

Visions for Våxnäs

From Brownfield to Bluegreen Neighbourhoods

Situated between dense forests and the vast expanse of Lake Vänern, Karlstad occupies a unique geological zone where land and water converge. Located on the lake's northern shore – with the Klarälven River flowing through its center – the city experiences a high number of sunny days and a mild inland climate. As a result, it boasts a naturally rich and flourishing landscape. About 3 km outside of the city center of the city center, Våxnes is an area characterized by the urban planning ideas around the 1950s and -60s. Functionally segregated areas, vast open green spaces, and a high focus on automobile accessibility between different parts of the city.

Regardless of the rigid street network that was established from the beginning – over time and out of necessity – new buildings have been added and the result is somewhat unorganized in between large asphalted parking lots. Many of the existing buildings on the site have a fun and colorful expression, creating an atmosphere that gives a particularity to Våxnes.

The buildings primarily house low height storage- and logistical buildings, commercial buildings and some offices. This brings a lot of activity to the area, in the form of consumers and workers. The spaces between buildings consist mainly of paved surfaces for streets and parking.

The Våxnes commercial area borders the Låglandet park and Hagalund residential area in the west, the L2-forrest in the North, the E18 highway and the Strand villa area in the south, and the railway and an area of multiple sports arenas in the east.

The open green spaces not only serve a vital role in rain water absorption and delay, but also hold a potential as a recreational space and a connection between the different neighbourhoods that is underutilized today. The main challenge of Våxnes is that there is very little consistency in the urban situation, making it a confusing space to navigate for anyone not driving a car. The green surfaces of the area are almost non existing, apart from Låglandet park and the alleys spanning across.

To solve these challenges we have created 4 visions for the future of Vaxnas:

4 Visions

Our proposal is focused around four main visions:

1. Våxnes should be a flourishing neighbourhood where the blue and green structures help frame and enhance the activity going on within and strengthen the connection with surrounding areas.
2. By enhancing paths and green corridors between neighbouring areas and adding small scale urban interventions, Våxnes will become more closely connected to the rest of Karlstad
3. Resourcing of the site's existing buildings, materials, vegetation and land – through adaptive reuse, reconfiguration, densification and adding new layers – Våxnes will become more resilient holding a strong local identity.
4. By introducing public, cultural, and residential programs, Våxnes will transform into a vibrant, inclusive neighborhood buzzing with life, diversity, and activity.

Stages of Implementation

To achieve these visions for Våxnes, one of the first steps is to activate key sites, by transforming and establishing multiple reuse spaces in existing buildings across the site for the storage, categorization and reparation of dismantled building parts.

By activating the bus depot and connecting it to the larger network of green spaces, schools, and sports facilities, the project encourages movement through the area from south to north, helping regenerate the entire industrial zone as a vibrant, mixed-use district.

Through different micro interventions, or 'confetti planning', aimed at a variety of different goals such as strengthening green spaces, enhancing community or delaying rain water, changes can start happening quickly. This way, the local stakeholders and residents will become more engaged in the process from an early point.

By creating two main green corridors that span from Klarälven River to the L2-forest we extend the forest edge, and create an ecological corridor that enriches biological diversity. After removing and reusing pavement, natural soil remediation is used to allow the main corridors to extend into the streets of Våxnes and the surrounding areas, creating a blue-green grid on top of the existing street network. By connecting across to the smaller ecosystems the project aims to strengthen the main—and create new ecological corridors in the area. The strategy is rooted in the existing structure of the rest of Karlstad.

New housing typologies are added to repair and rebuild an underlying urban structure indicated by the street network, forming semi-open courtyards. In the northern part of the site, we propose mainly lower density row houses intertwined with some smaller urban villas. Going further south there is a larger mix of programs, as well as existing buildings. Urban villas with a height of 4-5 floors, with commercial programs in the ground floor.

The visions for Våxnäs outline a practical and future-oriented strategy for turning today's fragmented area into a well-connected, resilient and welcoming part of the city.

Blue-green Neighbourhoos

Two primary floodways — Låglandet and Høglandet parks — are designed to manage stormwater while offering diverse recreational experiences. A gradient of vegetation is established from the L2 Forest toward the river, forming an expanded ecological edge that enhances biodiversity and habitat connectivity. Integrated water management strategies — including wetlands, bioswales, and retention areas — support both ecological health and the creation of attractive public spaces.

Mobility and Connection to Karlstad

By linking existing green spaces and creating corridors between forest, river, and city, Våxnas can support active travel and a stronger urban ecosystem. Reclaimed voids can become part of this network, while mixed-use streets reduce car dependency and promote walkability. Mobility hubs are introduced at important junctions to encourage sustainable and active transportation.

Use of Existing Resources

Våxnas can grow sustainably by reusing existing buildings, materials, and land. Repurposed asphalt and concrete can form new paths, while preserved industrial structures can be retrofitted for new uses. Densifying the area reduces sprawl and supports greener transport. A playful "confetti structure"

of public spaces—made from reclaimed materials—adds identity, creativity, and community to the neighborhood.

Recreation, Sports and Culture

Våxnäs will build on its current recreational and commercial strengths, adding cultural and residential spaces to create a lively, mixed-use area. Public spaces like plazas, parks, and venues will host daily activities and larger events. Green corridors and walkways will connect sports facilities, schools, and nature, promoting social ties, health, and environmental harmony. The result is a neighborhood where culture, sport, and nature come together to enrich urban life.

The Role of the Neighbourhood

Public to private

The spatial structure of Våxnäs is organised along a gradient that transitions from large-scale public landscapes to intimate private gardens, creating spaces for both community interaction and privacy. The two principal parks — Låglandet and Høglandet — function as vibrant public spaces, accessible to all and capable of accommodating a range of recreational, cultural, and social activities.

Clusters of row houses and urban villas are arranged around common courtyards, which serve as extensions of the public realm but are scaled and programmed to support neighbourly interaction.. These shared courtyards integrate community-oriented functions — such as allotment gardens, play areas, and floodable landscapes that can transform into picnic spaces or informal gathering spots — creating flexible environments that adapt to seasonal and social needs.

Through this layered structure of public and private space, the neighbourhood supports a continuum of interactions, where the boundaries between public and private domains are deliberately softened, allowing for permeability, inclusivity, and shared ownership of the environment.

Mix of Typologies

The development introduces a combination of apartment buildings and row houses — both in small and large. The typological mix ensures spatial variety, social diversity, and flexible density gradients that respond sensitively to the surrounding landscape and existing urban conditions.

The urban villas and row houses establish a human-scaled street frontage and define semi-public courtyards that mediate between the larger parks and private gardens. The larger apartment buildings contribute to the activation of public squares. Together, these typologies support a fine-grained, porous urban morphology, in which private, communal, and public spaces interlace seamlessly.

In line with the vision of “re-sourcing,” the architecture of Våxnäs is shaped by reused and locally sourced materials that reinforce both sustainability and local identity. Building cores use rammed earth from site excavations, while facades combine salvaged concrete, brick, and steel, expressing the area’s industrial heritage. Sun-shading in repurposed timber and new wooden buildings continue Karlstad’s timber tradition, creating a low-carbon and coherent architecture with a sense of place.