



ATYPICAL CITY ARCHITECT

Policy note 2016–2020

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FOREWORD

Although never short of atypical elements, Antwerp has gained another one with its City Architect ('Stadsbouwmeester'). As an 'outsider' looking in with a fresh pair of eyes, it is hard not to compare Antwerp to cities such as Berlin, Munich or Amsterdam. But the single most important conclusion is that Antwerp is **incomparable** to these cities in a number of crucial respects. And thus, *Atypical Antwerp* proves to be much more than a catchy slogan for an original city-marketing campaign¹.

It is amazing how quickly one feels **at home** in Antwerp. This is in part due to the scale of the city. Distances are easily overcome. Walking and cycling bring the entire city within reach. While this means an endless supply of new places to discover, it also turns every nook and cranny of the city into potential familiar territory. The scale of the buildings themselves, too, tends to be 'friendlier' than in other cities. Towers do not form intimidating masses in the streetscape, but remain exceptional landmarks. They bring a sense of wonder into homely surroundings.

Also remarkable is the **spontaneously** developed mix between century-old and contemporary architecture. There have not been impossible attempts to keep the inner city entirely in the middle ages or nineteenth century at the latest. Here, century-old grandeur can be found next to today's stunning landmarks, with yesterday's mistakes in between. And even those can be very beautiful, as mistakes are utterly human. It is because of this that Antwerp has not been reduced to a décor for tourism, a fate some other cities have failed to escape.

On the contrary, Antwerp clearly and certainly **belongs to its citizens**. They can still find affordable houses here, especially considering the dazzling property prices in cities such as London

1 Explore Atypical Antwerp at www.visitantwerpen.be/en.

**“ ANTWERP IS A CHARMING
VILLAGE OF MILLIONS**

and Paris. Tourism, too, still positively contributes to the cosy and familiar atmosphere of the inner city. Houses are not sold off one by one for exuberant prices or converted into B&B's like they are in Amsterdam. Citizens are not forced out of their homes by the overpowering presence and nuisances of mass tourism.

Together with my team, I want to contribute to the **remarkable balance** and familiar scale that characterise the urban landscape of Antwerp. While the city services and myself are ready for a new wave of urban development in suburban territory, I also want to continue the unique grammar of the inner city and help it achieve the high-quality finishing it deserves.

This policy note translates these aspirations into organisational and spatial **priorities** for the City Architect's team in the coming years. Of course, this does not mean that we will limit ourselves to these priorities and projects. Where possible, we will continue what was started and we will keep following up and monitoring the quality of the many other projects and themes that play their roles in Antwerp's urban development policy in the coming years.

Finally, as the City Architect of Antwerp, I want to contribute to a shared and fostered **building culture** and invite the citizens of Antwerp to join me on a journey to rediscover this city together.

Christian Rapp
City Architect of Antwerp



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SWAROVSKI

**“ IN THE INNER CITY, THE
REMARKABLE BOND BETWEEN
OLD AND NEW AND MODESTY AND
EXCEPTIONALITY MUST BE CONTINUED**

ATYPICAL CITY ARCHITECT

The first task of the City Architect is to give shape and meaning to the function of City Architect itself. My concept of 'Weiterbauen' promotes a certain 'attitude' towards the urban fabric, for which we hope to enthuse as many partners as possible. I want to achieve this through a refreshing focus on research-by-design within my interdisciplinary team and the joint establishment of a professional 'urban design workshop' that brings people and ideas together and clears the path for a new architectural culture.

'WEITERBAUEN': BUILDING ON ANTWERP'S UNIQUE GRAMMAR

Antwerp is being **rediscovered** like never before as an attractive place to live, work and visit. As in other cities, Antwerp's population is growing. We are expecting 60.000 new citizens by 2035. Even though this entails important challenges for the city, it is still a far cry from the expected 300.000 extra citizens in my hometown of Amsterdam over the same period. In Amsterdam, this is clearly resulting in increasingly steep property prices and an unaffordable city centre for the average citizen. In addition to this so-called London-effect, the Venice-effect is bringing huge waves of mass-tourism over the city. To the citizens of Amsterdam, the city slogan 'I am/sterdam' might begin to sound like a question rather than a statement.

But: Antwerp is not London, Venice or Amsterdam. Antwerp first and foremost still very much **belongs to its citizens**. It has an opportunity to absorb the moderate growth through well-considered transformations of the urban fabric. The city has the luxury to determine urban planning priorities based on the entirely unique and distinctive morphology of its streets, urban blocks and buildings.

This is what I mean by the German notion of 'Weiterbauen'. The term originally referred to an intelligent architectonic strategy for the restoration of monuments, but I propose to apply it to the field of urban development as well. Weiterbauen then means confirming and continuing the **particular grammar** and the unique leaps in scale and time that are found side by side in the inner city. As the City Architect of Antwerp, I want to help ensure that urban growth contributes to the quality of the urban fabric as a whole. This also means ensuring high-quality urban transformations on the other side of the Scheldt and the Ring road and – last but not least – along the Ring road itself.

Finally, Weiterbauen means acknowledging the fact that urban transformations begin and end in **living tissue**. High-quality public space is therefore crucial. It is the place and perspective from which the city is experienced. The spatial quality of buildings and public space only derives true meaning from its contribution to an attractive and sustainable urban environment.

THE CITY ARCHITECT'S ATELIER

The City Architect is not just a person, but also forms an institute in the urban policy landscape. The City Architect's team functions as a multidisciplinary 'atelier'. All my team members work within a horizontal structure and adopt an integrated approach. Team members are **dispatched** within the existing project structure of the city services. They support the project directors, who coordinate and process-manage the many projects in Antwerp. On the other hand, the team forms an 'urban design workshop' where project directors, project leaders and external partners can come to test ideas, get inspired and seek advice on achieving spatial quality.

The renewal of the modern function of City Architect is in part inspired by the historic City Architects from the 19th- and early 20th-century. But whereas predecessors such as Pierre Bruno Bourla, Gustaaf Royers and Emiel Van Averbeké designed city buildings, I primarily intend to **design plans**. For this more active role in urban development policy, I put my trust in the power of design.

The City Architect's Atelier has already received reinforcement from the **design-by-research**-team to help render tangible, discussable and mouldable the city's transformation from a 'Weiterbauen' perspective. These architects can be activated in planning processes much sooner, to help define the design question itself. Or even before there is any planning process to speak of, to trigger design questions and put priority issues on the agenda.

Together, the different fields of expertise and backgrounds within the City Architect's Atelier drive an integrated implementation of the City Architect's vision, tasks and plans. The team does not act solely upon proposals from within or outside the administration, but **proactively seeks out** opportunities and partners. And thus, the Atelier will not only explore the possibilities and limits of design assignments, but also stimulate dialogues throughout the design process.

AN URBAN DESIGN WORKSHOP

The interdisciplinary City Architect's Atelier also has an important activating role. This is the underlying idea of the urban design workshop: a nerve centre that brings together actors and stakeholders from different realms of society around visions, plans and designs. At the heart of the workshop, a **transformation map** provides a shared spatial frame of reference and serves as a 'living' working tool.

The transformation map is not a fixed or strict 'map of the future' but provides a **dynamic and evolving overview** of proposed, planned, approved and current projects. The map sheds light on opportunities and facilitates connections, discussions and communication. Combined with a **3D-model** of the map, a clear but dynamic framework is offered to help visualise, evaluate and optimise the plans of different actors in the urban fabric.

This working method offers points of connection and orientation in the complexity of the many challenges urban development faces today. **New questions** with regard to organising cooperation between property owners, forming new coalitions and activating private capital and property can be explored in the urban design workshop. At the same time, ideas can be evaluated in terms of their architectural and urban spatial quality and a balanced approach to market functioning, public interests and economic, social and cultural aspects can be promoted.

“ A NERVE CENTRE THAT BRINGS TOGETHER ACTORS AND STAKEHOLDERS FROM DIFFERENT REALMS OF SOCIETY

A number of **concrete assignments** have already been placed on the agenda of the urban design workshop. The conversion of church buildings, the future of Linkeroever, Lab XX_Work's typological research into mixed living and working environments and the building stocks of the many large knowledge institutions in the city. The concept of 'Campus in the City' can stimulate an active and more visible role in the urban fabric for these and comparable institutional building complexes (e.g. Stuivenberg hospital, Slachthuislaan ...). Conversely, isolated mono-functional blocks and sites could open up, let the urban fabric enter and benefit from more 'City in the Campus'.







ATYPICAL CITY TRANSFORMATION

I want to continue the unique leaps of scale and time in the urban fabric and help ensure that urban growth improves the quality of the urban fabric as a whole. With regard to the transformation of the Ring road zone, I will especially focus on creating seamless connections to the edge of the inner city and the 20th-century city belt. Finally, as the City Architect, I too, cross the Ring road and River to join the quest for new types of urbanity, tailored to the unique character and scale of these areas.

HARMONY AND DISSONANCE

Initially, the so-called '**rule of harmony**' essentially limited the height of new building and renovation projects to that of existing buildings in the immediate vicinity. Partly under the impulse of the previous City Architect, this rigid notion has been somewhat adjusted in Antwerp's renewed building code. There is now flexibility with regard to determining the relevant reference image as well as allowing motivated exceptions.

Such room for creativity is necessary in a growing city that nevertheless wishes to preserve its historical layers, its unique character and its human scale. And thus, further growth necessitates **a new notion of harmony**. Again, this should not be a formula to be rigidly applied anywhere, but a design attitude to be cultivated. The conception of such a new notion begins with an optimal understanding of the intrinsic harmony of the Atypical city.

Unlike 19th-century Berlin, where a building height of 21 metres has determined the cityscape, Antwerp did not develop according to a strict rational pattern. Antwerp has evolved more **organically**, over several centuries and building on different opportunities and social and economic rationalities. Because of this continuation of previous layers, ‘accidents’ (the Oudaan building or the Antwerp Tower spring to mind) have haphazardly settled in the urban fabric in unexpected ways.

One of the defining features of the Atypical city’s harmony is the absence of negative competition between old and new, big and small, and high and low. Instead of conflict and contrast, unique **layers** have developed. This is how the Atypical city succeeds in amazing those who wish to explore her, while offering a human scale and familiarity to those who live or work here. The power of this lies greatly in a spontaneous and matter-of-course character, in the ability to entice of that which, on the other hand, is perceived as ordinary. However, actively pursuing this is another matter entirely.

In the Atypical city ‘harmony’ will not be pinned down – let alone limited – to building height. The notion of harmony I aspire to is not that of the ‘trimmed hedge’, but reveals itself in **moderate dissonance**. In a brotherly accompaniment and co-occurrence of time layers that somewhat differ from each other but clearly belong to a greater whole. The Leien form the best example of this concept. Here, an apartment building from the 1970s can stand proudly next to a 19th-century townhouse. To me, this image captures the charm of Antwerp’s own brand of urbanity.

I wish to further enhance and extend this concept of harmony beyond the new **frontiers of urban development** and into the 20th-century belt and Linkeroever (the left bank). Indeed, here, we need to find contemporary forms of the inner city’s harmony.

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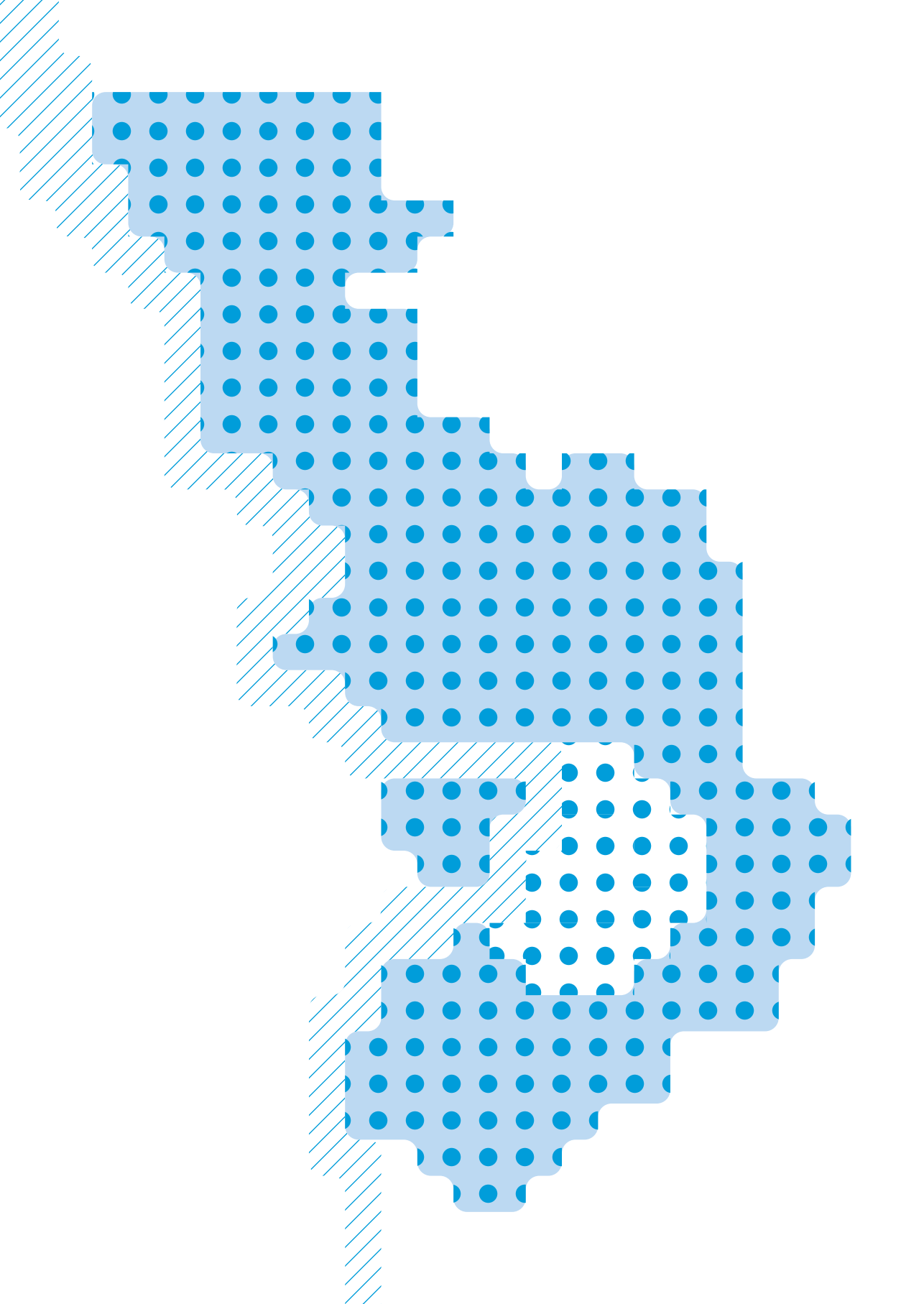


A NEW 'RINGSTRASSE'

As an urban boulevard or 'Ringstraße', the Leien form a **connecting element** between the inner city and the 19th-century belt. Before their construction, the Spanish defence walls formed a spatial and social barrier between the city and the villages on its outskirts, but the Leien tilted the city for good. The focus no longer rested solely on the Scheldt and the historic inner city. The new Central Station and Opera buildings came to lie in the heart of the city. Soon flanked by new streets, monuments and parks, the Ringstraße stimulated economic and cultural development.

The enthusiasm for and joint progress of the **Over de Ring** project leave no doubt about Antwerp's readiness for a new **Ringstraße**. Today, the Ring road essentially forms a barrier between the 19th- and 20th-century belts, but the plans for a complete highway cap create unseen opportunities. This is a chance to turn around the area's current status as a physical and mental barrier. We can create a new part of the city here, with public space as a connecting element and the built environment as the glue between the inner and outer city.

I want to monitor the quality of new developments in the Ring zone, with a focus on new functions, typologies and affordable housing. The idea is to complete the rough edges along the Singel and Ring roads and to improve their relationship with the inner city. They should continue its unique atmosphere or at least form a **prelude to the harmony of the inner city**. Smart, creative and high-quality fill-in projects should become the welding seams for a smooth transition and transformation from edge to centre.



THE LEAP OVER RING ROAD AND RIVER

The 20th-century city quarters – the new **frontier areas of urban planning** – are on the eve of a fascinating quest for potential new meanings of urbanity and urban transformation. Lab XX, Lab XX_Work and pilot projects such as Lageweg have already paved the way for the great leap over the Ring road.

The first morphological exploration of the city's **20th-century belt** has revealed a strong characterisation by its own specific scales and logics and a patchwork-like composition of large-scaled, mono-functional areas and open spaces. Rather than metropolitan densification, the focus must thus lie on breaking open outdated post-war urban morphologies.

I believe that the challenge for the 20th-century belt lies in experimenting with **mixed living and working areas**. In a human-scale city, housing and employment are accessible to all citizens. The theme of interweaving both in the urban fabric is prominent in the current context of many cities. In the inner city, the smaller scales and strong social fabric form a rich soil for small-scaled productive activities and the creativity of pop-up initiatives. Conversely, the 20th-century belt's larger scales and its specific, organically grown morphology, make this area especially suited for alternative types of productivity and for new types of functional mixes.

Linkeroever places the image of *City on the Stream* from Antwerp's planning history back firmly on the agenda. In addition to by now well-known areas such as Eilandje, Nieuw Zuid and the Scheldt Quays, Linkeroever, too, will be reconfirmed as a unique urban quarter by the water.

In part owing to one of the most beautiful barriers in the world – the River Scheldt – many parts of Linkeroever have basically remained **unknown terrain** up to this day. Not only for visitors and tourists: but even for many Antwerp citizens. Because of the reclamation of the polders from the end of the 19th century onwards, part of Linkeroever's rich history is hidden under

metres of sand. And so, the underlying urban fabric for Linkeroever's transformation, too, is significantly different from the historic morphology of the right bank.

Linkeroever has been at the centre of modernist architects and urban planners' attention once before, as the assignment of an international design contest in 1933. Finally, a series of plans was created which nevertheless were only partly implemented. This is why Linkeroever has rather remained a collection of **fragments**. Continuing the tradition of international design contests, the City Architect's Atelier launched an **open ideas competition** at the end of 2016. We wanted to collect as much input and inspiration for a potential transformation of Linkeroever as possible. This could be a first step towards a strategic development vision.

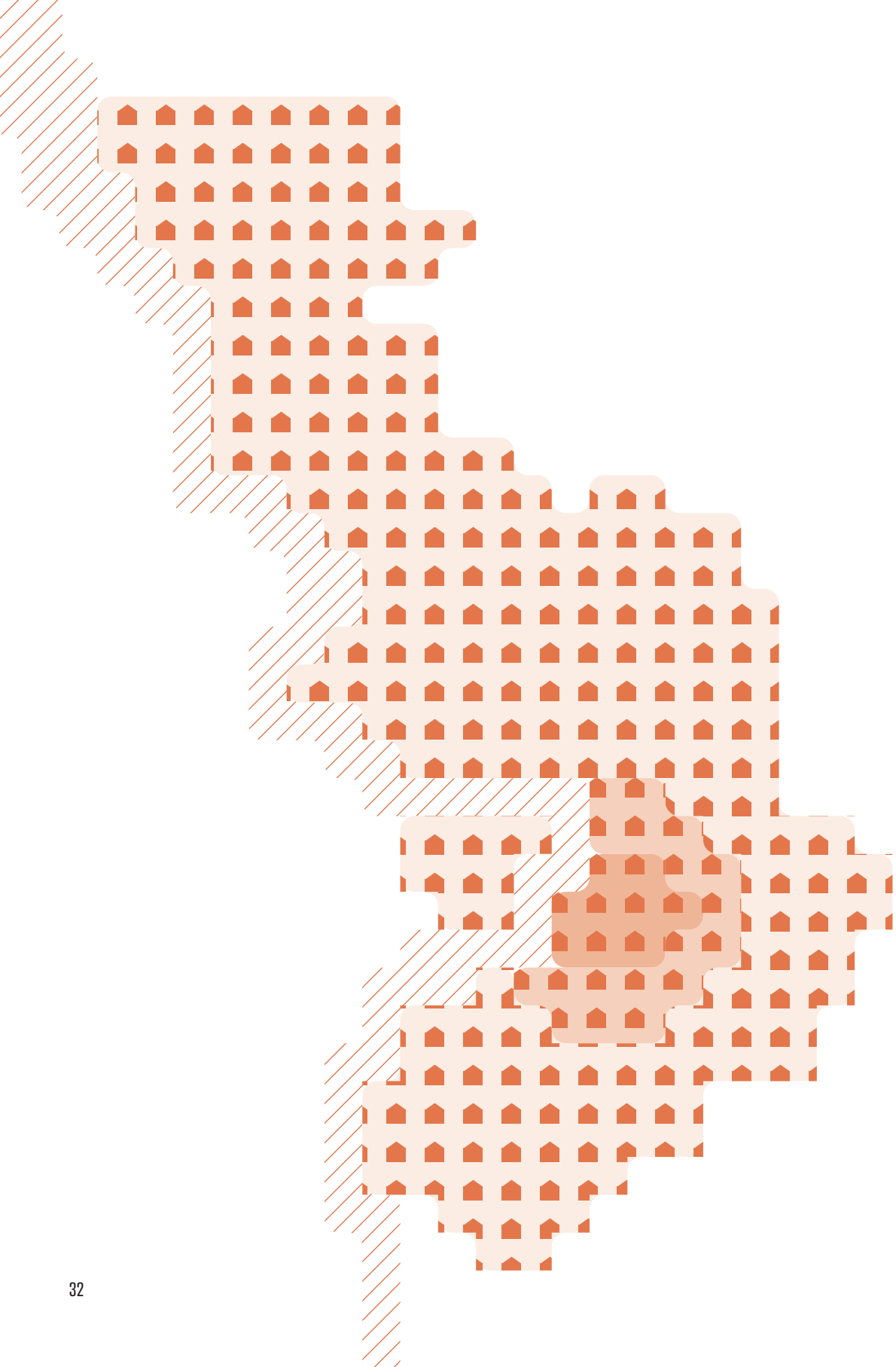
However, it is already very clear that the spatial organisation of the city quarter itself is as important as the search for a new relationship with the rest of the city. New connections must be physical as well as social in nature and must be created **thanks to the Scheldt** and not in spite of it. The image of the Scheldt as a barrier must be overcome by offering new ways to experience the River.

The assignment thus aspires to more than a physical transformation, but wants to contribute to the cultivation of a proud and **Linkeroever-inclusive** feeling of ownership of the city.

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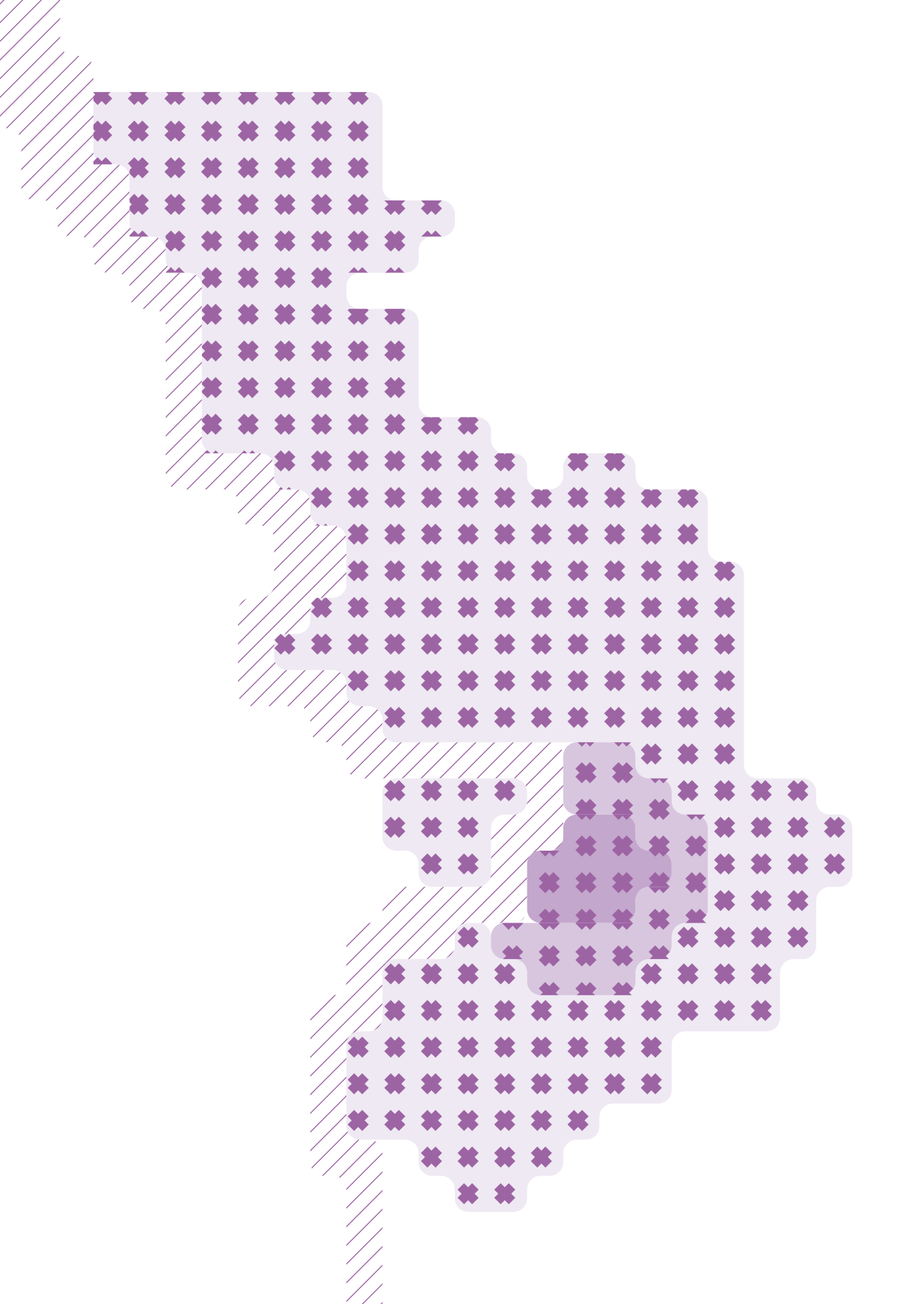


TOWARDS THE CITY OF TOMORROW

With the approach and priorities presented in this policy note I enthusiastically subscribe to Antwerp's strong and longstanding urban development practice as well as to the renewal of Antwerp's strategic spatial structure plan, which will be high on the agenda in the coming years. I am looking forward to working together with my Atelier and with all the city services and employees on the ambitions for the city of tomorrow. These ambitions have a city-wide scope and apply to the inner city as well as to the Ring road zone and the 20th-century frontiers.

LIVELY CITY TO LIVE

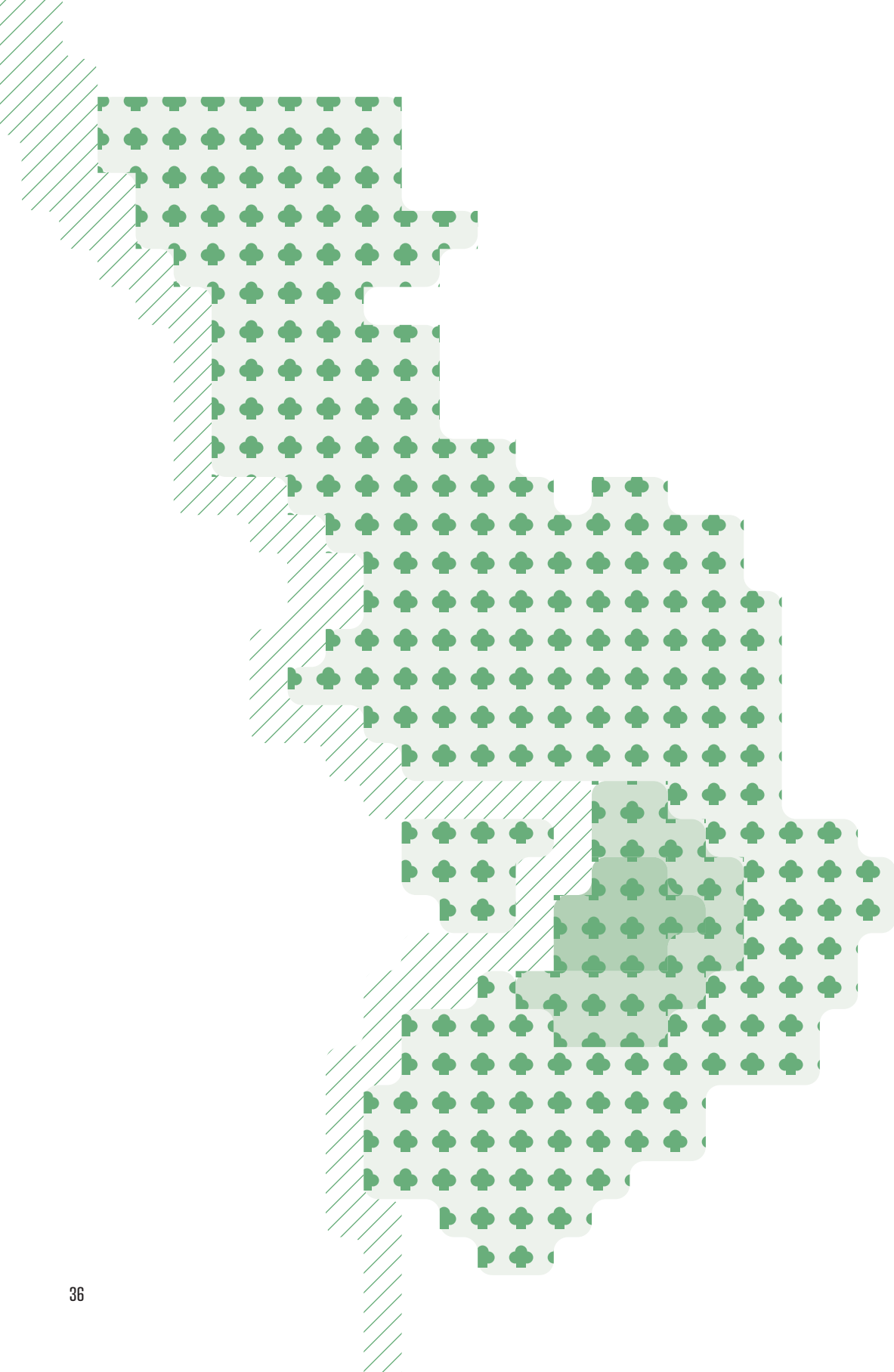
High on the agenda is Antwerp as a **city to live** in. The idea of Antwerp as the home of its citizens has historic and future dimensions. Attention for housing typologies is combined with consideration of the different layers and scales in the historic, 19th-century and 20th-century urban fabric. The cooperation project for the transformation of the Ring zone also demands attention for the area's potential to weave these parts of the city together. Key are mixed living environments that are in harmony with the specific city quarter and where pleasant public spaces enable walks to the local bakery or bicycle rides to school or work. The housing stock must cater to a wide spectrum of house hunters: current and new citizens of Antwerp, students, starters, expanding families ... But an attractive place to live also offers sustainable houses and a healthy living environment.



SMART NETWORK CITY

Each part of the city deserves strong **networks and connections**. In the coming years great efforts will be made to improve access to the city and to connect old and new city quarters across the Ring road. A district tram will also connect the district centres in the 20th-century belt to each other. Roads, streets and squares must offer smooth and safe routes, adapted to the different modes of transport. But strong networks are also born out of new forms of public-private cooperation and support for private initiatives in an economically healthy urban fabric. Moreover, such cooperation forms can help to ingrain sustainability in the urban fabric and community, mentally and physically. With regard to the latter, a city-wide heat network is one of the city's most ambitious objectives.

“ **STRONG NETWORKS
ARE ALSO BORN OUT OF NEW
FORMS OF PUBLIC-PRIVATE
COOPERATION** ”



ROBUST LANDSCAPE

Greenery, water and recreation are crucial for an attractive and connected city to live. Linkeroever is an example of how, in Antwerp, these three elements can be combined in unique ways. Equally unique and important are the large park structures, rivers and valleys of the 20th-century belt and the great variety of parks, plantations, gardens and even green façades and rooftops of the inner city. Finally, the cooperation project for the development of the Ring zone offers unique opportunities to create the ultimate pièce de résistance for a green City on the Stream.

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