



**CATEGORY** urban/architectural

**LOCATION** Alès - Station District

**POPULATION** 42,000 inhab.

**STUDY SITE** 18 ha **PROJECT SITE** 10 ha

**SITE PROPOSED BY** Alès municipality and the urban planning agency for the Nîmes and Alès regions

**SITE OWNER** City of Alès, SNCF and RFF

**COMMISSION AFTER COMPETITION:**

- Design studies on the project site
- Project management of public spaces on the project site
- Project management for the first housing operation or the sustainable development centre

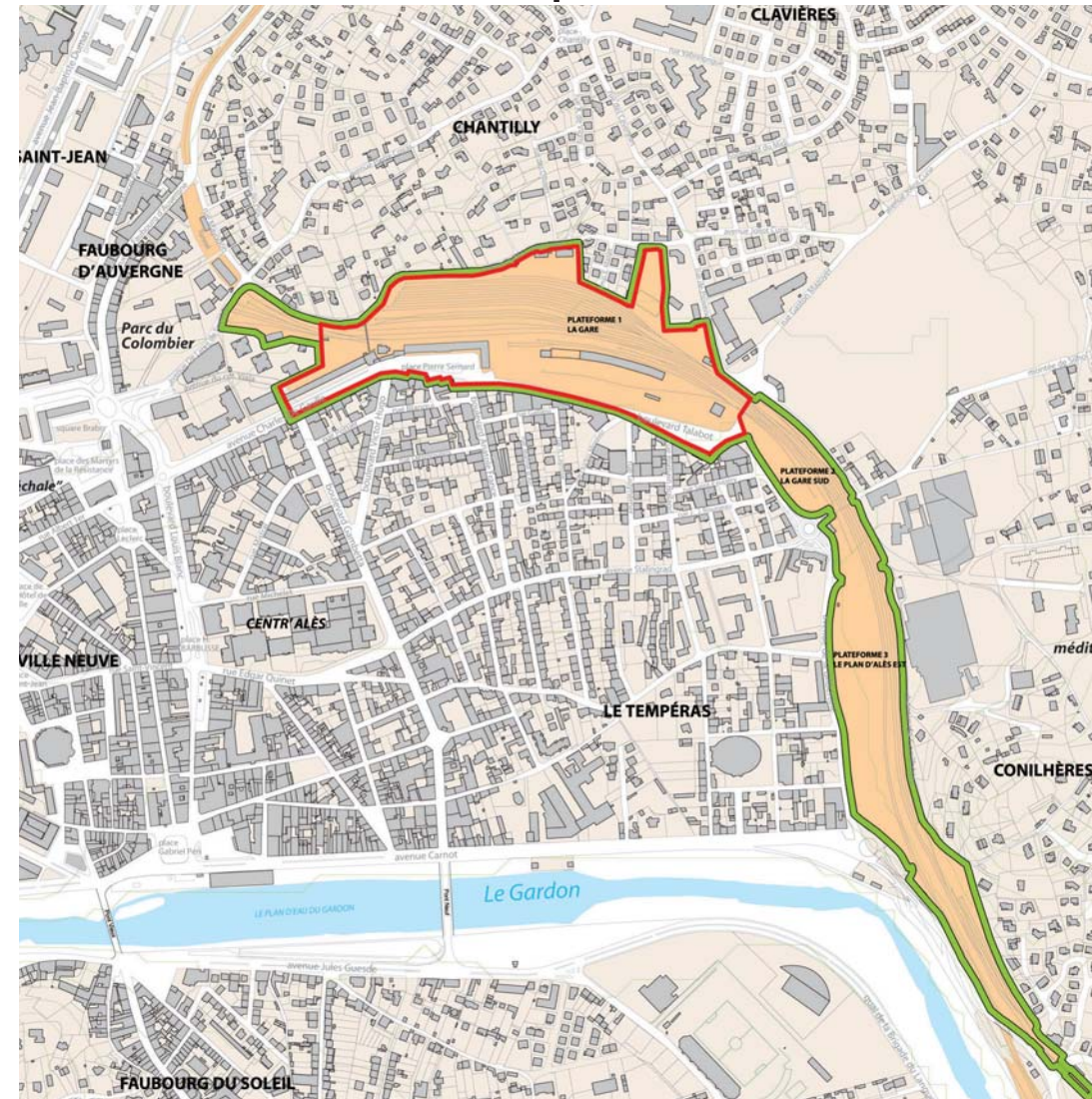
#### TRANSFORMATION OF SITE

The study site consists of a sequence of railway platforms flanked by slopes, between hills with detached houses to the North and the town centre to the South. In the immediate vicinity of the existing SNCF station and the future multimodal hub, the plots released from railway activities raise the question of urban density and intensity in the city centre. The building of sustainable housing, reflecting Alès' ambitious development plans, is the primary objective of the urban development of this part of the town.

The proximity of the city centre gives the project the opportunity and the duty to build a dense and sustainable district, connecting two urban landscapes with previously opposed functions and appearances, the dense inner city and the functional railway platform sites.

#### CITY STRATEGY

Periurban development and the presence of flood areas significantly limit the city's potential for expansion, so releasing the railway platforms in the centre of Alès should help to re-establish the necessary metropolitan equilibrium. The project will contribute to the formation of the regional networks of towns in the Alès-Nîmes-Montpellier-Sète area, by a strategy of reclaiming central districts around multimodal transport hubs linked by the railway network. The project is the Alès equivalent of the Hoche-Sernam project in Nîmes, initiating a rapprochement between the two cities. The city of Alès wishes to increase its population from 42,000 to 55,000 in the coming years while bringing down its average age through a housing stock better suited to current housing aspirations, an alternative to estates of detached houses.



## SITE DEFINITION

The railway plots that extends southwards to the Gardon, following the curve of the natural relief, together create a marked division, confining the town centre and isolating the districts further to the north. The new study site district will be based around a mixed program: 400 dwellings, the multimodal transport hub (PEM), the sustainable development centre (MDD), a new gymnasium and a hotel. The continuous line of platforms should also be used to create a green belt at the heart of the district, linked with the regional cycle track network. In a growing city that wishes to retain large greenbelt areas, and is considering developing new public spaces, how can a coexistence be established between the need for high density and the desire for nature? Taking the multimodal hub and the wish to develop green transport methods as the starting point, what sort of new relationship between town and rails might make it possible to establish a single neighbourhood on either side of the railway line?

## NEW MOBILITY

The presence of the railway station and the plan for a future multimodal hub on the site provide the opportunity for a particularly ambitious approach to transportation. The role of the car in the future district will be restricted. Travel to Nîmes will take place via the existing railway line, which will be modernised to provide a service similar to a tram-train, introducing a new, more local form of transport into the city. The existing visual and physical division created by the railway line between the northern and southern parts of the city is to be attenuated, not only by local crossing points but by a new form of relationship between town and train.

## NEW LIFESTYLE

The primary aim of the future district, which will have 300 dwellings on the project site, is to make up for the current housing shortage by creating housing for three population categories: families, older people and young people. Innovative housing typologies, designed for the climate, social relations,

practices and habits typical of Alès and the Mediterranean, will form the basis of a new way of living.

## NEW SUSTAINABLE ENVIRONMENT

The city of Alès, which is supported by the conurbation committee's agenda 21 process, wishes to build a district that will be an ecological role model. Exploring all aspects of sustainable development, the "station eco-district" will be able to count on local industries for its construction and operation, for example the timber industry of the Cévennes massif, the region's limestone quarries (Pont du Gard), the Eco-construction and Eco-industry centres of excellence, the Mining Schools, etc.

The city wants a Sustainable Development Centre to be included in the project, which will be a space for research, discussion and pooling of knowledge in this field. How can this emblematic program be made the symbolic centre of the new ecological neighbourhood?

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Aerial photo



View of the railway platform close to the train station

View of the train station piazza / View of the platforms looking south