WORKING TOGETHER ON THE SPACE OF TOMORROW

Brochure to the White Paper on the Spatial Policy Plan for Flanders

DEPARTEMENT RUIMTE VLAANDEREN

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WORKING TOGETHER ON THE SPACE OF TOMORROW

1. FLANDERS IS CHANGING ALONG WITH THE REST OF THE WORLD
   1. Metropolis on a human scale ........................................ 7
   2. Large footprint ....................................................... 8
   3. Limits on our use of space ............................................ 10
   4. Need for a different approach ....................................... 11

2. WE´RE CHANGING COURSE ........................................... 12
   1. It can be different ..................................................... 13
   2. Things are changing ................................................ 15

3. FLANDERS IN 2050 ................................................... 18
   1. Strong in the world .................................................. 19
   2. High quality of life ................................................ 22
   3. Smooth mobility ..................................................... 23
   4. Room for agricultural and food production and biodiversity .. 24
   5. Climate-resistant space ............................................. 26

4. WORKING TOGETHER ................................................ 28
   1. What is the Government of Flanders doing? ..................... 29
   2. What are the local administrations doing? ....................... 31
   3. Developing areas together ......................................... 32
   4. The White Paper and you .......................................... 34

COLOPHON
We have a beautiful palette of cities and villages, an excellent infrastructure and well-developed facilities. Health care, culture and education are accessible for everyone. Flanders has many beautiful spots where you can enjoy nature and open space to the fullest. An innovative economy makes our region a competitive player in the world.

At the same time, major challenges are headed our way. These include climate change, the traffic congestion problem, the globalising economy and the transition to renewable energy. And: our open spaces are coming under pressure. The number of Flemings continues to grow. Flanders is already one of the most densely populated regions in the world, and yet the densities in our cities and villages are strikingly low. We are also champions in strip development, taking over open space and paving the subsoil. If we don’t watch out, Flanders will soon be completely built up.

It’s important to give a clear idea of where we want to go with Flanders. Today’s choices will determine our future. This is necessary in order to keep Flanders strong and liveable.

In 1997, the Ruimtelijk Structuurplan Vlaanderen (RSV - Spatial Structure Plan for Flanders) offered an initial long-term vision. The Town & Country Planning policy took important steps to stem the exodus from the cities and make our cities liveable again. Twenty years on, we need a new plan. The Beleidsplan Ruimte Vlaanderen (BRV - Policy Plan for Town & Country Planning in Flanders) builds on the foundation of the RSV, but sets the bar a bit higher.

The Government of Flanders wishes to deal more carefully with its scarce open space. Doing more with less space: that’s the starting point of the new plan. From now on, we will be building housing, workplaces and facilities at well-situated locations in our cities and villages. After 2040, we will not be taking up any more open space. We need open space in order to capture excess rainwater, grow crops and ensure biodiversity. So we can preserve our landscapes and relax in and enjoy the countryside.

This brochure sketches the main outlines of the White Paper on the BRV - Policy Plan for Town & Country Planning in Flanders, which the Government of Flanders adopted on 30 November 2016. The White Paper contains a strategic vision for the space of tomorrow. It constitutes the basis for concrete measures and adapted regulations, and it contains the start for the future town & country planning policy. What path has Flanders already covered, and above all: where are we heading now? You can read it all here.

Together, we are going to write a new story about the space in our region... ... so it will still be good to reside, do business and live in Flanders in 2050.

Joke Schauvliege
FLEMISH MINISTER FOR THE ENVIRONMENT
WORKING TOGETHER ON THE SPACE OF TOMORROW
FLANDERS IS CHANGING ALONG WITH THE REST OF THE WORLD

Life is good in Flanders. We have a beautiful palette of cities and villages, a strong infrastructure network and well-developed facilities such as schools and retirement homes. In the open space we still find many beautiful spots to enjoy. But Flanders has to deal with challenges that are also rising all around the world. The way we’re using our space is running up against its limits.
Metropolis on a human scale

Flanders forms part of a network that also includes such metropoles as London and Paris. Our region lies in the middle of an area where 80 million people live and work. Leading technical and cultural innovations are born here. So, Flanders might have the strength of a metropolis, but it has a different structure from the surrounding areas. The many small towns and villages with open space between them lend Flanders a human character.

The mix of large centres, small towns and country villages makes our region effervescent with diversity. Its excellent infrastructure and top facilities promote economic and social development. Health care, education, business and culture are at a high level and lie within the reach of all of us. We can also fully enjoy the countryside and the open spaces.

LIFE IS GOOD IN FLANDERS

We are delivering agreeable city quarters and villages that are a standing invitation to enjoy sports and games, by constructing green sections and bodies of water.
Flanders has many advantages. But we’re not making optimal use of the space we have. With 6 million inhabitants, we are currently already taking up one-third of it with buildings (houses, offices, factories, schools, etc.), paved surfaces (parking lots, driveways, roads, etc.) and parks, sports fields and gardens. That appropriation of space is still increasing: every day we take up another 6 hectares of space. If we keep doing this, 41.5% of the total space will be occupied by 2050.

We live and work in a spatially dispersed manner. Our open space is therefore extremely fragmented. To get around, we are highly dependent on automobiles.

We live on a large scale, certainly compared to our neighbouring countries. In Flanders, 14 inhabitants live on each hectare of occupied space - and in The Netherlands, for example, that figure is 24. We could make much more efficient use of the space that we occupy. And that will be necessary: in 2060 there will be an estimated 7.2 million Flemings, and all of us will want to have some space to call our own. The population is aging and there are increasing numbers of smaller families. Hence, the demand for adapted ways of living is also rising.
“WE LIVE AND WORK SCATTERED ACROSS THE AVAILABLE SPACE. AS A RESULT, THE OPEN SPACE IS HIGHLY FRAGMENTED.”
3 Limits on our use of space

Our large-scale and simultaneously fragmented use of the space entails a fair number of draw-backs. In terms of mobility and climate change, for example.

Because we all live very spread out, we have to travel greater distances. Often we do so by car. The consequence: the roads are overcrowded. We find ourselves stuck more often and for longer periods in traffic jams than is the case in most other urbanised regions in Europe. The heavy car traffic also causes high CO2 emissions.

No less than 14% of the land in Flanders has a paved surface. In heavy rainfall, there are places where the water cannot penetrate the soil. That makes our region extra susceptible to flooding. And in hot periods, so-called “heat stress” raises its ugly head: the paved zones in cities, villages and residential strips get uncomfortably warm, and public health can suffer under the effects.

The social impact of our current use of space goes even further. For example, we have too few large, adjoining agricultural and countryside areas. International figures also seem to show that a higher density stimulates the economy.
Need for a different approach

The Spatial Structure Plan for Flanders (RSV) strove to revive our cities and strengthen our village centres, in order to combat the fragmentation and exodus from the towns and cities. As a result of this, towns and cities were refurbished and given a fresh look, railway-station neighbourhoods in the city centres were thoroughly renovated and Flanders invested in green areas where everyone can relax and bask in the sun. The rate at which space is being appropriated has slowed down: in 1994, 12 additional hectares of open space were taken up every single day for new developments, although since 2002 that figure has fluctuated at around 6 hectares per day.

The Spatial Structure Plan for Flanders played an important role in the concrete achievements and improvements in the field. But young families are still moving away from the city to seek their happiness out in the country. So, the exodus from the cities hasn’t stopped entirely yet. And the rate at which space continues to be taken up is only slightly decreasing. The Spatial Structure Plan for Flanders also doesn’t offer convincing answers to new challenges, such as climate change and the transition to renewable energy.

Our open space remains under pressure. We therefore need a new approach that deals effectively with our scarce space. And one which offers a powerful response to the social challenges we face.
The Government of Flanders has opted for an innovative approach to organising space. In 2040 we will cease taking up any more open space for building new houses, offices and facilities. Additional appropriation of space will fall to 0 hectares per day. Instead, we will make better use of well-situated places in our cities and villages. The new basic principle? Doing more with less space. Fortunately, there are plenty of opportunities waiting to be seized.
It can be different

Doing more with less, or: organising more activities on the same surface area. That’s the motto of the Spatial Policy Plan for Flanders. Instead of taking up open and unbuilt-up space to create new houses, workplaces, facilities and infrastructure, we transform spaces that are already built-up.

This reutilisation trend has already begun today. Unused houses are being renovated, old buildings demolished or are given a new purpose, polluted grounds are being cleaned up and redeveloped. In this way, each year we renew around 2% of the occupied space. That percentage can be further increased: around one-third of our urbanised environment qualifies for re-development. Until 2050 it is estimated that this will be 134,000 hectares. There is plenty of potential for reusing space, especially in residential areas, on industrial grounds and in port areas.

With each renovation, the spatial policy strives to use the space somewhat better than before. There are countless opportunities for doing more with less space. For example, we can build apartments above supermarkets, create underground car parks, use roofs of industrial buildings for solar panels or urban agriculture, divide up detached houses into apartments, build offices on top of train stations, use car parks at the weekends as playgrounds, share conference buildings between business park and neighbourhood, or even create sports fields above a supermarket.
The trend towards more intensive use of space has begun; for example, building lots are smaller than ten years ago. But we still see many unused opportunities. For example, relatively few of us live in apartments. And outside the city, people live in spacious surroundings. More Flemings could live there together without sacrificing comfort.

Moreover, a lot of space that is intended for residences and industry isn’t being used today. In 2014 there were 42,000 hectares of residential area and 10,000 hectares of industrial grounds that were still unused. These unused lots are sometimes unfavourably located. For example, they are far from a city or village centre or in flood-sensitive areas. Often it is better to change their intended purpose to countryside or agriculture. In this way, we are going to put a stop to strip development and fragmentation and we can prevent flooding.

IN 2025 WE WILL HAVE CUT THE SUPPLEMENTARY APPROPRIATION OF SPACE BY HALF, DOWN TO 3 HECTARES PER DAY. IN 2040 WE WILL HAVE STOPPED TAKING UP ANY FURTHER SPACE.
Things are changing

With the BRV White Paper, the Government of Flanders is initiating an ambitious turnaround. In 2025 we will have cut the additional appropriation of space in half, bringing it down to 3 hectares per day. In 2040 we will be taking up absolutely no extra space any longer. Spatial expansion will be the exception. From then on, we will place new houses, offices, schools and other facilities on land already within urbanisation areas. We will make use of the well-situated locations in existing towns, cities and villages. The development of new plots of land and urban districts will gradually become a thing of the past.

What does this mean in practice? The town & country planning policy aims to make the refurbishment of urban districts and villages easier, so that we utilise the opportunities to do more with these places as well as possible. Procedures must take less time and unnecessary rules should be eliminated. At the same time, it will become more difficult to cut into extra space. The rules on this are becoming tighter. The poorly-situated residential zones that were planned in the past but never developed will be reserved as much as possible for agriculture, country-side and forest.
We will increasingly combine or interweave hard functions - such as living, working and recreation - in a single location. We can also make our appropriation of space more productive through intensification. Reusing or temporarily using buildings and grounds also helps to do more with less space (see boxed text).

Of course, not all functions can be combined in a single place. We would do better to screen off activities that cause a lot of nuisance - such as busy roads, intensive agriculture, airports and heavy industry - from residential areas and workplaces. We adopt the principle “interweave where we can, separate where we must.” In any case, every spot is different. Some locations are more suitable for intensification or interweaving, because there is already a concentration of functions. We are thinking here of residential areas that have a lot of stores and facilities in the vicinity, or terrains with a good public transport connection.

More efficient use of space doesn’t mean that we’ll be stuffing our cities and villages absolutely full with buildings. We will keep the share of paved space within limits. Parks, gardens, (play) forests and ponds are important for relaxation and healthy living. Our climate benefits from them as well. Moreover, green spaces and waterways capture excess rainwater, provide cooling and purify the air.

“MORE EFFICIENT USE OF SPACE DOES NOT MEAN WE WILL BE STUFFING OUR CITIES AND VILLAGES ABSOLUTELY FULL WITH BUILDINGS.”

Temporary use of space means allowing activities in a space that is actually intended for something else. Think here of pop-up stores, temporary countryside on yet-to-be-developed business terrains, temporary student digs in vacant buildings, and so on.

Mixed use is the bringing together of various functions – living, working, facilities, energy production – in a single place. A youth movement that makes use of a school playground, for example. Wind turbines in agricultural areas and businesses that are integrated into residential areas are also forms of mixed use.
**INTENSIFICATION**
Intensification of our space is done by condensing, stacking or building underground. Examples are kangaroo houses, roof or underground parking structures and high-rise buildings.

**RE-USE**
Reuse is utilising old buildings and grounds once again. Example of this are the redevelopment of the Vaartkom in Leuven, a former industrial zone, and Park Spoor Noord in Antwerp, formerly a railway yard.
In 2050, Flanders is a world-class innovative region, where life is even better than it is today. People feel at home here, travel and meet one another easily. Biodiversity and food production are assured. Large and small open spaces offer Flemings breathing space and relaxation. We can spatially manage global caprices, whether in terms of climate, energy and food supplies, population growth or globalisation.
Strong in the world

In 2050, Flanders is a hotspot of knowledge economy, innovative production and circular economy. We are highly accessible internationally, which is necessary in order to keep Flanders competitive. Visitors, entrepreneurs and tourists find their way to our top facilities such as international conference centres, universities, specialised hospitals, European institutions, museums and concert halls. Flanders forms part of a single European urban-economic space.

**LIFE IS GOOD IN FLANDERS**

We are delivering economic growth and jobs by offering businesses space around hubs in the European transport network.
Our international nodal points, such as Brussels Airport (Zaventem), are easily accessible. By 2050, at strategic locations you’ll find 50% more houses as well as more workplaces than you do today. We will build extra houses at places from which you can quickly travel to the major cities, the airport and the larger train stations. Around these transport nodes there’s also space for doing business. In this way we will encourage innovation and economic activity, while we connect Flanders with Europe and the world.

The logistical hub that is Flanders will be running smoothly. Goods will be delivered and collected, and processed at easily accessible locations, near (international) production chains and sales markets. With an internationally renowned airport, high-performance seaports, a ramified waterway network and a fast and cross-border rail and road network, Flanders will be logistically stronger than ever.

Flanders is ideally embedded in the European energy network. We are both a transit country and a producer of renewable energy. Our power lines, heating networks and pipelines will be renovated and are state-of-the-art, so that the energy supply is assured. Our entire energy system is adapted to capturing the greater share of renewable energy.
INTERNATIONAL POWERFUL REGION

CLIMATE-PROOF SPACE

BIODIVERSITY AND FOOD PRODUCTION ARE GUARANTEED

TRANSFORM THE SPACE

BETTER USE OF THE EXISTING SETTLEMENT AREA

PRESERVE THE OPEN SPACE

FLANDERS IN 2050
High quality of life

In 2050, living in Flanders will be even better. Vital towns, cities and accessible villages will offer a wide range of living environments. The use of space will be more intensive and more interwoven, but that doesn’t mean that our quality of life has declined. On the contrary: re-development offers opportunities for extra parks and playgrounds, traffic safety and sustainable mobility, adapted forms of residence, beautiful landscapes, better materials and handsome architecture.

In the year 2050, our houses will use little energy. More than that: they will actually produce it themselves. Heat and energy will be smoothly exchanged within and between residential areas and companies. Each city and each village in Flanders will be coloured green. There will be a green standard that establishes how much green each new building project must include and how much green there has to be near large, densely-populated environments. Public gardens, playing fields and parks will invite people for encounters, sports and games. They will be accessible for young and old and for all strata of the population. In towns, cities and villages we will get around by foot or on bicycles. Green spaces will ensure better air quality. Walking and cycling routes will open up the larger green areas on the periphery of the city and out in the countryside. Thus everyone can enjoy rest, relaxation and nature’s air-conditioning.

In 2050, the housing stock in Flanders will have evolved in keeping with migration, ageing and shrinking families. There will be enough compact houses for small families, and adapted residential units for seniors. Residential areas will have a healthy social mix. New forms of living together will have developed, such as group residences, multiple generations under the same roof or care homes.
Smooth mobility

In 2050, every Fleming can travel easily each day. We will have organised our space in such a way that the need to travel around is reduced. More Flemings can get around sustainably. They will take the bicycle or train to get to work and leave the car standing in the garage more often.

We will build new houses and workplaces within a radius of 1000 metres from public transport nodes. We will aim for densities of at least 30%. Station neighbourhoods and other places that are connected to the railway or bus network or cycling infrastructure will be well developed, with many facilities and beautiful layouts. We will always put new houses within walking or cycling distance from basic facilities. That way, everyone will have a shop, a family doctor, primary school and child care right in the neighbourhood. Regional facilities – such as hospitals, swimming pools, administrative centres and secondary schools – will be easily accessible by public transport.

FIG. The average 70 to 90 minutes a day people spend on travel is a constant element, which shows the way forward in establishing high population centres.
In 2050, Flanders will have a robust open space. We will even make the open spaces somewhat more open. The total surface area of our open space will be 72.5%, and there will be 20% less paved surface. It will once again be a pleasant landscape with room for agriculture, countryside and forest. The rural area will consist of large, continuous open spaces and strong village centres. Fragmentation and strip development are reduced: new buildings and additional paving are allotted as much as possible to spaces that are already taken up. In this way the pressure on the open space will be reduced and there will be enough room left over for countryside, forest, agriculture and water.

In 2050, Flanders will have enough large agricultural areas. Our principal aim is for at least 750,000 hectares of agricultural area for professional farmers. That's necessary for a competitive agricultural sector. The agricultural zones are indispensable as the economic motor of rural regions. But they also offer space for functions other than agriculture, such as gentle recreation, water management and countryside.
In 2050, Flanders will have more valuable countryside and forest areas. At least 203,000 hectares of land intended for nature and forestry is a priority objective of the Spatial Structure Plan for Flanders. They will help to maintain the habitats of plants and animals and restore biodiversity. Large unbroken countryside and forest areas will be linked with smaller greenbelts in or near the city. Parks, verges, green roofs, avenues of trees, ponds, gardens ... all serve as green stepping stones and give plants and animals more room.

In the Natura 2000 zones, the nature objectives are attained. Hundreds of plant and animal species and their habitats thus enjoy extra protection.

“WE ARE MAKING THE OPEN SPACES MORE OPEN AGAIN.”
In 2050, Flanders is set up to be climate-resistant. A fine-meshed network of green spaces and waterways will run through open and built-up areas. The bucolic verdure doesn’t stop at the edges of our cities and villages. In the built-up areas too, there is enough room for gardens, parks, green verges, avenues of trees and water. That green-blue network will ensure food, (drinking) water, clean air, raw materials, relaxation, cooling and water buffering.

We will pave or harden the ground as little as possible. Parks, gardens, ditches and ponds will have a cooling effect in the summer months, and when there is heavy rainfall, excess water can penetrate the soil. Damage due to flooding will be reduced to a minimum. The city will be liveable, even on hot summer days.

Renewable energy generation – not only solar and wind energy, but also geothermal energy and biomass – will be given a place in large unbroken open spaces. Pasture lands, countryside and forest areas, rivers and streams will serve as a buffer they buffer the excess water when there are floods, serve as a water reservoir during dry periods and keep temperature variations under control.
PARKS, GARDENS, DITCHES AND PONDS BRING COOLING DURING THE SUMMER MONTHS.
We will be making the renewed space together. From now on, we will be developing new houses, workplaces and facilities at well-situated places in our towns, cities and villages. We will be creating more open space, cherishing our countryside and agriculture, and ensuring that there is more greenery and water in our environment. Governments, social organisations, citizens and companies will be getting together behind this new approach.

Who does what?
What is the Government of Flanders doing?

The Government of Flanders is setting a good example. Its own town & country planning projects always focus on more intensive use and prevention of fragmentation of open spaces. In order to offer everyone in Flanders a fine living environment, the Government of Flanders is implementing large-scale residential programmes near facilities and transport nodes. Thus, we are backing the development of railway station neighbourhoods, for example in Antwerp and Mechelen. In order to safeguard our open space and make it climate-resistant, we are creating space for renewable energy production, a strong agriculture and robust countryside and forest areas.

The logistics sector is and remains a source of economic growth and jobs. For this reason, we are promoting the extension of a logistics network that sustainably connects the sea-ports, Brussels Airport (Zaventem) and domestic nodes with the European hinterland.

The Government of Flanders supports and inspires. We are in constant dialogue with cities and municipalities, citizens and contractors: we explain opportunities, share good examples and provide funds. We ensure that the policy can be implemented in practice through the adaption of rules and procedures. The rules for taking up additional space are becoming more restrictive, while we are making it easier to make better use of districts and neighbourhoods in our cities and villages. We are also working on a better monitoring system. In this way we can know more precisely how and for what purpose we are using our space.
What are the local administrations doing?

Provinces, cities and municipalities are being given more responsibilities. They are determining for themselves which town & country planning projects they will focus on. The notion of a strict planning concept, imposed by the Government of Flanders, is being abandoned. Local challenges can from now on be dealt with from below. Provinces and municipalities are doing this with their own policy plan and with the most important principles from the White Paper on the Policy Plan for Town & Country Planning in Flanders at the back of their minds.

Local administrations are working to reduce unoccupied housing and assure more greenery and water. Decisions about the areas where businesses can set up and the viability of urban and village centres are also in their hands. They encourage new (collective) forms of residence, promote the reuse and temporary use of space, provide workplaces in the residential fabric and provide enough cycling paths and facilities (healthcare, education, public transport) in the neighbourhood. Provinces and municipalities are working together on issues that transcend the interest of a single municipality, such as the housing market, mobility, open space and water, facilities ... They can either lead or participate in such integrated development projects.

Local administrations together are ensuring that each area in Flanders has sufficient housing, facilities and a varied range of business premises. Supra-local cooperation is important so that construction projects take place at sites that can be properly opened up by (sometimes also Flemish) investments in cycling paths or public transport, for example.

Developing areas together

Each area is different. Therefore, we are doing as much as possible for integrated area development. (Local) authorities, social organisations, citizens, residents and contractors are together discovering how they can best structure an area.

It is important for municipalities to do an even better job of collaborating, because social issues such as water management, the development of the housing stock and mobility management require a supra-local approach. Provinces can be an important partner in these efforts. Integrated area development must become the prevailing approach. The government authorities involved are working together on this with social partners, contractors and citizens. Projects are harmonised and implemented on the basis of a common vision. The cooperation grows from the bottom up, supported by the Flemish town & country planning policy.

In the future, Flanders will only assume the director’s role again in areas where we are dealing with large-scale transformation projects. The White Paper on the Policy Plan for Town & Country Planning in Flanders offers an overview of the town & country planning work sites where the Government of Flanders is taking the initiative.

In other areas, Flanders will leave more room for the local administrations. Here the role of the Government of Flanders will be facilitating and supportive. Municipalities that collaborate supra-locally will be given more room to realise their own vision. They will be given the necessary funding for this, for example for coordinating cooperation projects. This is something that is already taking place today within the framework of the Strategic Projects. REKOVER in Kortrijk, Regionet in Leuven, the City Region of Turnhout and the City Region of Antwerp are examples of this.
The creation of the Policy Plan for Town & Country Planning in Flanders (BRV) has three milestones. In 2011, the Government of Flanders fired the starting shot. Citizens and experts were invited to reflect together about Flanders in 2050. All of these ideas and opinions were funnelled into the Green Paper (2012), the first milestone. We tested out the most important concepts and principles from the Green Paper on the basis of very concrete issues. The results of this were processed into the White Paper, the second milestone. This brochure is a summary of it.

The third and last milestone is the definitive BRV. We are converting the White Paper’s strategic vision into policy frameworks. Policy frameworks contain objectives for the medium term, indicate how the plans from the White Paper can be applied and list actions. After a public inquiry, the Flemish Parliament will then ratify the BRV.

“YOU TOO WILL BE GIVEN A CHANCE TO HELP SHAPE YOUR ENVIRONMENT.”
WORKING TOGETHER ON THE SPACE OF TOMORROW