

Neo, a strategic hub for Brussels

With the mixed-use NEO urban plan the City of Brussels wishes to exploit the huge potential of the Heyzel plateau for new economic and tourism opportunities. The tourist appeal of the world famous Atomium and the business tourism linked to Brussels' biggest exhibition centre and the Trade Mart helps underpin this development opportunity. These currently attract over 1.5 million visitors annually. On an estimated surface of 18 hectares out of the 68 hectares making up the Heyzel Plateau, the development plan includes the building of an international-scale congress centre, a shopping mall, hotels, leisure facilities including a concert hall, sports grounds, along with new green areas and 750 homes.

A possible look for the future of the Heyzel plateau. With the basic regeneration plans drawn up, KCAP presents its vision to transform an incoherent site (inelegant buildings, open-air car parks, derelict land, unplanned road system, etc.) into a harmonious district that is in keeping with the immediate environment and the specific features of the site and its landscape (Brussels Expo, the Atomium, the park, Trade Mart, the Kinopolis multiplex cinema,...). The presence of the (relatively new) Heyzel sports stadium and how it interacts with the project has also to be taken into account.



The project has been slow in making progress, for reasons which include neighbouring developments and political (regional) considerations, but it is finally set to come into being now that KCAP Architects have been nominated as head planners and that both the Brussels Region Minister President, Charles Picqué, and Brussels Mayor, Freddy Thielemans, are strongly involved in the development of this project, which they presented at the MapiC in Cannes last November. Charles Picqué highlighted the economic arguments behind Neo, talking of it being a flagship project combining sustainable economic development, tourism development, job creation, international pull and the well-being of the inhabitants.

NEO describes itself as a high quality mixed-use project including a convention centre, a shopping centre, leisure, housing and exemplary public transportation which will set a new benchmark in urban redevelopment.

The perfect match

With the Building of a 3,500 seat new international-scale congress centre above the existing Heyzel metro station, the Neo project intends to boost the business tourism which is already a major economic activity in the Brussels region. The proximity of Brussels main exhibition centre and the development nearby of shopping and recreational facilities would be highly complementary. To improve hospitality for visitors to the new

Neo programme in figures

Retail	70.000 m ²
Congress centre	15.000 m ²
Food & beverage	9.000 m ²
Restaurants and cafés	4.500 m ²
Cinema	14.000 m ²
Offices	19.000 m ²
Apartments	750 units
New expo hall	10.000 m ²
Hotel	15.000 m ²
Event hall	8.000 m ²
Parking	5.800 spaces



The development of green space and making the most of the existing park are also essential to the perfect harmony of the Neo project. Sport grounds (tennis, football, athletics) would be incorporated in the new green spaces. On-road parking is set to be eliminated, and the space freed up for broad cycle-ways and pedestrian boulevards.

congress centre and also to the existing Brussels Expo and the Trade Mart an extra 500 hotel rooms would be needed and integrated into the development programme

In 2006, the commercial development scheme commissioned by Regional Minister-President Charles Picqué recommended the building of one or more shopping malls. It was mentioned that Brussels would need 233,000 m² of extra commercial space to reach the average for major Belgian cities. Today three retail development projects are competing to fill this gap and seize this real estate development opportunity : Neo, Uplace located on the opposite side of the ring in Machelen and the 'Just under the Sky' retail and leisure center located alongside the canal to the north west of Brussels centre, near the Van Praet bridge. From a mobility point of view, the Heyzel plateau would be an ideal site for a new shopping mall being easily accessible by car and public transport which is already extremely good, with metro and tram stations in operation.

More appeal for the Heyzel plateau

Regarding leisure facilities, to give the Heyzel plateau even more appeal, the building of a new

concert hall with a capacity of 15,000 seats is also being considered. This new infrastructure would enable Brussels to host major cultural and sporting events which the city cannot accommodate at present. The further addition of a major museum beside the Congress centre such as the 'Museum of Modern Art' would add a cultural dimension to the area.

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The concept and philosophy of Neo are well defined. The urban regeneration plans show the possible outlook of the future Heyzel plateau, developing the existing urban fabric while taking into account the interest of the neighbouring residents and prioritising the positioning of the right activities into the right places, depending on their specific forms and characteristics.

Tim HARRUP ■

NKCAP, chief planning bureau for NEO

KCAP, the Rotterdam based firm of architects and town planners won the international competition for the selection of the chief planner for Neo. KCAP has highly valuable experience with this type of master-plan which they have carried out with success, for example, for the port of Hamburg (165 ha) or the London Olympic Games post-games site redevelopment (170 ha).

Kees Christiaanse, partner of KCAP, sees NEO Brussels as a development which will "strengthen the positioning of the Heyzel area, through a high quality development which will add value to the existing space and to introduce a sustainable development framework. A strong vision which will bring together Brussels, Belgium and Europe in one prestigious location".

Closing time for Mini Europe and Océade ?

One of the possible consequences of the Neo project may be the closing of two of Brussels' popular tourist attractions. Speaking recently, Thierry de Meeüs, owner of Mini Europe and Océade, said that he was preparing to close them down if the City of Brussels did not change its approach to Neo. The two parks are in the shadow of the Atomium, for many the very symbol of Belgium itself, and obviously unaffected by the plans for Neo. However, reacting to these comments by Thierry de Meeüs, a spokesman for the City of Brussels said that Mini Europe and Océade had never been excluded from the Neo project, and that no 'take it or leave it' proposition had been made to their owners. Interviewed some time ago about this, Thierry de Meeüs pointed out that when Bulgaria joined the EU, a question was even asked in its parliament about when a symbol of the country would appear in Mini Europe...

