods on either side of the Ring area. The project integrates and stimulates the expansion of bicycle highways and functional connections with the city region.

Based on 'Routeplan 2030', a multimodal mobility policy for the city and region is being elaborated together with the region. A wide range of modes of transport and smooth changeover points can help achieve this, making maximum use of digital applications.



**“ The greenery
extends from each
district right up
to the Scheldt**

Resilient landscape

Green spaces and water make up 45% of Antwerp's territory. Antwerp could therefore be considered as one of the greenest cities in Europe. If we only consider public green spaces however, without the Scheldt and the docks, then Antwerp's score is much lower, i.e., 27%. In addition, only 61% of residents live within walking distance (400m) of public green spaces. This needs to improve in the future. The relationship between the city and the water also needs to be restored. Antwerp has been a water city throughout its history, and its economic wealth as a port city is due in no small part to its river. But over time, water has increasingly disappeared from view. In the future, a robust green-blue structure will need to protect us against climate change. This buffers excess water during thunderstorms, prevents the subsoil from drying out during periods of no rain, and provides a cooling effect through water evaporation.

Green as the blueprint

Green plans and street gardens

The vision for water and green spaces is set out in the water plan and the green plan. They provide the tools for climate-proof urban renewal. The new norm is a resilient city. This requires a new design mentality in which the desired green-blue network forms the basis for every new plan or project, thereby contributing to a healthier living environment. The green tool and the catalogue of liveability measures set out in 'Over the Ring' can provide support in this respect. Green and water will be given a legal foothold through the building code and spatial implementation plans. The city is taking the lead in this respect, with its own designs.

Creating green space for everyone

Each district needs to strive towards creating green spaces within walking distance. Densification must always be weighed up against the additional requirements for greenery that it creates. At the very least, we aim to achieve a qualitative status quo for the green areas in the potential densification areas. By building taller buildings, undeveloped spaces remain unpaved as much as possible.

In the most built-up areas, primarily intra muros, we need to take things further and focus on eliminating paved areas, due to the considerable lack of green spaces, heat stress and water problems. Experiments such as garden streets and the greening of inner areas with building block projects can also contribute to this process.

Everybody can create a green space

By far the largest share of Antwerp's territory is privately held. The city encourages inhabitants to make private gardens, facades, roofs and grounds greener. Promoting awareness and engagement between the government, citizens and entrepreneurs is essential in this respect. Stadslab 2050, the Ecohuis and European subsidy programmes, among others, support residents' initiatives aimed at greening parcels, streets and neighbourhoods. New projects will have to provide for their own green space.

**“ Every resident
has greenery within
walking distance from
their home**

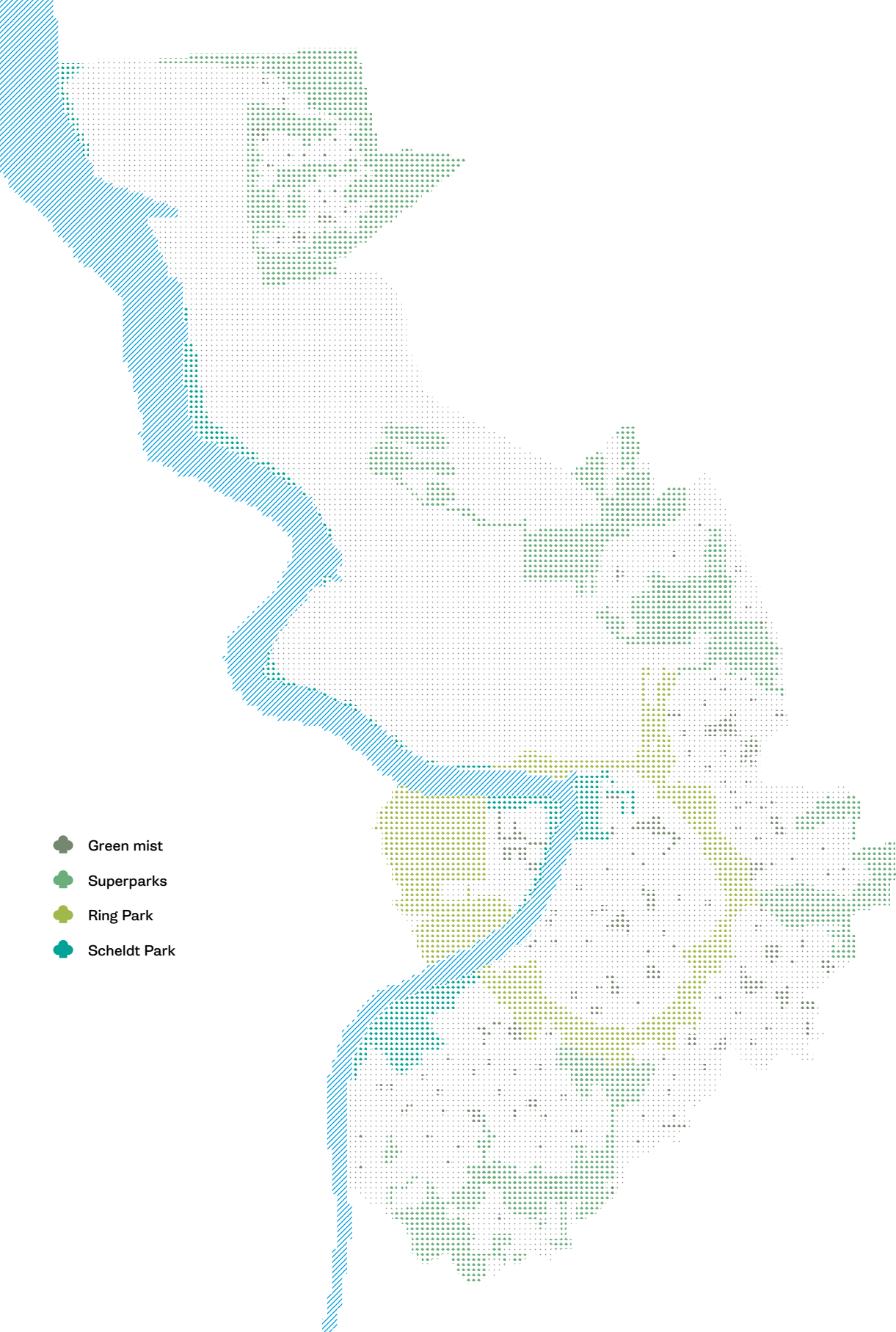
Green carpet

Green mist

Greenery and water are scattered throughout the city: in parks, on squares and in gardens, in streets, in private gardens, on facades and on roofs. Together, these various green spots form a 'green mist'. Many of these areas still offer potential for further enhancement. It is important to seize every opportunity to incorporate as many cooling and calming green spaces as possible, as is the case with the reconstruction of the Scheldt quays, or by creating smaller, new green spaces such as 'Groene Sproeten' in Deurne, Kunstenplein in Berchem or the Gedempte Zuiderdokken in Antwerp.

Superparks

The Superparks are large and spacious. Three Superparks are formed by large-scale open spaces of polders, valleys, castle parks, forests, etc., which extend from the city region and gradually infiltrate the city, near the Ring road. The Superparks are made up of various green areas or 'landscapes'. From north to south, the three parks are Noorderpark, Schijnpark and Zuiderpark. In order to further develop into resilient, green lobes, the missing links between the landscapes need to be filled in. Better connections and, where possible, extensions, will enable them to grow closer together. These spaces are connected with the Scheldt via the Ring Park, and they infiltrate the urban fabric via the green mist.



Scheldt Park

Together with the Ring Park, the Scheldt Park forms a green-blue connector that connects the left and right banks, and into which the Superparks extend. In addition to the river itself, the park encompasses a number of related areas. The necessary raising of the quays and banks provides protection against flooding, as well as creates an opportunity to restore the link between city and river, while taking into account the precious Scheldt habitats. The connecting functions of the Scheldt, via the water bus, the ferry and the future Scheldt bridge, also emphasise the city's connection with the river.

Ring Park

The Ring area is a huge green space that is currently underutilised, due to the dominance of traffic infrastructure. There is a shared awareness that the development of a Ring Park, with the execution of the covering projects, will be crucial for the further development and quality of life of the city. The Ring Park becomes a connector between the Superparks and therefore also the districts, connecting these to the Scheldt Park. It provides soft connections and becomes a green attraction where the residents of the adjacent neighbourhoods can go to relax, for leisure and sports. The northernmost part of the Ring Park has the most missing links. Water management and green spaces can be further developed in the margin of the urban renewal projects in this area.



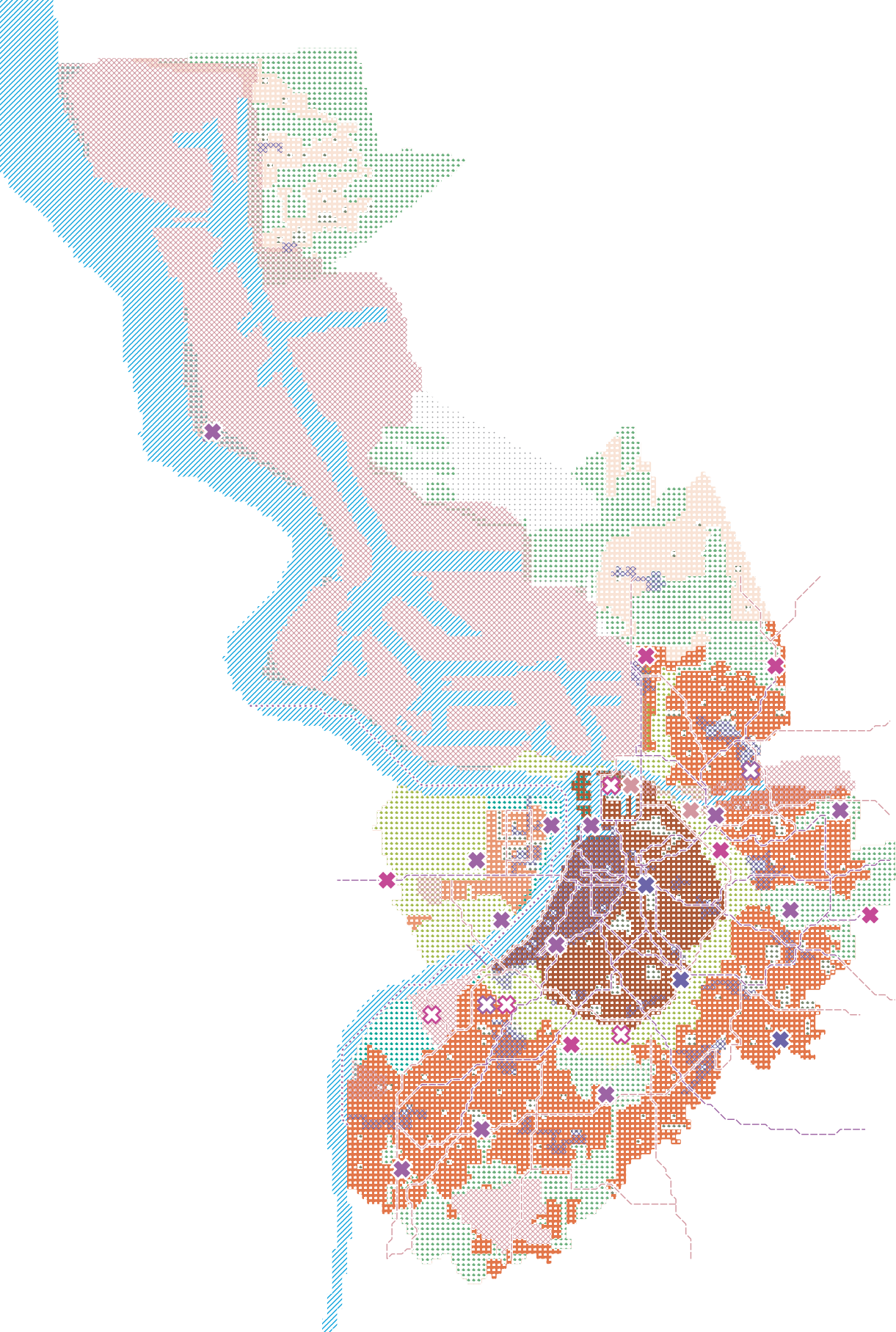
The first step towards the renewed strategic spaces

In the early 1990s, 'Stad aan de Stroom' (City on the River) kicked off the intra-muros renewal of the city, a process that is still ongoing. The reconstruction of the Scheldt quays recently started, the transformation of the Eilandje is steadily progressing, the first residents have already moved into Nieuw Zuid, while the first companies are moving into Blue Gate Antwerp. But there are also countless projects in the urban centre that are still in the pipeline. As such, construction on the 'Stad aan de Stroom' will continue in the coming decades, where a balance will be sought between living, working and recreation, with good accessibility, and where there is more room for green spaces and water.

The dynamism with which the 'Stad aan de Stroom' started a few decades ago is evident once again in the ambitious Over the Ring project, which is the driver of the 21st-century urban renewal. The Ring area provides space for new housing development projects, businesses and (supra) local amenities. This area will develop into an essential green lung which connects the 'inner city' with the 'outer city'. This also opens up new opportunities for the further renewal and densification of the 20th century belt.

Antwerp continues to develop into a polycentric city with a wide range of amenities in the districts and neighbourhoods. Smaller district centres are nestled between the more significant urban centres. Connections between these hubs ensure that the districts are easily accessible.

The 'green carpet' consists of the Superparks which extend all the way to the city. Urban parks, green streets, gardens, etc., all spread the greenery further into the city. The Ring Park and the Scheldt Park are the green and blue connectors. They are a place to cool down in hot weather and form a reservoir in the event of heavy storms, but they also ensure that Antwerp is a pleasant and healthy city. Existing structures are enhanced and the missing links are eliminated.



**“ We are already
building the city of the
future today**

From inspiration memorandum to a new Strategic Spatial Plan for Antwerp

This inspiration memorandum forms the basis for the new Strategic Spatial Plan for Antwerp. This spatial plan will also take into account the Antwerp planning tradition. The broad process that was adopted to draft this inspiration memorandum will be continued according to a broadly supported vision that will underpin the urban development of the coming decades, and which we will work to achieve with the entire urban community.

The three themes in this inspiration memorandum, i.e., a Vibrant residential city, a Smart network city and a Resilient landscape, together form the basis for this integrated urban development vision which is all about 'Creating Space for the City of Tomorrow'.

Colophon

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City debates: Caroline Wijckmans, Willem Somers and Antwerpen aan 't Woord
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