

LEARNING FROM SMARTER GROWTH IN HOLLAND



October 2009

PARTICIPANTS

TEN

TEN is a small group of senior local government officers in London who have met regularly over six years to share ideas and exchange knowledge on how to achieve urban renaissance. Using the principle of *looking and learning* they visit pioneering projects to draw out lessons that can be applied in their own authorities. In the process the members develop their skills as urban impresarios and place-makers, and are able to build up the capacity of their authorities to tackle major projects. The study tour of The Netherlands involved the following:

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Amsterdam



Vathorst



Rotterdam

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WHERE WE WENT



1. Boat trip to see new harbour side housing in Amsterdam



3. Metro, walking, river taxi and tram tour of Rotterdam



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INTRODUCTION

This report draws conclusions from a TEN Group study tour in October 2009 to major developments in three Dutch cities (Amsterdam, Amersfoort and Rotterdam). Building on what we had learned in the previous visit four years ago, (when we also visited the New Town of Almere) this study tour focussed on new Dutch suburbs and integrated transport, with the chance to find out how quality design was secured and funded. The report also draws on a programme of research that URBED has been undertaking into lessons from regeneration success stories and new settlements in Northern Europe, including *Regeneration in European Cities: making connections*¹, which features Kop van Zuid in Rotterdam as one of three case studies, and *Beyond Eco-towns*², which featured Vathorst in Amersfoort as an exemplary new settlement.

We have set out the conclusions from the visit under a series of themes all starting with the letter C; Context, Connectivity, Character, Community, Climate-proofing and Collaboration. The idea is to make them easier to remember, and also to stress that regeneration and renaissance are holistic processes that cannot be measured by physical results alone. The report reflects views that members expressed at the time, and also suggests some transferable lessons that could be put into practice in London.

There was a notable focus on the particular issues facing Outer London boroughs. The challenges include getting smaller developments, and especially house building, going in the face of lower property demand, a shortage of skilled staff, financial cutbacks, public opposition and member cynicism. This report and the accompanying PowerPoint presentation provide evidence on some exciting possibilities.

Iconic architecture in Rotterdam



Space for new jobs in Vathorst



Sustainable transport in Amsterdam

¹ *Regeneration in European Cities: Making Connections*, URBED for the Joseph Rowntree Foundation, 2008

² *Beyond Eco-towns: Applying the Lessons from Europe*, PRP, URBED and Design for Homes, 2008

I. THE STUDY TOUR ITINERARY

The visit made use of Eurostar to get to the Continent by train, changing at Brussels Midi onto the French high speed train to get to Amsterdam. Shortly times will be cut still further when the dedicated high speed line opens linking France, Belgium, Holland and Germany. Some of the members also made a trip on foot to the city's information centre, which reuses the old Zuiderkirk and houses a display that gives details of new development projects in Amsterdam. We then went on a boat tour of new developments that took in the historic canals as well as new waterside developments in the Eastern Harbour. Our trip took in a huge range of new schemes and benefitted from a guide with local knowledge as well as architectural interests.

On the Friday, we left by tram and train from Amsterdam Central to the new station of Vathorst in Amsterdam, where we hired bikes to tour this new urban extension of 11,000 homes. This is 40% complete and is one of the urban extensions developed under the VINEX programme. A discussion in the Information Centre with the Chief Executive of the Vathorst Development Company explored how such high standards are achieved and financed, and there is a case study in the briefing pack which pulls together our knowledge.

In the afternoon we took the train from Vathorst to Rotterdam Central. Our guide, an architectural student, took us first to the new underground station, which had opened a week previously, and forms part of an integrated and complex system. After looking round the new high rise commercial and cultural developments at Willemsplein on the Kop van Zuid, a former dock area, we walked

through an area that had been master-planned by Norman Foster to the New York Hotel, an imaginative refurbishment of the former Holland America Line's head offices. From there an astonishingly fast water taxi ferried us to the Lloyd Quarter, which has been turned into one of Rotterdam's creative quarters. We saw imaginative conversions of old warehouses to attractive design studios as part of Rotterdam's economic development strategy of diversifying away from logistics to creative industries, and of attracting higher income people to live in the centre. Interestingly the Netherlands Maritime University has 2,000 students alone, and Rotterdam is also the home of Erasmus University. We completed the tour by tram, which took us past the beautiful park, with its stylish art gallery, which was the first building by Rem Koolhaas, a now world famous local architect.

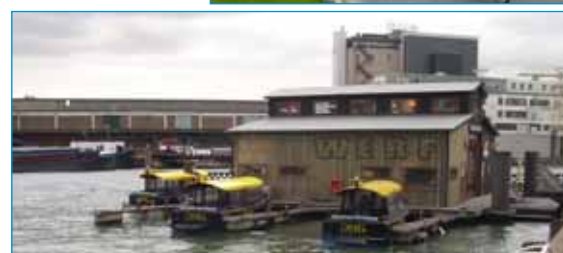


Above: Eastern Docklands, Amsterdam



Right: Bike tour of Vathorst

Below: Rotterdam water taxis



A short history of Dutch planning

From early on, the need to keep water out of the low, flat countryside resulted in city councils with the powers to plan and control public works, particularly drainage. The Dutch therefore have a close relationship with their towns and cities. After the Second World War the pressures of reconstruction within limited resources led to the national Government assuming more powers, but these have been progressively returned. The electoral system of proportional representation has dampened down major swings between left and right, but also enabled minority groups, such as the Provos in Amsterdam (who were against office developments) or the far Right (who are concerned about immigration) to gain seats.

In a short speech at the Local Government Association (December 9th 2009) Ralph Pans, Chief Executive of the Dutch local government association VNG (and a former Mayor of Almere) summarised recent trends. The Dutch want to use the current financial crisis to make the transition to a more sustainable society. Two decades ago, a number of major changes were introduced, including halving the number of local authorities to 440 municipalities, which have also taken on extra tasks, such as schools and social support for the elderly and disabled. There is a 'participation' budget for the 'integration of newcomers'. Mergers are likely to continue and the role of the Provinces is being questioned.

A distinction is made between 'autonomous tasks', where local authorities are free to do what they want, and 'delegated tasks', which are specified. The Financial Relations law requires that any new measure introduced by government is accompanied by the funds to implement it. Most of the funding comes from national government, and currently municipalities are free to use €15 billion, and a further €12 billion is earmarked for delegated tasks. Local taxes and user charges raise €6 billion or about 10%. Local authorities also secure an income from property, as they own many of the freeholds, and also from utilities such as energy companies.

There is a Code of Relations, which sets out the rules that govern how the different levels work together, and importantly local authorities are seen as the 'first level'. An agreement was reached on 'proportionality' to maintain the local share of the national budget, which is referred to as 'ascending and descending the stairs together'. No cuts are to be made in the period 2009-11, but €35 billion has been cut from 2012.

Interestingly the LGA's new report *Global slowdown local solutions: international comparisons* uses a number of examples from Rotterdam and elsewhere to make the case for pooling government funding at a sub-regional level, and then responding to local economic priorities. Rotterdam Council has called on all local partners to sign a Declaration of Intent to create and sustain local employment opportunities, and is targeting 1,000 young people, self-employed and long-term unemployed to get them back into work. It has also set up a €3 million fund to support new innovative businesses in the environmental and energy sectors. €15 million has been allocated to making the old port area a centre for green innovation.

Planning is now taking place at the Randstad level to ensure that 40% of new housing is concentrated in the larger cities of Amsterdam and Rotterdam, while also taking steps to improve the quality of the green space between them. There are also major initiatives aimed at reducing the dangers of flooding, which encourage collaboration between different authorities.

In responding to a question of how the opponents of devolution can be overcome, Mr Pans stressed the importance of working with people in running services that are both more effective and cost less. There is also a need to demonstrate success, as Dutch cities have progressively done.

2. THE DUTCH PLANNING CONTEXT

Dutch planning has had a huge influence on European urban thinking. Ideas like the Compact City and Regional Spatial Planning were first pioneered in the Netherlands. Lord Richard Rogers and the Urban Task Force highlighted both Rotterdam and Barcelona as models for the UK. Their success was attributed to the use of three dimensional masterplans and a greater concern with design. However, there are other features that make the Dutch system work so well, such as the way people in authority work together over time, and the trust placed in local government. Four features are important to the lessons London might draw: investment in the public realm; local autonomy; concern for social balance; and programmes for community cohesion.

Investment in the public realm The roots, which were stressed in our earlier report *Learning from Dutch Cities: achieving sustainable urban growth*³, lie in the history of how people cooperated to literally build the Netherlands together. An exodus of people from Spanish occupied Flanders in the 17th century and the Treaty that brought an end to the Thirty Years War created a new country founded on liberty and equality. The overwhelming need to cooperate to keep the sea out of flat, low lying lands (the so-called ‘Polder mental-

ity’) produced one of the most equal societies in the world. It also left a legacy of fine, terraced houses overlooking the canals which helped communications, as well as drain the land and, which give Amsterdam its special identity and world city status. The emphasis on co-production rather than consumption reflects Calvinist doctrine. Towns and cities are important sources of pride and communal wealth.

Local autonomy None of the extensive public realm would have been possible without sustained high levels of saving and investment. The results can be seen not only in the first class public transport system, which is truly integrated, but also in the way people use bicycles to get around or reach the railway stations. As one of the participants noticed, because the main cities, such as Amsterdam and Rotterdam, own the freeholds of most of the property they are able to achieve better results through redevelopment. Though the national government provides most of the public finance out of national taxation, the cities have much more independence than in the UK. The system of proportional representation and appointed Aldermen with remits that cross functions helps ensure continuity and attracts talented people to work on local councils.



³ URBED for the TEN Group, 2005

Traditional canals in Amsterdam

Government is elected through proportional representation, which not only enables minority opinions and values to be reflected, but also makes compromise and mutual respect essential. The system of agreements between the cities and government, was pioneered in Rotterdam. After the Second World War, which destroyed much of the infrastructure and the whole of the city centre in Rotterdam, government took the lead, but has progressively transferred power back. Though there are separate provinces (equivalent to our regions), such as South Holland, they are concerned with issues of common interest, such as water, and do not seem to interfere. A city such as Amsterdam, which has a population of 750,000, is divided into 15 districts, to provide closer links to local needs and concerns. We discovered Amsterdam has increased the population living in the central area from 80,000 to 200,000 over a couple of decades as a result of a concerted effort to encourage families to live in the central area, which now extends both sides of the vast harbour.

Social balance A further difference lies in the attitudes to tenure. With a higher proportion of the population living in apartments, housing associations have played a much larger role in development and management. Some 30% of the population is eligible to live in social housing. As in Britain, new developments are required to provide 30% of affordable housing, with the land transferred back to the local authority, as in the case of Amersfoort. The housing associations have been privatised since 1990, and see their role as helping to rebalance communities, not just cater for the poor-



Bicycle parking outside Amsterdam Central Station



A range of apartments have been built in Amsterdam to attract families back into the centre



Old barges converted into a children's play park

est groups. A pamphlet published by Localis on *Principles for Social Housing Reform*⁴, which is co-authored by a Hammersmith Councillor who is head of the Conservative Councils Innovation Unit, commends the Netherlands for 'creating better mixed and better balanced neighbourhoods' with a number of features:

- Social housing accounts for 35% of the housing stock
- Providers are active in providing homes for owner occupation and higher value renting
- They also support their residents with care, access to jobs and education
- As a result there is less stigmatisation and spatial concentration of disadvantage
- Around 10% of the stock has been rebuilt over the last decade.

Community cohesion Differences in organisational culture may explain why the Dutch have done so much better overall than the UK or the USA on so many indicators of social malaise, such as teenage pregnancy or drug and alcohol addiction. The charts and underlying analysis in Wilkinson and Pickett's recent book *The Spirit Level* bring out the importance of income disparities in explaining other disparities. An OECD study on children showed that Dutch children, along with their Scandinavian counterparts, are the happiest, while those of the UK and the

USA are the most miserable. It is not therefore surprising that Dutch planners tend to be more confident and are given greater authority. It also may be no coincidence that the Netherlands has also outperformed the UK both in economic terms, and also in measures to address climate change and make the urban areas more sustainable. Rather than watching manufacturing decline, and relying on financial and business services, they have taken steps to become better educated and more competitive, and to retain ownership of key sectors.

There is a stress on rebalancing neighbourhoods to overcome polarisation. However it would be wrong to assume all is perfect, and there are very real issues in integrating high proportions of immigrants into the Dutch way of life. The main cities of Amsterdam and Rotterdam both have populations where ethnic minorities make up over half the population, (a result in



Right: The Netherlands Maritime University in the Lloyd Quarter, Rotterdam

Below: Social housing on Amsterdam's Eastern Docklands



⁴ Stephen Greenhalgh and John Moss, 2009

part of the move from apartment blocks to houses in new suburbs on the edge). Many of the immigrants have come from former Dutch colonies with high levels of Muslims, and over 170 languages are spoken. Though education is free and funded by the State, there are separate Catholic, Protestant, and what they call Black schools. Well-publicised right wing political movements and attacks on liberal politicians show there are real tensions in some cities. Whether one likes the high rise towers or stylish apartment blocks that have been built in the centre of Rotterdam, they undoubtedly have helped change the image of what was formerly seen as a working class and rather ugly city that was poor relation of the rest of the Randstad. It has also helped to attract middle class families, professionals and creative people to live in the city.

There is an ongoing issue of how to deal with anti-social behaviour, with immigrants from so many backgrounds, and what has been described as the 'non working class'. Innovative programmes, such as Opzoomeren (diagram on page 14), which encourages 'social etiquette' in Rotterdam, or the involvement of artists, such as through the Vario Mundi Foundation in

Vathorst, may well be more productive than relying on Anti-social Behaviour Orders or CCTV to catch and punish offenders. Previous visits have suggested much greater communication and coordination between different services at the local level. This is coupled with a greater degree of social control, as opposed to punitive systems and people in uniform.



Kop van Zuid and the iconic Erasmus Bridge



3. CONNECTIVITY

The key to urban renaissance in Holland has been investing in high connectivity, which influences everything else.

Transport hubs Investment around the stations appears to be underway everywhere, and the public transport system is being upgraded at several different levels. First there are the connections between the Netherlands and the rest of the world. Amsterdam Schiphol is not only linked to all the world's cities, but is on a transport hub that enables the traveller to reach their destination very rapidly and with minimum hassle. The connections are being reinforced by the European High Speed Network, which cuts the time from Brussels to Rotterdam and Amsterdam and on to German cities to the point where the train is the preferred mode of travel for journeys between cities.

Growth points The station areas are used for a variety of purposes. Thus a huge new business centre has emerged around South Amsterdam station, but similar complexes can also be seen in Utrecht, where the surrounding area is being redeveloped, and even in the medium sized town of Amersfoort. They make the Randstad the principal model for a 'polycentric conurbation'. New stations such as Amersfoort are architectural masterpieces that also serve as commercial and community hubs.

Rapid transit Locally, the system of suburban metros and trams, as well as double decker inter city trains is being further upgraded by a new light rail system round the Randstad. The consequence has been that the areas around the main stations are in a state of turmoil for what seems a decade, as all the underground



Tram linking Kop van Zuid with the rest of Rotterdam



Central Rotterdam's new subway station



Joined up transport hub at Rotterdam's Central Station

services are diverted and replaced. Young people travel free, and as a result services can be quite crowded. The buses run at frequent intervals round the edge, of Vathorst they are inexpensive and each home must be within 400 metres of a bus stop.

Easy cycling We cycled around Vathorst, one of three urban extensions on the edge of the historic town of Amersfoort. Getting to work by bicycle is much easier and safer than in the UK because you do not compete with traffic. Bikes are often used to reach the train, and can be safely parked or carried, and many Dutch people own a number of bikes as a consequence. There are said to be 12 million bicycles for a population of 15 million, and they cluster around railway stations, where we would have car parks. The design of the new settlement of Vathorst gives primacy to cyclists and pedestrians even though there seems to be plenty of on-street parking. Cross-roads rather than mini roundabouts, with priority to people coming from the right, and cycle reservations where there are roundabouts, make cycling easier. We noticed that Dutch cyclists seem less aggressive, and often cycle in pairs or with children towed behind, and without helmets, and often use heavy bikes without gears. Moving about by bike is also much easier than in the UK because every street has to be connected with every other one, and cul de sacs are not common place.

Pedestrian priority In a new urban extension like Vathorst in Amersfoort, the street layouts of the different neighbourhoods have been carefully designed to prevent people driving through them.



Bike parking at Vathorst train station



Allocated cycle paths around roundabouts giving cyclists right of way



Car free centre in Vathorst

Instead of massive supermarkets surrounded by a desert of car parking, parking is less divisive. The new shopping centre at Vathorst features a range of shop unit sizes in a traditional layout. There is no street clutter, and extensive use is made of 'shared surfaces' and home zones (or Woonerf).

Car parking Parking is generally provided in residential areas on the street, with a lot of the parking being nose to kerb, and in Vathorst the ratio is 1.9 spaces per home. However, in this case the location on the junction of two motorways and its appeal to young families does mean that congestion at peak times is an issue.

The Dutch parking policy classifies locations as ABC in terms of their accessibility by public transport. The aim is to promote development around locations with high accessibility; and the places with the best public transport systems are also allocated the most parking spaces, and hence attract the most offices. However, cities do vary, with Rotterdam being far more car dependant than Amsterdam, for example. New underground car parks are being built as part of the Rotterdam Central Station redevelopment. Similarly in Amersfoort, the lower levels of the offices around the station are used for parking. But with parking charges being as high as 60 euros a day in Amsterdam, and congestion on the main motorways linking the cities, there are real incentives to use public transport as much as possible.



Canal side housing with on street parking



Vathorst's new shopping centre



Montevideo the highest building in the Netherlands and Hotel New York the former head office of the Holland-America line

4. CHARACTER

Flexible design Though opinions may differ on some of the new architecture, with, for example, more unconventional structures and colours than we are used to, the variety of housing does mean that there is much more choice than in the UK. This may help explain why half the people in the Netherlands buy new homes when they move, compared with only 10% in the UK. Visits and assessments by CABE tend to focus on the work of some of the leading architects, such as Meccano, West 8, and the Office of Metropolitan Architecture. This has led to Dutch architects being used for major renewal projects in London. A presentation by David Levitt following a CABE study tour stressed a number of features including *'intelligent use of flexible design codes; complete range of skills within local authority planning teams, land costs recovered over time through leasing, not selling freeholds; encouragement to families to stay in city; higher standards generally, including higher space standards; more*

progressive attitudes towards visual privacy; and security less of an obsession than in most UK cities.' However, while there are some extraordinarily innovative architects in the Netherlands the general variety stems from a number of other factors, which we could learn from.

Bold masterplans The new neighbourhoods are designed to fit within masterplans that fix the uses, densities, and street and open space patterns, but are much more relaxed over the look of the facades. These tend to be driven by the local authorities, rather than responding to proposals from private developers. It is notable how different cities are pursuing different ideas, as they seek to outdo each other. Also values or priorities can change. Thus Rotterdam has deliberately gone for high and slender buildings to make it look more distinctive, and went for 'trophy architects' in redeveloping Kop van Zuid. While these edifices may have helped change the city's



image, and attract major organisations who like 'signature buildings', the effect at street level, where the wind blows the construction dust around, can be intimidating. The next phase will be more modest.

Distinctive neighbourhoods A major feature of the new urban extensions has been the 'branding' of different neighbourhoods to reflect different lifestyles. Thus Vathorst has been marketed as a 'world of difference' with at least five different kinds of place, ranging from a whole district built around canals and an updated version of traditional Dutch architecture, to contemporary places, or areas that stress living in the country. The homes range from low rise terraces to tower blocks, and there are thatched roofs as well as green ones. A multiplicity of architects are used, and in Vathorst no one architect can design more than 80 units in a scheme. Furthermore there is conscious attempt to make houses look individual, for example by varying the colour of the brick on the canal side houses, with some 11 different shades of brown, as well as areas in front of terraced houses that occupiers can individualise (rather than stuck on 'bits of architecture').

Walkable streets Much of the character comes from the high quality of the public realm, with well-laid pavements laid on sand (which are turned when the construction work is finished). No yellow lines spoil the streetscape. There is extensive greenery, and a respect for any traditional features, such as the incorporation of the old farm houses in Vathorst. Apartments are required to have outside space, and the use of large and imagina-



Apartment blocks help create distinctive neighbourhoods



Personalised spaces outside of homes



tively designed balconies makes the new blocks look individual, and much more interesting than the usual block of flats. They also overlook communal courtyards, which are good for families with young children. There is also very little street clutter in the form of warning signs and no barriers to crossing the street!

Public art is used very imaginatively, including along the old surviving street that runs from the Lloyd Quarter in Rotterdam past a superb museum park to the centre. This suggests a very different relationship between designers and transport engineers, a common language of urban design, and a greater interest in how places look

Efficient construction Simple and modern methods of construction reduce building costs and enable generally larger units to be provided. One of the most influential schemes on Borneo Island features quite individual homes but all built within a tight grid. ‘Tunnel form’ construction is often used (where the structural concrete for the walls and floors is poured into forms) and the facades can then be personalised.



Borneo Sporenburg designed by Dutch architects West 8



Imaginative public realm in Kop van Zuid

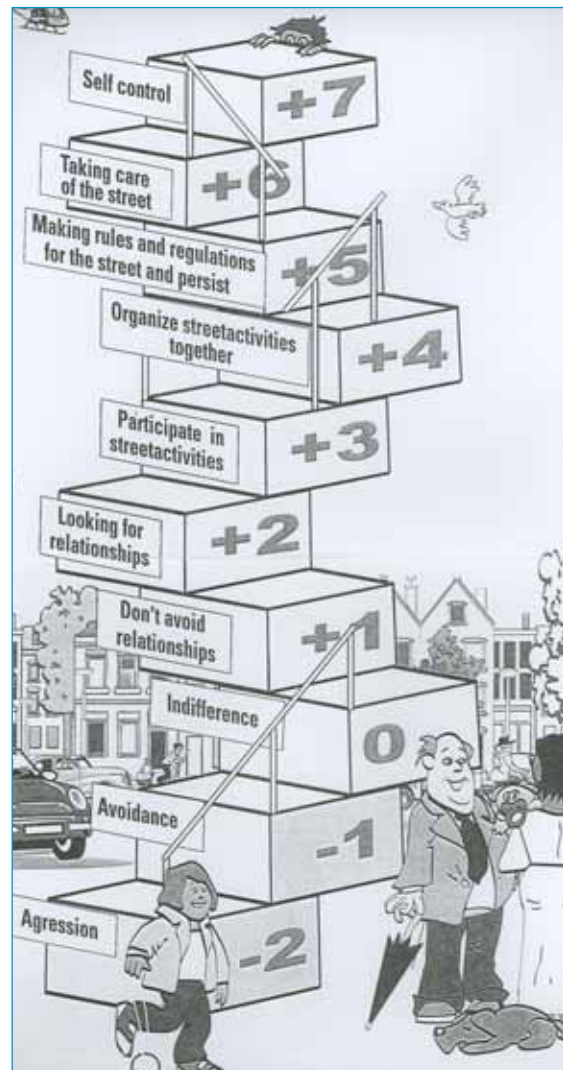
5. COMMUNITY

Child friendly neighbourhoods

One of the features of Dutch life is that the children are among the happiest in Europe (according to UNICEF studies) whereas those in the UK (and USA) are among the unhappiest. Though this may be due to the relatively equal and classless society, it could also reflect the kinds of neighbourhoods that the Dutch have been building since the last war, when much of the country was destroyed. For example parents are not afraid to let their children walk or cycle on their own.

Family oriented centres Many more families live in central areas that enjoy good facilities, and where it is not necessary to drive a car to get to work. In Amsterdam, there has been an increase in the population of the central area from 80,000 to 200,000, thanks largely to new developments. In Rotterdam, which started with a poor image, there has been a determined and successful effort to attract middle class people and creative people to live in the city centre, reversing the policy adopted after the Second World War when the centre was completely rebuilt.

Social mix Though it's hard to understand how communities work from a brief study tour, a number of points emerged from what we saw. There has been a conscious attempt to break down concentrations of disadvantage, and to ensure that new developments are truly mixed. The principle pioneered in Amersfoort in new districts like Vathorst is that the mix of housing in neighbourhoods of 500 units should reflect the wider pattern in terms of price levels. This seems a better policy than just going for 30% of the housing being affordable. The social housing is handed over to the local



The Opzoomeren model for neighbourhood management



Homes in the centre of Vathorst for those with special needs, with day centre facilities

authority who then contracts with housing associations. A significant part of the social housing is owner occupied, but on an arrangement that if the unit is resold, a major share of any increase in value is paid back.

No stigmatisation In Vathorst the design makes it impossible to tell who is living where, though it is the higher value housing that enjoys views over water. Efforts are made to avoid the most expensive housing being next to the cheapest. We saw that densities varied greatly between neighbourhoods, and the higher priced detached housing was on the edge, and close to the railway station. Yet such areas also included special needs housing for those with Alzheimers and autism.

Communal space Though gardens may be limited in size, every flat now has some outside space in the form of large balconies. There is also a lot of communal space, which appears well-maintained. In part this is due to the management regime, but it is also helped by community development work, to encourage 'social control'. The underlying ideas are graphically expressed in the cartoon used to explain the Opzoomeren project, which has worked in over 2,000 streets in Rotterdam. The idea of teaching 'social etiquette' is much more positive, and effective, than issuing Anti-Social Behaviour Orders. We saw no CCTV cameras, or figures in uniform.

Community events A sense of community is not created by providing community centres, but by making it easy for people with common interests to get together. So restaurants are built early on to act as community hubs in Vathorst,



Temporary shops were provided from the start



Art and education build social capital in Vathorst



Vathorst Information Centre, a dedicated facility for visitors and residents and includes a café and scheme model



Foundations including ground source heat pumps are provided by the public private partnership before the sites are handed over to developers

along with a major new school, which helps people make new friends. Temporary shops and banks were provided early on in the development. The Arts Foundation, which the development company has funded, employs artists to help create a sense of community pride, and artists have been attracted to work in a major studio complex. A creative approach to community engagement has also been used in other areas, and there is a notable use of intermediaries, such as Architecture Centres in almost every city, to encourage interest in the built environment.

6. CLIMATE-PROOFING

Energy saving The Netherlands benefited from early discoveries of offshore gas, but after a period of inflation, has sought to reduce dependency on fossil fuels. Considerable use is made of local power generation and heat distribution schemes, and some half the homes in Vathorst are connected up. All homes have to be highly insulated, though interestingly Vathorst generated negative national publicity through some of its innovations, as damp can easily create problems. Developers there are offered a menu of possible innovations from which they can choose, and have gone for ground source heat pumps in a big way.

Water Because the land is flat and low lying, water is seen as the biggest challenge for building in the Netherlands, and there is the greatest experience of dealing with potential flooding. Rain water run-off has to be held on site, and is used to create a feature and add value, with extensive use of swales and new canals. Instead of worrying unduly about safety concerns, children are taught to swim! In Vathorst they say 'treat water as your friend not your enemy'.

Waste Rubbish disposal is often handled through underground containers that are positioned to avoid homes being dominated by wheelie bins or roads built for garbage trucks, for example in the 'canal' area of Vathorst. Non recyclable waste provides fuel for local energy generation.



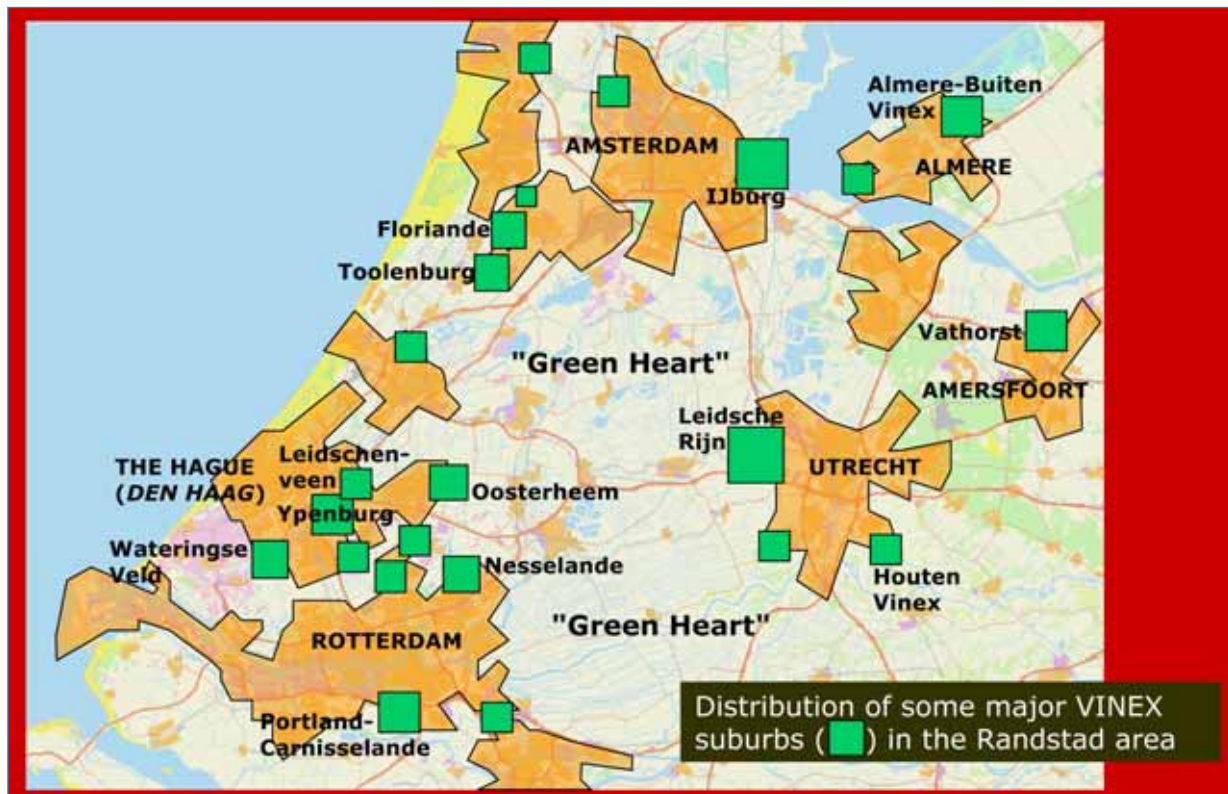
A green heart runs through the centre of Vathorst



Underground waster storage



New canals



Source: Han Lorzing, Netherlands Institute for Spatial Research

7. COLLABORATION

Places look different and cared for because they are properly designed and managed. Instead of trying to transfer all the risks and responsibility to the private sector or charity, as in the UK and USA, there is a much stronger tradition of public private partnerships. This requires ongoing collaboration and mutual respect, and a lot can be learned from the experience of the Vathorst Development Company, which we have sought to understand (see for example the case study *Making Eco Towns Work: Developing Vathorst* in the briefing pack for more details of how the finances of Vathorst work). While the situation of Amersfoort as a nationally identified growth point may be special, the mechanisms that have been used to provide the security for quality development could well apply more widely.

VINEX housing programme The national government took the lead in identifying the best places for growth in terms of both their employment prospects and transport connections. Vathorst is one of 90 new urban extensions, which increased the housing stock by 455,000 houses or 7.6% between 1996 and 2005. The VINEX housing programme involved a collaboration between the Dutch government and local authorities, who were invited to put forward proposals that met a number of criteria (such as being well-connected to existing towns and cities), but were not given specific targets.

Planning for smarter growth The housing ministry (VROOM) asked municipalities to come up with proposals, and agreements took some three years to

finalise. URBED estimates suggest that the government financial support may amount to around 6% of the total value of the investment. Amersfoort Council, which has already successfully managed two urban extensions, was persuaded to overcome local opposition to building beyond the motorways, on the grounds that otherwise they would have something forced on them that they could not control.

Establishing a public private partnership The Council formed a partnership company with five landowners, including developers they had worked with successfully before. The company was chaired by a well-thought of local politician. The chief executive was hired from the private sector. There are some 15 staff based in offices by the Information Centre.

Drawing up the masterplan Theme groups convened by the local authority developed policies for different aspects of the scheme. The company commissioned

a masterplan after a competition, and in the end brought together the Council's master-planner Ashok Balotra (who had started off winning the competition for the first extension at Kattenbroek), and Adriaan Geuze of the well-known Dutch architects and planners West 8.

Financing the infrastructure On the basis of the business plan for development, the company borrowed €250 million from the Dutch municipal bank at an interest rate of 5% and repayable over 15 years. This was underpinned by guarantees of €2 million each from the private partners. However the local authority is taking the ultimate risk, with the benefits coming from control over the housing mix, and a substantial number of houses they can use to meet local needs. The national government was persuaded to pay for decontamination of part of the site, and a connection off one of the motorways that runs past the site.

Building in stages The whole site has been developed in phases, working from the outside in, and with a multiplicity of builders



Map showing Amersfoort's three extensions; Vathorst, Nieuwland and Kattenbroek



Facilities in Vathorst (source *Een Nieuw Stadsdeel In Amersfoort Vathorst*, Ontwikkelingsbedrijf, 2005)

working at any one time. Thus some 200 units were available for purchase when we visited. The construction and occupation rate has been some three times the British rate for an equivalent project. Serviced sites are sold to the development partners in accordance with planning briefs, and at a price which reflects 30% of the sales value. 30% of the land was transferred back to the local authority, who then went into partnerships with housing associations, which provided some of the incentive. It is not possible to tell the tenure by looking at a building, though generally those with the best views tend to be private.

Maintaining the public realm The development company is responsible for maintenance of the public realm until the sites are handed over to the local authority. A deal has been done with a private contractor to take on maintenance at a cost of €160 per home per year, which seemed very reasonable. We saw very few signs of litter being dropped or vandalism, which should help keep costs down.

Building a community Community development has been promoted through a number of measures. Temporary buildings were used to provide some shopping



Top: Vario Mundi Arts Foundation's studio

Above: Scheme model in the Information Centre

Right: Schools provide community hubs



Vathorst canal side housing

facilities early on. The primary schools play an important function. However the greatest innovation has been setting up a trust, Vario Mundi, chaired by the same Alderman who has promoted the new community, and which employs artists to work with local people on ventures. A major studio complex has been built as part of one of the local centres. An example of collaboration is how a group of residents worked together to build a wooden boat that they can use once all the canals are connected together.

8. TRANSFERRING THE LESSONS

TEN delegates were impressed by much of what they saw and heard. The Netherlands provides the best and most replicable models for what we should be doing in London. There were three main conclusions.

1. Training and capacity building Interest was expressed afterwards in providing staff with the training to take a more proactive and holistic approach. For it is the Dutch attitude of mind where we have most to learn. The Netherlands, through its physical proximity and lack of language barriers, could provide the UK, and London in particular, with a means of addressing climate change issues without having to learn through mistakes. It is significant that a number of Conservative Party publications, such as Control Shift, seem interested in learning from Europe. But nothing will change unless the lessons are codified, and a sustained effort is made to apply and learn from them. With TEN Group support it may be possible to set up a collaborative management project, possibly assisted by European, HCA or IDeA funding, aimed at speeding up the development process.

2. Public private partnerships The funding method for Vathorst seems much more effective and straightforward than the approaches used in London for the Thames Gateway, for example. Approaches such as Joint Venture Companies with the private sector or through regeneration agencies owned by local authorities could offer a way out of the shortage of specialist skills. It might be possible for several members to collaborate, for example in sending staff on the City Management training programme in Rotterdam, or testing out the lessons from Vathorst in new 'eco suburbs'.

3. Infrastructure funding The great objection to house-building is the strains new houses would put on over-loaded infrastructure. We need to learn from the system of agreements used to fund infrastructure in the Netherlands, including the idea of a municipal bank. While the City of London has the resources, it is not very good at taking a long-term approach. By drawing on Dutch experience, and possibly involving Dutch contractors and investors as joint venture partners, it may be possible to overcome some of the obstacles and avoid over-dependence on unpredictable and inadequate national government funding.

