GREEN PAPER

Flanders in 2050: Human scale in a metropolis?

SPATIAL POLICY PLAN
“The network of many smaller urban regions can compete with other innovative regions of global stature.”
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SPATIAL POLICY PLAN
Have you ever thought of Flanders in the same terms as New York, London or Paris – all prestigious metropolises with which everyone is familiar? Probably not, but the comparison does hold.

Flanders and Brussels constitute a network of many smaller urban regions that together can compete with other innovative regions of global stature. Just to be perfectly clear: Flanders certainly must not develop into a single conurbation. Our often small historical towns and cities, situated so close to each other, are an asset. As a result our region offers outstanding quality of life on a human scale. Education, care and culture are always close at hand. Accessible open space is within everyone’s reach. We must make efficient use of the space.
flanders metropolis 2050

available to us. With this in mind, meticulous use of space is key. In Flanders Metropolis we create a world-class, versatile living space, in which people can live and work, relax and meet. That makes Flanders even more attractive for inhabitants, tourists and talented people or investors from abroad.

Our metropolis must be adaptable, so that we can take account of the consequences of climate change and the energy issue. A network of green corridors and water-courses guarantees biodiversity and water catchment. Large open spaces are reserved for food production, raw materials, fauna and flora. In urban natural areas and parks we find relaxation, water and oxygen.

Let us work together on a well-balanced Flanders Metropolis, where progress goes hand in hand with respect for our rich past and new developments improve quality of life. The purpose of this green paper is to serve as inspiration and provoke discussion. I invite you all to get involved in this discussion. You can find out how in this green paper. I fervently hope that you seize the opportunity. Because this is the space that we share, that is dear to us and that we must all use prudently and creatively for the benefit of generations to come.

Philippe Muyters
Flemish Minister for Spatial Planning
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A background document (in Dutch only) is also available alongside this green paper, containing information that has been used as input for this green paper.
1. Flanders today
2. Spatial vision 2050
3. Strategic themes
4. Working together to achieve results
5. What happens next?

Key issues

References

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Flanders today

Its unique location ensures that Flanders is among the world’s foremost regions. At the same time, Flanders is characterised by intensive soil sealing and fragmentation. Spatial policy in Flanders is facing a number of societal challenges. The population is expected to grow from 6 to 7 million, so the pressure on the space will not be reduced. How can we provide a high-quality open space, good mobility and space for renewable energy production? How can we prevent floods, protect food production and offer investors and businesses the space that’s needed to keep our region competitive? In this chapter we set out the challenges.
Flanders is part of a network to which such global cities as London and Paris belong. It is the centre of an area that is home to 80 million people, where groundbreaking technical and cultural innovations are conceived and developed.

Our region has a different structure from the surrounding areas. There are many urban cores with fragments of open space in between. It is difficult to make a clear distinction between towns and countryside at this scale.

The spatial structure of Flanders is regularly described as a nebular urbanity. Flanders has the assets of a metropolis, without having lost its human character. Thanks to its relatively small towns, Flanders is a vibrant, varied region where open space is never far away.

These spatial assets carry within themselves a major challenge: Due to that nebulous structure, we occupy a lot of space at a relatively low density. Around a quarter of the total area of Flanders is taken up by buildings or paved surfaces and gardens. This is more than in surrounding regions. And according to forecasts, if no action is taken this area could expand to a third or even half of the available space by 2050. As a result, the open space will come under ever greater pressure. That represents a unique challenge for Flanders. This strain on the available space must be addressed prudently.
Societal challenges

This chapter surveys the societal challenges we are facing, such as population growth and climate change. Spatial policy must provide solutions to absorb the spatial impact of these challenges. In recent years, the discussion on spatial policy has been mainly focused on quantitative goals, on the basis of spatial accounting, among other things. The 2011 citizen survey teaches us that today’s citizens do not always experience sufficient quality in their living environment. They place great importance on such things as high-grade architecture and landscapes of high value; they are also aware that special quality enhances the utility, perception and future value of a space. The search for spatial solutions to societal challenges must not be at the expense of quality.

On the contrary, we need to take advantage of the societal challenges to drive a more quality-oriented spatial policy. In a densely built-up region like Flanders spatial planning must do more than simply offer space.
Flanders without borders

The economic world order is rearranging itself at a fast pace due to growth in emerging countries. Relations between global cities are being strengthened by the use of new technologies. International trade between the EU and the rest of the world increased from 14.1% to 20.6% of GDP between 1997 and 2007. Territorial cohesion within the EU has been significantly enhanced by the removal of trade barriers and the expansion of the European transport network. To a considerable degree, Flemish prosperity is the consequence of exports to our neighbours.

In order to be competitive in this context Flanders must remain attractive for employers, employees and visitors. International accessibility, both physical and digital, is key. It raises Flanders to the level of other privileged regions. Social, ecological and cultural progress contributes to the international appeal. Flanders must decide which special assets it will deploy to this end.

From 6 to 7 million

The population will grow from 6 to 7 million and its composition will also change. Migration, ageing, greening and smaller households generate different needs with regard to housing, care and service provision. The large cities experience the greatest influx. In highly urbanised environments, social-spatial polarisation and suburbanisation threaten to hamper harmonious development. This demands a high-quality differentiated stock of affordable, attractive, accessible housing, close to sufficient essential services of general interest, also for more vulnerable citizens. Social segregation and an additional strain on the environment and natural resources must be avoided.

"In order to be competitive Flanders must remain attractive for employers, employees and visitors."
Working with climate

The climate is changing. Of that there is no doubt. The European Union has shown its commitment to the global target of limiting the rise in temperature by 2100 to less than 2°C by implementing measures to reduce emissions of greenhouse gases and fine particles, cut energy consumption and increase the use of renewable energy. Emissions will fall on a structural basis by organizing the space in such a way that the need for energy is reduced. The more the world manages to do this – and that includes us – the more limited the consequences of climate change will be.

Changing patterns of precipitation, flooding, water shortage, rises in sea level, more storms and droughts are all expected in the coming decades. Open space is necessary for water catchment during heavy rainfall and for water storage for use during periods of shortage and drought. Both are expected in Flanders as a result of climate change. Open space in urban areas can keep temperatures down. Flanders must make the necessary spatial adjustments in a timely way.
More careful consumption of raw materials and energy

The global population is consuming more and more raw materials and energy. Flemings consume more than they produce. Renewable resources have a part to play in responding to this challenge. With that in mind, the transition to sustainable consumption is high on the European Union agenda. But in Belgium the share of renewable energy in total primary energy consumption was 3.3% in 2009. This is well below the EU average of 10.5% and the EU target of 13% by 2020. Progress towards a society that consumes fewer raw materials is a key point of departure for spatial development in Flanders.

The production of renewable energy places specific demands on space. The various forms demand a different or more extensive occupation of the space than traditional energy production. We have to identify the most efficient way to use our space for the production of a range of renewable energies. Prudent energy consumption contributes to a low-carbon society. Our built environment must consume much less energy, which demands a change in how we build. Buildings and activities can be arranged in a more energy efficient way in the space.

“Open space is necessary for water catchment during heavy rainfall.”
Staying on the move

Transport is essential in our society. Flanders has one of the densest road networks in Europe, at 52m per ha. Even so, road users spent a total of around four million hours in traffic jams in 2009. We have to organise the space in such a way that the need for journeys is reduced.

Today, transport systems are ill adapted to the spatial organisation and vice versa. Intensive activities are still often developed in places for which multimodal access is inadequate. At the same time, transport interchanges with high potential are underused. This demands more efficient multimodal use of infrastructure in a specially adapted network.

The sharing of means of transport, such as car-sharing, can enhance the liveability of urban centres and create a situation in which the car has a less dominant role. The capacity of the infrastructure network can only be increased significantly by using existing infrastructure for other forms of transport, by means of technological innovation, for instance.

Continuing to innovate

If Flanders wishes to advance, it must give opportunities to the innovative economy. The innovation-driven economy, such as high-tech industry and services and specialised farming, integrates differently into the space and has a different relationship to employment and the market than conventional economic activity. Urban environments are incubators of the creative economy. In spatial terms this means choosing locations with good access, a high-quality environment, and services of general and economic interest, other businesses and resource institutions in the vicinity. Integration with other activities is a priority for enterprise that is more focused on knowledge and service provision. Additional logistical and production activities place greater strain on the current infrastructure network to and from our ports.
Biodiversity and food diversity

Biodiversity on our planet is shrinking. In Flanders it has been shown that the existing network of nature and woodlands is not up to the task of halting the loss of plant and animals species. More attention is required for the preservation and expansion of sufficient interconnected open spaces that extend into our towns and cities. Ecological corridors between green areas constitute a necessary precondition of biodiversity. These corridors can differ immensely from location to location, depending on the different types of fauna and flora.

There is a rising demand for food worldwide. Increasingly, there is a global food market. Demographic change, climate change and geopolitical tensions mean that global food insecurity will probably increase. Flanders has a number of large farming areas at its disposal. In spite of climate change, the region continues to be very attractive for food production due to fertile soils and good precipitation. Furthermore, Flanders is specialised in competitive niches. However, farming, recreation, nature and urbanisation are in competition for the available space. In this densely populated region people yearn for green and water nearby, where they can walk, cycle and relax. In Flanders, food production can also be organised to better fit the small-scale, fragmented open space that characterises our urban habitat. There is a delicate balance in how the open space is used for minimum critical food production, export-oriented farming niches, co-use of water management, nature, energy, landscape management and as breathing space for the urban Fleming.

More attention is required for the preservation and expansion of sufficient interconnected open spaces that extend into our towns and cities.
The societal challenges we face today provide clear proof that spatial policy needs a new project. Building on the Spatial Structure Plan for Flanders, we formulate new long-term goals. In that way we outline the direction in which spatial policy is set to develop. We then present a draft vision for the Flanders of 2050. This vision is not at all well defined at the present time. That is inevitable: 2050 is still a very long way off. And in a permanently evolving society we have to factor in a long list of uncertainties. We wish to encourage meticulous use of space and actively cultivate quality.
Setting ambitious targets

Our space is groaning under the strain of our large population, a heavy downpour causes floods, clogged up roads are routine and biodiversity is in retreat. Yet, despite this, the population is growing, traffic is increasing and heavier rainfall can be expected in the future.

The citizen survey ahead of this green paper shows that only a small minority of respondents feels that today’s Flanders presents an attractive picture of the future. Foreign examples of green and sustainable living environments characterised by high spatial quality, such as the Vauban neighbourhood in Freiburg, do fire the imagination. We have to set much more ambitious targets in our spatial policy to create this type of living environment.

Spatial structures change slowly. Shaping the space is a long process. And the choices made in the past continue to determine the future. Without a long-term vision and a concern for continuity we will fail. Flanders first started to plan on the basis of a long-term vision with the Spatial Structure Plan for Flanders (SSP). This created a more professional, targeted spatial policy. The aim is for the Spatial Policy Plan to build on the robust lines of the SSP and set even more ambitious targets.
Building on the robust lines of the SSP

The Spatial Structure Plan for Flanders (SSP) has shaped spatial policy in Flanders over the past fifteen years. Thanks among other things to the efforts of many partners, spatial policy has produced tangible results: renewal and renovation of entire districts and neighbourhoods, restoration of watercourses in the urban area and in the landscape, transformation of station neighbourhoods, increasing attention for bike and pedestrian paths, the setting up of science parks, the planning of woodlands and nature areas and so on. These are all tangible results we can be proud of. However, there is still work to be done. We have still to bring the suburbanisation and fragmentation of the open space under adequate control. And the SSP does not provide a conclusive response to new challenges, such as climate change or the energy issue.

The vision we are developing for the Spatial Policy Plan builds on the robust lines of the SSP and introduces a number of innovative aspects that are expected to give new momentum to spatial policy. We continue to work for sustainable spatial development. This means meeting the needs of the present generation without compromising the possibilities of future generations. It is a development that respects the limits of growth and contributes to the liveability of society. The aim of sustainable spatial development is to find the right balance between economic, sociocultural and ecological aspects with respect for the capacity of the space.

The future spatial policy must build on the robust lines of the SSP to bring sustainable spatial development within reach. The existing spatial structure continues to be the basis on which to graft new spatial developments. We wish to continually strengthen our city, town and village centres by clustering development there. We will strengthen the economic power of Flanders by grafting economic activities on to existing economic concentrations. The spatial choices we make must help us control mobility. We also wish to protect the open space and combat scattered development. We will respect the basic goals, spatial principles and many other aspects of the SSP, while bringing them up to date.
Long-term goals

We formulate two long-term goals of ambitious spatial policy: we wish to create spatial conditions for societal progress while at the same time setting in motion a smart transformation of space. We consider the long-term goals to be firm. However, it must be possible to work towards them in a flexible and dynamic way, depending on societal developments, priorities, international commitments and obligations. In doing so, our aim is to respond efficiently to a fast-changing reality without losing sight of the long-term goal.

Spatial conditions for balanced societal progress

The purpose of spatial policy is to create the right spatial conditions for societal projects. This is done from a very broad perspective based on shared interests. As such, it contributes to the development of pleasant towns, cities and villages, the proper functioning of economic activities, the preservation of open space and good mobility. Spatial policy also has a direct impact on the environment and biodiversity. We encounter each other in the space. Spatial policy brings together the many spatial claims and interventions. The whole is greater than the sum of its parts. We must always approach each individual spatial claim from an integrated perspective. We must come up with solutions that go beyond the borders of policy areas and policy levels. It is essential to involve partners and citizens. That is the only way we will be able to integrate individual claims in a shared interest.
Smart transformation of space

Flanders wishes to gradually evolve into a region in which the total built-up area no longer increases. To make this transformation possible, we want to use the existing built environment more efficiently and intelligently for housing, work, shopping and recreation. New greenfield sites need to be developed that can be more easily adapted to the various spatial functions and removed if no longer well used. In the future, de-shredding of open space must outpace fragmentation. That brings Flanders into line with the Roadmap to a Resource Efficient Europe.

“In the future, de-shredding of open space must outpace fragmentation.”
Meticulous use of space

More intensive use of space is often more beneficial from an economic perspective too.

If we wish to avoid Flanders becoming one large built-up area, we will have to do more with the same space. Creative forms of land use can provide the answer: more intensive building, sometimes higher and underground, integration of functions, reuse and reversible spatial use.

Today every square metre of space is used or claimed. That does not mean this use is efficiently or meticulously organised. To allow activities to function properly and avoid disruption we need an intelligent spatial arrangement. We also place high value on the qualitative organisation of a location, in which a positive experience and future-proofing are prioritised. Meticulous use of space is the responsibility of each and every citizen.
Towards intelligent use of space in three steps

The space is scarce and finite. Yet despite this, we believe that Flanders has enough space to create the spatial conditions for societal progress. This presupposes a different, more meticulous use of the space. Continuing to consume a finite resource like open space is no longer feasible. We wish to evolve towards a spatial development in which the total built-up area no longer increases. The question that comes to mind is what to do with currently undeveloped areas that are slated for development. By applying Lansink’s waste management ladder to space, we arrive at a three-step approach to intelligent use of space: reduce, reuse, recycle.

1 First, additional activities must find a place within already built-up territories. A more compact solution is usually possible on the basis of greater intensity of building, partially underground or higher into the sky. This is often more beneficial from an economic perspective, too. In many cases, multiple use of space is possible by bringing activities close together or directly integrating them. A youth club can use a playground after school, for instance. We target creative solutions in which the spatial measures to reduce disruption are used positively, such as noise barriers along the motorway. Technological progress can create new possibilities for mixed land-use.

2 Second, we have to maximise reuse of well-situated space that has been built on in the past but has fallen into disuse. There are still a number of practical difficulties with regard to transforming existing buildings and soil remediation. Pursuit of a consistent policy of reuse will make brownfield development more competitive than greenfield development. Locations that are not well situated for highly dynamic activities are best used for the restoration of open space.

3 Third, we must work on reversible use of space, especially where greenfield sites are still being developed. That means that use of space will be considered as recyclable: it will be easy to revert space to its original condition or it will be designed in such a way that it will be easy to change its function. This approach is only efficient if we support the status quo between built-up and open space by means of land policies.
Actively cultivating spatial quality

People expect space to be attractive, functional and future-proof. We feel our surroundings are pleasant when a certain quality is present. We wish to build on existing quality. We closely monitor the combination of four aspects of quality.

1. CHOICE OF LOCATION

First of all, finding the most sensible location is a key task for spatial planning. We wish to place functions where they are accessible and do not cause any negative environmental impact or disruption. Energy efficiency is another key consideration in intelligent location policy.

2. UTILITY VALUE

Second, utility value is important. We wish to introduce cohesion and structure into spatial development, so that the various human activities are able to function properly.
EXPERIENCE VALUE

Third, spatial quality revolves around experience value. As well as the aspects of attractiveness and significance, there is also a concern for a healthy living environment, social solidarity and safety. Living environments and landscapes take their significance from being recognisable and ‘readable’. Based on landscape design, among other things, we will work on conserving and developing existing and new landscapes.

FUTURE VALUE

Lastly, future value is about the space’s capacity for absorbing change. There is a field of tension here between the flexibility and stability of a space or between what can change and what must be conserved. That means new developments must have the opportunity to build on existing qualities.
Flanders metropolis in 2050

- Metropolitan appeal
- Human scale
- Resilient space
We have chosen the Flanders Metropolis as a spatial metaphor for Flanders in 2050. The Flanders Metropolis is an innovative region of global stature where people feel at home and can meet each other. It is a resilient space with the capacity for making societal development possible in spite of global capriciousness in terms of climate and energy.

The Flanders Metropolis gives expression to a desired spatial development built on three main objectives: We wish (1) to strengthen the metropolitan appeal of Flanders, (2) retain the human scale in the Flemish space and (3) increase the spatial resilience of Flanders.

We see it as a challenge for spatial policy to combine these three main objectives in a balanced way. We want built and unbuilt spaces and corridors to develop based on the role they can assume in the Flanders Metropolis. For the built space we speak in terms of a polycentric development model in which various cores each assume their own role and reinforce each other through good interconnections. Spaces with metropolitan appeal and small-scale elements complement each other, interspersed by nearby open space. For the unbuilt space we speak in terms of robust open space in which large and smaller open spaces are well connected by means of green-blue networks.

Metropolitan appeal, human scale and resilience form three layers, as it were, which we pursue at the same time as we proceed towards 2050.
Metropolitan appeal

We wish to enhance metropolitan appeal to protect our prosperity in the face of intensifying global competition between urban regions. To that end, Flanders must become more attractive for skilled professionals, visitors and foreign investors. At the present time, it are primarily the larger global cities that are advancing.

The Flanders Metropolis considers Flanders to be a polycentric network of functional urban regions that together generate sufficient urban power to rise above the middle bracket of the small town. The polycentric metropolis has a balanced spatial structure. We wish to align with the EU’s territorial cohesion policy, which guards against the overconcentration of economic policy around Brussels in favour of other urban regions. To that end, we work intensively across municipal and regional borders.

The Flanders Metropolis also has close ties with other metropolises in Europe and the world, and is part of international flows of knowledge and people. We feel that Brussels, which is centrally located in the economic and demographic heart of Europe, close to London, Paris, the Randstad and the Ruhr, has major potential for shaping the desired metropolitan appeal.

The relations with metropolises outside of Flanders will therefore be strengthened between now and 2050. The seaports, the HST stations and Brussels National Airport at Zaventem are still major windows on the world.

The Flanders Metropolis adds to its general metropolitan appeal in a series of world-class residential and work environments. These are mixed urban environments with outstanding international connections and good accessibility within Flanders. They are environments that are the showpiece of the Flanders metropolis due to their high-quality architecture and public space. As a result of the very high density and integration of functions, these can justifiably be called international meeting places and incubators for innovation and creativity. The same metropolitan appeal is ascribed to specific urban parks. They are attractively designed, entice a large number of visitors due to their international pull and are pleasant locations to catch your breath in the bustle of urban life.
Its historically rooted small-scale feel distinguishes Flanders from other urban regions.
We wish to protect the human scale of the Flemish space to ensure Flanders remains an attractive place to live for its inhabitants. Flanders is home to a large number of small historical cities, towns and villages within a short distance of each other. The Flemish cities, towns and villages are relatively small from a global but also from a European perspective. Its historically rooted small-scale feel distinguishes Flanders from other urban regions. We view this small-scale feel as a competitive advantage and an asset we wish to exploit to guarantee high quality of life going forward. With that in mind, we opt for a spatial organisation based on a definite small scale. The Flanders Metropolis cannot be allowed to grow into a single continuous conurbation. Flanders is not New York! Even as a metropolis, in 2050 Flanders will offer its inhabitants a great variety of high-quality residential environments. It is one of the most attractive living environments in Europe. The residential environments provide quality of life because of the human scale and the proximity to basic amenities. The numerous historical town and village centres contribute to the identity and the attractiveness of our living environment. The public space in the residential environments is of high quality.

Flanders is composed of various urban regions in which the housing market, the labour market and a range of high-quality services of general and economic interest are organised. We opt for a development model in which various centres each assume their own role and reinforce each other through good interconnections. The small-scale idea will help avoid large-scale problems in the future and help support affordable housing and social cohesion, certainly in the light of the expected population growth. We advocate a Flanders in which an accessible open space is within everyone’s reach.
We wish to strengthen the spatial resilience in order to reduce vulnerability to the consequences of climate change and energy transition. Due to the highly scattered building model, the downstream location in the system of river valleys and the coastal location, Flanders is very susceptible to heavy rainfall, escalating energy prices and a rise in sea level, among other things. The economic and societal costs of this type of event can be very high. As a consequence, in 2050 the Flanders Metropolis will have a robust open space supported by a network of green corridors and watercourses to capture excess rainwater and improve biodiversity. Scattered development will be halted for good and actively driven back. Large open spaces are not only used for food production, there is also room for a large diversity of fauna and flora. In the more densely populated areas the open space will be where people want to recreate and enjoy nature and park-like environments. The green-blue network spans both open and urban environments. Together with the robust open space, it fulfils eco-system services, such as water and air purification and the production of food, natural resources and raw materials.

Flanders has many different landscapes that can be a source of value for society. We wish to improve the existing landscape values of open space, urban and port landscapes. As a consequence, the landscape must not only become more attractive, it must also be put to better use for societal services such as energy production or climate measures.

“In the more densely populated areas the open space will be where people want to recreate and enjoy nature and park-like environments.”
We further crystallise the vision 2050 in 13 strategic themes. These strategic themes are strongly interconnected and all of them play a role in achieving the three main objectives in the vision 2050 set out in part 2. Together they form the framework for policy for the coming decades. Their purpose is to direct the policy at Flemish level and at lower level. For the sake of convenience, they are structured below in accordance with the three lines of the vision 2050. However, we would reiterate the strong cohesion between all the themes, bearing in mind that in part 2 we took on the challenge of combining the three main objectives of the vision 2050 in a balanced way.
1 Growing with less space
2 Connecting Flanders
3 Innovative clusters
4 Excellent metropolitan environments in attractive urban regions
5 Recognisability and involvement
6 Proximity and accessibility as guiding principle
7 Polycentric urban regions
8 Making choices in suburban areas
9 Vital countryside
10 Shockproof territories
11 Climate change sponge
12 Guaranteeing green-blue arteries
13 Room for energy transition
Metropolitan appeal as strong ambition

As an innovative region of global stature the Flanders Metropolis expresses a firm economic ambition. We strongly advocate a Flanders that plays a significant role in Europe and the world. The space of Flanders has sufficient potential to achieve this ambition. We wish to make Flanders more attractive in order to protect our future prosperity. We interpret this ambition in spatial terms by strengthening the metropolitan appeal of Flanders.

We do have to make conscious spatial choices. We opt for a spatial policy that takes an intelligent approach to globalisation rather than allowing globalisation to shape the space. Growth must be well-thought-out. The metropolitan appeal we have in mind must be a source of added value for everyone in Flanders. The economy changes fast but the space changes slowly. The aim of spatial policy is to provide a robust spatial environment in which various economic activities of international importance are able to flourish.
Growing with less space

Spatially responsible economic growth will do more with less space. We are looking for ways to achieve our economic ambitions with respect for the open space and within the existing built environment. Spatial investments in the economy must yield more in terms of added value and employment. We opt for long-term international enterprise with a good likelihood of success and continuity. We invest strongly in a recycling economy in which we take spatial account of the need to control waste flows, close material loops and use resources efficiently. Spatially responsible economic growth entails greater internalisation of the societal costs of investment projects. We are convinced that the societal costs (environmental offsets, greater accessibility) cannot be passed on exclusively to the authorities and so to taxpayers. Responsible growth also entails expressly taking the health and wellbeing of the population into account in spatial development.
The passenger traffic gateways constitute critical infrastructure if Flanders wishes to be a region of global stature.

Connecting Flanders

Flanders currently benefits from its central location with regard to major European economic and population concentrations. By 2050 the Flanders Metropolis will be seamlessly connected to the economically important parts of Europe and the world. The Flanders Metropolis has optimal infrastructure that provides convenient access to the international labour market, sales markets and foreign decision centres. In the future we want to prioritise the strengthening of relations with our neighbours and such growth regions as Hamburg-Copenhagen-Malmö, Stuttgart, Singapore and São Paulo. The passenger traffic gateways constitute critical infrastructure if Flanders wishes to be a region of global stature. To open the window on the world a choice must be made between increasing capacity at Brussels National Airport in Zaventem or investing in improved connections to the major airport hubs in Frankfurt, London, Amsterdam and Paris. We also want the HST stations in and close to Flanders to provide high-speed connections to metropolises and international airports outside of Flanders. Furthermore, we will ensure that areas with a strong metropolitan appeal maintain convenient services to the HST stations and Brussels National Airport in Zaventem. The areas around certain stations on the rail line to HST stations and Brussels National Airport in Zaventem offer opportunities for the development of metropolitan environments and innovative clusters. We will ensure that the Flanders Metropolis forms an economic node in the international network. A specific spatial development logic will be proposed for the extension of the logistical network. Together with their Dutch counterparts, the ports of Zeebrugge, Ghent and Antwerp constitute a major international gateway for goods, which we will develop further with a limited number of junctions and interchanges in the hinterland. There are good multimodal connections between ports and hinterland junctions and interchanges (water, rail, road and pipelines), which together ensure the most efficient transport system possible. This network of logistical gateways and hinterland junctions and interchanges is the foundation on which logistics-dependent production can be developed. Based on the European TEN network, we wish to optimise, fortify and where necessary restructure the existing aggregate of transport networks. We will involve the neighbouring regions in this. The junctions and interchanges in the transport networks will be developed to facilitate fast convenient connections.
Innovative clusters

We wish to give room to innovative service-sector activities and manufacturing by consolidating them in innovative clusters. The advantage of clustering is that it can generate economies of scale. Businesses and knowledge institutions can share economic facilities and infrastructure but will also be better placed to establish direct relations that stimulate innovative enterprise. The economy typically changes at a faster pace than space. With that in mind, we wish to invest in robust work environments in which innovative clusters are able to flourish. Over time, robust work environments provide opportunities to various types of business, rather than responding to the demands of a specific business at a specific time. We provide them with a location close to a wide range of facilities and a large pool of potential employees. We do this by using the network of urban regions as a structure for the establishment of innovative service provision and clean manufacturing. We also want to strengthen the economic power of this network by using the projected population growth to increase potential in terms of workforce and facilities.

We want to look for space for innovative clusters by adopting the principle of ‘mixed use where possible, separation where needed’. Therefore, we will first work to create mixed urban environments. We also need to have the courage to designate sites of some size in the direct vicinity of existing knowledge centres, such as universities, certain large hospitals or highly specialised businesses. A condition of this is that these knowledge centres drive the development of new innovative enterprise.
Excellent metropolitan environments in attractive urban regions

The urban regions are and will remain the drivers of economic development in Flanders. With that in mind, the towns and cities in the Flanders Metropolis must together be able to attract skilled professionals, visitors and foreign investors within the global competition among metropolitan regions. Spatial development and urban promotion go hand in hand.

The urban environments in the Flanders Metropolis therefore offer a high level of basic quality. The cultural-historical heritage and the presence of rivers and brooks infuse our towns and cities with a strong identity that we want to capitalise on. Collective transport within and between the urban regions provides cohesion and creates the necessary urban power. We also want to enhance the attractiveness and identity of our towns and cities with world-class residential and work environments. These are mixed urban environments with outstanding international connections and good accessibility within Flanders. They are environments that form the showpiece of the Flanders Metropolis due to their high-quality architecture and organisation of the public space. As a result of the very high density and integration of functions these can justifiably be called international meeting places and incubators for innovation and creativity. They are special places where the inhabitants of Flanders can meet the world.

The attractiveness of our urban regions will have to be examined from a cross-border perspective to some degree as some of the cities that help boost the Flemish economy are located off territory, such as the Brussels Capital Region. Cross-border relationships are a key factor here.

“Very high density and integration of functions mean these environments can justifiably be called international meeting places and incubators for innovation and creativity.”
1 Growing with less space
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In 2050 Flanders will be composed of an exciting diversity of living environments. This is a key source of added value for inhabitants and users. We develop our space on a human scale. We opt for tailor-made development, with quality of life, health and identity as core values. That creates a wide and diverse array of qualitative environments with room for housing, work and relaxation, where citizens feel at home.

To limit the demand for mobility, we aim for a balanced proximity between housing, work and services of general interest. In 2050 urban regions will attract a wide range of inhabitants and users. In 2050 we will look back on intelligent choices for suburban zones. In 2050 Flanders will still have its countryside with a successful combination of different societal uses.
Recognisability and involvement

Flanders offers an abundance of places with a clear individual identity. That does not mean that they are separate from each other. In fact, they form a cohesive, fascinating whole. The various environments manifest as urban regions, the suburban area and rural areas.

In 2050 we want to capitalise on diversity as an asset. Everyone should feel at home in his or her own living environment. Cherishing the positive identity of a healthy and spatially qualitative environment can strengthen the feeling of solidarity between inhabitants and produce a greater sense of safety and support. It leads to inhabitants investing more in their environment and the home they live in.

Society creates and uses the space. To guarantee a pleasurable and positive use and perception, we prevent social exclusion and isolation by keeping our space accessible. To do so we seek a good balance between private space, to which the individual can withdraw, and the various gradations of public space, in which people can come into contact with each other.

When designing our space we give due consideration to safety and health, by limiting sources of excess inconvenience (such as emissions, noise). This can be done by combining less attractive functions and where necessary separating them from housing.

On the other hand, complementary functions do have to be clustered together to achieve a more optimal use of space. By developing broad-based support we endeavor to weaken the NIMBY phenomenon. The authorities take advantage of the attachment of citizens to their environment by involving them in new spatial development and giving them the opportunity to develop initiatives of their own. The interests of society have priority and demand intelligent choices that can sometimes trump the interests of a specific location.

Proximity makes daily interpersonal relations possible.
Proximity and accessibility as guiding principle

Among other things, quality of life is determined by proximity, accessibility and availability of work and such services as education and care. In 2050 every citizen will have satisfied access to basic services of general interest in his or her residential environment. This proximity will make daily interpersonal relations possible and allow people to maximise their participation in society. We distribute basic services of general interest hierarchically and share out large-scale facilities in mixed urban environments in Flanders. By clustering human activities in a balanced way in our space we ensure that excessive societal costs of infrastructure, energy, distribution and all manner of community services can be avoided. Proximity helps drive down the demand for mobility. By keeping the distances between housing, work and amenities short we create more opportunities for travelling on foot or by bike. For journeys farther afield there is a guaranteed high-quality network of collective transport, supported by an array of other means of transport. This demands an intelligent location policy oriented to integrating and condensing work and amenities close to the residential environment.

Accessibility is obviously also determined by the quality and capacity of links and connections. At city, town and village scale we feel that an intricate bike and pedestrian network, complemented with collective transport, is crucial. In 2050 the distinction between private and public transport will be less clear cut. Other forms of shared transport will lead to a lower demand for parking capacity in the urban regions. At international scale, the quality of connections (such as the HST lines) will determine the time it takes to travel between two regions.
Polycentric urban regions

In 2050 the town and city will still be the best place to absorb societal changes. The town and city has become more than a town centre or a regional hub; it has grown into an urban region with multiple cores, each with its own characteristics. The historical town centre is easy to reach from the other cores, making the urban region attractive for a wide array of inhabitants and users. Urban and economic development occurs in multiple cores that together form the urban region. As a result, the city is given back its breathing space and we are able to conserve the relatively small-scale character of our historical towns.

In some neighbourhoods action will be needed to renew the housing stock. That goes for the 19th century belt in the urban regions and the housing areas built in the 1960s and 1970s. We will make our built heritage more energy-efficient, strengthen the social cohesion and adapt the housing stock to absorb the expected growth in population.

We will deal with societal changes by working more intensively to densify those places where good access can be guaranteed at urban region level. With that in mind, we will provide fully-fledged collective transport connections and high-quality links for soft road users to such places. We will keep the cores in the urban region compact with a satisfactory level of basic amenities. This means that a large proportion of journeys can be completed within this core.

Green-blue arteries through the built space will ensure a good supply of oxygen.

“We keep the cores in the urban regions compact with a satisfactory level of basic services.”
Making choices in suburban areas

In the transition between the urban and rural environment we now have suburban zones characterised by a fragmented landscape and lots of mono-functional residential environments with a rather low building density. Many Flemings find a good-quality residential environment a short commute from their work. Strip developments and other peripheral developments are also found there. These areas are undergoing change. They are turning from rural into urban regions.

There is no clear strategy for these environments at the present time and we therefore view them as an important policy assignment. Selectively densifying some parts of our suburban areas, because they maintain very good relations with nearby urban regions, for instance. The present situation would appear to be the best option for other parts, with monitoring to ensure they do not become more urbanised. In exceptional cases, such as parts located on flood plains, actively curbing development may be advisable, by making them less accessible, for instance. We wish to avoid this type for sporadic development in the future because it claims a large amount of space, the negative impact on the open space, mobility, living environment, energy consumption and the affordability of utilities.

We have to ask ourselves which places we can develop in the suburban areas without encumbering the open space further. In these areas we have to ensure networks of green-blue arteries, revalue landscape fragments and protect open space where it is under pressure. We will avoid suburban areas competing with the harmonic development of the nearby urban region.
Vital countryside

We want the countryside to be vital in 2050. There are still areas that are relatively intact where open space dominates the buildings. Further fragmentation is prevented, ensuring the countryside keeps its identity and power to accommodate a multitude of functions. A number of essential functions have priority in the open space: nature, farming, biodiversity and water. We combine other activities, such as reclamation, tourism, energy production, carbon storage, forestry and recreation in such a way as to ensure that essential functions are not threatened.

Food production in the countryside contributes to economic liveability by way of innovation, specialisation, diversification and widening. The economic function of farming demands well organised farming areas. In the countryside we take advantage of the quality of the landscape with due regard for nature development and heritage value. We accordingly take a stricter line with functions that do not belong in the countryside. We choose village centres as carriers for the organisation of other human activities. They offer development opportunities for the local population. Strong village centres are ideal locations for local forms of organised transport, enterprise and basic amenities. In many cases, working to enhance the identity also predisposes the strengthening of social cohesion and the involvement of the rural inhabitant in the region. We opt for societally responsible solutions in regions that are experiencing a fall in population.
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From unruly to resilient space

The space in Flanders is unruly. Buildings are highly scattered and the open space is fragmented. As a result it is not always easy to cushion the impacts of climate change, effectuate the switch to renewable energy, prepare for economic ups and downs or protect biodiversity and a healthy living environment. We are looking for better spatial conditions to provide a more powerful response to the global issues we face.

With that in mind, by 2050 we wish to significantly improve the resilience of the space. By resilience we mean that the space is able to cope with changing circumstances. This demands stronger intervention in the existing and planned spatial structure and conscious incorporation of natural and technological loops. To strengthen the resilience of the space, we will make new societal arrangements for the management of space for shared interests, cut right through designated uses, forms of possession or public domains.

In 2050 the space will be organised in such a way that the demand for energy is limited and an intricate but robust green-blue network will have been developed that tempers climate change and any consequences it may have. This presupposes that we no longer view open space as what remains after development but as an intrinsically valuable good we need to handle with care. We aim for a harmonious coming together of open and built spaces.
Shockproof territories

The growth of wellbeing and prosperity in Flanders is highly dependent on the whims and uncertainties that go with rapid changes in the world. We must make strategic choices to reduce our vulnerability in the world. Less vulnerable means showing greater awareness with regards to land as a resource, biodiversity and natural and technological loops on our territory. All too often we use the space for one function or the users of space obstruct each other. In 2050 we will organise the space efficiently to minimise the wasting of resources and energy. Where possible we will consume locally available water and consume food produced in Flanders. By 2050 a robust open space will have been developed that provides the space to close loops.

The integrated natural and technological systems benefit from multiple use of space because this makes it possible to optimise the individual loops. Residual heat or waste from one production process will be used by other users. Nature development and food production will be brought together in shared territories. Water management, energy and material efficiency will be prioritised in the spatial policy. Securing a number of these basic needs cannot be seen in isolation from the geopolitical context in which Flanders finds itself: the relationship with the neighbouring regions and countries and with the European Union as a political and economic reality.

The provision of adequate space for such needs as food, potable water and energy has become an economic and geopolitical necessity. It is accordingly part of a spatial strategy to protect the most productive farming land and areas that are important for the extraction of potable water. A minimum amount of energy production within the borders is advisable. And on the demand side the deployment of strong energy- and material-efficient forms of economic activity and transport is to be encouraged.
Climate change sponge

By 2050 the space will function as a sponge for climate change, both for water storage and for consumption in hot or dry periods. We give the ecosystems the space they need to temper the impact of climate change and maintain biodiversity. We absorb local impacts of climate change, such as flooding and heat islands also in towns.

To achieve this sponge effect a broad spectrum of measures of very different orders of size is essential, also in urban environments. A tailor-made approach is always prioritised. We also want to use the areas we use to absorb the impacts of climate change for soft recreation nature and where possible food production, too. It is important to drive back the sealed space area to allow as much water as possible to infiltrate into the soil.

“"It is important to drive back the sealed space area to allow as much water as possible to infiltrate into the soil."
Guaranteeing green-blue arteries

In urbanised Flanders various activities are highly interdependent. Robust open space and the green-blue network are an important quality in our living environment. They guarantee not only natural values and biodiversity, but also the appearance of the space where people relax and enjoy recreation. In that way the various eco-system services (such as water management, biodiversity, recreation) will be fulfilled at the same time. The green-blue network therefore spans not only the countryside but also the built environment, especially if it is densely built up. These green-blue arteries supply oxygen to the built environment and help limit both the heat island effect in our towns and cities and ecological fragmentation. We should not pass up opportunities to introduce the green-blue arteries. When planning major infrastructure, districts, urban renewal or business parks we will look for possibilities to introduce them. It is sometimes necessary to remove buildings from very densely built environments. Our aim is to combine green-blue networks with bike and pedestrian links.

“The green-blue network spans not only the countryside, but also the built environment.”
Room for energy transition

In 2050 the space will be organised in a way that allows us to use it in a more energy-aware manner. Buildings in Flanders will have become energy efficient due to insulation and other measures. Additional measures at district and regional level will enable us to make great progress in terms of energy efficiency. These measures will have a greater impact. Less energy will be consumed for journeys due to intelligent organisation of the space in Flanders.

We organise spatial economies of scale as follows:
First of all, we work to minimise the energy demand. A proper location policy can reduce demand, among other things for journeys. The demand for energy can also be reduced by densifying the space and bringing activities together.
Second, we maximise energy efficiency. A lot of energy is currently wasted by underutilisation. Integration transforms waste into synergy between various functions. As a result, energy surpluses from one function can significantly contribute to the energy demand of another function.
Lastly, we organise the space such that energy demand can to a large degree be met with energy from renewable sources. We will use the energy potential in biomass, waste, wind or other renewable sources to meet the remaining energy demand. Where possible, this renewable energy will be generated as close to the user as possible, such as district heating or cogeneration. This integrated energy production will not be enough to meet the total energy demand. With that in mind, our starting point is that large-scale renewable energy generation can become a major spatial task both within the urban regions and in the open space.

Renewable energy demands a specially adapted network. The various forms of energy production – some of which can fluctuate greatly depending on weather conditions – means that it is less easy to gear production to demand and some type of energy storage may be required. In 2050 we will have an intricate energy network allowing energy to be transmitted from areas where the most energy is being generated at any given time. In this two-way network surpluses can be transmitted or stored. The network will also be versatile enough to also split up underexposed or as yet unknown sources of energy.
A spatial vision only truly works on the ground when all stakeholders participate. We note that the efforts we have made up to now have not been efficient enough to achieve all the ambitious goals of the Spatial Structure Plan for Flanders. We are aware that the goals and the vision we have formulated in this green paper are no less ambitious.

So it is time to redouble our efforts to look for new and improved ways of working that enable us to achieve our goals in a more efficient and effective manner. Time is of the essence. 2050 seems to be a long way off, but if we do not get started today we will not be able to organise in time to respond to the spatial challenges that await us.

A strategic action programme is expected to get things on track. To this end, we have identified a number of areas we would like to work on in the short term. They concern partnerships and the pursuit of a selective, result-oriented policy, among other things through the strategic introduction of an improved set of instruments.
Working together on the Flemish space

Diverse partnerships

Such an ambitious vision cannot be implemented by spatial policy alone. Spatial policy has too few resources, manpower and expertise in the many fields involves in it in one way or another. So it is vital that various partnerships are established to shape and implement the vision from the very start. Developing a vision is a joint venture involving all levels of government, policy fields and partners. We wish to avoid the establishment of too strict a hierarchical structure to evolve towards a model in which each level of government takes its responsibilities as a partner in the process and takes care of those matters it is best placed to take care of. Mutual confidence, consultation and cooperation are key. We also see citizens as a partners in this process. That will enable us to move away from ‘thinking together’ to ‘working together on the Flemish Space’.
Committed partners generate more clout

Partners contribute specific expertise, energy and/or resources. They have their own responsibilities and goals. To work efficiently it is essential that partners are involved in the process at an early stage so that a consensus can be reached on a shared vision and a shared goal. To this end, we wish to work across policy areas, policy levels and federal boundaries. Together with the many sections of society we wish to bring our programmes together and gear them to each other. We are not simply looking to create broad-based support. Partners should commit to work on implementation on the ground. This partnership model is very strong when each of the partners endeavours to achieve their goals on the basis of individual procedures.

Citizens, businesses and investors take part

We want everyone to feel at home in Flanders and its inhabitants to take part in improving the quality of their living environment. We believe in participation because it contributes to the identity and spatial quality of the districts, neighbourhoods and villages in which people live. That means that there is room for citizens’ initiatives. The aim of this Spatial Policy Plan is to remind citizens, businesspeople and investors of their responsibilities and their potential. Through their actions every citizen and business has an impact on the spatial development of Flanders. The role of the authorities is to make sure that this particular initiative contributes to the achievement of the spatial vision and so to the general interest.

In that way we define a new role for the authorities, which must involve citizens and private initiators in identifying and analysing the challenges, developing a vision, formulating solutions and putting them into practice. It must provide forums that enable participation and, by involving citizens and businesspeople, encourage these parties to invest in the living environment and the Flemish space. On the basis of participation, the authorities must investigate alternatives and explain how the final decision is to be taken.
With the Spatial Policy Plan we evolve towards a spatial policy that builds upon the vision of the Spatial Structure Plan for Flanders while taking a much more strategic approach to the various choices. With a strong focus on strategic themes and strategic spaces the Flemish Region will work in a very targeted way in those areas where the impact is greatest, the situation is most complicated and the emanation to other areas is clearest.

The Spatial Policy Plan will be an important part of a coherent and integral spatial planning system that enables meticulous, transparent decision-making on spatial issues at various scales. During the process that results in the Spatial Policy Plan we formulate a long-term vision for spatial development in Flanders. To identify how to achieve the long-term vision we will have to develop a strategy in the white paper. The vision of the policy plan will be developed in action programmes that ensure effective achievement on the ground. The authorities will work closely with the actors involved to increase the effectiveness of the efforts undertaken. Municipalities and provinces will also draw up action programmes to drive their spatial policy efforts. They will work on their own policy plans, which will respond to their specific needs in a more selective way than the present structure planning.
Spatial Policy Plan succeeds the Spatial Structure Plan for Flanders

The Spatial Policy Plan builds upon the robust lines of the Spatial Structure Plan for Flanders (SSP). Just like the SSP, the Spatial Policy Plan formulates a vision and, just like the SSP, it examines how the vision is to be implemented. So, the Spatial Policy Plan replaces the SSP. That is how we ensure continuity in the policy. At the same time, we wish to introduce three new aspects.

First, the vision must be adapted to the new or changed challenges. Part 1: ‘Flanders today’ examines this in greater detail.

Second, we make a more explicit distinction between vision, strategy and action programme. The reason is the difference in degree of abstraction, time horizon and status with respect to these three aspects. A vision is the most abstract, an action programme the most concrete. A vision takes account of the long term – 2050 – so it has to be robust and it must have maximum support. Strategies are concerned with how the vision is put into practice. They are drawn up from a long-term perspective. An action programme is the most concrete. The lead time is short. That means it has to be possible to take decisions faster. That also means responses can be given to emerging opportunities or problems. The action programme must of course always be subordinate to the implementation of the vision.

Third, the pursuit and implementation of the vision will demand improved cooperation between levels of government and with partners. The Spatial Structure Plan for Flanders is still being implemented. We have to properly organise the transition in the implementation between SSP and the Spatial Policy Plan. As the preparation of the Spatial Policy Plan advances, insight into how such a transition can be achieved will also grow. The action programme for the Spatial Policy Plan will have to show how processes of the SSP currently being implemented are continued, adapted or possibly phased out.
An innovative set of instruments

Spatial policy is more than zoning alone. Actions must lead to changes on the ground. Co-operation with other partners is expected to result in spatial investments. This requires a clever mix of instruments. Spatial policy and the policy of the partners deploy a clever mix of instruments to achieve the goals. Some instruments are anchored in the legislative framework around spatial planning or have to be integrated in to a new legislative framework. Improvements to the instruments are especially needed in terms of result orientation. The planning processes and actions must be transparent and choices imitable. With that in mind, the authorities will operate as far as possible on the basis of a long-term vision that has broad support and explain how the choices made relate to that long-term vision. Monitoring of developments on the ground and evaluation of actions are essential. We have to take account of a degree of uncertainty as to the future development of society. We use specific scenarios to understand this uncertainty better.
Flanders, provinces and municipalities as equal partners

The Spatial Policy Plan outlines a vision of the development of the Flemish space and the levels of government are jointly responsible for that. With that in mind, the plan must be shared with the three levels of government. The Flemish authorities are responsible for the establishment of the policy plan in association with the other levels of government.
Region, provinces and municipalities work as equal partners on establishing the policy plan. The executive tasks are divided up on the basis of selectivity and strategic deployment of people, resources and instruments. The Flemish authorities take initiatives themselves or play an integrating role when input is needed from the various levels of government. Their role may also be limited to inspiring and or facilitating. For instance, the Flemish authorities establish the necessary preconditions so that provinces and municipalities are able to contribute to implementing the vision.

All provinces and almost all municipalities now have a spatial structure plan for their territory. The last remaining municipalities still have to complete their structure plan. We wish to ensure continuity of policy. In practice, many structure plans have a fixed format that aims to be comprehensive.
In the future we will need a system with more degrees of freedom, in which a consistent policy is maintained but the policy planning is geared to the needs and the characteristics of each municipality.

The new plans no longer need to be comprehensive. For instance, a municipality could focus on a specific strategy and outline in an action programme its contribution to the implementation of the vision in the Flemish Spatial Policy Plan. Or a number of municipalities could work together to develop a vision for the typical problems faced by the region that are not raised in the Flemish Spatial Policy Plan.
Partnerships between the various authorities will be encouraged, both in Flanders and in the border regions.

"We need a system with more degrees of freedom, in which a consistent policy is maintained."
Action programmes to drive the Spatial Policy Plan

We formulate long-term goals for the policy and translate them into a vision. For the subsequent implementation on the ground we need a proactive policy that gets to work on a concrete programme with short-term actions. The Government of Flanders adopts an action plan linked to the Spatial Policy Plan. The action programme enumerates the actions in which the Flemish authorities wish to play a key role. They state which areas, themes or essential preconditions they wish to deploy to be able to make a difference. Provinces and municipalities also draw up their own action programmes. Such an action programme is preferably linked to a budget and a term. In action programmes there can also be room for initiatives that have been put on the agenda not by an authority but by private initiators. Such an initiative constitutes an opportunity if it helps implement the vision.

An action programme is strategic in nature: it makes choices and sets priorities. We do not have unlimited budgets or possibilities, after all. It determines which actions we have to take in the short term to achieve our long-term goals. An action programme can also be understood more broadly as a programme that also lays down measures in terms of means of communication, instruments and partnerships. The long-term goals also make themselves felt in the action programme. The actions are properly monitored and where necessary adapted. Specific short-term actions may not need to wait until the approval of the Spatial Policy Plan and can mesh with the establishment process for the policy plan.

The action programme enumerates the actions in which the Flemish authorities wish to play a key role.
Focus on thirteen strategic themes

Strategic themes will be proposed on the basis of the long-term vision because the theme has a critical mass and occurs in Flanders in a frequent and dispersed manner. Strategic themes are highly complex and demand cooperation across policy levels, policy fields and social partners. Failure to deal with strategic themes can also undermine the implementation of the vision.

This green paper proposes 13 strategic themes. The focus will be refined in the white paper to prioritise the most strategic themes. Obviously we want to choose those themes that can have a major impact on policy.

After the approval of the green paper a consultation structure will be launched for these strategic themes, to which the various partners will be invited. The aim of this consultation structure is to examine a number of themes in more depth in preparation of the white paper.

The consultation can also deliberate on concrete actions that will enable us to deal with the challenges we face. Further investigations will provide input for this consultation.
Choosing strategic spaces

Strategic spaces are areas that can make a great contribution to the implementation of the vision. They are areas characterised by a complex situation in which various parties lay claim to the space and multiple actors are involved. Strategic spaces are selected because they have international significance with development potentials at extra-regional level, have a cross-border function or specifically address multiple challenges. Interventions in these areas act as a lever for developments in other areas or have an indicator function.

In the vision we have shed light on three main lines: the metropolitan appeal, the human scale and the resilient space. These main objectives will determine the planning work in strategic areas. Which strategic areas is a policy choice. The choice of a strategic space entails the Flemish authorities’ spatial planning policy field setting up a number of actions for that space itself. It can also take part in initiatives of other levels of government, other policy fields or in private initiatives.

It can play an integrating role or else inspire or facilitate. In the phase between green and white paper, together with the partners we will go in search of these strategic areas. We will then launch a consultation structure that brings together the essential partners for each individual strategic area. The goal of this consultation structure is to work with the partners to develop a vision, conduct any additional investigations and where possible set up concrete implementation-oriented actions.
What happens next?

A green paper to stimulate the discussion

This green paper is a discussion document. We wish to stimulate the discussion on the desired spatial policy by presenting a picture of Flanders in 2050. This picture will clearly generate reactions and you will want to put forward your views.

You can do so at www.beleidsplanruimte.be. We will also organise various consultation and discussion forums. At these forums partners will be able to discuss and interpret the supported vision on spatial development in Flanders. The consultation forums will be organised in large or small groups depending on when they are held in the consultation process and the theme.

Elaborating a policy vision in a white paper

We wish to refine the vision on the spatial policy based on the responses to the green paper, the discussions in the various forums and the additional investigations. This spatial policy formulates a long-term goal for 2050 and is included in the white paper that we wish to present in mid 2013. The white paper will also contain concrete proposals on how we wish to implement the spatial policy on the ground, which partners will be involved and which instruments we wish to deploy. We will then proceed to a Spatial Policy Plan.
Key issues

Choices for the future
This green paper presents a new spatial vision on Flanders that leads to a number of pointed choices. They are summarised below in the form of 11 key issues. We are curious to know your thoughts on these issues. Go to www.beleidsplanruimte.be and tell us. You will help shape spatial planning going forward.
1 Restricting the sealed surface area in the open space

We want to enable Flanders to evolve into a region in which the total built area is no longer expanded to:

- limit the risk of flooding
- protect the open space (farming and nature)
- reduce the number of vacant, dilapidated buildings

This could lead to less space being taken up by:

- building housing closer together
- reusing buildings and sites that have fallen into disused
- bringing together activities (housing and work, for instance) in the same place

Consider this key issue and express your opinions at www.beleidsplanruimte.be.

2 Renovating the residential environment

We wish to renovate the residential environment in the neighbourhoods where the greatest challenges are found today (such as the 19th century belt in urban regions and the suburban areas built in the 1960s and 1970s) to:

- raise the energy efficiency of our built heritage
- strengthen social cohesion
- adapt the housing stock to absorb the expected population growth

This could lead to:

- the need for far-reaching interventions, such as demolition and new build in these residential environments

Consider this key issue and express your opinions at www.beleidsplanruimte.be.
3 Deploying human scale in the Metropolis

We wish to view the human scale that characterises the Flemish space as a competitive advantage and deploy it as part of the Flanders Metropolis to:

• enhance the liveability of residential environments
• guarantee the proximity of basic amenities, such as shops and schools
• support social cohesion in districts and villages

This could lead to:
• increased difficulty in implementing large-scale housing projects
• a certain degree of decentralisation
• an inability to take advantage of economies of scale in some cases

Consider this key issue and express your opinions at www.beleidsplanruimte.be.

4 Connecting Flanders with the world

We wish to connect Flanders to the economically important parts of Europe and the world on the basis of optimal infrastructure to:

• support economic growth and job creation
• make it easier for Flemings to travel

This could lead to:
• the need for new mobility infrastructure, more intensive air traffic and additional logistical business zones

Consider this key issue and express your opinions at www.beleidsplanruimte.be.
We wish to give open space a wider societal meaning, no longer reserving it exclusively for farming and nature, but also water management, recreation, tourism, care, renewable energy and more to:
• reduce the risk of flooding
• enhance biodiversity
• provide for our energy production needs better and
• offer peace and quiet and space in the vicinity of towns and cities.

This could lead to:
• this type of environment becoming relatively expensive as a residential environment for the average Fleming
• a silent process of gentrification
• erosion of the small, human scale of Flanders

Consider this key issue and express your opinions at www.beleidsplanruimte.be.

We want to enhance our towns and cities with world-class housing and work environments. These environments must become the showpiece of the Flanders metropolis and be characterised by high-quality amenities (concert halls, museums), exceptional architecture and design of the public space to:
• offer attractive places for the whole society
• support creative and innovative enterprise
• offer skilled professionals a place to live

This could lead to:
• increased difficulty combatting fragmentation
• a significantly reduced possibility of large-scale farming in the vicinity of towns and cities

Consider this key issue and express your opinions at www.beleidsplanruimte.be.
7 Developing a robust open space

We wish to develop a robust open space supported by a network of green corridors and watercourses to:

• limit the societal costs of heavy rainfall and a rise in sea level
• combat fragmentation
• offer peace and quiet and space in the vicinity of the residential environment

This could lead to:

• the need to reject new applications and even reverse past planning permission for buildings and certain functions (such as industry) in the open space

Consider this key issue and express your opinions at www.beleidsplanruimte.be.

8 Doing more with less space

We wish to use the same space for various functions at the same time to:

• use the available space more efficiently by sharing such facilities as car parks
• halt further land-take
• bring functions close together to limit the need for journeys
• preserve open space

This could lead to:

• the need for various users of space to show a certain degree of tolerance so that they are able to use the space together

Consider this key issue and express your opinions at www.beleidsplanruimte.be.
9 The right activity in the right place

We wish to find the most sensible location for an activity to:
- drive down the demand for mobility
- limit the societal costs of infrastructure
- avoid environmental impact and mutual disruption
- work towards improved energy efficiency
- improve the liveability of the residential environment
- This could lead to:
- such things as shopping centres, sports stadiums, offices and transport companies no longer being welcome outside the cores

Consider this key issue and express your opinions at www.beleidsplanruimte.be

10 Making choices in the suburban areas

We wish to design specific strategies for suburban areas in which areas that are well served by public transport are densified, while developments are curbed or even actively dismantled in other areas to:
- provide space for population growth
- prevent dispersed building
- combat congestion
- preserve open space
- This could lead to:
- the need to make hard choices to actively dismantle some areas
- large cities expanding further
- the facilitation of fragmentation
- competition for the harmonic development of neighbouring towns

Consider this key issue and express your opinions at www.beleidsplanruimte.be.
Making way for renewable energy

We wish to organise the space so that the demand for energy can be met as much as possible by renewable sources to:

• reduce dependence on energy imports
• limit climate change
• protect access to affordable energy
• This could lead to:
  • a lot of space, especially open space, being needed for the building of renewable sources of energy

Consider this key issue and express your opinions at www.beleidsplanruimte.be.

Concluding question

What is your priority

If you were the minister for spatial planning with a budget of 100 million euros to spend, how would you split it over the three main policy lines?

• Metropolitan appeal
• Human Scale
• Resilient space

Consider this key issue and express your opinions at www.beleidsplanruimte.be.
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Are you concerned about the future of the Flemish space?

The subject of this book is the living environment in which you will grow old. In which your children will live. In which our grandchildren will look for a job, a partner and a home.
The choices we make today will determine how Flanders will look in 2050. With that in mind, we have to think seriously about which way we wish to go.
To enrich the debate we bring the issues into focus in this green paper. We present our vision on the Flemish space and possible ways to implement that vision. This green paper certainly does not contain policy. It provides food for thought and debate. This green paper is the first step on the road to a new Spatial Policy Plan.
Plotting a new course for spatial policy cannot be a tug of war in which the strongest wins. The better option is to think about the future together. We value your opinions.

Tell us what they are!

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