

**London Thames Gateway Development Corporation
Study Tour, Rotterdam and Amsterdam.
May 30th to June 1st**



Over the course of two days in early some of the board of London Thames Gateway Development Corporation visited Rotterdam and Amsterdam to get some insights into Waterfront Housing, urban development, flood prevention and other topics. We met with approximately 20 different people from various state and city bodies who gave us a very thorough understanding of the history of planning systems and future design initiatives of Rotterdam and Amsterdam. We met with economic promotion bodies, architectural firms, planning associations, planners, and consultants to get an understanding of how Rotterdam and Amsterdam were managing issues such as expanding cities, flood prevention, urban planning and reclaiming land for housing.

We began in Rotterdam.

Alderman Habers told us about how the Stadshaven (cityport initiative) is integrated into the Port of Rotterdam. The city realised that is it vital to keep developing in order to keep the harbour competitive. The project, which will take place over the next decade, will be designed to create more housing within the city. The council are going to re use the old port and harbour area, by redeveloping older buildings, and building on brownfield land.



In order to become a knowledge city, the city has recognised how important the maritime knowledge sector is, and therefore the city has created many new knowledge institutions focusing on Maritime industries which will bolster this image, and help contribute to the future of the city.



Rotterdam Marine University

Environment

Economic growth should go hand in hand with improving the environment. Rotterdam's climate initiative objective is to halve CO2 in a decade. Rotterdam aims to become a world capital of CO2 free energy.

Stadshaven is a unique project, which is 1600 ha large and is comprised of housing, port authority, and businesses

The Vision of the City

The bombing of the inner city in WW2 created a white page for the city to work on. After the war there was a lot of new growth and development, and a lot of new housing, because the growth of the harbour demanded a lot of new housing.



Why was there a need for an urban vision?

The demographics of the city were and are changing – people are deciding that when they earn more income, they must leave the city centre – which is a disaster for the city. There is a lot of growth all over Europe, and Rotterdam has to establish its competitive advantage vis a vis other cities around Europe. Climate change demands that Rotterdam keeps its feet dry, and this is an urgent issue that the city has to deal with.

The vision for the city was commissioned by the municipal executive, and drawn up by the OBR, (inward investment agency) the department of housing and other partners. There was also an extensive community consultation project to get the views and ideas of the local community. The central message is that a strong economy and an attractive residential city are key in the process, and you can't have one thing without the other.

The city made 10 core decisions to help realize the mission. 3 concerning housing, 3 for economy, and 4 conditional.

1. By 2030 the city must be a front ranking port city in Europe for **knowledge and innovation**. The Medical and creative sectors are key parts of this plan too. These three sectors have been recognized as key to the city, and the city is now going to start focusing on these areas. Education is highly important – the city is focusing on this by having one great university, and 4 polytechnics These are strong in arts, maritime, and architecture.
2. Rotterdam utilizes **leisure time and cultural space** to boost new economic and business activity. Inner city activity is important – public space for the inner city. A stadium and a speed staking rink are being developed. A shopping centre, exhibition centre and kids' entertainment are being planned. Many festivals are also run during the year that attract tourists to the city.
3. Rotterdam creates **space for entrepreneurs**. Many of the new spaces for entrepreneurs have been created out of existing old buildings, that have been refurbished.
4. In order to meet housing demand, Rotterdam is **building in the existing urban area**.
5. Rotterdam is **creating residential environments that counteract selective migration**. Rotterdam has far too much social housing, and not enough housing for middle income earners. By residential environments they mean creating spaces that are good for kids, with lots of green space, good schools and good transport links. The three areas are: Urban Core housing (fancy apartments) Quiet Urban – around centre, and Green Urban. The new strategy is to build in areas that are highly valued by people. They get places which have good names, and then build that up.



6. Rotterdam is **transforming its weak residential environments**. There are still some problem environments. People who live in social housing need good space too.

The creation of a strong economy and an attractive city is only possible with:

- Good public space and water
- Accessibility
- The environment
- Cultural heritage and architecture.

The creation of the new harbour will be key to all this, with lots of new facilities, new housing, new business parks, and new entertainment areas in the city port areas.

The most important mission is that the city has had to join up with all the city partners to make this happen. Because of the need to build in the city, they have to use neglected space. It is nearly impossible to use green areas, as everyone complains. There are also important environmental issues – the city has to take into

consideration where local flooding could take place if there was to be a rise in sea levels.

The city created 13 VIP areas – areas that are crucial to the realisation of the objectives of a strong economy and an attractive residential city

CityPorts Rotterdam.



Rotterdam is known as the gateway to Europe, and the City Ports organisation is tasked with keeping it that way. 40 years ago the city started the first urban renewal work, and according to the founders, this type of work has always been very time consuming and difficult. In the past the inner city of Rotterdam had a huge shortage of houses, and the standing houses at the time had very bad facilities. As social housing was important to the local government at the time (socialist), most of the new housing was put on the borders of the river.



The new Kop Van Zuid, an industrial island in the city centre, represents a huge change in thinking. The city changed from quantity thinking to quality thinking. The emphasis on social housing was reduced, because there was so much industrial and low income housing. In the 70's the middle classes were being forgotten, and they were moving out into the hinterland and suburbs, depriving the city of their vital influence and affluence. The city centre as a whole was beginning to be left behind. To counteract this, the city had to do something out of the ordinary to stop the brain drain, so in the 90s the quality was underpinned with new, high quality housing, and there was a renewal and focus on a knowledge based economy and the port economy. To help kick start the Kop van Zuid, the government and local authorities invested in the area – they put their money where their mouth was! A Justice Court as well as the tax corporation were built, and now hundreds of employees work in the area. This created a strong magnetic effect, giving other companies a good incentive to cross the bridge.

After a long time, the essence of what the city had to do was to identify what to do with these new areas that were being left behind by the new port development. Based on the facts of their investigation, it was decided that the Waalhaven would remain an economic area, and become a mix of port economics and city economics. The rest of the areas are going to be transformed into housing areas, which are very large areas, and will take up to 30 or 40 years to achieve.

Land Ownership

In terms of housing ownership, the land is owned by the city and private owners, but the city does not have one strategy for redeveloping. The national government is also involved in the mix, and they contribute financially and otherwise. The government is very interested in the transformation plans, they are major shareholders in the organisations, the environment is important, and the fact that they are mixing economic, port and city life together, means that the government

wants to invest here. Transformation is extremely expensive, and Rotterdam needs the government's investment.



The Maasvlakte 2 is the new port and industrial zone that is to be built right on the North Sea. The port authorities are keen to keep the port growing, and to keep up with bigger ships, the need for bigger port areas and the need to constantly adapt to new demands from the shipping industry. With Maasvlakte 2, the port of Rotterdam will offer companies a new top location in the heart of the European market. 1000 hectares of sites will become available for deep sea-related container throughput, distribution, chemicals and new industry.

Population Shifts

In Rotterdam the population is getting younger – that's why the city is trying to redevelop its educational and cultural institutions. The older social housing areas are located in the harbour – facing the water. These apartment blocks will remain – and the city has no plans to knock them down – at least not yet. They are typical 70's houses with small windows, but the city can't rationalize the decision to knock them down, just because of the aesthetics of the buildings.

The strategy to change from lower to higher income belongs to the municipality. The economic development board put a strategy together – everyone wants a knowledge and creative economy, but not everyone can have it. How this occurs is that the city leaders choose an economic development board, the members of which are handpicked from around the world, on the basis of their economic expertise. They are supported by local economic experts, and together they create a plan on how to develop a strong knowledge based economy. This idea was 'stolen' from Singapore, which was very successful in developing this model.

Jo Coenen



The following is a transcript from our meeting with Jo Coenen.

Jo Coenen is from Limburg, in Maastricht, and worked for the city planning as an architect, and as such he worked on public buildings and libraries. He studied a lot about Architecture and Urban Planning in southern Europe, which gave him his ideas and inspirations, which are not based on an anglo saxon mindframe.

He is proud to be European. Cities in the south are not only famous for sunshine, and good food, but because of the natural squares and nice spaces. This heritage was studied and by many architects – many cities are made and created because of the urban context. Jo Coenen works across other parts of Europe, and has a lot of experience in other European cities. This is an important factor in his experience, as he is not stuck in one design school.



The shaping of our surrounding has to be filled with this belief of southern European values. Coenen believes in old squares, and gates, and public areas. London also has a heritage of townscapes. If Dutch architects talk about UK architecture, it is interesting in terms of the technical details. If you go to other countries, the stress is on the “technicalities” If we look at how to make quality spaces between the buildings, then this is a deep study, and has to be considered carefully.

Looking at new cities, it is very hard to build new surroundings that we like to be in. Perhaps it is functional and looks good, but in the long term, people don't like their new surroundings, but people love their historical surroundings.



Masstricht university is a good example of how to use urban space by reusing the old and by redeveloping it in a sensitive way.

Coenen also spoke to us about transformation – “two thirds of all that we have in the books right now is building within a context – look at Paris. In Paris, we have wonderful boulevards – we think it has always been like that, but this has been very recent. We can learn from these lessons.”

“We have to explain, reassure and help people to understand how this belief works. I have to have a belief in a human being.”

Zandbelt and Vanderberg

The office of Zandbelt and Vandenberg work in city metropolitan strategies. In the London plan – or greater London authority area – there are many multi central nodes – and there are opportunities and intensification areas, and these are areas that will help the deprived areas to flourish.

The city of Rotterdam asked the office of Zandbelt to do a report on the lessons from other port cities around Europe, to understand successful port cities.

In their studies they kept seeing the same things, such as the biggest aquariums, the nicest cruise terminals, many beaches (to lure the people into the new areas) etc. In many port areas, there was a lot of new freedom for things that could not have been done in the cities, (such as golf courses and amusement parks)

The tools that the office developed can be used by city planners for new ideas when developing port areas.

The ideas are as follows: Chunks, Marketing Strategies, Drivers, Grassroots strategies, Anchors and Events.

Chunks: Chunks are pieces of land that are developed one at a time, with a focused strategy, and a defined end goal. The benefit is that efforts are made more effective, work is finished on one part, and then work can start on another.

Drivers: A driver for an area could be a new airport. East London’s drivers are the airport and the Financial Services Centre in the Docklands.

Grassroots strategy:

When a new development starts up, it can be hard to attract the big investors and developers to get involved. Therefore, its important to help small developers and entrepreneurs to take a risk on the land, and make something of it. Local creative companies have proven this strategy right in many cities.

Anchors:

Large, safe anchors such as museums, bridges, convention centres or shopping centres can be great for attracting other developments, such as apartments and office buildings.

Events:

A good event can create a positive vibe for a city. It draws people to the event, which draws investors too. Once a city seems like a vibrant place, then investors feel more confident about getting financially involved.

Marketing Strategies:

Marketing to get people into an area are used for big audiences. A lot of publicity can be arranged around the event that showcases what is going on, and this in turn attracts people. Usually this can be around a big event, such as the Olympics.

In some cities, the port areas can cause problem with residents. In Copenhagen for example, the residents are suing the city because the pollution from the boats hangs around the houses, and there is a lot of noise at night. This is hard, because at the start of the project there were no problems, because water sells. Living near the waterfront is a great strategy, but planners have to be careful and look for potential problems.

"In the Netherlands, we seem to forget that infrastructure is good for development. The Dutch tend to think that green, and housing is good, but sometimes leave out good infrastructure planning. There is a traditional to plan for total control on this scale."

Being able to touch the water, and get near it, is very important. In Hamburg, there is a big distance from the land to the water, but in Malmö, you can touch the water, it is so close.

Having a strategy for the long term and having chunks to design well, are the main messages from the research. But the role that design can play to explore the future of the region is very important. A design studio was created by the regional development authority, which It is in collaboration with the TU Delft which looks at all of these issues.

Another area of research for Zandbelt is to create new seaside towns on new land reclaimed from the sea in North Holland. They aim to see how these cities would work, and this helps to create new ideas from many other experts. Designers go away with these ideas, and then try to plan using the inspiration obtained from these plans.

Amsterdam and the IJburg Islands.



Grimshaw Bridge

According to experts in Amsterdam, a “piece by piece” strategy is far more effective than creating a big scheme all at once. In this area there is a mix of 30% live/work space, social housing, 40% middle income housing and 30% higher income or open market housing.

Making sure that the city gets good quality and high quantity housing, and how it prevents slums from forming is a huge task for the city. The key to the IJ area is that it is an attractive place to live for families. It is close to the city centre, and close to the hub of the city, the Central Station. A key point in the city planners plans is the refusal to deal with investors or speculators. If sites are sold to builders they may not be sold until the house is built and lived in for at least one day. This prevents selling off plan, and it also prevents investors buying up plots and selling them on once they have planning permission. The city does not allow speculators to make a quick gain – the city leases the land for 50 years, so they have a lot of control over the areas. The IJburg was released for their own development purposes by transferring the dirty industry and city services from the eastern and western parts, thereby allowing the land to be redeveloped.

Before Amsterdam even thinks about buying land for development, it has to have a vision in place first. Then, the city goes ahead and buys land that it feels that is suitable, and then it starts negotiations with a developer. In all cases, the vision comes first, the buying afterwards. Amsterdam has a unique situation in that it can hinder land owners from developing on their own. For example, Shell had a large parcel of land it wanted to offload to a developer for housing. When it approached the city, for rezoning, the city told Shell that it would not be given planning permission, and they were encouraged to sell the land to the city, at the market price for developed land. When the city bought the land, it then leased it to developers for a 50 year span, with leases being reconsidered after that time.



Part of the KNSM Island Initiative

To ensure quality, the city employs a quality supervisor, and a quality committee for the whole area who ensure that buildings and the quality of architecture are in line with where the city wants to be.



Risk Taking

The city has a variable attitude to risk taking. It knows which areas will be in high demand, and the areas of lower demand, and works with a mix of housing corporations and developers with whom it shares the risk. If the city knows the demand will be strong, then they find it easier to work with developers, rather than with housing associations.

In the case of the IJ island the risk is shared with private housing associations, as it was a new market in untested waters.

One unique aspect we saw on the IJ islands was a form of housing where the city sold individual plots to private owners. The new owners then had to keep within an envelope, but they had complete freedom to do whatever they wanted within that space. The quality or beauty commission did not oversee this project, and it resulted in some very interesting terraced housing:



In our final meeting we met with Alderman Maarten van Poelgeest, the Alderman for Town and Country Planning, Water Management, and ICT.

Infrastructure Development

With regard to infrastructure, the city works with the national government to get help with amenities. As the city is the land owner, they look at the costs of what is to be built, and what the market values the land at. According to the program, we make the land values, and we sell the land. The developer does not get all the profits, and the developer has to pay a levy, for services.

The 'Make It Simple' plan is going for two years now. The master plan and a block by block plan is made by the city planners. The program and the envelope is explained and this is put on the market, and developer bid for these plots. We know the minimum price, but it is possible for the developers to bid higher. There is freedom to make the envelope it different, with better quality. The quality team or supervision committee makes sure the standards are high. The beauty commission also has to approve the building before developers can get planning permission.

Costs of affordable homes:

Affordable homes are €610(£410) per month. If you earn above €1200 (£806) per month, you can't get social housing.



Are higher income households being introduced in Amsterdam?

The price of houses in Amsterdam has been increasing rapidly over the years. There are a lot of wealthy people living in the city centre. This means that middle income groups are living in the outskirts and in some parts of the city centre. In the very centre, it is very difficult to keep affordable houses on the market. Parts of them are owned by housing corporations (32%) private owners own 20%. The gentrification process is going on right now in the city. The planners want a certain percentage of affordable housing but they know that the market is driving them out. Lower income families live for many years in the city, and as their lives get better, then they do not want to move from the city.