

ECO-HUB RAISMES

A vibrant gateway to (re)connect with nature.

The Eco-hub Raismes project builds on an ambitious vision for a 'European Wildlife Park Hainaut' as an answer to the accelerating decline of biodiversity on our planet. The park encompasses a strategic region in Belgium and France with unique and diverse habitat areas where nature can be actively cultivated and experienced. Within this framework, Raismes becomes an important entrance to experience nature and a laboratory for new, nature-inclusive, templates for recreation, food, nature management, education, research etc. Nature becomes a catalyst for new activities and opportunities for the region in which the unique mining history can also take up a new role. The Eco-hub will be further developed with a clear ecological framework, a vision of sustainable mobility and local identity and added value.

TOWARDS A DISCIPLINARY SHIFT

Biodiversity is being eroded by humans at a rate unprecedented in history. By the end of this century scientists expect the extinction of 20 to 50 percent of all living species on Earth. Important thinkers of our time fundamentally question the anthropocentric way of looking at and interacting with our planet. To ensure our own existence, we must move away from this binary view of human versus nature and develop an approach that is more sensitive towards other life forms. In order to tackle these ecological challenges we must radically redefine how our landscapes are organized in space and time. This means larger inaccessible zones where other life forms can flourish, and also clear gradations and templates for co-habitation in different areas. At the same time, there's a need for spaces where we can reconnect with nature and rediscover our own position in the natural world.



Figure 1 View on entrance zone Eco-hub Raismes

A EUROPEAN WILDLIFE PARK

The cross-border nature park Hainaut offers unique opportunities for further development as a large scale, European wildlife park. In order to provide answers to the loss of biodiversity, there is a need in Europe to establish larger contiguous nature areas where nature conservation and recreation can be developed in a more professional and large-scale manner (see also the ambitions of the European Green Deal and European Bauhaus). Thanks to the central crossing of the Scheldt river, the cross-border nature park Hainaut has an extensive ecological potential with many interesting wetland habitats, alternating with drier areas and artificial landscapes (e.g. Terrils) accomodating unique plant and animal species. With an area of 75,000 hectares, potential for expansion, and a unique mining heritage, this is an excellent location for the development of one of the most astonishing nature parks in Europe. In addition, the park is unique because of its proximity to large urbanized regions (Paris, Lille, Flanders, Brussels). This provides a unique potential to attract not only a broad public of tourists and recreational users, but also to forge important links with research institutes and universities in the region.



Figure 2 Overview European Wildlife Park Hainaut

AN APPROACH BASED ON THREE PILLARS.

The Hainaut European Nature Park will be developed according to three main pillars. The first pillar comprises ecology and focuses on the development of the natural potential of the site and the optimization of wildlife habitat. A more proactive development of the area as a contiguous area with a better framework (scientifically and logistically) is aimed at, as well as the reintroduction of certain plant and animal species. The second pillar comprises the recreational and nature education aspect of the park zone, whereby it will further profile itself as a top destination for nature recreation. In this respect, it is important to develop a differentiated offer that focuses on various

target groups (young-old, rich-poor). The last pillar comprises the local anchoring with special attention to identity, employment and heritage. The development of the European nature park must be a catalyst for a new identity for this place with opportunities for the local economy that can also support the preservation and integration of the rich mining heritage. The development aligns itself with the existing vision for the area but tries to sharpen the ambitions and tries to find important links with initiatives on a larger scale (regional, national and European). recreation can be developed in a more professional and large-scale manner (see also the ambitions of the European Green Deal and European Bauhaus).

RAISMES, A VIBRANT NATURE HOTSPOT

As a southern gateway, Raismes will become a bustling hotspot of nature-oriented recreation and tourism. In addition to the current recreational activities, the offer will be extended with activities that are more strongly focused on the European Nature Park. For example, the castle of the princes of Arenberg will be transformed into a unique and exclusive place to stay and restaurant. The theme of sustainable food is central here and important links are being sought with the adjacent food forest and the hunting culture of the region. The car parks will be reorganised and centralised at the site. A new research centre and clinic for wildlife is situated at the access road. The site can also accommodate a tree and plant nursery to promote indigenous and exceptional plant species with a local sales point. Finally, we plan to integrate ecolodges on the terrain to the north, where guests can stay with a unique view of the water. To organize these new functions, the strong landscape gestures of the park are further articulated in a new ecological framework.

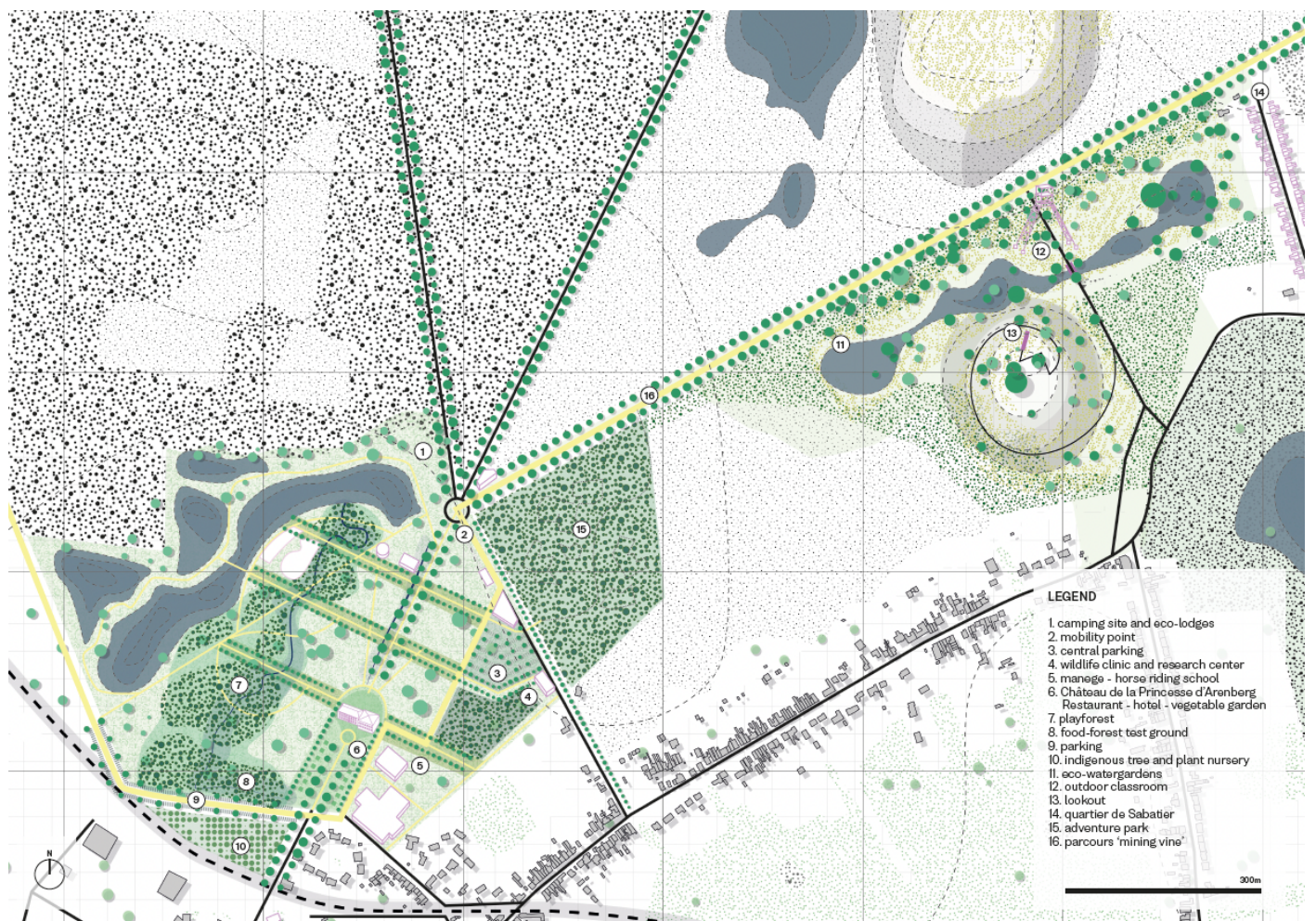


Figure 3 Plan view Eco-bub Raismes

NATURAL AREA TERRIL SABATIER

In the area around the Terril Sabatier and the water gardens, nature education is central. At the height of the old mine tower, an outdoor classroom is planned where the story of the mining past and nature can be told in a unique place. The lookout point on top of the slagheap will also be extended, floating above the ground. In this way, the special nature on this slagheap will not be disturbed.

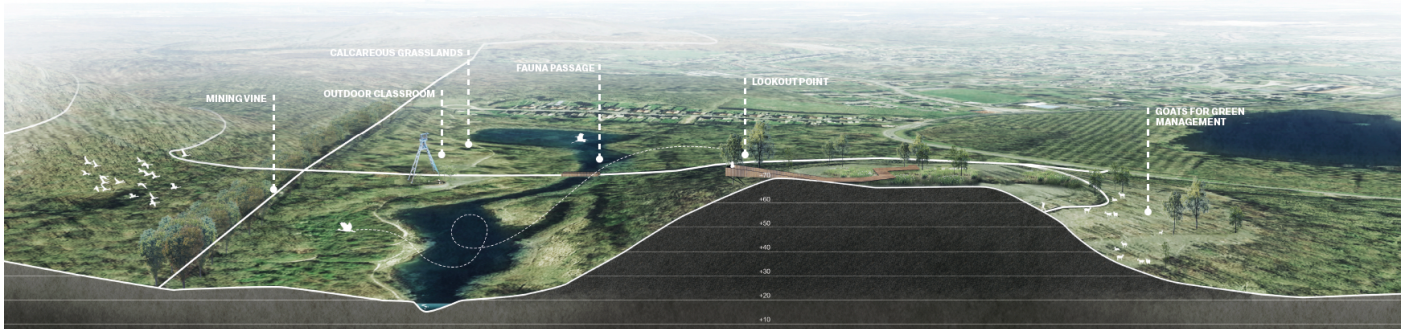


Figure 4 Section through terril and water gardens.



Figure 5 Lookout point on top of the slagheap. A floating path avoids impact on the unique plant species that live here.