

LIÈGE, WELL BEYOND 2017

URBAN REHABILITATION

It was during the last Mipim fair in Cannes that the real estate element of the international 'Liège 2017' exhibition project really took off. Liège mayor Willy Demeyer is enthusiastic about this: "In November, whether the final decision of the International Exhibition Bureau goes our way or not, the new district project will take place. And the private partners who have been bold enough to commit to this with us will not regret it!" Caroline Thiry (City of Liège) and Jean-Luc Pluymers (Economic Redevelopment Group) unveil this major real estate project.

■ Interview by Bruno HODITTE



For Jean-Luc Pluymers of the Economic Redevelopment Group, Liège 2017 will embody the new dynamism of the city of Liège. Caroline Thiry emphasises the new positive face Liège will present in its 2017 configuration. Cornemeuse of course, but also Bressoux, Drolixhe and Saint-Léonard.

Photo Luc Garnier

Jean-Luc Pluymers, you are the Director General of the ERG (Economic Redevelopment Group). Tell us 'why' Liège 2017.

J.-L. J-L Pluymers: What we are undertaking is in fact a vast project made up of two elements: on the one hand we are organising Liège 2017 and on the other the rehabilitation of twenty hectares of land around the Cornemeuse district. The International Exhibition project is the culmination of an ambitious redevelopment strategy which confirms the position of Liège as the economic capital of Wallonia and crowns the policy of major structural projects established by the public authorities along with the economic and academic worlds. While awaiting the arrival of the tram, the principal of which has been accepted by the Walloon government, other substantial projects are underway: the restoration of the Royal Walloon Opera, the transformation of the Museum of modern and contemporary art into the International Centre for Arts and Culture. And we shouldn't forget the recently inaugurated new TGV station designed by Calatrava, the Ron



The urban project for the Cornemeuse site covers 25 hectares on which will be built the exhibition pavilions along with all of the infrastructure required by an International Exhibition expected to attract 6 million visitors. The master plan schedules keeping half of the 25 hectares for green areas.

Arad-designed Médiacité or the Grand 'Cursius' museum hub... Investment in real estate and infrastructure within the province now stands at over 3 billion Euros.

Liège has gone through some difficult times, but it is undergoing genuine rehabilitation and the 'Expo 2017' will put this in the spotlight!

So that's the theory. Now tell us about the practice.

J-L Pluymers: The City has selected the Cornemeuse site for the Exhibition. This is a project extending over 25 hectares on which will be built the exhibition pavilions along with all of the infrastructure required by an International Exhibition expected to attract 6 million visitors. The choice of Cornemeuse was obvious: a genuine entrance gateway to Liège when coming from Germany or

the Netherlands, Cornemeuse is located immediately alongside the route of the tram which will connect it to the city centre. Cornemeuse is on the banks of the Meuse at the entrance to the Albert canal, and there are many green spaces within it. Historically, Cornemeuse was also the location of the last International Exhibition to be held in Liège, in 1939.

Caroline Thiry: This land belongs to the City of Liège, which is also a major advantage. And the 20 hectares located on the other bank in Bressoux-Droixhe shouldn't be forgotten, as it is here that the multi-modal hub of the Exhibition will be located, with a relay car park, Bressoux station and the arrival of the tram via the Atlas Bridge. In order to create a strong link between this district and the Cornemeuse district, a crossing for cyclists and pedestrians will

span the Meuse. All of these elements will benefit the city when the Exhibition is over.

J-L Pluymers: The master plans sets out that half of the 25 hectares will be laid out as green areas. As for the pavilions forming part of the Exhibition, they will be located on the rest of the site. This is where the strong point of the project is to be found: it is these buildings which will be converted to residential and services us after the Exhibition.

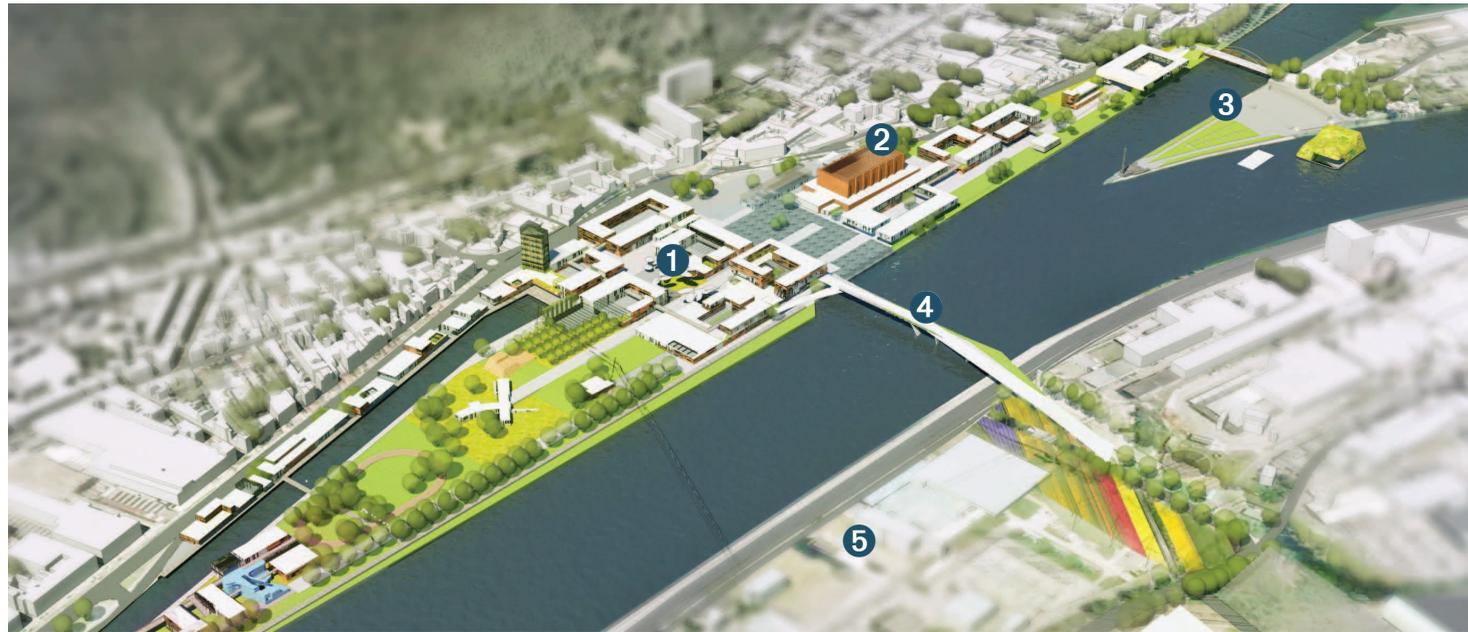
Isn't this obligation to convert the buildings to housing and offices going to put the brakes on where the private partners who have been approached are concerned?

J-L Pluymer: Quite the opposite! At Mipim private investors showed themselves to be very interested. The technical constraints imposed by the conversion to residential and services seem to represent an even more motivating factor. And on top of that the repercussions of an event such as an international exhibition constitute another advantage.

You know, an exhibition is failing if the revenues from entrance tickets alone are counted, and the buildings have to be amortised by the closing day. The solution – confirmed by the IEB – lies in a financial structure in terms of the real estate involved. We are in fact counting on a total budget of some 400 million Euros spent, with a positive result of around 100 million. The City of Liège, the ERG, the University of Liège, the Province and the Ecetia inter-communal organisation have set up the Immo Cornemuese scrl real estate company. The Cornemuese real estate is valued at 10 million Euros plus survey fees within the capital of this company. The 165,000 m² of real estate developments which will largely be used for the pavilions which will accommodate the Exhibition for three months, will then be transformed into 217,500 m² of built area, mostly residential. A call for tenders will be launched in September, based on two scenarios. The first includes the Exhibition, the second excludes it. We will have pre-selected our partners by November, the moment when the IEB makes its decision known.

C. Thiry: In terms of land use, there is a lot at stake for Liège: we are going to create 1,300 quality residential units and 30,000 m² of services, in a pedestrianised eco-district, including parking, a crèche, a school, a park and a marina. The project should see the return of families to a city which the thirty year olds have tended to leave over the past few decades.

The Expo 2017/Cornemuese project will pull the whole of this side of Liège upwards. Bessoux is set to benefit in particular, thanks to building a maintenance centre for the new tram, a relay car park, a new modern exhibition hall, the enlarging of the food processing zone, new road access... Bressoux, but also Saint-Léonard, Droixhe... Liège will be showing its new face in 2017. ■



Master plan for the layout of the 25 hectares of Cornemuese for Liège Expo 2017

1 Pavilions / eco-district

The buildings destined for the exhibitors will replace the current Exhibition Halls and will accommodate the pavilions of the participating countries. Following the Exhibition they will be converted into residential units (1,300) and 30,000 m² of services, complying with very strict environmental norms.

2 Renovation of the Grand Palace

The Grand Palace, a remnant of the 1939 International Exhibition, will be entirely renovated.

3 Concert zone

The tip of Monsin Island will be the backdrop for the many cultural activities which will take place during the Exhibition for three months.

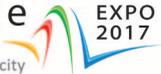
4 Crossing

A crossing for cyclists and pedestrians will span the Meuse and link the Bressoux-Droixhe district with the Cornemuese site.

5 Bressoux-Droixhe, multi-modal hub

In order to accommodate the millions of visitors expected at the Exhibition, Droixhe will have a relay car park, Bressoux station will be renovated and the tram will arrive on the exhibition site via Atlas bridge.

Liège
Belgium
Candidate city



www.liege-expo2017.com