

# I'LL SEE YOU IN MIDDELPLEIN!

## UPGRADING SCHORSMOLEN TO A SOCIAL, CONNECTED, AND ECOLOGICAL NEIGHBOURHOOD

Our ambition for Schorsmolen is to create a vibrant urban environment that fosters the wellbeing of its community.

We propose a strategy of focused interventions, aimed at upgrading the current neighbourhood and providing new possibilities for living, working, meeting, moving, and embracing nature.

The project develops from the existing social and spatial fabric of Schorsmolen, in an attempt to take the most out of what is available, from building blocks down to single trees.

The key moves of our plan are:

- Activate public space and realise attractive places to meet;
- Open up the neighbourhood by realising important connections to the surrounding areas;
- Make Schorsmolen a healthy place to live for people, animals, and plants, by improving its ecology and climate-resiliency;
- Upgrade the existing building blocks to offer a wide range of living and working options;
- Provide a flexible framework for implementation, led by an inspiring and optimistic vision.



Middelplein

### LET'S MEET!

At the heart of Schorsmolen is the garden-square Middelplein. This central meeting place has plenty of green, a sport court, playground, and sitting niches. Around the square, several block corners are activated, while new building fronts contribute to the lively urban character of this place. This important social space is obtained by reducing one block – an essential intervention to free the core of the neighbourhood and create a recognisable centre. Middelplein is a connecting place, where the axis of Middelstraat intersects with a new route from the Haagdijk to the upcoming urban areas in the north. On the water side, a green, stepping quay and a new bridge define the Water-plein: an attraction point with a floating garden, a social space, and water sports platform.

Middelstraat is the central axis of the neighbourhood, tying the different places together. Along this green street, there is a finer grain of meeting places, often coupled with active programmes in the corners of buildings. Front gardens, benches under a tree or simply green house stoops.

At the north-east end of Middelstraat an existing parking lot is turned into a Water Park. This is another social catalyst in the neighbourhood, as well as an important ecological and water retention area. New and current residents meet and play in this green & blue park at the door of their homes. The Water Park also works as a connecting element for different directions and walking flows.

One particular issue in Schorsmolen are the blind corners frequently encountered on residential building blocks at the street level, often occupied by private storage spaces. This lack of lively ground floors causes streets to feel anonymous and unattractive. We intervene on the corners of the Stichting Mooiland blocks (A, B, C) with small 2-floor extensions, to provide space for active ground floor programmes, with an extra room and a terrace for the apartments above.

Inside the blocks we deck the existing parking and storage rooms to create green courtyards for the residents, with front doors at levels +1 and 2 of the surrounding buildings. This second ground floor is pierced with trees rising from the parking below.

## MAKE CONNECTION

Our plan to turn Schorsmolen into a well-connected, walkable neighbourhood is based on an effort to facilitate proximities, establish logical links, create attractive and programmed routes.

The orientation of the area predominantly towards the historic centre and the Haagdijk contributes to its isolated character: two long building blocks (215m and 240m) obstruct the access to the water in the north, with no walking and biking bridge for more than half-kilometre. We envision here a series of pedestrian connections and two bridges between the historic centre and the future districts in the north ('t Zoet site, Havenkwartier, Triple-O Campus), passing through Schorsmolen. The long blocks on the water become more permeable. The new Middelleplein prolongs through the block by a "Woonerf" with workshops and atelier-homes, reaching out to the new bridge.

Another important missing link is the connection from the historic centre to Middellaan, which we propose at the Water Park by cutting through the existing building block and placing there a landmarking high-rise that leads the view from the Hoge Brug towards the new passage. A smaller cut is also possible through the same building. Both passages correspond to possibilities to go through the long block of De Prins and reach the new pedestrian-bike bridges.

Middellaan remains the most important axis in the neighbourhood. This car-dominated lane is transformed into the green Middelstraat. Car access remains there possible in order to reach the inner-block parking grounds. Pedestrians move in a green, welcoming space, dotted with small activities, corner shops, meeting places, front gardens, and home addresses. An extra bridge can be realised as continuation of Middelstraat to the Royal Military Academy, in a long-term perspective of opening up this area towards Valkenberg park and the city centre.

Accessibility is a crucial issue. Car use is high: public space is dominated by cars, as well as collective courtyards. We made an attempt to improve accessibility while maintaining the current capacity and promoting a mobility shift. Larger parking facilities in and around Schorsmolen are transformed into local hubs for shared mobility, situated at comfortable walking distance from all housing. Parking is organised in a more coherent way, by turning perpendicular street parking into parallel, optimising and covering existing facilities within the blocks, replacing the large open parking in Middellaan with an underground garage.



New Woonerf

## EMBRACE NATURE

The future Schorsmolen is a healthy place that promotes the wellbeing of people, animals, and plants. With this ambition in mind, we envision a landscape strategy at different scales, to reinforce the ecological structure of the area, increase biodiversity and climate resiliency.

In the bigger picture, it's essential to establish a stronger relationship with the water in the north and thus with the river Aa of Weerijds, today almost cut off from the rest of Schorsmolen.

Across the neighbourhood, public space is now largely impermeable, with extensive paved areas sealing the ground and green pockets emerging as cut-outs rather than a continuous structure. Within the blocks, collective spaces also lack green qualities. The three blocks of Stichting Mooiland are an extreme example, with sun-struck parking surfaces absorbing heat and repelling storm water.

The new Middelstraat and Middelplein are turned into an urban oasis. Paved areas for people are carved into a green, permeable carpet. So are the buildings: a strip of front gardens is attached to all existing building façades, emphasising the buildings as objects in the green, while upgrading the current terraces of the ground-floor apartments.



The site of the Water Park lies roughly 0,5-0,8m lower than Middelstraat, being suited for rainwater retention. Existing tree lines led the design of this small-scale urban wetland, which is conceived as a phytodepuration, biodiversity, and social environment. With the ambition of maximising soft

surfaces on full ground for larger trees, we replace and increase the current parking capacity with an underground garage packed between the two new villas at the edge of the Water Park.

There is a variety of trees dotting streets and parking lots. As a starting point for our landscape design, we carefully mapped and re-drew the every single tree in the neighbourhood, integrating them into the new green structure: in the Water Park, along the streets, as well as inside the blocks. By doing so, we maximise the canopy cover for shading on public and collective spaces, as well as providing orientation and nesting opportunities for birds.

Inside the courtyards, parking is organised more compactly to maximise green. On a smaller scale, by upgrading the housing blocks, the current roof surface is drastically increased. This is a chance to create new green roofs (up to 30% of the total roof area) that collect rainwater, capture solar energy, and provide of micro-habitats for insects.

## A HOME IN SCHORSMOLEN

Considering the diverse and relatively young population of Schorsmolen, as well as the expected urban areas at 't Zoet, on the north side of the railway tracks, providing more diversity in housing and public space types is a major task. In the various areas of intervention, we see opportunities to develop a vast range of living and working options to match current and expected demands.

The three blocks of Stichting Mooiland are upgraded by improving their relationship with public space, activating their corners and creating green courtyards. Block B is reduced to make space to the new square and gains a new building front. In the three blocks roof extensions and the combination of apartment units is possible, allowing for multi-generational living and freedom to upgrade your own home.

The new Middelplein is conveniently situated in the proximity of care-homes for the elderly, who gain an accessible and inviting public space at their doorstep.

The large block by the water is split in two (D, E) by the new Woonerf. In this informal environment, atelier-homes and community workshops can be realised. A new block by the water houses larger family homes with gardens. Smaller blocks open on Middelplein with apartments facing a decked courtyard, active ground floors for work and public functions.

At the Water Park site, two urban villas with their feet in the green and public functions in the plinth offer different apartment types for starters, students, and young families. Both villas have terraces with shared amenities and an underground parking garage.



Green courtyard

## STRATEGY

Our vision for Schorsmolen can be realised step by step, as it consists in a series of small interventions per block, tied together by public space and key connections through the neighbourhood. Phasing is flexible and can be adapted to the current ownership structure of the real estate assets. The area of the new Water Park, the long block on the water partly owned by Stichting Alwel, and the three blocks of Stichting Mooiland form somehow independent clusters that can be tackled at different stages.

Climate-adaptation and energy transition can function as an engine to kick-start the transformation process, both at the level of the public space and the buildings. The current housing stock will need to be upgraded to meet upcoming decarbonisation targets. This impulse can be used strategically to relocate tenants from housing corporations and perform the envisioned upgrades to the buildings.

While we believe that the regeneration process should unfold along a coherent trajectory, we envision a feasible strategy that allows for different starting points and development speeds. Cooperation among municipality and local stakeholders, such as owners, housing corporations, citizens, and local associations, is crucial in achieving such shared vision. We hope that our proposal shall serve as the starting point for the discussion on the future of Schorsmolen and provide the inspiring, optimistic image that this neighbourhood deserves.