

Parkplein aan de Eem

Our vision in five ideas

- We **build low-rise buildings** to reduce building complexity and costs, and encourage bio-based techniques. We neither build high, nor underground.
- A **4m structural grid** improves feasibility with **biobased materials**, shortens construction durations, and leverages economies of scale for a cost-effective project.
- Floor plans are designed for **contemporary households** and flexibly accommodate different household constellations over their lifespan.
- The Parkplein is a **public space primarily for habitation and appropriation**, secondarily for consumption.
- The Parkplein wants to be the **living room of Kop van IJssel**, extending Amersfoort's city centre with a new, proud piece of its history, becoming a destination in itself.

Making a public space work

Pleinpark aan de Eem is our vision for the city square reimagined not in stone but in soil, trees, light and shade. A **hybrid of park and square**, the Parkplein challenges the prevailing notion of urbanism—where often hardscapes dominate and public life is tethered to consumption.

Modern housing developments across the Netherlands and Europe follow a trend: buildings are getting larger, yet the **homes within are shrinking**. In this context, the demand for generous, multifunctional public space is not simply aesthetic but existential. The Parkplein offers an alternative to the model of consumption on public squares: it proposes an open, inclusive place that supports daily life in all its richness. Think of it not as an amenity, but as an **extension of the home**—a place to linger, rest, work, eat, play, and, perhaps most radically, do nothing at all and be okay with it.

Designed foremost as a landscape, the Parkplein prioritizes continuity of greenery and industrial heritage at the heart. From the Bokkeduinen and Groengordel Soesterkwartier, to Weerhorst and beyond, trees, meadows, and gardens are not decorative backdrops but active agents in shaping how space is used and shared. Hardscapes are introduced sparingly and purposefully to support access, enable spontaneous encounters, and **lower the threshold for participation**. At its best, the Groenplein becomes a kind of **outdoor living room**. At worst, quiet neighbourhood park. Both are worth pursuing.

Here, one might sunbathe, nap, co-work, or even cook. Children can run safely while their parents chat, knowing they are no cars around. A teenager may find a quiet corner to listen to a podcast while watching the world go by; a group of friends might encroach a clearing in the orchard to do a barbecue. Jam sessions and dining tables might appear, not as curiosities, but as **fixtures of civic life**.

Where the modern city square is often a place of consumption and sometimes ceremony, the Parkplein is a **space of inhabitation**. It offers an antidote to the increasingly privatized, programmed, and polished urban environment and trends in housing in the Netherlands. In doing so, it enriches not only the urban fabric—but also the **rituals of daily life**.

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Adaptive Reuse of Industrial Heritage

The historic factory buildings are transformed into public frequency bringers. The Rova, NeNaFa, and Van der Meiden buildings all have working structure and foundations - **they are functioning as they are**. There is a new building to be found within and not made in all of them, one that tells the story of what Kop van Isselt was while singing about what it ought to be.

The Van der Meiden fabriek is turned into an **active part of public space** by opening it up to provide covered public space, restoring its roof and repurposing its structure and envelope. We propose a gastronomical program to fill its plinth with life and support future events within the fabriek. People may take shortcuts through it, sit under its roof for remote working, or simply enjoy a meal.

During our visit to the NeNaFa fabriek we remarked how well it already worked as a series of shared creative workspaces and we don't see a reason to change it. Our proposal **restores** the historical part of the building while **extending** it with a tall, thin vertical volume (or a big chimney) that connects the old factory with new housing and works as a central landmark in the neighbourhood.

The Rova building is **fully restored** and its south-head facade programmed into an inviting place through landscape design. By adding individual atelier spaces, it becomes a part of the creative incubator that, combined with a gastronomical use, aims to fill the plinths of the Parkplein with activity throughout the whole day.

The landscaping also plays a pivotal role in heritage preservation. The ground, while predominantly composed of granite pavers, includes **memorabilia harvested from the demolished buildings** of the

whole industrial area in its structure. The Parkplein will be dotted with old concrete beams, stone carvings and brick patterns, creating a discoverable park that illustrates of the history of the Amersfoort. The required 2500m² of creative incubator is spread amongst old and new, creating a vast diversity of spaces and activating plinths around the Parkplein. We placed the 1000m² health centre in a new building, anticipating high technical requirements.

Eempark as the Green Heart (or the Green Living Room)

The Parkplein prioritises the **continuity of vegetation** while providing the **walkability of a square**. On a large scale, it ensures the connection of the new larger master plan with the the larger Amersfoort area: to someone on a bike, on a jog, or a stroll along the green belt, the Parkplein will be a welcome addition to the path - or a destination in itself. At the same time, on a district scale, it must also ensure the new neighbourhoods to its north-west and south-east are well connected, **playing its role as a node**, not a separation.

The urban proposal clearly defines the edges of the Parkplein, creating a **sound barrier** towards the Amsterdamseweg and enabling a car-free, quiet space. Transition spaces between surroundings and square and carefully dimensioned, given their importance in ensuring connectivity and mobility. The whole landscape is designed around the notion of domesticity and is **dimensioned on a human scale** to foster interactions. We hope, in a near future, people use it for everything they also do at home: celebrating your birthday, sleeping, reading, doing sports... We've dotted the plan with four types of spaces: **introverted individual, introverted group, extroverted individual, extroverted group** - to ensure that, programmatically, we cover the full spectrum of life's colours. Even a **natural pool**, fed

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from the Eem and filtered by plants, offers refreshment during the warmest days, fixing the Pleinpark as a **destination in wider Amersfoort**.

The material palette of the landscape is highly restrictive, focusing on vegetating where possible. Granite pavers increase their spacing the moment you step away from a main route, **allowing water and plants through**. With a single gesture, we can merge spatial and climatic zones in one: plants and evaporation provide cooling. For those buildings that will necessarily be demolished, we'll **re-use the materials** for the paving.

Next to the natural pool, **wadis/bioswales** are located where vegetation condenses to collect stormwater run-off. A central fountain makes part of the water retention a landscape feature that changes with the seasons.

The planting concept circles around the idea of **food**. There are three main landscape types: a **orchard**, an **edible garden** and an **edible swamp**. Rather than being an idealised version of nature, an edible Parkplein offers more **vectors of interaction** with nature: picking paths, boards with recipes and a sense of uniqueness that we hope make the Parkplein a destination.

New ways of living

In the original masterplan, the height of the residential towers within the factory buildings would have likely necessitated the use of **unnecessary amounts** of concrete and steel. In response, our massing proposal favours **low-rise buildings**—limited to a maximum of six storeys—to encourage the adoption of biobased construction methods and curate . The gallery buildings are primarily made of **timber**, with their structure providing protection for the sensitive façades against the weather climate. The corner

and head buildings are envisioned in **compressed earth blocks (CEBs)**—a promising, yet underutilised material in the Netherlands, particularly suitable for regions with abundant clay. Using anti-erosion layers not only increases their lifespan, but also creates a **self-shadowing facade** that reduces urban heat island effect. Nesting aids are included in the facade composition.

Our guiding principle is to offer an **example model for affordable and sustainable housing outside the Randstad**, where profit margins are typically lower. New buildings are organised on a 4-metre parallel structural grid, optimising costs of building in timber through standardisation. This **modular grid** also defines the flats, allowing for flexible unit sizes without imposing a hierarchy of room sizes. It enables various forms of **co-habitation** within the exact same floor plan: traditional families near the city centre as well as more contemporary arrangements—co-parenting setups, young professionals sharing, intergenerational living, or students. It allows to easily reach multiple target groups. The aim is to foster a mixed community where different generations support one another: a young professional picks up groceries for an elderly neighbour, who in turn cooks for a student next door and the student then babysits the couple's four-year-old upstairs. The living quality is augmented through the design of the plaza, where much of the domestic activities can spill out like they would in a private garden.

For reasons of sustainability and feasibility, we propose an alternative to underground parking. Taking the chance that the depth of the northwest blocks provides, parking is placed at their core, allowing active frontages along the perimeter and a raised courtyard overlooking the Parkplein. These parking structures will be built using CLT, making them demountable and adaptable in a future with fewer cars. Eventually, these block interiors can be transformed into extensions of the park, or into semi-private outdoor spaces for residents.

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Our proposal in numbers

Urban parameters	Building footprint	5926 m ²
	new	3462 m ²
	existing	2464 m ²
	Site occupancy ratio	ca. 20%
	Permeable ground	15847 m ²
	Water infrastructure	
	wadis	508 m ²
	natural pool	946 m ²
	fountain	196 m ²
	roof retention	ca. 2300 m ²
Program	Creative incubator	2870 m ²
	Gastronomy	1500 m ²
	Health centre	1390 m ²
	Housing	15800 m ²
	Total	167 units
	Small	63 units
	Medium	70 units
	Large	34units

