

Objective 2030 : 38,932 residential units to be built



Laurence de Hemptinne,
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The latest seminar held by Editions & Séminaires once again brought the cream of the real estate world together. The object of this day, rich in information and an ideal opportunity to meet people, was : Brabant Wallon, major urban projects and real estate projects allied to the future RER stations.

According to the Federal Planning Bureau, there will be 450,000 inhabitants in Brabant Wallon in 2030, against 386,785 on January 1st 2012. It is with this in mind that Laurence de Hemptinne of Editions & Séminaires and Kim Verdonck, Head of Research at Real Estate Consultants CBRE, undertook a survey which was unveiled during a Property Meeting organised by Editions & Séminaires. From the survey it emerges that 38,392 new residential units will have to be built, which equates to 2,020 per year between now and 2030, in order to house these new inhabitants.

2,020 units a year between now and 2030?

The survey's authors asked themselves if this objective was feasible. To try and answer this, they compared actual constructions delivered over recent years with future needs.

It would appear that in certain years, actual construction has not been sufficient, notably in 2008 and 2010, with only 1,600 and 1,700 units delivered. By contrast, 2009 and 2011 were record years, with more than 2,500 and more than 2,300 units actually constructed. As for the permits granted before any housing can be built, they are down in 2010 and 2011, below the necessary figure of 2,020 at just 1,600 and 1,500.

Having said that, the survey's authors also note that very many residential projects are at various stages of being planned.

8,765 residential units in the pipe-line

The authors are already able to identify 8,765 new residential units in the pipe-line on a map showing where the major projects are located.

The authors insist that this figure is viewed with caution, given the number of projects which may fail or which are still only right at the beginning of the planning permit stage, or which haven't even got that far – simply being at the 'land acquired' stage, for example.

Amongst projects highlighted are: those of the Brabant Wallon Land Agency (the regional housing agency) which is aiming to build 1,350 residential units by 2018. Amongst provincial projects the Gastuche 'ZACC' project (220 units) in Grez-Doiceau and the Chastre 'Bois des Champs' project (110 units) should be mentioned, along with the site of the former Folon school in Wavre for which a call for tenders has been launched and is awaiting results.

Rehabilitated industrial wasteland

Numerous projects located on industrial wasteland were also detailed, such as the former Genval Paper-works (Equilis), the former breweries (Matexi), the former paper-works at Mont-Saint-Guibert (Ginkgo), the Henricot factories at Court-Saint-Etienne (Equilis), etc. The authors also mention the 2,000 residential units scheduled in the master plan recently presented by Duferco Development for the conversion of the Clabecq Ironworks at Tubize along with the 800 units planned for Genappe on the site of the former sugar works (property of the Walloon Region). These developments may take many years to come to fruition.

An important transaction was revealed during the conference: the 'Bétons Lemaire' site at Ottignies, not far from the 'Galerie du Douaire', a site of more than seven hectares, has been acquired by the Matexi group which wishes to develop a substantial residential project here once the



Kim Verdonck,
Head of Research, CBRE



Named Courbevoie, the new major Thomas & Piron en Besix real estate development in Louvain-la-Neuve will see 600 residential units above the future RER car-park. Syntaxe Architects have been selected to design these buildings.

termination of activities of the company has been announced.

Another interesting project announced during the seminar was the 'Domaine de Cromwell' at Nivelles, on the former production site of Lazer Hats, (the Cromwell was one of their iconic models). Currently under development by Thomas & Piron with architecture bureau Montois Partners, the Domaine de Cromwell will be directly connected to the RER. And this trend seems to weigh heavily, even if the opening of the RER has now been put back to 2022.

RER stations are the star attraction

It is indeed clear that many residential projects are planned almost everywhere around future RER stations – Nivelles (see below), Louvain-la-Neuve and Braine-l'Alliance for example.

Where Louvain-la-Neuve is concerned, Philippe

Barras, MD of Inesu Immo, the real estate arm of the UCL, talks of over 1,000 units at project stage, which is over 100,000 m².

A large project (56,000 m²) is scheduled for the covering of the future RER car-park at the 'Ferme de Lauzelle' (following modification of the sector plan) and another of 25,000 m² is planned along the Aula Magna. For the first project of 600 residential units named Courbevoie, real estate partners have already been found: Besix and Thomas & Piron. The imposition of long term leases in force at Louvain-la-Neuve does not therefore seem to constitute any sort of obstacle for investors! And that isn't the end of the matter for Louvain-la-Neuve: a modification of the sector plan is already underway, to transfer 30 hectares of economic activity area to housing.

At Braine-l'Alleud, alongside the Parc de l'Alliance, the representative of AXA Belgium, Jean Sterbelle,



Philippe Barras, Managing Director of Inesu Immo, the real estate arm of the UCL, spoke during the seminar of over 1,000 residential units at project stage in Louvain-la-Neuve, which is over 100,000 m². A large project (56,000 m²) is scheduled for the covering of the future RER car-park at the 'Ferme de Lauzelle' (following modification of the sector plan) and another of 25,000 m² is planned along the Aula Magna.

indicated that a project of 700 to 800 residential units was being studied close to the future Braine-l'Alliance RER stop, a project which has already been named 'Porte de l'Alliance'. He also spoke of a shopping centre project which may come into being close to the same stop.

Evolution in the type of housing

The type of construction being realised in Brabant Wallon is substantially evolving. The tradition in the young province is for detached houses. And although this type of house makes up the majority of the existing stock, it is the construction of apartments which has the wind in its sails today. In 2007 apartments became the most constructed category in the province. So it is that in 2009, 1,500 apartments were built against only 1,000

houses. The survey's authors also emphasise the modification to the way households are made up in the province, indicating a clear increase in households of one or two persons. The average occupancy level in residential units in Brabant Wallon now stands at 2.37 persons. The success of apartments is also explained, of course, by the increasing scarcity and price of land for construction. It also corresponds to the desire of the Walloon authorities to achieve higher residential density, especially around stations and RER stations. This desire was reiterated by Michel Dachelet, assistant bureau head for Walloon Land Use Minister Philippe Henry (Ecolo Party).

Bruno HODDITE ■

The impact of the RER development

The Regional Express Rail network (RER) has the objective of relieving the chronic traffic congestion in Brussels by enabling drivers to leave their cars behind and use public transport. The sections of rail line involved in this project will be increased to four tracks and two of these will be reserved for the express service. During peak times, the RER will give those living within a radius of 30 km around the capital the possibility of taking a train every fifteen minutes from all stations and stops located on the network. Communications hubs are the subject of profound studies which aim to integrate all modes of transport into the public domain, including the soft modes. Inter-modality is at the heart of this thinking, with its corollary, an increase in the quantity and quality of car-parking facilities.

Eurogare is studying and establishing ten stations and stops on lines 161 (La Hulpe to Ottignies) and 124 (Waterloo to Nivelles). Setting up the RER implies repercussions which go far beyond just the engineering work on creating four tracks. Originally scheduled to come into service in 2012, the RER was put back to 2015, then 2018, and the new date is 2022!

The simple prospect of access to an RER stop in a few years is leading to unprecedented interest in real estate. And companies also seem to be convinced by the proximity of an RER station. The upcoming move of the headquarters of AGC Glass Europe from Brussels to Louvain-la-Neuve falls within this context.

