



FACTS

- The current urban development plan was drawn up by the Waterfront consortium and Mulleners + Mulleners Architects and Lodewijk Baljon Landscape Architects in close consultation with Harderwijk municipality and urban planner/supervisor Jos van Eldonk.
- The Waterfront project comprises some 750 dwellings, a new marina, a tourist yacht harbour, an urban beach, two multi-storey car parks and many shops, bars, restaurants and recreational facilities.
- TBI companies Comfort Partners, Voorbij Prefab, Voorbij Funderingstechniek and Mobilis were also involved in the project.
- A large part of the ground under the old Haven industrial estate was seriously polluted with asbestos. One of the largest asbestos factories in the Netherlands, Asbestona, had been located on the estate for many years. To clean up the site, 600,000 cubic metres of soil had to be removed.

Water has been at the heart of Harderwijk ever since the town was founded but in the second half of the twentieth century the historic centre was in danger of being cut off. According to property developers Dennis van Hunen (Synchroon) and Mathijs van Beem (Koopmans), the town was being left high and dry by the unremitting sprawl of industry and recreation. "The only things you could see from the Boulevard were rows and rows of parked cars and a dreary industrial estate. The water was becoming a distant memory."

Harderwijk Waterfront

Returning the town to the Zuiderzee

The plan to improve the area around the Boulevard was first conceived in 1995. But it took more than ten years before the town council put the Waterfront development project out to tender in 2006. A consortium made up of Synchroon, Koopmans Bouwgroep and Boskalis Nederland won the competition and were awarded the contract to create a new, attractive residential area on the water. "It involved the complete transformation of part of the centre of Harderwijk. Industry and pollution had to be cleaned up so that the town could reclaim the water again. And the development had to complement the town's historic character, of course."

Long breath

According to Van Hunen, the fact that the first homes did not go onto the market until 2014 is a good example of "perseverance, determination and conviction". The developers first had to clear a series of hurdles. The zoning plan necessary to relocate the industrial activities to a new site did not make it through the Council of State. The housing crisis depressed the market and the soil underneath the industrial estate was so seriously polluted with asbestos that a major clean-up operation was required. When they started to remove the asbestos, moreover, the developers unearthed several unexploded bombs from the Second World War.

For a while it looked as though the project was doomed. "But it wasn't," remembers Van Beem. "New agreements were made with Harderwijk council and within the Waterfront consortium in 2011 to refine the plans and cut costs. So we had to adapt the plans that had won the competition in 2016. For Synchroon and Koopmans, who are bearing the development and management risks of the entire Waterfront development, however, the changes made the business case viable again."

Because everything was taking so long, the consortium decided to give the town a present by bringing forward the creation of the new urban beach.

"We created the beach island and then landscaped it in cooperation with local business," explains Van Hunen. "It's been an enormous success. It even won the 2014 Gelderland Spatial Quality Award."

New land

According to the developers, Waterfront is one of the most complex district development projects in the Netherlands. "We put several years' hard work into preparing the site and creating the two islands on which the houses will be built, North Island and South Island," recalls Van Hunen. "The success is due chiefly to the good working relations among the consortium members and with Harderwijk municipality and Gelderland province. Mobilis also played its part by building five drawbridges and one fixed bridge connecting Waterfront. Two of them link the new Beach Boulevard to the historic town centre."

Many of the houses on the islands have been designed by TBI WOONlab. "Some of the first houses weren't," says Van Beem, "but since 2014 they have all been designed digitally in BIM – so have the apartments, actually the entire neighbourhood has. When a project goes on sale it can be displayed in 3D. By imaging the surroundings and the homes that have already been built, we can show the buyers where they are going to live. They can even see what the view from their apartment will be."

Unsurprisingly there is a lot of interest in Waterfront. In May, 460 people attended an open day on North Island and explored the new development using VR glasses. North Island lies between South Island and the Knar yacht marina. It will host a large variety of homes, from terraces to stately town houses, and from semi-detacheds to free-standing villas in a variety of styles. And they will all be close to the water. The eye-catcher is the 45 metre high apartment tower, the Vuurtoren, which will radically change the skyline of Harderwijk.