

## Wallonia projects make progress while awaiting RER

Editions & Séminaires (Laurence de Hemptinne), held its latest seminar this morning, on the subject of urban planning in Wallonia. Using the newly voted law on planning and construction regulations as a backdrop, Laurence de Hemptinne invited a number of expert speakers to outline some of the ten projects selected by the Region to be new districts or 'new little towns'. And to cover a very hot and contentious topic, she had persuaded François Bellot Federal Mobility Minister to come and talk about the RER....

First to speak was Michel Januth, Mayor of Tubize, who outlined the mega-project on the former Forges de Clabecq site in Tubize. There are currently 25 projects in the commune, but this one is by far the biggest and will see 2,500 new residential units, along with shops, offices and services on the 87 hectare site which is being operated under the name of Duferco.

Stéphan Sonnevile, CEO of Atenor, gave a description of some of his company's projects. La Sucrerie and Le Port du Bon Dieu have been well covered on this site, but Au Fil des Grands Prés less so, and Les Berges de l'Argenteuil not at all. The first of these, between the historic centre of Mons and the Grands Prés shopping centre, has progressed to the stage where all 130 apartments of the first phase have been sold. To these will be added more until a total of 202 is reached. This project covers 7 hectares and phases 2-3 will be complete between 2017 and 2019. The completion date of the remaining phases is not yet clear.

Philippe Barras, MD of Inesu Immo (UCL) and Jean-Luc Roland, Mayor of Ottignies – Louvain-la-Neuve spoke about the Athena- Ferme de Lauzelle project in Louvain-la-Neuve, the location of the conference. This is a huge project just on the edge of the town whose objective is to be connected to and thus be an extension of Louvain-la-Neuve. The 30 hectare zone will be developed into a sustainable district with around 1,500 residential units. This is a project which will introduce criteria into the selling process, to avoid it being taken over by property speculators. The Ottignies station district is another strategic development in this area, as this is the most used railway station in Wallonia, and is currently in a poor state and lacking easy access, among others. It will eventually see around 100,000 m<sup>2</sup> of housing built.

Minister Bellot was, to say the least, passionate about his subject. While criticising some of the decisions of the past, he fully assumed responsibility for implementing those which were in place, but was not prepared to put up with any more dithering or passing the buck. "Everyone has to take responsibility for his own domain", he said. And he made it clear that where the SNCB is concerned, this means trains and services, not building new roundabouts near to stations, for example. These are for others, and they should get on with them.

The rail lines involved (within a 30 km of Brussels radius) will in time be four tracks everywhere to accommodate the RER, but more RER services will be able to run – 4 an hour in rush hours – even before the extra rails are in place, he confirmed. He also spoke of the one billion Euros that the government was making available to the SNCB, and said that among others, this would lead to longer trains by 2020.

François Bellot also said that all of the communal mayors involved had received correspondence telling them of the most urgent priorities to be tackled immediately. And to sum up his new approach and his no nonsense attitude, he said: "I have rung the bell for the end of playtime".

Perhaps the last words of wisdom should go to Stéphan Sonnevile, however, who said: "The most important element is dialogue between all the interested parties, whatever the administrative procedure. Politicians have to tell us what they want for their communes, and it is then up to developers to deliver on this".



Minister Bellot will not put up with any nonsense where the SNCB and RER are concerned