

# Urbain Loi

## A NEW BEGINNING

The Berlaymont building can be seen just above the tallest of the proposed new constructions.



Christian de Portzamparc has been chosen for this major urban redevelopment.

### Urbain Loi within the European district

Total office space	
European district	<b>3,300,000 m<sup>2</sup></b>
Urbain Loi existing	<b>470,000 m<sup>2</sup></b>
Urbain Loi new	<b>240,000 m<sup>2</sup></b>
Of which 'Europe'	
European district	<b>1,340,000 m<sup>2</sup></b>
Urbain Loi existing	<b>170,000 m<sup>2</sup></b>
Urbain Loi new	<b>230,000 m<sup>2</sup></b>
Surface area:	
European district	<b>328 ha</b>

(There are a total of 35,000 inhabitants currently living in the European district; Urbain Loi alone will see 110,000 m<sup>2</sup> of new residential accommodation)

Architectural competition winner:  
Atelier Christian de Portzamparc

Cortenbergh, emerging in front of the Berlaymont. All of these measures are intended to reduce traffic in the district by 20% by 2018. The Region's plans for Urbain Loi also have to be seen within the context of its stated aims for the entire zone: 'The masterplan sets out measures to improve the quality and accessibility of public spaces, to conserve and find uses for the architectural heritage, to raise the architectural quality and environmental performance of the new buildings'.

The Leopold district of Brussels, commonly known as the European district because it is here that the European Union and Commission have set up most of their offices (Parliament, Council of Ministers...) is receiving particular attention from the regional authorities.

The desire is to transform this most archetypal of 'concrete office jungles' back into a more liveable, human area. As with most city centre office districts in most cities, the Leopold district saw its original housing stock decimated to make way for office-dwellers. One of the urban factors which currently render this area even less 'human' is that it has the two main road thoroughfares serving the city from the east (the inbound Rue de la Loi and the outbound Rue Belliard), running right through its centre. These roads thus enable the Ring motorway to be reached in just a few minutes, with the entire European motorway network therefore close at hand and the airport just ten minutes or so away by car.

### Conviviality

It is the Region's intention to break up this 'urban corridor' and to create easier pedestrian flows across it, in other words perpendicular to it, and more green public areas. Amongst ways of achieving this are the reduction of the Rue de la Loi (which runs from the Schuman roundabout, the European nerve centre, to the city's inner ring road a few hundred metres further on), from its current five lanes to three, with cycle and pedestrian lanes on each side. The Rue Belliard would also be reduced, to four lanes. It has now been decided, in addition to this, to stop traffic from driving on the surface at the Schuman roundabout. This will involve a tunnel underneath the Avenue

### Mobility

On top of these private transport measures, the district is set to see enhanced public transport facilities, including an automated metro system with substantially increased capacities, a new metro tunnel, and the expanded multi-modal nature of the Schuman railway station itself. The arrival of the RER system (Regional Electric Rail) is also scheduled, the latest date for full operations also set at 2018.

On the real estate side, the European Union, quite clearly the district's most important tenant, has accepted the idea that the area will become more mixed-use in nature. As well as preparing to install some of its future office requirements in other districts of Brussels, the EU is also preparing a new 'Blue Book' on constructing 'greener' buildings with better environmental performance. This has been a requirement of Brussels for public buildings since 2010.

### Function transfer

In terms of the future constructed make-up of this district, some current office buildings will be returned to residential use, and some of the micro-zones within the area will not be allowed to see their office stock grow. The Urbain Loi zone currently has 470,000 m<sup>2</sup> of offices, of which the European Commission accounts for 170,000 m<sup>2</sup>. A further 240,000 m<sup>2</sup> of office space is scheduled to be added, the vast majority of this (230,000 m<sup>2</sup>) also destined for the Commission. The wider European district as a whole is home to a total of 3,300,000 m<sup>2</sup> of office space (around a quarter of the whole of the Brussels stock), of which the European institutions account for some 1,340,000 m<sup>2</sup>, or around 40%.

Tim HARRUP ■

The Rue de la Loi is set to be reduced to three traffic lanes. The improvement in public transport is designed to help reduce overall traffic by 20%.

