



Markermeer - IJmeer
Natuurlijk ontwikkelen

INVESTING IN MARKERMEER AND IJMEER



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The Netherlands is under constant development. For the last few decades, there has only been one specially designated exception. We always assumed that the centrally located Markermeer would at some point be made into a polder area (the Markerwaard) and, as long as this future designation applied, we treated it very pragmatically. The turning point came with publication of the Spatial Planning Policy Document, which stipulated that the Markermeer should no longer be considered a national buffer for land reclamation.

With the Markermeer and the IJmeer, the so-called Noordvleugel (or North-Wing) of the Randstad conurbation has access to a conservation and recreation area on its doorstep of nearly 80,000 hectares. The extensive open waters and the varied coastline possess unique qualities, especially given their urban surroundings. The value of this area for nature is beyond question. The lakes are a key link in the international routes of migratory birds. The presence of many thousands of birds is one of the reasons why this area enjoys protection at a European level. But nature is under pressure. It is not obvious at first sight, but nature has declined significantly in this area since the eighties. Bird numbers have fallen. The question is whether and how this decline can be reversed.

At the same time, the Noordvleugel of the Randstad conurbation is very dynamic. Almere is set to double in size by 2030 to 350,000, Amsterdam and environs continue to grow and Utrecht is about to launch into a new phase of expansion. There will soon be more than 1.5 million people living around the two lakes. All these extra residents mean growing demand for infrastructure, jobs and recreational facilities. This urban development places huge demands on the surroundings. The landscape is a key distinguishing feature of the Noordvleugel, a metropolitan region that, in contrast to most other European metropolitan areas, consists of a network of cities instead of one large continuous urban area. The Markermeer and IJmeer could contribute significantly to this trump card, boosting this area's international competitiveness. The potential is there, but it must be exploited wisely. And this requires proactive, development-oriented policies. One aspect of this involves a renewed legal approach to conservation projects that goes beyond the current fashion of environmental compensation.



The need for integral development is recognized at executive level, which has led to this more holistic approach being designated as part of the National Programme for the Randstad. The provinces of Flevoland and Noord-Holland have been requested to manage an Integrated Development Perspective project for the Markermeer-IJmeer. This scheme was submitted to the Minister of State for the Ministry of Transport & Public Works as an interim model towards a long-term strategy for the area.

The Integrated Development Perspective project demonstrates that the ecological decline can be reversed with a systematic approach. This approach aims to create an ecological system that is flexible enough to absorb future changes without a substantial loss of quality. This will help to generate space for the urban and recreational dynamics of the Noordvleugel.

Integrated Development Perspective

To realize the above, more work is needed in ecological terms than is legally required to maintain the conservation levels stipulated in the European Natura 2000 programme. Natura 2000 and the Dutch version of this programme have resulted in an ecological task which is drafted in terms of ecological support for specific species and habitats. However, compliance with the above still leaves the ecological system as a whole vulnerable to natural phenomena (such as storms and climatic changes) and human intervention. The system approach of the Integrated Development Perspective project aims to create a robust ecosystem. This hardy and resilient system allows us to realize advantages of scale in ecological terms, and creates enough support for protected species and habitats so that new projects and activities no longer form a threat to the ecological balance. The realization of such a tough and flexible ecosystem is an innovative method. External legal advice indicates that the

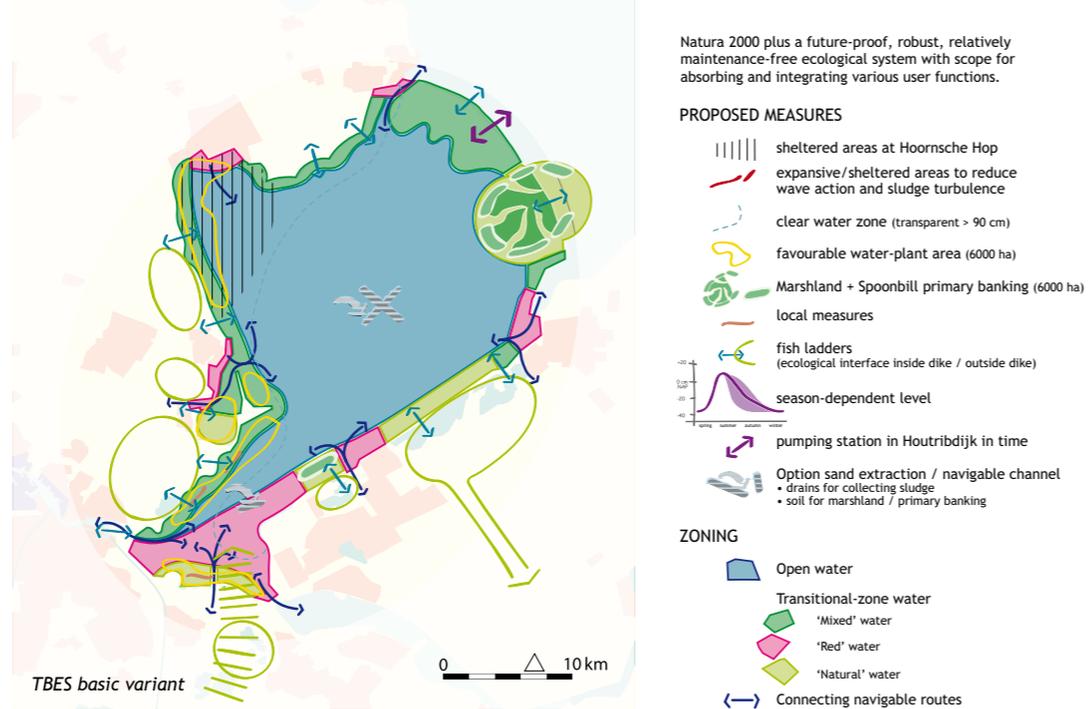
combination of a future-proof ecological system and limited development measures for other functions would be less likely to run up against legal barriers as a matter of course. Development plans lacking such an overall perspective are much more likely to hit such legal obstacles.

The plan to allow the Markermeer and IJmeer to develop into a unique conservation area in the Randstad is supported by the European Commission, which refers to it as an “excellent and innovative example that integrates the enhancement of nature and the development of recreation and urban areas in a single project”. Subject to all the measures of the Integrated Development Perspective being implemented and factually substantiated, the basic principles of the so-called Habitat Directive apply.

Fresh water and sea level

The new policy framework for the IJsselmeer area requires the government to make a decision regarding the Markermeer and IJmeer water levels over the longer term: 2050 and 2100. These dates form points of reference in the KNMI's climate scenarios. The key criterion being to secure the safety and provision of fresh water over the longer term. The regional parties want a decision to be made to uncouple water levels in the Markermeer and IJmeer from sea level rises, and to maintain these levels at around the current position after 2050. This serves the feasibility of the Integrated Development Perspective project.

Chart of Ecological Measures



The Blue Heart of the Markermeer and IJmeer:

- consists of a flexible and coherent ecological system capable of absorbing changes (human as well as natural);
- increase in biodiversity;
- is accessible and enjoyable;
- guarantees freshwater provisions for the existing supply area;
- provides sufficient protection against flooding;
- ensures landscapes, cultural-historical elements and ground and soil factors are of a high standard;
- allows space for economic usage (fishing, shipping, sand extraction);
- creates space for urban and recreational development.

All this according to the Birds & Habitats Directive.

The plans in a nutshell

The Future Vision for Markermeer-IJmeer demonstrates how the area's nature is to gradually regain its vitality and resilience. The most notable proposals are the development of an extensive marshland area along the shoreline by Lelystad and 'primary banking' at Almere. The marshland and primary banking will result in a greater array of transitional zones, which will provide extra habitats, further increasing the area's biodiversity. The marshland is positioned to enhance the relationship between land, lake and conservation area for the benefit of the bird life. Another pillar of the plans is sludge management. The realization of zones sheltered from wave action and of sludge drains will create more areas of clear water around the lakes. The end result of all these measures will serve to increase biodiversity and landscape variation. In other words a landscape that is more appealing to plants, animals and people.

Costs

The stated ecological objectives require investments of 850 million euros. A significant share of the costs of conservation can be financed by sand extraction from the Markermeer. Although we are talking about large sums of public money, spending will result in key social benefits. And neither is this sum required in one lump-sum. The Future Vision will be implemented in phases and will take 20 to 30 years. Awarding Natura 2000 status to Markermeer and IJmeer will significantly enhance the area's quality of life and the Randstad's position as an internationally competitive region. Furthermore, conservation measures will create employment and provide a basis for further urban development and tourism/recreational projects thanks to the 'future-proof ecological system'.

How is the Future Vision progressing?

In November 2009, the Cabinet opted for a future perspective that includes an ecological, infrastructural and urban Expansion of the Northern Randstad. The Cabinet insists that measures to improve the quality of nature are initiated soon. The definitive first-phase measures for the Future-proof Ecological System (TBES) depend on the recommendations of NMIJ (Natural Markermeer IJmeer project). Under the auspices of the NMIJ, the Dept. of Public Works (RWS) will continue up to 2015 to assess the assumptions made in the Development Paper and will test the proposed measures on a small scale using different experiments.

Together with the region, the state authorities will now study the ways in which the plan's various components can be realized.



Further information?

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