

Communities in Bloom 2022 Profile document



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Oudenaarde



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Welcome to Oudenaarde!

The city is located in the Flemish province of East Flanders, in the heart of the Flemish Ardennes. It accommodates 31 394 inhabitants and covers 6 805 ha. Oudenaarde combines the best of two worlds: the charm of a relatively small but cosy historical town on the banks of the river Scheldt but yet providing all the facilities you encounter in a much bigger town.

The town is easy to get to by car, bike or public transport (frequent and direct connection to Brussels, Ghent and Bruges). This way Oudenaarde is a perfect starting point to visit these larger cities. Situated in the valley of the Scheldt the town is surrounded by the hills and hillocks which constitute The Flemish Ardennes. The combination of the green district – 'Flanders' Most Beautiful Landscape' – with its rich art-historical past and patrimony, with its authentic area and buildings transforms Oudenaarde into a magnet for tourists and sightseers. All sights are within walking distance (2,2 km) from the centre.

Recently, new projects to renew the town scape have been laid out, such as the reconstruction of the quays and banks along the Scheldt, the new Scheldekop, a peninsular in the Scheldt, the new layout of the town park and the market place. This market, of old the beating heart of the town, is now the place to be for a chat, over a glass of beer or with a good meal. Traffic has been drastically reduced and with the new plantation the function of the square is now revalued. With its famous cobbled green hills and hillocks Oudenaarde is also the background of The Tour of Flanders, especially since the finishing line of this world famous cycle race has been drawn near the town centre. Oudenaarde has proved to be a surprisingly interesting and charming town to visit or to stay at.



Community appearance

Every town in an urban area is an important factor for the quality of living and working of its inhabitants. Within the boundaries of the town the local authorities aim to concentrate the urban structures in order to safeguard the countryside, keeping out those new developments that might harm the natural beauty of the landscape.

After all, Oudenaarde is part of The Flemish Ardennes, one of the most traditional landscape in Flanders. The hills and hillocks, the woods of beech, the cobbled tracks, woods with wells, listed churches and protected rural area are typical of our region. The town and country planning concentrates on the preservation and strengthening of these environmental structures.

Policy in spatial and ecological structures

Inside the municipal boundaries the focus of the town policy is on concentrating the urban structures: this implies the compact building of higher premises but at the same time the creation or development of green area, but only if the added value is socially acceptable. This way the town will get more public open space, more light and more air. Projects to construct 'slow connections' (such as cycling freeways), sports and leisure centres and car-sharing initiatives, are now being realized.

If the car is king in Flanders, **the cyclist will be Emperor in Oudenaarde**: actually, Oudenaarde is the bike-rider's heaven on earth (but sometimes it is hellishly hard to ride uphill!). This way, the local authorities try to enhance the quality of life of pedestrians and cyclists; by giving the town centre new plantings, life in town has become an attractive place to live in, to work or to join social life. And this is realized with the participation of our inhabitants.

Sustainability - participation

A good example of participation is the new site built on the **left bank of the Scheldt**. This area of 200 ha, bordering the town centre, is cut through by the Scheldt.

The area contains two old and abandoned factories, the town sports centre, a brickyard and marshland. This area has recently got a new and lively function.

The town has a partnership with the Provincial Government of East-Flanders. Both authorities are working together on a masterplan, taking special care of the ecological aspects. This cooperation is based on four pillars: landscape, water, mobility and circular economy. Different target groups such as citizens, owners and the general public have been consulted through bilateral consultation, project conferences and participation events.

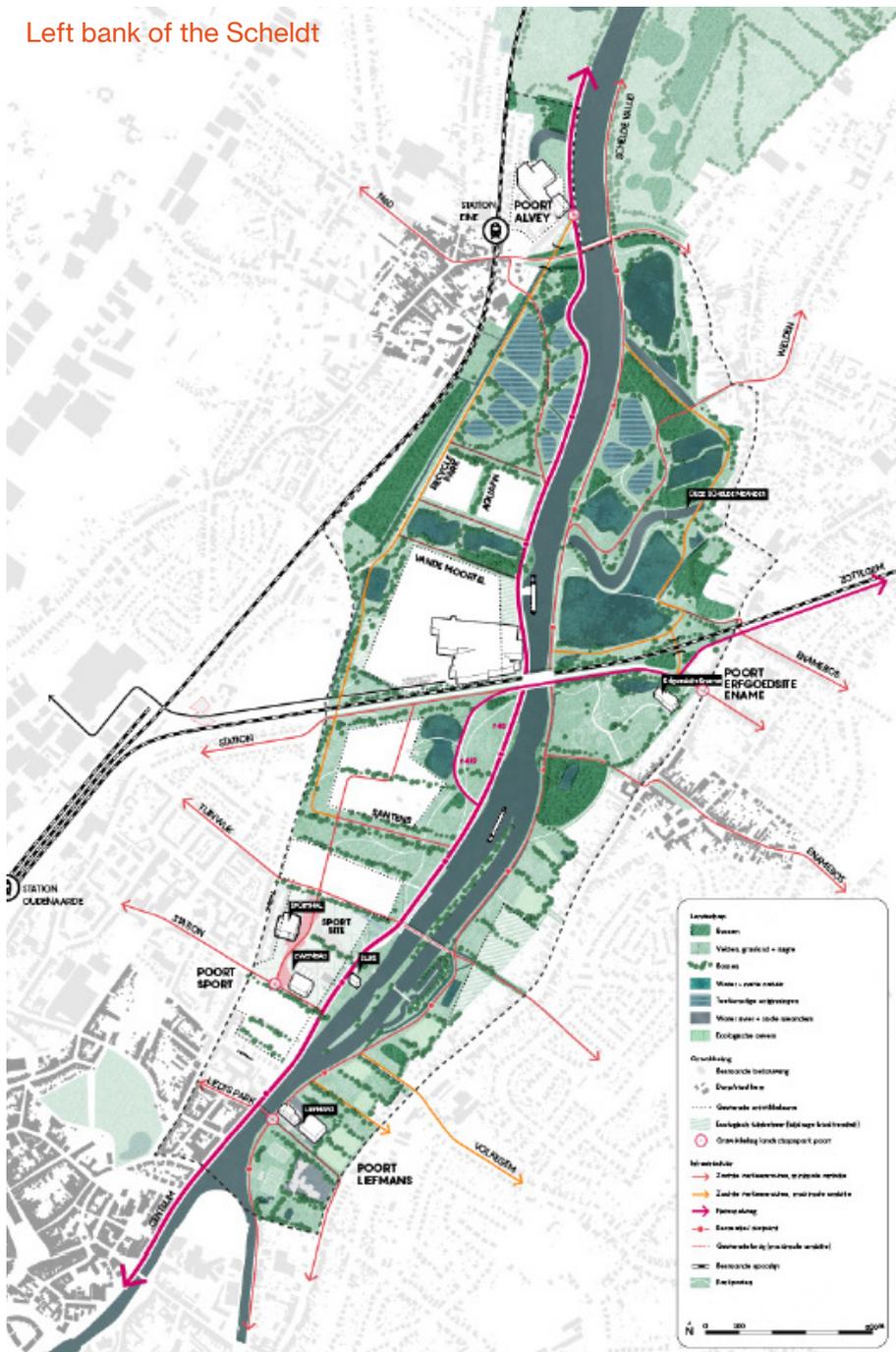
Another example of town development projects and the participation of the citizens is the reconversion of the **Saffre Frères site**. On the old and abandoned factory premises a new residential area is being built respecting the special ecological character of the surroundings. Cars will have to give way to pedestrians and 265 families will live in this green setting. A 'tiny forest' was laid out that will bring biodiversity within the urban setting. The economical destination of one of the old factory remnants was chosen by employers and citizens.

Enterprising is a point of special interest within the city planning. The city is well equipped with schools, a hospital, a law court, administration offices and consequently has a high degree of employment.

The town provides 14,000 jobs and in doing so it is an important employer in the region. To consolidate this economical position, and if possible to strengthen it further, the municipal authorities had a detailed study made in December 2018. At the same time, a study of the housing shortage was ordered. With the results of both studies the local government has a good survey of the dynamics of the spatial challenges for the years to come, allowing them to use objective data to delineate a correct sustainable development and environmental planning.



Left bank of the Scheldt





Stronger together?

The city of Oudenaarde is investigating whether a possible municipal merger with three surrounding cities **Kluisbergen, Kruisem and Wortegem-Petegem** can strengthen the municipalities.

The Flemish Government stimulates municipal mergers with a strong financial contribution. A merger can furthermore offer multiple benefits to different service areas. The four towns have successfully collaborated on various issues in the past few years, such as the coronavirus and the vaccination campaign.

A consulting firm is currently completing a feasibility study on the possible merger. Strong and constructive citizen participation is an essential part of this study. The municipalities organised surveys and multiple participation moments to identify the residents' key concerns and questions and to understand the advantages and disadvantages from a citizen' viewpoint.

The municipalities' employees could express their opinion on the topic through a questionnaire. A final decision on the matter is expected at the end of 2022.

Tidiness

With the support of the Flemish initiative Mooimakers ('Making things more Beautiful'), we are continuously working on keeping our city tidy and without litter.

The city has its own team of workers to clean the streets and empty the public trash cans. They are assisted by a group of **volunteers** who bring a grab stick and waste bag with them on their walks through the neighbourhood and help keep the streets free of litter. Companies and associations frequently organize litter campaigns. Schools use educational packages to educate their students on the importance of clean communities. The city actively supports these efforts.

Waste management is essential during **events**. For example, during the international bike race Tour of Flanders in 2022, only reusable cups were allowed in the public tents. The VIP areas exclusively used reusable catering equipment. The city placed plenty of waste islands along the route. During the race, eco teams picked up litter to keep the area tidy. Enforcers actively motivated spectators to throw their garbage in the waste islands. A communication and awareness campaign was developed to stimulate that Flanders' Most Beautiful (the nickname of the Tour of Flanders) would also be Flanders' Most Tidy. After the event, any remaining litter was cleaned up by youth organizations and social employment.

The results of this campaign were very successful: the route and the area of the finishing line in Oudenaarde were noticeably cleaner than the previous editions.





Environmental action

Building a green and climate friendly town where living is easy and cosy is not only the task of the local government alone. All inhabitants, enterprises, schools and clubs must be involved, too.

Climate plan

In 2016 Oudenaarde signed the Mayor's Convention promising to reduce the CO₂ emission by 20 % by 2020. A climate plan was drawn up to further rational use of energy and more specifically, renewable energy. In 2020 we renewed our commitment: by 2030, we want to reduce CO₂ emissions by 40% compared to the reference year of 2011. We will record this ambition in a climate plan, which includes a mitigation plan and a adaptation plan.

The mitigation plan contains actions and measures for different sectors: households, industry, transport, tertiary sector, agriculture and urban services. A separate chapter focuses on renewable energy.

In the adaptation plan we determine how we arm ourselves against the noticeable effects of climate

change, such as flooding, drought and heat stress. Both elements resulted from an intense internal collaboration between the various city departments in a climate project team, which will carry out the implementation. Citizens shared their input during a participation evening. The Province of East Flanders supervised the drafting of the plan.

Education

We want to educate our children and teenagers to become climate-conscious citizens. They are our assets to a sustainable future.

There are lots of primary schools in Oudenaarde and two large secondary schools. Their students can enjoy environmental and nature classes in their hometown. 't Spei has a variety of biotopes, trees, shrubs and flowers. In 2018 during The Week of the Honeybee the 'Hall of Bees' was ceremoniously opened in the orchard of standard trees in 't Spei. The pupils of the Secondary Technical School have built a 'hotel' for solitary bees and other insects. 't Spei can be visited with a professional bee-keeper.



Horticultural school in Liedtspark

There is also a horticultural school in Oudenaarde; on the site of the allotment gardens the pupils can till the soil in some plots or they can cooperate with the municipal gardeners there. A 15.000 euro grant was given for this Leaderproject.

The town added the same amount of money which allowed them to build a small classroom near their workplace. During the school year, several learning days are provided, during which **students work alongside the city workers**.

Community against climate change

The fight against climate change results in a strong community feeling in our city. Several citizens worked together and created **associations** that contribute to the realisation of the climate objectives and the transition to a sustainable society.

These environmental and nature associations have been active in Oudenaarde for many years. They inform and activate the inhabitants of Oudenaarde and regularly assist the city with advice. The city supports these associations by giving them financial support. For example, the Repair Café and the Cyclists Association ('Fietzersbond') are active climate ambassadors. Other associations include Natuurpunt Vlaamse Ardennen, Werkgroep Bos t' Ename, Velt, Milieufrent Omer Wattez and many others.



Working together with other governmental organisations is essential. We have a strong collaboration with the Regional Landscape Flemish Ardennes, the Agency for Nature and Forests and the Province of East Flanders.

One of the most striking examples of a successful collaboration is the Peregrine Falcon project. A pair of peregrine falcons (*Falco peregrinus*) have been building a nest for years in the nest box on the tower of the Saint Walburga church. Every spring, this can be followed by a livestream. Hundreds of viewers actively watch the livestream on the city's website. The falcons are ringed just before fledging.

There is a lot of interest in sustainable and environmentally conscious gardening in our four **allotment gardens**. The allotment gardens contribute to community building and strongly focus on cultural, educational and social purposes.

For example, in Ename you can find a shared garden with a touch of history. A vegetable garden has been redeveloped on an archaeological site of a 17th-century abbey with respect to the past.

In Eine and in the centre of the city, an area has been set up where people who might have financial difficulties have the opportunity to grow their own fruits and vegetables under supervision. This strongly promotes social cohesion within this community. To boost the sustainability of the allotment gardens even further, the city offered a course in ecological gardening and composting.





Every Thursday morning there is a **flower and vegetable market** in our city. The Tacambaro Square transforms weekly into a green oasis. In addition to this weekly market, a more extensive flower market is organised once a year, where 25 renowned florists from all over the country display their planting material.

Thousands of buyers and spectators come by to admire what the growers have to offer. The city provides plenty of entertainment for children. The market vendor with the most beautiful stall and the most variety of plants receives a price from the city of Oudenaarde.

A lot of the chores in the municipal garden provide an income for people in social employment. For more than twenty years, the green management along our extensive footpath network has been carried out by the non-profit organisation Grijkoort. This organisation provides training and social employment. This non-profit organisation works annually with a budget of more than €160,000.



Waste management

The collection of household waste is organised within an inter-municipal cooperation. More than twenty waste fractions are selectively collected at our recycling centre. Still usable materials can be handed in to the collection point of the Kringwinkel (a second-hand shop).

Residual waste, paper and cardboard, and PMD+ (soft plastic, metal packaging and tetra bricks) are collected every two weeks. Composting barrels and bins are offered at a low price for at-home composting. Asbestos is also collected from home, free of charge, to encourage inhabitants to dispose of these health-threatening materials in a correct and safe manner.

Since 2021, a more environmentally friendly alternative has been offered for the traditional annual Christmas tree burnings. The green department of the city organises a shredding of Christmas trees at several locations throughout the city. Citizens can take the shredded material with them to use in their garden.

Brownfields

Environmentally damaging industries no longer have a place in a city centre. This hasn't always been the case. The textile industry flourished in Oudenaarde, traces of which can still be seen in the centre today. Some of these historic industrial lots are currently being redeveloped as brownfields for living and working. For example:

- Scheldekop: the former gas site has been transformed into a varied urban district with 195 residential units.
- The Saffre Frères site: on the old and abandoned factory premises a new residential area is built respecting the special ecological character of the surroundings.
- The site Alvey (automation company) and site Santens (textile factory) are being redeveloped within an integrated plan for the left riverbank of the Scheldt: a 'circular Scheldt park' for living, working, greenery and water.
- The Aldia site: a recently abandoned jam factory. The city is preparing a redevelopment plan for living and working.



Heritage conservation



Cultural heritage

A town is pleasant to live in if there are nice places where people can meet: a snug pub, an outdoor café or pub, attractive shops, a lively square, an interesting passageway... Building this pleasant atmosphere to improve the quality of living of its inhabitants, tourists and entrepreneurs is exactly what Oudenaarde strives for.

Oudenaarde is a historical town that received its town privilege as early as 1189. Today, Oudenaarde is a modern town brimming with energy and at the same time, it still has its medieval aspect in its network of streets and in lots of eye-catching monuments.

In the town centre the town square with the famous **city hall** in late Gothic style (1526-1537) and its magnificent belfry, listed as UNESCO world heritage, deserves particular notice. The medieval clothmakers' hall at the back of the town hall was built in 1330. In it you can admire the late medieval roof-trusses and the most important

works of art from Oudenaarde: the wonderful tapestries.

Oudenaarde is proud of its more than **100 protected monuments** – only Ghent has more in our province - of which a great part belongs to the religious heritage: old monasteries and nunneries, the Hospital, the Black Nun's Convent and unique Gothic churches Saint-Walburga and Our Lady's Church (1234) at Pamele. Our monuments attract thousands of tourists every year.

The **market square** is the place to be. Five years ago the municipal authorities had it reconstructed into a new meeting place, laid out in French stone, the colour of which grades nicely into the white shades of the town hall. A new lighting system for the square and the surrounding streets was drawn up and put into operation.

Three municipal projects in the town's heart and on walking distance from the town square were set up.



Droesbeke closed the gap between the buildings at this side of the market place; the site of the Tour of Flanders Centre is a modern realization of bringing together luxury flats and the museum of the Tour of Flanders.

The **Ham** in the neighbourhood links the densely built on market square and residential tourism: the town stimulated the building of public housing, together with a new hotel Leopold (65 rooms). Both places, Droesbeke and Ham, have been brightened up with smaller squares, gangways, green areas and public works of arts, which enliven this part of the town.

De **Scheldekop** is still being developed. Oudenaarde was the first to be nominated for a project concerning town planning of the Flemish Government. Oudenaarde received a three million Euro grant. This building project generated millions of euros by private investment in the built-on section of this area. This way the old town merges well with the new urban developments in the town centre which transforms the town into a lively and diverse city.

Works of art

In 2016 the town project Scaldis exhibited several new sculptures along the renewed banks of the river Scheldt; performances and shows by local clubs enlivened this event.

In a modern town, art as part of the streetscape is as important as trees in the landscape. Modern sculptures by renowned artists (such as Johan Tahon, Kris Martin, Philippe J. Tonnard, Myriam Eykens, Peter Bijls and Jul Vuylsteke) lend style to the site where they are shown.

House Beucarne

While many historic buildings and heritage sites are owned and managed by the city, many are privately owned. A unique example of such a historic home is the **House Beucarne** in Ename. This authentic house has been family owned since the 18th century. The interior, archive, art, antiques and curiosities, garden and grape conservatory have been preserved in remarkable condition throughout the generations.

Beer culture

The diverse beer culture is a part of our country's cultural heritage. **UNESCO** has recognized the beer culture in Belgium as an intangible cultural heritage.

Our city has been a beer city for centuries. Brewing beer in Oudenaarde started in the 12th century, possibly because the springwater in and around Oudenaarde was of excellent quality.

In the 19th century Oudenaarde had become famous for its beer: the use of roasted and caramelized malt produces the special colour (dark brown) and taste.

Fifty years ago there were 8 breweries in Oudenaarde; now there are still 4 making beer according to traditional methods (although their tools are very modern): **Roman, Liefmans, Cnudde and 't Smisje**.

The annual **Adriaen Brouwer Bierfeesten** ('Adriaen Brouwer Beer Festival') attracts thousands of people on the last weekend of June.





Natural heritage

The municipal authorities have invested for years and years to safeguard, to develop and to open the green space to the public. The town has its own team of environmental workers who clean up and keep all plants, flowers, shrubs and trees in top condition.

Certainly worth mentioning is the educational centre 't Spei (a kind of weir originally) situated at the town's edge and enclosed by two old meanders of the Scheldt. The educative area comprises a 3 ha broad-leaved forest, an instructive path through the trees and shrubs, ponds, greens and tangled growth.

Recently the total area of this green space was extended to 10 ha. By buying plots, the city could prevent building contractors laying claim on these grounds and in doing so preserved these valuable marshlands.

Nature in the city

On the other side of the Scheldt, nearer to the town centre we find Meerspoort South, an area of 5 ha which also holds a meander from the Scheldt. Formerly, this arm of the Scheldt ran deep into the town centre. Part of it is a 'birthday wood': young parents are invited to plant a tree for their new born child in this forest.

Along the railway is yet another green zone: Vestingen (3 ha), a remnant of the old ramparts of great cultural and historical value. Before the purchase by the city, the area was privately owned; most of the area is occupied by a shallow pond. Typical flora are Populus, Salix, Fraxinus, Crataegus, Cornus sanguinea, Sambucus nigra, Prunus padus, Filipendula ulmaria en Eupatorium cannabinum.

Finally, Meerspoort Noord (4ha) consists of a coppice strip, a naturally designed play area and moist lake plots, woods and reed land. A potential nesting site for the kingfisher has been established on the bank of a branch of the Coupure river. *Rhinanthus angustifolius* and *Pedicularis palustris* are found on the most southern hay fields.

Liedtspark and the allotment gardens

The Liedtspark of 6 ha with allotment gardens is the green lung in the heart of the town. This park was laid out as an English landscape park with footpaths, sports facilities, a pond with fountain, large greens, bowers, an icehouse and hundreds of standard trees. It was originally a private garden with a nice pavillion going back to the end of the 19th century.

And recently a ravelin was reconstructed with a subsidy from EFRO, the European Fund for Regional Development; it is the only remnant of the ramparts of Oudenaarde. This monument of earth was erected according to plans of 1819-1829 as part of the Wellington barrier. It is the only remaining one out of 5 planned ravelins, built on the groundwork of an older bulwark and bastions.

The allotment gardens in the town centre are quite unique and can be walked through across a central pathway. Both the park, the castle and the gardens have been listed as protected areas.

Bos t'Ename

Bos t'Ename is a 105 ha nature reserve managed by Natuurpunt vzw. The natural historic forest area is located on the steep eastern flank of the Scheldt valley.





The reserve consists of forest, grasslands and pools and is home to a vibrant fauna. The area is best known for the various species of newts, including the rare *Triturus cristatus*. In addition, the forest is home to numerous birds (*Falco subbuteo*, *Strix aluco*, *Coturnix coturnix*, *Sitta europaea*, *Dryobates minor*, *Dendrocopos major*, *Motacilla cinerea*, *Luscinia megarhynchos*, *Regulus ignicapilla*), mammals and insects (including the *Cucujus cinnaberinus*).

The flora is also not to be missed and consists mainly of *Alnus* and *Fraxinus*, *Quercus robur* and *Carpinus betulus*, with various patches of a spring wood. Many rare plant species can be found in the herb layer of the Bos t'Ename nature reserve, one-third of the Flemish flora is represented there. The most well-known species that bloom in the forest are *Hyacinthoides non-scripta*, *Polygonatum multiflorum*, *Anemone nemorosa*, *Lathraea clandestina*, *Primula elatior*, *Neottia ovata*, *Lysimachia nemorum*, *Geranium phaeum*, *Silene flos-cuculi*.

The Bos t'Ename has great cultural-historical value. This forest has been closely associated with the former harbour town of Ename since the Middle Ages and later with the abbey of Ename. The forest has always played an essential role in everyday life in Ename. The forest area has been exploited for centuries as a medium wood forest.

The Loose Gardeners

The Province of East Flanders is investing, with Heritage Site Ename as the driving force, in expanding the archaeological abbey site of Ename. An excellent example of this is the redevelopment of the vegetable gardens, based on 17th-century plans.

Heritage site Ename attracted the residents to redesign the vegetable gardens. Gardening together creates a new social dynamic in the village. The cultivation of forgotten and old vegetables is encouraged, with respect for the historic site.

Eighteen families come to grow vegetables. They each have their own plot of land, but also work together on a common area, which serves as a practice garden where they learn the tricks. Gardening is now done in the 'sacred' ground as the friars once did: without chemicals, without bulky equipment, without garden sheds, but also without stress and with a lot of dedication and patience. Nor are there any fences or gates. The various gardens on the site flow seamlessly into one another.





Tree management



Trees are invaluable to our well-being and play an increasingly crucial role in combating global warming in our cities. This requires deliberate tree management in which maintenance, preservation and renewal require the necessary follow-up.

Our city pursues a policy aimed at strengthening the urban structure with infill projects and urban renewal to protect the countryside where new developments are kept out as much as possible to preserve the natural and landscape layout.

Oudenaarde is part of the Flemish Ardennes, one of Flanders's most important traditional landscapes. Our region is characterized by hills, forests, cobblestone roads, spring forests, classified churches, protected village views, and a very high biodiversity. The policy objective 'greenery and nature are part of the city's dna' was included in the multi-year plan of the city and is aimed at preserving and strengthening these spatial-natural structures.

The Flemish government encourages cities and municipalities to draw up a municipal tree plan to deal with trees in various locations in an effective, sustainable and financially responsible way.

A green plan was drawn up, in which trees should be an apparent connecting factor to connect the fragmented green areas. But such a format is not at all sufficient. What counts for the citizen is the actual implementation of it.



Trees as historical landmarks in the landscape

On numerous historical maps, one can notice seemingly figurative images of isolated trees. However, further research shows that these are historical landmarks in the landscape. Only a few of these ancient witnesses remain. The Sint-Hilariuslinde near Mullem and the characteristic plane trees on the Enameplein are still here.

The vanished centuries-old trees leave their traces in the form of place and street names. An inconspicuous name such as Lindenstraat in the industrial area of Bevere refers to a lime tree that, in the 19th century, marked a boundary between the inner- and outer-area. Publications about historic trees in Oudenaarde have been included in numerous professional literature.

Tree charter

Because a forest's strength is greater than a tree's, our city signed the tree charter in 2019. Through this tree charter, a private initiative, cities and municipalities commit themselves to plant more trees on their territory.

The tree charter symbolizes the collective struggle we are facing against global warming. Oudenaarde has made the commitment to plant 20,000 trees during this period. We already dare to say that we will exceed this number, thanks to our city's extensive communication on the subject and our citizens' efforts.

Future trees

The city wants to plant 500 'future trees'. These trees will be planted at locations where they will have the time and space to grow into full-fledged models that will stand the test of time. To respond to the effects of climate change, alternative tree species have been selected that can handle stress ('climate trees').

Many professional associations and growers have published selections of trees with specific requirements to increase the chances of success. *Parrotia persica* – *Nysa sylvatica* – *Zelkova serrata* and *Tilia mongolica* were recently planted.

Visual Tree Assessment (VTA)

An expert arborist (European Tree Worker) carried out a VTA survey to map the defects of trees at specific locations. Additional research is carried out through tensile tests and tomography. This way, it is mapped out what can be prevented in case something goes wrong. Where possible and responsible, we replace grubbing by veterans management or ecological felling.



Forests

In addition to the wet meadows, Oudenaarde can offer nature lovers three forests. The Koppenbergbos (largely owned by the city but managed by the Agency for Nature and Forests), Bos t'Ename (managed by volunteers from Natuurpunt) and Volkegembos.

The forest Volkegembos is now afforested on the loamy soils of a former loam exploitation. The destination was changed to forest area to achieve an optimal combination of landscape restoration, prevention of soil erosion and protection of the groundwater layers and drinking water sources.

In time, the city of Oudenaarde will acquire two parts of the Volkegembos. Natuurpunt owns the third. After the finalization of this project, an urban forest will be created in Volkegem with a combined surface area of more than 30 hectares, which can also be regarded as an offshoot of the Bos 't Ename.

In 2002-2009, the plots that were first released and purchased were planted in combination with a location for spontaneous afforestation. Location-specific and, if available, autochthonous plant material was used for the plantings, with special attention to a mantle-hem structure.

The open areas of this part of the forest are mowed twice a year, with the clippings being removed. This impoverishes the soil, which results in a greater diversity of species. Many animals and insects benefit from this.

The existing hiking trails are unpaved and mowed every two weeks, from the end of April to the beginning of November. Natuurpunt brought horses to the Volkegembos for grazing management. These grazers are also used in the recently acquired parts of the city. In this last phase, pools were excavated. In the future, a play forest of 3 hectares will also be set up.

Birthday Forest

Since 2005, a birthday forest has been organized by the Family Council in collaboration with the city. Parents receive an invitation to plant a tree for their newborn in a new patch of forest. This way, we emphasize the wish that our children can grow up in a green and healthy environment.

Tree planting action

The non-profit organisation Regional Landscape Flemish Ardennes organizes an annual tree-planting campaign where cities, companies and citizens can purchase planting material (fruit trees, hedges and forestry). Only native, regional and - where possible - autochthonous plants are offered. The fruit trees are the typical standard trees of old, regional varieties.

In addition to selling planting material, this promotion also provides a multitude of information about the importance of autochthonous material, the natural value of standard orchards, landscape restoration ...

Felling permit

An environmental permit is required for the felling of tall trees, single, in groups or in a line. In the event of a favourable decision, the city council sets the condition that replacement planting is necessary.



Landscape

Characteristic of the Flemish Ardennes is a fragmented landscape with fields, green woods, meadows and pastures but above all: the valley of the river Scheldt and the hills and hillocks. In this region Oudenaarde is the magnetic coil attracting and bringing about new developments.



The old forests around Oudenaarde (Edelareberg, Koppenberg and along the banks of the Scheldt between Volkegem and Eine) show a diversity of trees and flowers. The long history of the remaining forests around Oudenaarde demonstrates their great biological wealth. They can rightly be called 'hotspots' of biodiversity.

The fact that our forests bloom so profusely in the spring and are so rich in wood anemones, bluebells and - to a lesser extent - wild daffodils is the best proof of this. They are the silent witnesses of what the coal forest used to be.

Along with the spring flora, many fauna survived, especially special insects characteristic of historical and mature forest ecosystems. On a global scale, the wild hyacinth's natural range is minimal. Western Belgium and therefore also the Flemish Ardennes are in the epicentre of the distribution area. That is why we can call our forests unique and exceptionally rare on a global scale.

The wild hyacinth does not flower until it is about five years old. The seeds are quite large and heavy, and the plant will spread no more than 20 to 30 cm in the best case.

We can guess how old a carpet of these flowers is, extending over tens of hectares. A few centuries to thousands of years old is, without a doubt, the correct answer. That's how long it takes for forests to develop that kind of wealth. It is also how long it takes to restore a forest to ideal conditions, which no longer exists in the current fragmented landscape. It is truly all the more reason to take care of the last refugia.

Over the past thirty years, more care has been taken of our forests. Due to legal protection and a policy that focuses on conservation and forest expansion, the government, a few private owners and nature associations managed to expand the Koppenbergbos (approx. 80ha) and Bos t'Ename (approx. 200ha). Extraordinary and vulnerable forest species such as the black woodpecker and the Apatura Iris have since re-established themselves in our forests, after they had disappeared. The roe deer and the stone marten have also regained their place in the past ten years. More than 250 families volunteer within the Bos t'Ename working group. They provide multiple activities such as themed work days and seasonal walks.

The Scheldt valley

At the time of the Austrian Netherlands, the vast Scheldt valley was a typical lake landscape that was often - and locally even for a long time - flooded during winter floods. The valley was crucial in water storage and usually protected settlements from severe flooding. When the Scheldt overflowed its banks, clay and sand were deposited. Fairly nutrient-poor and heavier sand was deposited close to the river and formed natural (river) walls. They are the driest and highest parts. Very fine nutrient-rich clay particles were carried deep into the valley with the rising water and slowly settled there.

Every year a layer of clay was deposited, which resulted in the formation of heavy clay basin soils, the raw material for clay extraction and consequently the brick industry that has been characteristic of the settlements along the Scheldt for centuries.

In the centre of Oudenaarde, the Scheldt has been diverted several times over the centuries. Several water mills were active and weirs regulated the water level.

Around the 19th century, the landscape of the Scheldt valley changes radically. Willow cultures and rows of pollard willows are popping up in high numbers. In Flanders, weaving flourishes and artisans are present in every village. At Oudenaarde, winches (baskets) are lapped. In the twentieth century, poplars were planted on wet valley floors. Since then, they have been the raw material for producing matches (industry in Geraardsbergen), veneer wood (boxes and fruit boxes), and affordable furniture wood. In the twentieth century, more forests appeared in the valley, partly because the weaving craft was past its peak and pilot whales and willows became wild or gradually acquired a different function (tools and firewood).

Since the industrial revolution (in Oudenaarde mainly the textile industry), the Scheldt has been polluted, sickened and biologically dead (mainly due to dye spills). In the fifties and the decades after, the river Scheldt was straightened for shipping. Numerous cut-off meanders were left behind in the valley as stagnant puddles with no

function. Since the 1960s, the valley landscape has changed drastically again and clay and sand are extracted on an industrial scale. The donk pond was created from sand extraction, which was necessary to construct the N60 road. Many other large lakes between Oudenaarde and Zingem are clay extraction sites for the local brick industry. Some puddles were partially filled and were given the opportunity to evolve into real natural pearls as a swamp spontaneously. Provided that an appropriate policy is adopted, Oudenaarde has the opportunity to develop a pearl necklace of wetlands, starting from the flooded mining holes. The Pandion haliaetus, Phalacrocorax carbo and recently even Grus grus have already found their way.

In nature reserves such as the Langemeersen and Heurnemeersen, we can still find the age-old flora. Rhinanthus angustifolius, Cardamine pratensis, Silene flos-cuculi and Caltha palustris colour the grasslands mainly yellow and lilac in the spring, while the umbellifers such as Heracleum sphondylium, Daucus carota and Angelica archangelica colour the valley white in late summer.

The valley was particularly rich in insects over the centuries. Anthocharis cardamines is a butterfly that mainly occurs on Cardamine pratensis in spring. Large dragonflies such as Orthetrum cancellatum, Aeshna mixta, Libellula depressa and Anax imperator are still very typical of our lakes and rivers. One of the most striking is undoubtedly the Calopteryx virgo, which has been around for about ten years because the water quality has improved.

Since the quality improvement and the construction of fish passes along the weirs, numerous fish have once again been found in Scheldt. The brown trout probably appeals most to the imagination. But a large rodent that thrives in the water and became extinct in our region more than 150 years ago due to overhunting, is back: the beaver! It is also essential to keep an eye out for the indicator of good water quality: the otter.





Open fields

In addition to relics of historic forests and a vast Scheldt valley, the area around the city centre of Oudenaarde is also characterized by extensive open arable complexes, the so-called historic coulter. The coulter are situated between Wortegem-Petegem and Mullem, as well as between Volkegem and Ename. The landscape is characterized by nearly treeless fields on the ridges of gently sloping hills.

The coulter around Oudenaarde are often intersected with stream valleys in which small-scale cultural landscapes have survived to this day. These stream valleys are still rich in small woods, mixed wooded edges and rows of (knot) trees and large historic farms.

Settlements arose on the coulter and the transitions between those dense stream valleys and open arable complexes. It is often there that the source line is located and that groundwater could be drawn, at least temporarily. To this day, a few communal wells have been preserved, and most historic houses and farms have preserved their own groundwater extraction.

We are – rightly – proud of our ancient forests of Koppenbergbos and Bos t'Ename, but we are also committed to forest expansion and development. For example, the Volkegembos is being developed on the reclaimed land (loam mining) in Volkegem. The extraction area has a nature reserve as its destination.

An agreement was drawn up between the extractor and owner of the land and the city of Oudenaarde whereby the area will be reclaimed in phases, and each phase will be transferred to the city after extraction. A significant part was planted as 'birthday forest'.

City scape

The city of Oudenaarde has a lot of greenery under its management: a city park, allotments, a nature education centre and protected nature areas. Government regulations, developments in the green sector, the wishes of citizens and the challenges of climate change (drought, warming, loss of biodiversity) do not make planting, maintenance and removal of the plantations any easier: the ban on pesticide use, choice of plants adapted to the environment, respect for biodiversity, respect for bees and bumblebees as pollinators and restrictive climate conditions.

Today, landscaping means a lot more than boring lawns or the classic ornamental shrubs. That is why today, meadows and green areas are turned into flower meadows by planting naturalizing flower bulbs or sowing flower mixtures. Bird fields are also sown for larger areas of public greenery in the outlying area.

Invasive species management

Our territory is also spared from invasive exotics. *Heracleum mantegazzianum* in particular is of great concern to us. After years of



intensive manual control by a social employment insertion company, the spread has decreased considerably. We are convinced that this exotic species will disappear in the foreseeable future.

Previously, a water feature of more than 1.5 hectares covered with *Myriophyllum aquaticum* was successfully controlled. A specialized company was deployed for this, which could remove everything mechanically.

The eWeeding project in combating *Fallopia japonica* is unique. eWeeding is an innovative technique that, in contrast to current methods (burning-brushing-hot water), also fights the root of the plant using an electric current. High voltage electricity passes through the plant, destroying the plant cells.

This system combats spot-wise and is therefore very suitable for fighting invasive exotics among the greenery to be preserved. This technique makes managing weeds in urban and rural areas more efficient and sustainable. More efficient - because fewer treatments are required. More sustainable - because the control is done with electricity. We, therefore, find it valuable to be one of the pilot municipalities in Belgium to participate in the e-Weeding project.

Sport site

The sports site is part of the Masterplan Scheldt Left Bank and is still in development. Over the past ten years, the city has continuously invested in new accommodation, in the spatial experience of this green area and in access for cyclists.

A new Sportoase swimming pool was built and the sports hall was sustainably renovated. The next step is to create the sports site's own identity. A running route (1.4 km), a playground, a skate park, a flower meadow, a lawn with picnic tables, ... should give athletes of all ages and non-athletes the opportunity to enjoy a fantastic experience in this green setting.



Maai Mei Niet / Do Not Mow May

Bright green, trimmed lawns are disastrous for nature and biodiversity. Pollinators such as bees and butterflies cannot find food there, and water evaporates faster from the soil when the grass is too short. That is why the magazine Knack launched the campaign "Maai Mei Niet" (Do Not Mow May) in 2021.

Citizens, companies and governments were urged not to mow during the month of May. This way, more flowers will bloom, and pollinators will find plenty of food, boosting biodiversity. The city of Oudenaarde was one of the first participants and also participated in 2022. We even provided a little extra: to prevent plants that bloom later from being mowed at the beginning of June, we place signs saying "do not mow me". At these locations, the mower goes in a circle around the bloomers. Citizens are encouraged to mark the places where these signs belong.

Facade gardens

Our city encourages the construction of facade gardens that significantly contribute to our urban living environment. They bring peace, provide oxygen, and form a habitat for birds and insects. Regulations were drawn up to help residents to create their own facade gardens.

In 2021, a garden coach was deployed in a residential area to transform the often paved front gardens into a more valuable pieces of greenery. A plan was drawn up for twenty facade gardens. Enthusiastic residents asked to carry out a makeover for two pieces of public land.

This year we are expanding the project to all types of gardens. When selecting the garden coaches, we give opportunities to young, local landscape architects.



Plant and floral displays

Apart from the green elements belonging to the historical scenery, Oudenaarde can boast of a vast green area (130 ha), comprising 4800 trees, 2,8 ha of shrubs, 8,1 km of hedgerows, 47,3 ha of lawn and 5,2 ha of bee-friendly flowerrows, spread about in the entire city. A dozen of local government employees, helped by workers from garden contractors look after trees, shrubs and flowers, which costs about 1.750.000 euros.

Planting of trees

More than 100 new climate-robust standard trees are planted every year throughout the city. The trees are very diverse but with an emphasis on regional species in landscape areas.

Immigrant species are more often planted in the city centre and are often purchased as preformed topiary trees because in the densely built-up city centre, not everything can grow according to its natural habit. In addition, well-chosen topiary trees add a lot of character to the streetscape and accentuate the architectural beauty. When planting in the countryside, a lot of attention is paid to the correct selection of bee-friendly, flowering trees.

Flower displays

Our city colours every year in a sea of floral splendour. Varieties of hundreds of thousands of Narcissus welcome residents and visitors to the arrival of spring. After this flowering period, more than 16,000 annuals are planted in flower towers (36) - flower bowls (50) - flower boxes (460), as well as in open ground (725 m²). Since the cultivation of bedding plants is an expensive investment, they are purchased from a recognized grower. Every plant has a plant passport and is true to its species. The potting soil is also carefully composed in consultation with the company where the plants are grown.

In 1999, Oudenaarde was the first municipality to use the Garsy flower towers, which have since spread worldwide. Soon various photos of our flower arrangements appeared in many professional magazines, even outside our national border. The green department consciously chooses to work with pronounced colour accents every year. The flower parterres in the ground adorn the spring with a splendour of Tulipa in harmonizing shades.





This year's summer bedding plants include Dahlia Mystic Memories – Verbena bonariensis "Loly Pop" – Diascia trinity "Sunset" – Salvia "Ping Pong" – Salvia "Magic Wand" – Gauriella bicolor – Begonia sunbrero "Dark Pink" – Begonia "Big White" – Begonia benariensis "Big Red". The flower towers and flower bowls are equipped with Supertunia Vista varieties, a plant that does great in changing climate conditions.

The flower arrangements along the Scheldt borders are characteristic to our city. More than 300 meters of anti-theft flower boxes with a built-in water reservoir, planted with Pelargonium peltatum, colour the renovated Scheldt borders.

Flowering arrangements are not only provided in the city centre: 50 flower bowls equipped with a water reservoir are spread over the entire city. In the context of sustainable water use, Scheldt water has been used for 4 years to water the plants.

Gradually, several flower bowls are replaced by new perennial sections in the context of softening. This ensures a more sustainable greening of the environment and increases the quality of the public domain. The flower bowls are more intensive in terms of maintenance. Perennial perennials are used in the planting areas, providing added value in autumn and winter. In the planting period 2021 – 2022, no fewer than 15,000 perennials and roses (40 different varieties) have been planted over 2,500m².

Potting soil

This year a pilot project will be started, where future-oriented substrates will be used, named "Advanced Substrate". They are high-quality growing media with new raw materials, whether or not in combination with (sustainably managed and extracted) peat. These new high-quality raw materials, which are locally sourced as much as possible and with a low carbon footprint (eg wood fiber), are necessary to meet the worldwide increasing demand for sustainability of substrates.



Polymers

Our city is very closely involved in the application of hydro absorbent polymers. TerraCottem is an effective soil improvement technology consisting of more than twenty components from different groups, all of which synergistically promote plant growth processes.

The cross-linked hydro absorbent polymers absorb and store water at root level that would otherwise be lost through evaporation and leaching, reducing both the volume and frequency of irrigation by up to 50%.

This water then remains available to the plants and is released at the request of the root hairs. This way the volume of water in the root zone remains longer. A cost-benefit analysis was made together with the Terracottem company. The use of this innovative product proves a labour-saving of no less than 50%.

Flower meadows

Bad news for all of us is the rapid decline of many bee and bumblebee species. Due to the declining diversity, there is less and less food, pollen and nectar available to these important insects.

In the meantime, several thousand m² have been sown with both annual and perennial flower seed, in both bare and grass-covered soil. In addition, 6,350 bee-friendly perennials were planted, such as Geranium pratense – Knautia macedonica – Campanula Grandiflora – Leucanthemum vulgare – Silene dioica – Centaurea cyanus – Papaver dubium.

In addition, we have worked on ecologically sound roadside management, where “sinus management” is applied in flower-rich locations. A part (approx. 40%) of the vegetation remains standing per mowing and winding mowing paths are used, so-called sinus paths. These vary in space and time.

The results are a great deal of variation, which is particularly beneficial for biodiversity. Moreover, flora and fauna-oriented management are interwoven in one process.



Stad
Oudenaarde

