



GREEN (ON)CONNECTS!

Welcome in Beek en Donk, greenest village of the Netherlands!

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Laarbeek: Waterport of the Peel.

A green area abounding in water, with many outdoor activities and a rich social life. We are proud of all volunteers and organizations that helped us creating a green and liveable Laarbeek. Together we are working on a sustainable future, to make sure our next generation still can enjoy our natural treasures. By participating in the European Entente Florale and by showing our green vision, we hope to increase awareness of the importance of our green environment.



Welcome in Beek en Donk

Beek en Donk is a village, part of the municipality Laarbeek and located in the region Peelland (province of North-Brabant) in Southern Netherlands. In 1997, Laarbeek was established by merging the former municipalities Beek en Donk, Aarle-Rixtel, Lieshout and Mariahout. Its name regenerated from the downtown area ‘Het Laar’ and ‘Beek’ accentuates the stream valley. The valleys of the streams Goorloop and Aa contribute to the unique green area of Beek en Donk.



We are happy to share our green vision. The rich monumental heritage combined with the open green spaces is characteristic for Beek en Donk. We will show examples of projects where we have integrated development with conservation of our valuable natural environment and existing landscape. Through education, leisure facilities and communication we involve the residents of Beek en Donk in our projects. This has led to numerous green initiatives and active volunteer organizations. During our tour you get to meet these people and our projects.



GREEN
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Planning and development

Our green vision is an essential element in the formation of new plans, since it is one of our most remarkable qualities. In the Structural Vision and Green Policy Plan we defined the importance of the green features of Beek en Donk and the way we will maintain them.

Structural vision: our spatial course

The remarkable qualities of Beek en Donk are defined in our structural vision 'Growth in Balance'. This vision is developed by the town council and forms our fundamentals for the green spatial course we take. Our diverse landscape, our wet area, the friendly village atmosphere and the nearby benefits of the city, are essential qualities. Sustainability of both buildings and environment improves our natural and landscape values and increases biodiversity.

Green Policy and Green Master Plan

In the Green Policy and Green Master Plan the green structure of Beek en Donk has been analyzed and classified as: main green structure, district green and additional green. In the main green structure, green elements determine the character and townscape of Beek en Donk, by accentuating the urban design and historical structure of Beek en Donk. These green elements consist of green areas (parks and plantations) and line structures (roads with



Structural Vision 'Growth in Balance'

planting). District green also consists of green areas and line structures, but improves liveability of the neighbourhood. Green squares, for instance, function as play and meeting grounds. Finally, additional green consists of public green spaces in residential streets with a decorating function.

The classification forms the basis for policy decisions and maintenance levels, whether it concerns protection of trees or facilitation of resident participation. The maintenance level of the main green structure is intensive (mowing multiple times per year), whereas district green and additional green are less intensively managed. Additionally, green areas in the rural area and at the edge of the village are ecologically managed (mowing twice a year) to support nature development and biodiversity.

Residential involvement

We involve our residents in the development of our municipality, as much as possible. New policy plans are not developed in the town hall anymore, but together with those involved. However, the policy board keeps control by clearly describing the possibilities in the open green spaces and idea requests. For instance, the influence of residents is great in district green, like playgrounds or green squares. However, the possibilities in the main green structure are limited, since its structure may not get fragmented. Additional green is in particular ideal to be designed and maintained by residents, due to its flexible design range.



Developing new plans with those involved

Focus Group Green

Our Focus Group Green gives us advice on developmental plans. This group represents volunteer nature organizations IVN Laarbeek (nature education) and foundation Laarbeeks Landschap (local landscape), Heemkundekring (local history), Southern Agriculture and Horticulture Organization ZLTO and TOP Brabant (leisure and tourism). New projects and policies related to green or rural areas are discussed within this group before decisions are taken. Plans may be adjusted to ensure their support.

Nature development on private areas through funding



Pasture bird pond established through STIKA

In recent years, Beek en Donk has invested in Stimulation Framework Green-Blue Services (STIKA) and project 'ErvenPlus', focused on improvement of biodiversity in the rural area and on farmyards. Residents and companies can apply for financial support to maintain existing, or develop new nature areas and landscape elements. Fifty percent of the support is funded by the municipality and the other fifty percent by the province of North-Brabant.

Sustainable use of rainwater

One of the characteristics of our 'water village' is the sustainable use of rainwater. We retain rainwater as long as possible in order to prevent problems downstream during heavy rains. Rainwater infiltrates or



Classification of the green structure of Beek en Donk. Main green structure consist of red lines en green areas

is discharged to water retention areas in the open green spaces within and surrounding Beek en Donk. In the case of extreme rains, we accept temporary puddles in the streets, as long as these stay between the curbs. During sewage renovations, separate sewer systems are placed to separate rainwater from household wastewater. In this way, we are able to reduce pollution of our streams and cope with extreme weather events due to climate change.



Rainwater retention at the edge of the village



Natural environment

The two canals and the south-north orientated streams are characteristic to Beek en Donk. The streams form the blood vessels of the landscape and are responsible for the wet valuable areas. These areas form the habitat for many native flora and fauna species, but water plays also a significant role for the community. Drinking water is extracted for thousands of people, ground water is used to brew beer by brewery Bavaria, and wastewater is purified in the sewage. A full hydrological cycle within our municipal boundaries!

Water, air and soil

Beek en Donk is located in a rural area and has therefore limited problems with air quality. Technical features, like air scrubber systems to reduce particulate matter and ammonia emissions, are required on livestock stables and planting is used on farmyards to capture particulates.



Improving awareness on a vital soil

In cooperation with local farmers, brewery Bavaria and water board Aa & Maas, we developed the project 'Farmer, Beer, Water' focusing on a vital soil. A vital soil leads to a better crop health and contributes to a robust environment. Additionally, new cultivation techniques are developed to reduce the use of pesticides, for instance, by using biodegradable bioplastics. These plastics are used to reduce weeds, water use and manure, by covering the soil. The plastics

are made of starch and decompose completely after a few months. The use of bioplastics reduces pesticide use with 75%.

Furthermore, brewery Bavaria is connected to local farmers by its residual water. During periods of drought, purified wastewater is used for agricultural activities and to maintain the water level in the canal. In this way, drought damage to crops is reduced and groundwater quality preserved. This form of residual water use is unique in the Netherlands. Partly thanks to this project and exclusion of chemical pesticides, brewery Bavaria was awarded most sustainable brewery of the world. Farmer, Beer, Water is a perfect example of how collaboration improves achievements. The role of the municipality within this project was mainly connecting the different authorities, support procedures and facilitate innovations.

Control of weeds and exotic species

Maintenance of open green spaces and pavement in Beek en Donk is free from chemicals.



Weed control in Beek en Donk is primarily focused on prevention by taking care of lawns, planting of species that grow rapidly and reduction of pavement. This leads often to reformation of open green spaces or the removal of pavement in order to reduce weed pressure.



Weed control measures using hot water

This year we started a pilot experiment to reduce chemical control on sports fields. By applying alternative fertilizers, soil life will increase and grass growth improve, reducing weed pressure.

Our sun rich forests are susceptible to invasive species such as wild black cherry and northern red oak. Despite the costs, local control is insufficient. Alternatively, forest development is stimulated and native shadow tolerant species planted to prevent dominance of exotic species. Thus, we work together with nature to fight it.

Waste material

Waste material is collected separately (plastic-metal-carton containers, paper, organic waste and residual waste), or handed in (glass, textile, and other material at the recycling center). Residual waste is burned and the resulting heat is converted into steam to generate electricity. Organic waste is composted and used to improve soil quality in municipal parks. Our residents frequently use the waste separation facilities, and, therefore, processing the organic

and residual waste of Beek en Donk is the cheapest in the whole region. About 75% of waste material collected in Beek en Donk is recycled. However, our goal is to increase this percentage to 95% by 2020 and we strive for a circular economy according to the principle 'From Waste To Resource'.



Recycling centre

Sustainability

In 2015, the town council decided to prioritize on sustainability. To do so, solid funds were created to subsidize new ideas and initiatives to improve sustainability. Sustainability is not only about the use of energy resources and environment, but also about people and society; and, economy and quality of life. It is also about setting an example, working together to learn and inspire each other. It is not something that only concerns the municipality, but something that concerns all of us.



The first steps are taken by the program 'Laarbeek Energetic' that focuses on:

- investing, not just maintaining;
- facilitating, stimulating and supporting the strength of our residents, young people, companies, institutions and associations;
- considering the health and welfare of future generations (leisure, taking care, living and working);
- mobilizing society;
- involving people with disabilities in the society (social sustainability);
- supporting initiatives from the community, and help them achieve.

One project within our sustainability program is Dragons' Den, which boosts creativity of our residents. This project is based on a Japanese television program. Residents may pitch their sustainable idea in front of an independent jury, the 'Dragons'. The winner will receive financial support to realize his/her sustainable idea. And it works: already 54 ideas have been submitted!

A sustainable energy supply is one of the major focus points of our sustainability program. Our residents have the opportunity to loan money from the municipality to buy solar panels. This loan has a low interest rate and will be paid off within 15 years. Since the interest of the loan is lower than the current electricity bill, the solar panels will pay for themselves and save money for the residents. The role of the municipality is to facilitate and support the transition towards renewable energy and limit climate change. At the project 'Big Power' from Foundation Sustainable Laarbeek, solar panels owned by residents of Beek en Donk were placed on the roof of a pig farm. Aside of facilitating sustainable projects, our organization also focusses on sustainability itself. Council meetings are entirely digital, we print two-sided, separate our waste material and we

have solar panels on top of our roof. Additionally, service bicycles are available to reduce car use.

Social sustainability

People with disabilities and people with a distance to the labor market have an important role in the maintenance of open green spaces in Beek en Donk. They carry out green maintenance activities in Beek en Donk and clients of Foundation ORO (people with learning disabilities) help us weekly by picking up litter. In addition, guidance is offered to unemployed people. Sustainability means for us also that we take care of the more vulnerable groups. Therefore, we have also established a vegetable garden near the new senior homes as part of the Project 'Together'. Children from the nearby primary school help with the maintenance of this garden.



Collection of litter by clients of Foundation ORO



Built environment

Beek en Donk is strongly associated with the two canals that meet here. The canal 'Zuid-Willemsvaart' was built in 1825 and connects Maastricht with 's-Hertogenbosch. This connection led to the industrial age of Beek en Donk. The 'Wilhelmina canal' was completed a century later and connects the Amer canal with the 'Zuid-Willemsvaart'. The T-shaped junction is an unique picture and played a remarkable historical role, according to the war report of English pilot Guy Gibson. The junction was used as a reference point for the attack on the dams of Möhne and Ederstuw by British bombers.

History of Beek en Donk

In 1300, the Duke of Brabant allowed residents of "Beek" ('brook') to transform his wet meadows into farmland. An agricultural settlement developed on the hill that connected several sandy roads. The Heuvelplein (Hill square) is characterized by this authentic historical townscape. The pillory "de Kaak" on this square was used to denounce people, and was in 2013 rebuilt by the Heemkundekring. This pillory is part of the culture-historical trail 'Law and Order'.



Heuvelplein

Northern of Beek, "Donk" ('tump') is situated. Donk is established on a riverdune in between the streams Aa and Goorloop. Donk was a small agricultural hamlet until

the metal industry arose in the 19th century due to the establishment of the new canal. The employment opportunities and improved living conditions boosted the population of Donk. Besides shops and restaurants, a private school was built.

Expansion of both Beek and Donk continued during the 20th century. The centers grew towards each other, but the lower wet area in between the centers remained undeveloped. The Green Lung still separates the two centers and is home to a variety of native flora and fauna species.

Monuments and policy

Information about heritage, archeology and landscape structure is open accessible through the digital heritage map. It consists of an overview of the archeological and culturehistorical valuable areas. Beek en Donk contains 16 national monuments (14th to 17th century) and over 200 iconic buildings (18th century). Maintenance of the buildings is described in the Action Plan Monuments. This plan specifies the importance of maintaining and strengthening the cultural history. The cultural and historically valuable estate Eyckenlust and monastery Heilig

(Obtained from: 'Enemy Coast Ahead' by Guy Gibson, 1946)

Our new course should have followed a very straight canal, which led to a T-shaped junction, and beyond that was the Dutch frontier and Germany. All eyes began looking out to see if we were right, because we could not afford to be wrong. Sure enough, the canal came up slowly from underneath the starboard wing and we began to follow it carefully, straight above it, for now we were mighty close to Eindhoven, which had the reputation of being very well defended. Then, after a few minutes, that too had passed behind and we saw a glint of silvery light straight ahead. This was the canal junction, the second turning point.



The pillory "de Kaak"

Bloed (Holy Blood) are located outside the center of Beek en Donk. These monuments are true pearls in the open rural area.

In 2006, the municipal monument committee selected historical buildings, of which 33 buildings were approved as municipal monument, including ten buildings in Beek en Donk. Maintenance of these buildings is paid through a municipal grant. To protect our natural heritage, new constructions and renovations in main streets and historically valuable areas have to meet the policy requirements according to an urban development policy.

Development with respect for history

Cultural heritage is of crucial importance in all our spatial plans. However, this does not mean that we stand still. Instead, we use our history as inspiration for development plans and combine it with economic values. We encourage our residents and local companies to create new initiatives. We



Historical map Beek en Donk, 1850

incorporate heritage and cultural history by including historic village structures and prominent places in the main green structure, but also by imposing requirements on townscape. One example is the construction of business premises between the old factory buildings from the 19th century, alongside the canal 'Zuid-Willemsvaart'. Within all our construction and nature development plans, we aim to recover historical landscape structures and protect monumental trees.



Industrial heritage along the canal Zuid-Willemsvaart

In zoning plans we define construction locations, what can be constructed and under what conditions. All zoning plans contain a list of iconic buildings responsible for the atmosphere of Beek en Donk. These historical buildings have not the quality of monuments but are essential for the towns' character.

A green and sustainable built environment

By providing information, we hope to raise willingness among residents to increase sustainability in and around their homes, for instance by installing solar panels. We set the example at municipal facilities: sports park Sparta '25 is provided with solar panels and LED lighting, whereas the Raagten school has a sustainable sedum green roof. This type of roof reduces heat gain and retains rainwater. In this way, rooms stay

cooler during summer. For the children it is even possible to get outdoor classes in their learning garden or play at the green playground.



Green roof of school De Raagten



Playground school De Raagten





Landscape

Diversity is the keyword when describing the landscape of Beek en Donk. Both the landscape and natural values are highly varied. However, the relationship between the village and the wet area of the streams Goorloop and Aa is always apparent. These streams form the basis of the landscape and the development of Beek en Donk.

Strengthening and development of the landscape

Management and policy of our landscape is described in the Landscape Development Plan. By creating habitat corridors, we increase visibility and attractiveness of streams for both nature and leisure activities. The area-specific character of different landscape types are strengthened through matching plantings. The presence of green elements provides structure in the landscape and accentuates the relation between the town and the rural area. Sandy roads are used as ecological and recreational corridors, whereas lane structures highlight the many roads in Beek en Donk. Additionally, there are various landscape elements, such as hedgerows, groves and ponds.

Mandatory investment in our landscape

For each construction plan in the rural area, measures have to be taken to improve landscape quality. Twenty percent of the value increase of the land has to be invested in improvement measures. These measures are mostly integrated in the construction plan, like yard planting. In case of large investments, the money goes to the municipal Landscape Fund to pay for implementation of measures according to the Structural Vision, for instance the habitat corridor alongside the Goorloop.

Landscape management

Maintenance of all municipal berms, ditches,



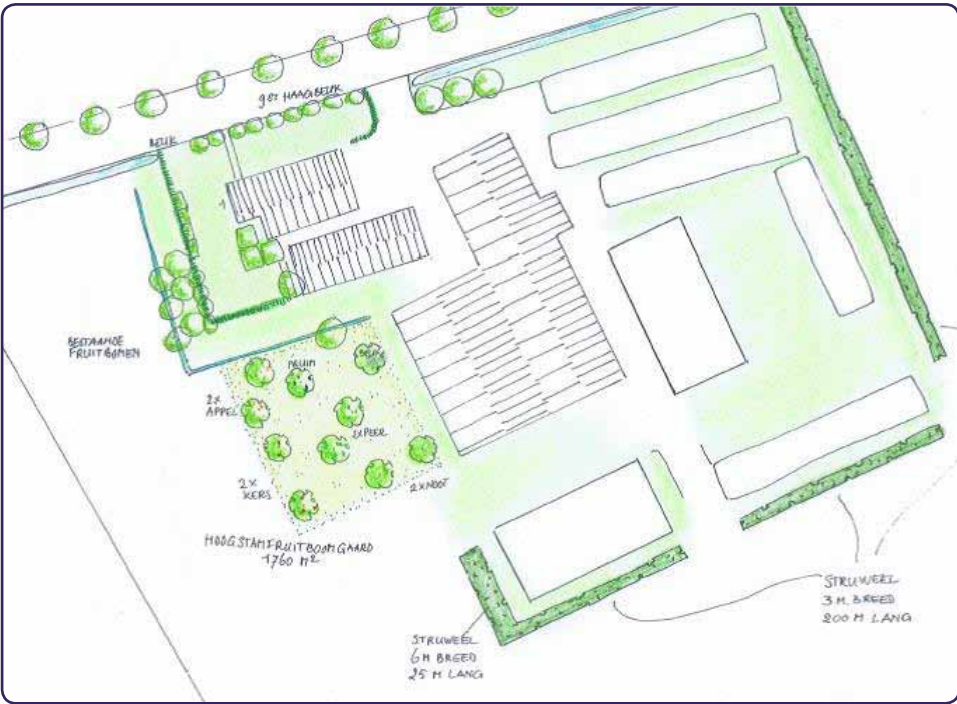
Stream the Goorloop



Stream valley of the Goorloop



Hedgerow landscape near De Biezen



Design farmyard in the rural area

nature areas, forests and landscape elements (ponds and hedgerows), is described in the Landscape Management Plan. Management measures are aimed to increase natural, recreational and/or culture-historical values. Ecological managed grasslands are mowed once or twice a year, and the clippings are removed. Control on dangerous dead wood of hedgerows, groves and lanes is performed every three years, and thinning/pruning is applied every 10 years. Ecological managed sandy roads, berms and natural riverbanks are mowed (every two years) and pruned (every six years) in phases, with cuttings removed. Ponds are cleaned/dredged once every ten years.

An important aspect of landscape management is participation of green interest

groups. Volunteers are involved in both the implementation and preparation of new management plans. A new aspect of landscape management is 'social return'. People with disadvantage in the labor market will be involved to give them the opportunity to develop certain skills.



Open green spaces

Beek en Donk is known as ‘garden village’ due to the Green Lung with its Music Garden. This 12-hectare green area is bordered by the Goorloop in the west the canal ‘Zuid-Willemsvaart’ in the east, connecting to estate Eyckenlust. In the Green Lung, you have the feeling that you walk in a nature reserve. However, by walking only 50 meters to the left or the right you are back in the village. This makes the green structure of Beek en Donk unique.

In the Green Lung

The original centers Beek and Donk are separated by a wet area, which was too wet to allow any construction activities. Paradoxically, this ‘worthless area’ is now the most valuable green area of Beek en Donk. The Green Lung has a high recreational use and many initiatives started here. It all began in 1920 with the construction of the Music Garden by the local Music Group and was followed by an outdoor swimming pool, educational birdwatching trail, animal park and trim trail, and most recently a gym and

adventure park. It is even possible for people with a disability to take part of the survival trail of Outdoor Laarbeek.

In the Masterplan of 2007, the Green Lung was described as a bead cord with different characteristic beads. Thanks to various measures, this plan has gradually been implemented. The streams, the trails and the habitat corridor that connects Goorloop with estate Eyckenlust form the cord between these beads.



Survival trail for people with disabilities



Masterplan 2007



Terrace at pavilion in the Music Garden



Music concert in the kiosk in the Music Garden

Goorloop as a green-blue border

Along the stream Goorloop, a spacious zone was created where green and nature play an important role. Nature development is combined with retention of rainwater from the neighboring residential areas. Low level recreational use is facilitated, however, the ecological aspect of this area has the priority. This zone is connected to the Green Lung and the habitat corridor Voorbeemd (connecting the Goorloop with the canal ‘Zuid-Willemsvaart’ in the north. The last missing green links along the Goorloop will be completed this year. This will result in a green-blue border of three kilometers long, that forms the gradual transition between the village and the rural landscape.

Sport and health

Open green spaces are also closely related to sport and health. We encourage sport and an active and healthy lifestyle as much as possible. For instance, we facilitated the

‘Health Race’ that consists of various activities to raise awareness and encourage a healthy lifestyle. It organizes recreational activities in open green spaces, like Nordic walking, boot camp in the Music Garden, outdoor tai chi workshops and weekly walking groups. This is an unique residential initiative, that won several national prizes and inspires other municipalities.



Boot camp in the Music Garden

Natural playgrounds

Besides the traditional equipped playgrounds, other (green) spaces are also suitable to play in. In recent years, we established natural playgrounds in cooperation with neighbourhood associations. These educational areas offer the opportunity for children to discover and play together. Height differences and elements like sand, water, tree trunks and pebbles trigger children to use their imagination and create their own game. By playing in and with their natural environment, children learn to appreciate it.



Natural playground Laarsche Velden



The Partridge as ambassador of biodiversity

A few years ago, the municipality selected the partridge as an ambassador species of biodiversity, as was suggested by IVN Laarbeek. The partridge is stated as a vulnerable species on the Red List and symbolizes the decline of pasture bird species in the Netherlands. We try to stop this decline by implementation of measures, focused on sandy roads, hedgerows and flowery field margins. In cooperation with IVN Bird Group and Laarbeeks Landschap, we established three partridge fields. The partridge is still fairly present in Beek en Donk. The designation of ambassador species, thus, has led to concrete actions.



Thematic Prize: Biodiversity

Thanks to the quality of our green areas and motivated volunteer organizations, we are able to improve biodiversity. Unique locations, like the Green Lung, the habitat corridors near the Goorloop and estate Eyckelust, provide excellent conditions for a variety of flora and fauna species. Through measures and maintenance, we are able to improve these conditions. Volunteers have monitored the effectivity of these measures, and how they improve biodiversity.

Biodiversity in the Green Lung

The Green Lung harbors a high biodiversity, with more than 200 native plant species and about 50 species of birds. The IVN Bird Group has created a birdwatching trail through the Green Lung, with information about bird species that can be seen. Besides the striking colony of rooks, dozens of nest boxes are present. In one of those boxes a rare forest owl is breeding. A kingfisher wall is established as well as a couple of flowery field margins which support butterflies and insects.

Biodiversity Meter



Biodiversity Meter

The Biodiversity Meter was developed in response to the biodiversity decline in the Netherlands. By showing the state of biodiversity, this meter raises awareness of biodiversity and stimulates collaboration between residents, schools, companies and

volunteer organizations to improve biodiversity. The Biodiversity Meter provides information about measures to improve biodiversity in private gardens, like placement of bird and bat boxes, and in open green spaces, such as embellishing additional green areas with flower rich planting. In this way, the project also promotes social cohesion in the neighborhood.

Sandy roads, berms and ditches: Small ecological paradises

The rural area of Beek en Donk contains kilometers of sandy roads. Besides the recreational value for hikers, cyclists and horseback riders, these roads and their berms have a high ecological value. Although their limited size, they form valuable patches within the intensive agricultural landscape for many species of birds, insects and small mammals. Through mowing and removing the cuttings, planting hedgerows by Laarbeeks



Sandy roads: ecological paradises in the agricultural landscape

Landschap or by deliberately doing nothing, we have increased the ecological value of these dirt roads.

Habitat corridors to support dispersal of species



Habitat corridor along the Goorloop

To enhance biodiversity and connect existing nature areas, habitat corridors were established. One of these corridors is located along the stream Goorloop. Over the past few years, the municipality has purchased over 10 hectares of land to improve the ecological value of this area with ponds, flowery grasslands and hedgerows. This has resulted in an important habitat for various species of amphibians, fish, butterflies and birds.



Great crested Newt

Measuring means knowing: Monitoring natural development

To measure the effectivity of our effort, we work according our Monitoring Plan. Once every six years, an additional ecological monitoring is performed as part of the national Subsidy System Nature and Landscape. With professional support on request, monitoring activities are carried out completely by volunteer organizations IVN Laarbeek (190 volunteers) and Laarbeeks Landschap (100 volunteers), The IVN Bird Group, IVN Water Group, IVN Plant Group and the Bird Protection Group, voluntarily monitor and share their data with the municipality.



Monitoring by volunteers of IVN

The data is stored centrally in the National Database Flora and Fauna (NDF). One of the highlights for both the volunteers and the municipality was to find the European weatherfish in the Goorloop, which indicates improvement of water quality. Additionally, the number of partridges has increased from 43 to 67 last year. Results like these make worth the effort.



Planting - Permanent and/or season

Beek en Donk uses a wide variety of plant species. The main green structure, consisting of parks, municipal plantings and side roads, determines the atmosphere and character of the village, which is reflected by the quality and amount of plantings. More than 600 species of trees, shrubs and plants are used in the open green spaces. This variety of species comes with a variety of flowering periods and color spectrum of both flowers and leafs.

Tree management

About 10,000 municipal trees of 130 species are planted in Beek en Donk, and a couple of thousand trees in private gardens. The Tree Policy Plan was defined in 2013, describing how to deal with hazardous trees, construction nearby trees and management of trees. Once every three years, trees are visually inspected according VTA (Visual Tree Assessment). Trees near busy locations and older trees are annually or biennially checked. Based on these controls, pruning

takes place. Pruning of younger trees occurs once every three years to support their growth. Often trees are replaced, but in 2018 an official Tree Replacement Plan will be developed describing the policy requirements in case of replacement. During planting of trees, we take into account the growth space available both belowground and aboveground, to ensure sustainable tree growth. We prefer quality above quantity, therefore, we improve growth conditions for trees in the main green structure, through the use of special substrates like special growth enhancing soil.

Protection of valuable trees

All valuable trees and green structures are digitally mapped on our Green Map. Removal of these trees is not allowed without municipal permission. Aside of these regulations, we provide financial support to private owners of valuable trees we also offer free VTA controls, advice and collection of pruning wood.

Shrubs, hedgerows and ground cover

Along the public roads, many shrubs, hedgerows and ground cover are planted. By covering the ground as quick as possible we reduce weed pressure. We try to increase diversity within our open green



Pruning of trees



Monumental tulip tree (Liriodendron)

spaces by combining deciduous and evergreen species. In the main green structure we limit species variation to preserve its structure, whereas we use distinct planting to accentuate prominent places.

Accentuating prominent places and village entrances

According to the Green Policy Plan, management of open green spaces in the rural area is becoming more ecological, whereas we accentuate prominent places both in terms of townscape and maintenance.



Reintroduction of perennials

These areas are decorated with flowering planting, as part of our policy to increase variation in our open green spaces. More variation means a higher biodiversity and a varied image. Since 2015, several green areas have been redesigned and perennials were reintroduced.

Seasonal planting

In early spring, open green spaces are coloured by the many flower bulbs that are planted along the main green structure and prominent places. From May to October, hanging baskets with annual plants colour the centers of Beek en Donk. These colours contribute to the livability of the village. Seasonal planting is partly provided by the organizations and shopkeepers in the center. Agricultural organizations collaborate with Laarbeeks Landschap to establish flowery field margins, covering about seven hectares yearly. The municipality subsidizes projects that improves biodiversity in agricultural fields through Stimulation Green-Blue Services (STIKA). Finally, residents bring colour in the streets through the design of their own gardens.



Sowing of flowery field margins by volunteers



Environmental education

Awareness of the importance of our green environment starts with education. Our partner IVN Laarbeek provides many courses for both members and non-members. From a tree course to a course on landscape reading and from a course on fruit tree pruning to a biodiversity course, they provide it all. Many students that followed the course on fruit tree pruning, now participate in the Pruning Group of Laarbeeks Landschap. Local nature areas are promoted through the IVN cycling and hiking trails, and the educational birdwatching trail in the Green Lung. The municipality facilitates IVN with additional professional knowledge on request and financial resources.

Environmental activities

In addition to the many courses, IVN Laarbeek organizes monthly nature walks and various lectures in their clubhouse De Bimd. They publish every week in the local newspaper and have their own magazine. Near their clubhouse an educational eco-garden is established, that improves every year thanks to the enthusiastic IVN Garden Group. The IVN Kids Club is also enormously popular. They even had to limit the number of members to 60 children. However, IVN organizes several educational activities for children, like children's parties and events. This attracts 500 to 600 children annually.

Since 2009, the garden is transformed into



Educational garden of IVN



'Kikkerconcert' (Frog Concert)

an open air festival on the first Sunday of June. This 'Kikkerconcert' (Frog Concert) provides many activities for children, like fishing for aquatic animals under supervision of IVN volunteers, while their parents simply enjoy the music and the croak of frogs. Additionally, it is possible to walk the trail 'Around De Bimd'.

Boomfeestdag (Tree festival): learn and do

For years we organized the tree planting week with elementary schools. However, the educational value of just planting a tree or shrubs is too limited. That is why we developed a new concept in collaboration with IVN Laarbeek. This new concept is

focused on teaching tree ecology to children and inform them how they can contribute to a green, liveable and sustainable world. In the morning, the children start with a 'tree course' in the IVN clubhouse. This course is focused on the growth requirements of a tree and followed by a couple of practical assignments, such as trying to encircle the thick trunk of the monumental willow together. Eventually the children will plant a tree of a species chosen by the school and donated by the municipality.



Boomfeestdag (Tree festival)

Operation Breaking Stones

In autumn 2016, we started the project 'Tile out, Plant in' in collaboration with local green entrepreneurs. Approximately 7,500 kg of tiles were handed in and exchanged to over 1,800 plants. After this successful activity, the municipality joined the national initiative 'Operation Breaking Stones'. This initiative focuses on greener, more biodiverse and climate-proof private gardens. Furthermore, we initiated the 'Laarbeek Green Bat-



Tiles were handed in and exchanged for plants

tle' focused on designing a climate-resistant and biodiverse front yard. This encourages residents to take measures in their gardens that contribute to biodiversity. The four best designs were implemented with financial support of the municipality. Through information and public-oriented activities like these, residents become aware of the negative effects of pavement.



Educational garden of IVN



'Kikkerconcert' (Frog Concert)

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Effort and involvement

Our residents are always our starting and end point, since all our work contributes to the livability of their environment. Communication is therefore more than just explaining developments and changes in open green spaces. It is also listening and meeting the local needs, but at the same time indicating the possibilities and invite residents to contribute themselves.

Solidarity

Beek en Donk is home to initiative-rich people and tight-knit communities. This thriving community life plays a significant role in the livability of the village. Within Beek en Donk a strong social cohesion is apparent, leading to social involvement and caretaking of each other. This is reflected by the large amount of active volunteers in Beek en Donk. Both '2014-2018 College Program' and 'Future Vision Laarbeek 2020' strongly focus on this solidarity. Within these programs, we mainly facilitate, support and guide the energy and knowledge of the society, instead of defining policies that limit the possibilities. We are currently in the middle of the switch from director to facilitator, also regarding the management of open green spaces.

Initiatives of residents

We stimulate residential involvement, since this leads to awareness of their living en-



Hanging baskets funded by shopkeepers

vironment and improved cohesion and livability in the neighbourhood. We have defined a couple of preconditions, but within this framework everything is possible. Initiatives are supervised by a municipal employee, who is the permanent supervisor and has the capacity to make decisions with the initiators. Due to our way of thinking ("yes, please!"), initiatives are expanding, but sometimes projects delay or get stuck due to our open-ended attitude. However, together we will find a solution and make it happen!

Management plans: the major role of volunteers



Pruning of fruit trees by volunteers

Management and maintenance of nature areas and our landscape is planned systematically. For all nature areas, habitat corridors, berms and ditches, landscape elements and the 180 hectares of forest areas,

management plans are defined. The plans include target conditions, required measures and an estimated budget to implement these measures. The importance of volunteers within our management is unique. Nature volunteer organizations conduct the maintenance measures on ponds, groves, hedgerows, willows and fruit trees. Additionally, Laarbeeks Landschap takes care of various recreational trails and helps with the establishment of annual flowery field margins.

Collecting litter

Every year we participate in the national 'Cleanup Day'. On this day, residents and various volunteer organizations, including IVN Laarbeek and Scout Association, help us with collecting litter. We facilitate this event by providing trash bags and by collecting and disposing waste afterwards. We do this year round to support initiatives to clean up the neighbourhood.



Collecting litter on Clean-up Day



Tourism and/or leisure

Beek en Donk is located nearby the cities Helmond and Eindhoven and, therefore, attracts people who seek the peacefulness and quietness of the rural area, but want to stay close to the benefits of the city. The pleasant atmosphere and the rich community life support the livability of Beek en Donk. Recreational activities within and around Beek en Donk are mainly focused on our residents and residents of the region De Peel. All information regarding the attractions, restaurants and events is available at the Tourist Information Centre (VVV i-punt) in Beek en Donk.

Waterport of the Peel

Since 2008, we position ourselves as 'Waterport of the Peel'. Water has formed Beek en Donk to what it is today and is still of crucial importance for both economical and social aspects, since it is the major component of our beers, helps transporting our products, and is the basis of all kinds of recreational activities, tourism and our health. What is often experienced as 'ordinary' is actually very special. The vision 'Laarbeek, Waterport of the Peel' states that water is the starting point for policy development and initiation of projects. This is partly initiated by the municipality itself, but also by encouraging residents, associations, companies and organizations, which has resulted in many projects: 'Farmer, Beer, Water',

'recovery and visibility Blue Crane', 'Water boulevard of the Peel' (Developmental vision northern part canal 'Zuid-Willemsvaart'), 'June Water Month', 'History of Canals in the picture', 'Waterport Bike Trail' and 'Watermark Waterport of the Peel'.

Accommodation

The number of accommodation possibilities in Beek en Donk is increasing, partly due to allowance of accommodation facilities in both the center and the rural area according to our Bed & Breakfast Policy. We welcome innovative plans that link to existing accommodation facilities, but provide new experiences. Accommodation possibilities range from staying at the former farm Brabantse Kluis of the missionary monastery Heilig Bloed, sleeping at a tomato breeder (B&B The Tomato) or at a farm (B&B Vogelshof), and docking your boat at the port, up to three days free of charge. It is even possible to camp at the campsite of Farm 't Hertenkamp or eco-tourist farm De Biezen, which promotes biodiversity through ecological management and establishment of flowery field margins. Peace, space and nature are the key experiences.



Transport using the canals

Recreational activities



Walking in open green spaces

One of the strengths of Beek en Donk is the facilitation of recreational use, which is one of our main focus points. It is all based on a robust network of both walking and cycling trails. Together with volunteers we maintain this network. We are aware that a diverse green environment improves the recreational quality and therefore we facilitate natural playgrounds, trim trails and outdoor events. In addition to the facilities provided, a wide range of day activities is available in Beek en Donk. It is for instance possible to visit local companies (e.g. brewery Bavaria and bell foundry) and a range of culture-historical and educational places, such as the trails along the canal and water retention area 'Blue Port' in the near future.

Festival WiSH Outdoor

During the first weekend of July, the three-day festival 'WiSH Outdoor' returns to Beek en Donk. This festival started as a local ini-



Festival WiSH Outdoor

tiative 10 years ago, but transformed into an internationally operating company. Approximately 200 artists of more than twenty different countries perform during this event, which draws over 60,000 visitors annually. More than 1,000 volunteers and 100 local organizations are involved within this event. About € 150,000 of the profit is partly invested into local projects and charities. During the annually 'Forward Doe Dag' (Forward Do Day), volunteers of WiSH assist local associations and neighborhoods.

Pop-up restaurant

In 2016, the first edition of the pop-up restaurant 'LOS: op 't Veld' (Tasteful Laarbeek: in the Field) was located at the organic farm De Janmiekeshoeve. After this successful try-out, the second edition of this temporary restaurant was held near the canal junction. During eleven days, delicious dishes made of solely local products are served.



Pop-up restaurant



References

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Photos: IVN Laarbeek & Municipality Laarbeek



