



An urban location with a history. That is how Synchroon describes the site of the former rail engineering works. Synchroon is redeveloping the area between Utrecht Central station and Zuilen station to create a district that can offer the very finest in living and working conditions. The many green spaces and original elements such as points and rails, make Wisselspoor one of the most distinctive districts in Utrecht.

Industrial heritage turned into housing

FACTS

- Synchroon won the contract in 2014 for its vision of “An urban location with a history”. It drew on the know-how and expertise of the Ozive repurposing studio (an alliance between Nico de Bont, HEVO and Synchroon) to develop Wisselspoor.
- The Wisselspoor team is made up of the architecture firm Studioninedots, DELVA Landscape Architects, SKONK, the concept development firm, Ozive, the repurposing studio, and De Wijde Blik communications agency.
- The Royal Netherlands Engineering and Rail Works was established outside the city border in 1828. With 5,000 workers it was the biggest employer in Utrecht. The site is now within walking distance of Utrecht Central station.
- The houses in the first part of the development will be built to the Cityplot concept. This is a dynamic and flexible urban construction method that combines an appealing mix of functions and building structures.
- A pop-up restaurant opened up in the Carriage Works at the end of 2016. Apart from enjoying the food and drink, visitors can also follow creative workshops there.
- Construction will begin in late 2017/early 2018. Project completion is planned for 2018/2019.

Synchroon carried out the project in close cooperation with the city of Utrecht, NS Stations, the local community and future residents of the district. *“The residents were a bit suspicious at first,”* says Paul Roodnat, Synchroon’s project developer. *“But we contacted them as soon as we could to explain our plans for the first phase and involve them in the project. They are very enthusiastic now. They can see that Wisselspoor is a great addition to the area.”*

Werkspoor, as the residents call the district, is surrounded by several popular housing districts. The biggest challenge was to integrate the new houses into the existing housing without causing any friction. In consultation with the residents, Synchroon designed Linear Park: an extensive green zone that connects the existing district with the new one. “Pocket parks” were added in a number of places. A “Railway park” will also be created along the entire length of the development beside and between the railway lines.

The site is still fenced off at the moment but it will soon boast an attractive mix of functions and be open to the public. There will be space for houses, traditional bars and restaurants and creative entrepreneurs. Two cycle tunnels under the railway lines are also planned, one heading towards the city centre and the other towards the Cartesius district. One of the city’s key demands to reduce car use and improve health was that the district should be very cyclist-friendly and provide cyclists with easy access to the station and the city centre.

INDUSTRIAL HERITAGE

People were perhaps the most enthusiastic about the idea to retain the area’s industrial heritage. The culturally and historically important buildings were stripped of latter additions and restored to their original glory. The largest building, the Carriage Works, was the first to be restored. It will house a large car park in order to remove vehicles from the streets. The Component Works, the second building, is still in use. *“The lease expires in 2023,”* says Roodnat. *“So we’ll have to wait until then before we can return it to its original state. One of the options is to build the shells for 15 loft apartments that the residents can then finish off however they want.”*

“The residents were a bit suspicious at first”

Because a large part of the district will be public space, Synchroon met with the city officials to discuss the landscaping. In close consultation with them it is drawing up a zoning plan so that the district can be developed sustainably. Roodnat is confident about the results, *“The existing buildings will be repurposed, materials will be reused and there will be green spaces everywhere. Together with the city, Synchroon wants the development to be awarded an Excellent certificate in the BREEAM sustainability assessment method.”*