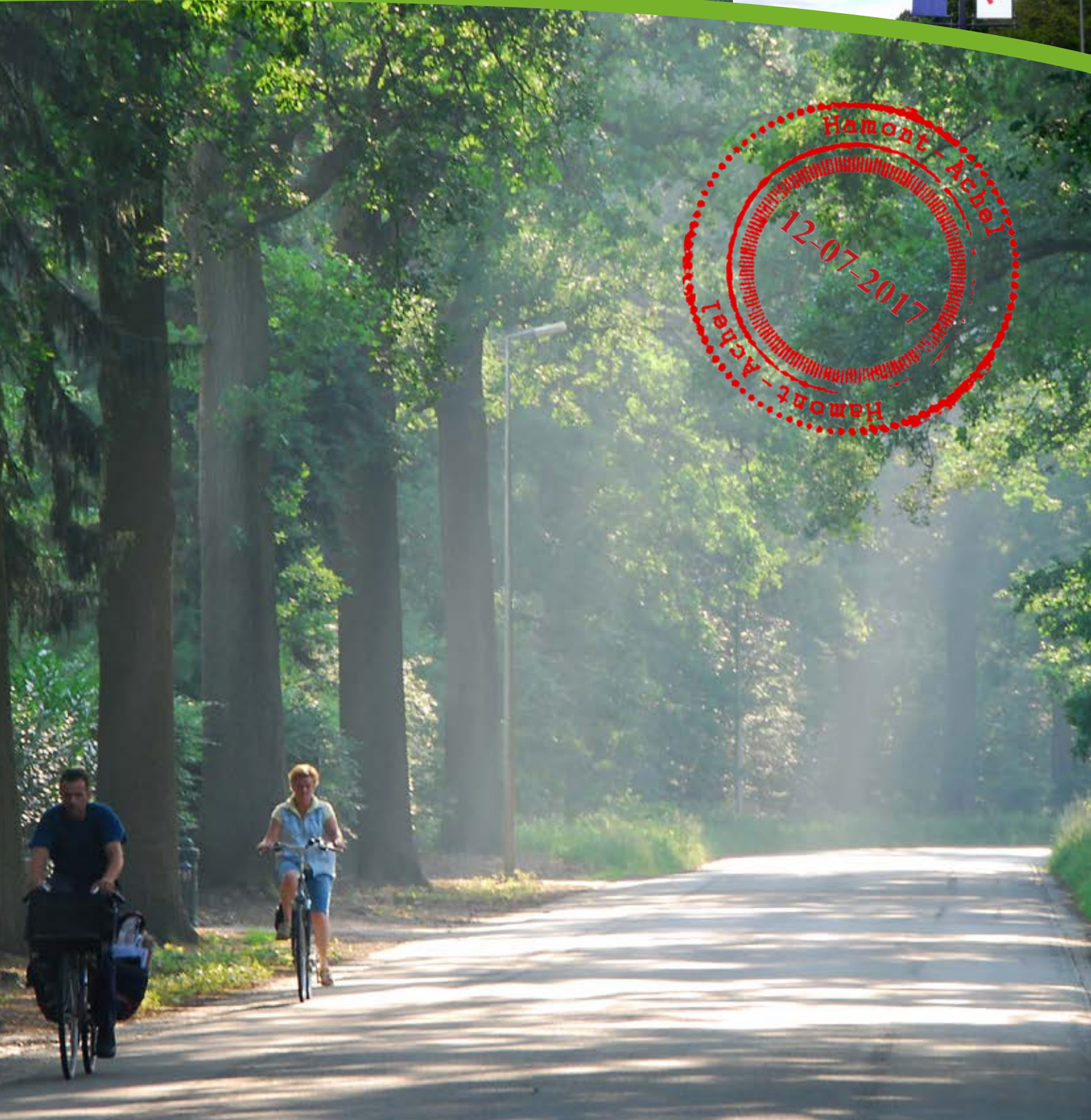




STAD **Hamont-Achel**  
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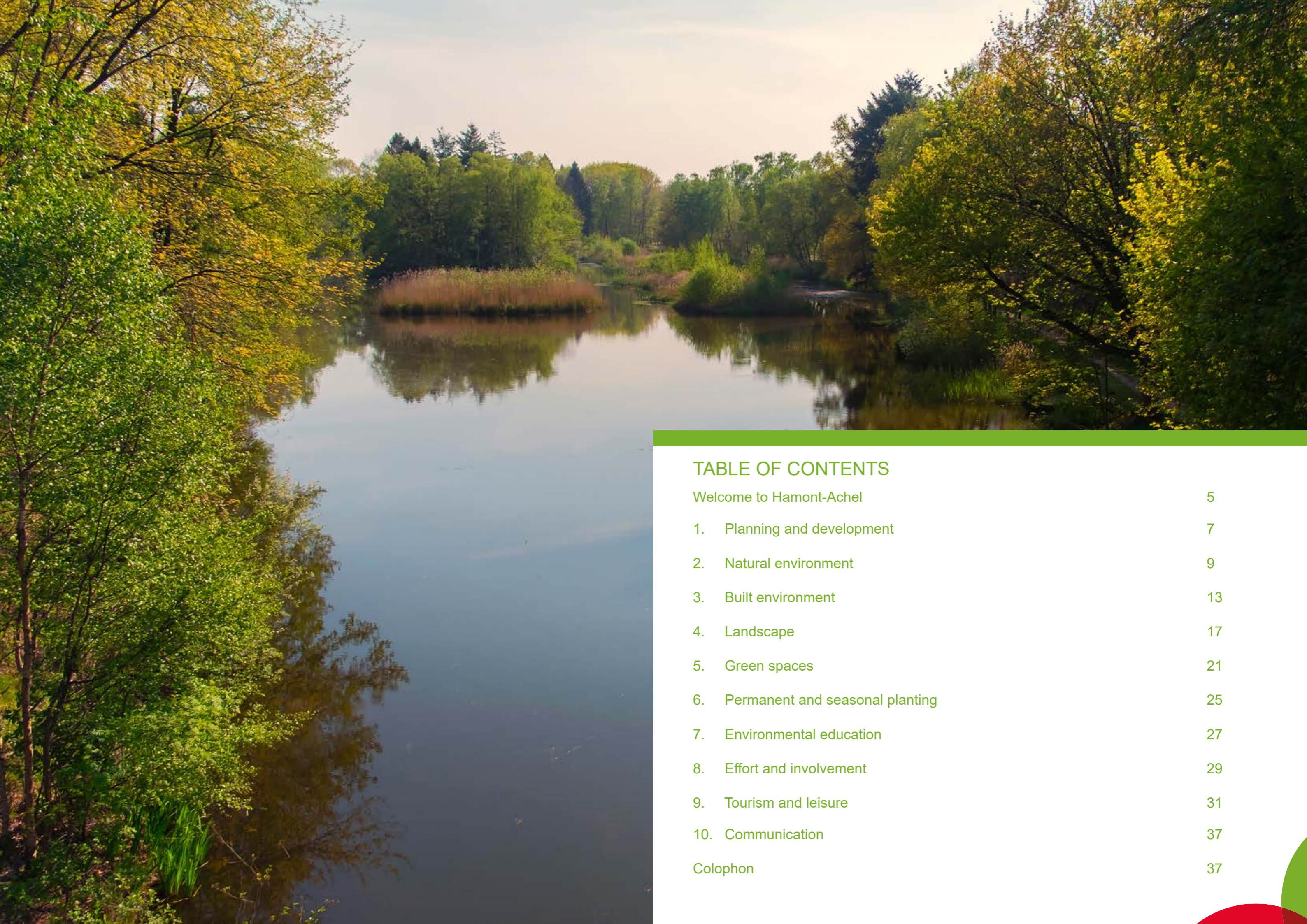


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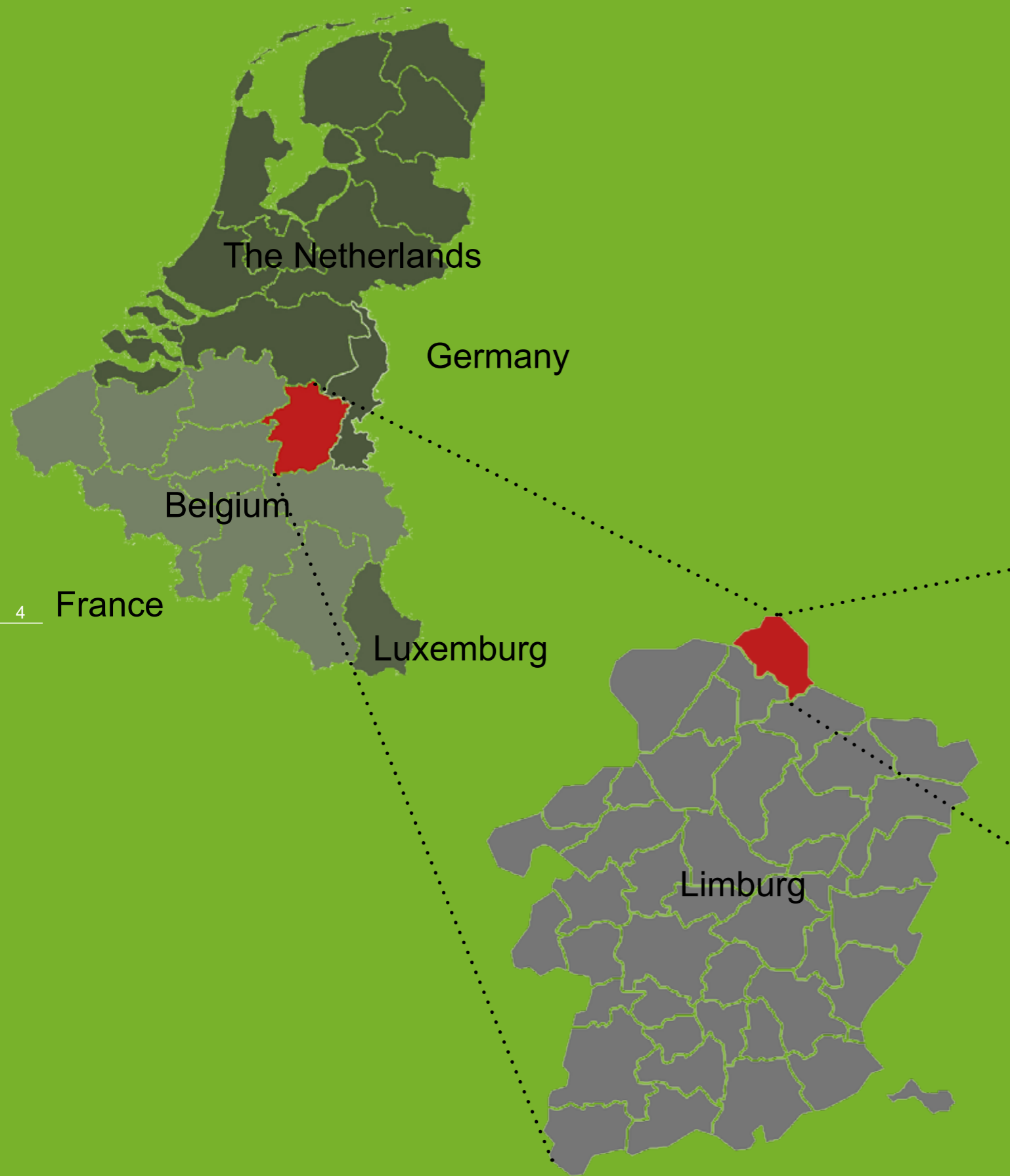
# Entente Florale Europe

## Policy summary



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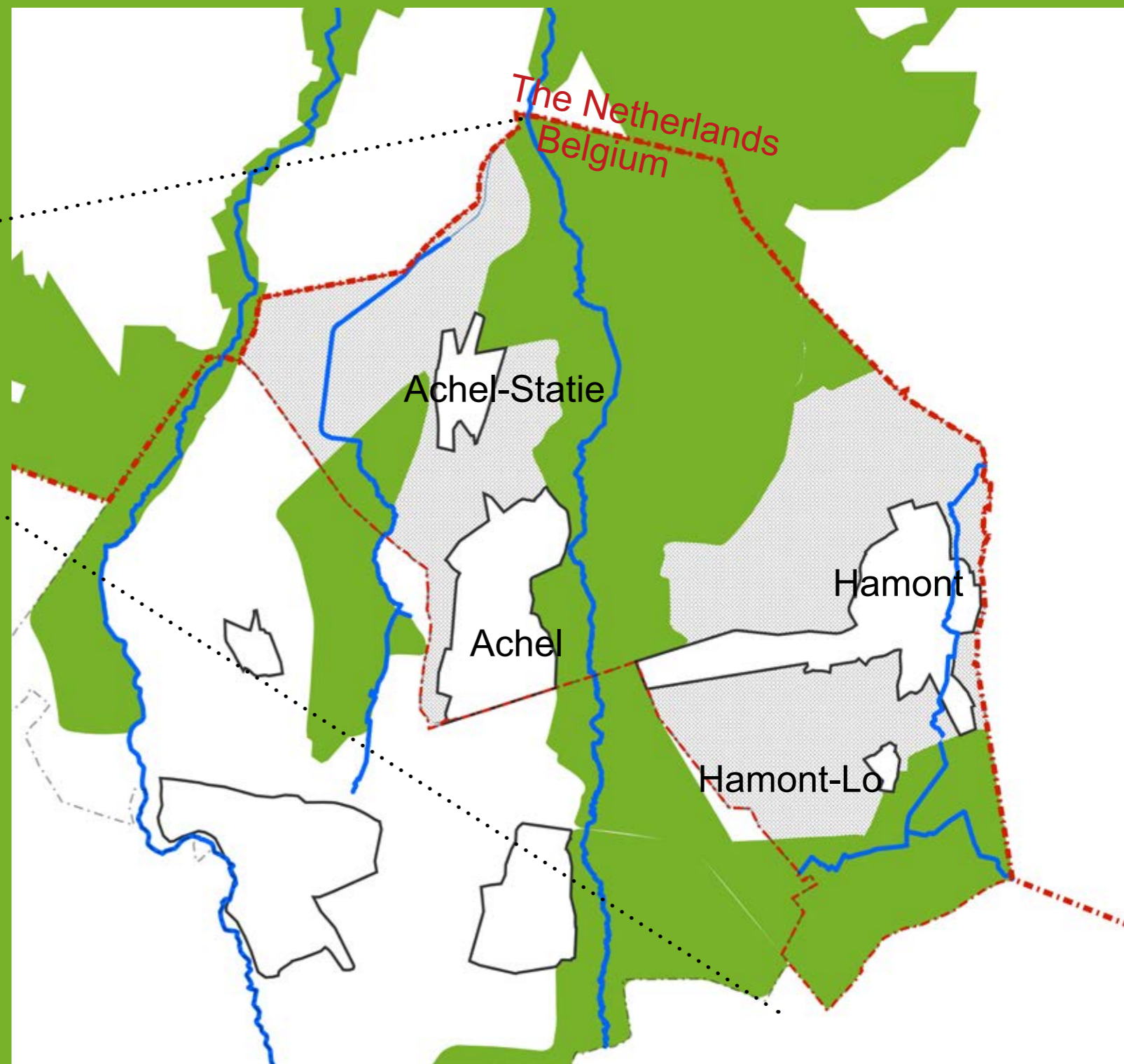


## WELCOME TO HAMONT-ACHEL

Located in the north of the province of Limburg, Hamont-Achel is a green historic location where the population is fond of encounters, within its rich association life and with visitors and tourists.

Evidence of this is the multitude of annual events. The area is physically well planned and developed, with a balance between open and built surfaces and integration of plantations in residential zones. This results in a high quality of housing and residences. There is also a high awareness of the value of its cultural and natural heritage among the inhabitants.

Since its amalgamation in 1977 the surface of Hamont-Achel covers 4,378 hectares and consists of four parishes: Hamont, Hamont-Lo, Achel and Achel-Statie. On 1st January 2017 the town of Hamont-Achel accommodated 14,417 inhabitants.





## 1. PLANNING AND DEVELOPMENT

During the previous 10 years separate master plans were made for the centre of Hamont and for the centre of Achel. These plans comprise the design sketches for all planned spatial developments.

### Master plans Hamont and Achel

The municipality wants to reinforce the centre of Achel as an attractive living district. The focus in its master plan lies on living in a rural and green environment and on building well-equipped local facilities. The centre of Achel will present itself as a village with a supra-local supply in the field of nature-recreation, tourism and the provision of care.

For the centre of Hamont the municipality aims at developing a dynamic and well-equipped town centre, which is attractive to inhabitants, visitors and investors. The master plan contains five main themes: safe and smooth traffic in and around the town centre; relation between the historical core and the so-called 'Wal' (old town bank) and the town park, with special attention to the green quality of the 'Wal'; qualitative residences and houses with an eye for new housing types for different target groups; bundled community facilities for all inhabitants of Hamont-Achel and new impulses for trade and the hotel and catering industry.

The design of the master plan of Hamont was based on earlier studies, as for example on the city marketing plan, but equally so on the feed-back by the population during participation meetings, dialogues and personal conversations. In the trajectory 'Wat wordt Wal?' ('what will the old town bank become?') special consideration was given to the development potential of the area alongside the old town bank, ranging from the re-allocation of the convent building to living in the park. During the 'Think, do ... town park trajectory' young and old people were consulted about their wishes for the redesign of the town park. The population was also invited to participate during the design of the master plan for the centre of Achel.

### Spatial plans and development strategies

Industrial activities are concentrated on one large and six smaller business parks. The companies that are located there, employ a few thousand people. Some of their products are of international renown. The candles from the company Spaas are an example of this and contributed to Hamont's title of 'candle town'.

### Environmental compounds

The four parishes are surrounded by meadows and fields, on which agriculture is the main activity. The allotments are often bordered by wooded strips and banks. These strips form a typical landscape and act as stepping stones to woods and nature reserves.



Town park



Participation moment master plan



## 2. NATURAL ENVIRONMENT

### Actions taken for air quality and policy on emissions

In 2011 the town of Hamont-Achel signed the Covenant of Mayors, the bottom-up European initiative involving local and regional authorities in the fight against climate change and in developing a more sustainable energy future. To reduce the CO<sub>2</sub> emission within its territory, Hamont-Achel takes part in the climate plan which was launched by the Belgian province of Limburg. Its aim is to reach climate neutrality by the year 2020. An analysis led to the conclusion that this town's open structure of the built environment causes an important loss of energy. Its forests (25 % versus 11 % for the whole of Flanders) and afforestation cannot compensate for the amount of CO<sub>2</sub> emissions.

That is why Hamont-Achel concentrates on improving the energy efficiency of its own buildings by taking insulation measures. The town subsidises the use of bikes and public transportation means by its own staff. Whenever new cars are bought, electric cars are opted for.

### Soil conservation measures

No pesticides are used anymore on public territory. Alternative weed management methods are applied on pavements and in parks. Private use of pesticides is reduced by raising public awareness, by means of publications and workshops. In co-operation with the neighbouring villages of Neerpelt and Overpelt a permanent campaign to prevent soil decontamination by leaking domestic fuel oil containers was launched three years ago. Brownfield areas, as the Remise site at Hamont and the Klima compound at Achel are being re-developed

### Actions taken for water quality in rivers and water conservation

The brook 'De Warmbeek', which is called the 'Tongelreep' in the Netherlands and which flows into the river 'De Dommel' in Eindhoven, is one of the cleanest and best structured watercourses in Flanders. Fish migration passes have been built on De Warmbeek and re-meandering projects are being planned. In Hamont-Achel, 99 % of the buildings are connected to the sewage system. People who have no connection to the sewage network, are stimulated and subsidised to install an own treatment system (IBA). Two wastewater treatment plants are operational. When new sewerages are made or old sewerages are replaced, separate systems for sewage water and rain water are put into place.

### Biodiversity of fauna and flora

Natural areas are abundant in Hamont-Achel, with brooks, woodland and dry and wet areas on heather moorland. Flora, fauna and biodiversity are being surveyed continually in co-operation with the Provinciaal Natuurcentrum (PNC - provincial nature centre) and its field study centre LIKONA. In 2006 Hamont-Achel adopted the grayling butterfly (*Hipparchia Semele*) with reference to 'municipalities adopt indigenous species from the province of Limburg' (GALS). The town later signed the declaration 'Countdown 2010, save the biodiversity' declaration. The town of Hamont-Achel herewith committed itself to take action to halt the loss of biodiversity on its territory. So, protective actions are taken for endangered and vulnerable species such as the grayling butterfly. An example of this is the heather recovery project which has been developed and worked out in close co-operation with the association Regionaal Landschap Lage Kempen (RLLK) and the government agency Agentschap voor Natuur en Bos (ANB) on the Beverbeek heathland in the northern part of Hamont-Achel. In 2016 a corridor was created between two fens by cutting part of the pine trees between two fens, to improve fauna migration possibilities and to offer living space to endangered species as the moor frog and lilypad whiteface dragonfly (*Leucorrhinia caudalis*).



Tree frog



Red-backed shrike



Nightjar



Moor frog



Completed fish migration passes

In the 'Buitenheide', the open western part of Hamont-Achel, some pools were dug between fields and meadows in 2014, with the aim to create a living environment for the red-backed shrike (*Lanius collurio*), a carnivorous passerine bird, and for the European tree frog (*Hyla arborea*). In this area also hayfields, hedges and wooded banks are maintained regularly.

Near the old tenement farm of Beverbeek, in a landscape which dates back to the Middle Ages, a project was realized to restore the so-called 'sweet chestnut lane' with the aim to protect bats (the common noctule, the water bat and the big-eared bat). This area, which covers 160 hectares and is part of the 'Natura 2000 network', is owned and managed by the Catholic University of Louvain (KUL). Decayed trees were replaced to maintain the lane structure and old and partly hollow but living trees were preserved to offer dwelling places to bats in summertime. This project is an example of the co-operation between the RLLK, the KUL and the town to attain the European nature goals. It also involves long-term thinking, because the newly-planted trees will only be suitable as new dwelling-places in 50 years from now.

At domain 'De Bever', which is one of the most beautiful spots in Hamont-Achel, the lake and its surroundings will be upgraded during the coming years. One of the main objectives is the promotion of biodiversity. The brook environment is of high ecological value but is threatened by the parrot feather plant at this location. This noxious weed will be removed this year and the lake will receive a more nature friendly makeover, to create a proper breeding place for the moor frog and the lilypond whiteface dragonfly. Part of the wet terrain behind one of the brooks will be rearranged, to stimulate spring heather (*Erica*).

Permanent constructions like tunnels and fixed guiding installations have been built to help toads in crossing the roads during the mating season.

The bee project aims at improving the living conditions of the honey bee and the wild bee. Wildflower seeds are distributed for free among the population and the municipality's green management and environmental services ensure that nectar and pollen-producing plants are used on public ground. So-called 'bee hotels' for wild bees have been placed at several locations near schools, but also in woods and on moorland.

### Actions taken to reduce waste and litter

Waste management is primarily done by the intermunicipal organization 'Limburg.net', which operates a refuse and recycling centre for the towns of Hamont-Achel and Neerpelt. Three substances are collected from door-to-door every two weeks: trash, organic waste and PMD (plastic bottles, metal containers and drinking cartons). Paper and cardboard are collected on a monthly basis. Glass and textile collection containers are available in most neighbourhoods and so-called 'waste islands', consisting of an assembly of waste bins for separate waste collection, are promoted for festivities.

Home composting is promoted by volunteering 'master composters', who help residents and schools to get started. The town's green management and environmental services use mulching lawn mowers to prevent green waste. Concerning private gardens, the municipality subsidises purchases of electric mulching lawn mowers.

The municipality organizes occasional litter clean-up weekends for schools every year in March ('Straat.net') and permanent clean-up operations for citizens and associations ('digital claim card') to raise awareness among residents. A pilot project to reduce litter was started recently.

Finally, the town also stimulates recycling initiatives, as jumble sales and so-called 'repair cafés'.



Fish migration passes under construction



### 3. BUILT ENVIRONMENT

#### Heritage buildings and structures

In the 'green lung' between Hamont and Achel several monuments testify of its rich history: burial mounds from the iron and bronze ages, the medieval tower 'De Tomp', the Trappist abbey 'De Achelse Kluis', the Saint Laurentius church with icons from the 13th to 16th century, the old church of Achel, the Napoleon mill, the 19th-century castle 'Genenbroek', the remnants of the medieval convent 'Catharinadal', the 19th-century castle 'de l' Escaille', majestic mansions from 17th and 18th century, the 19th-century mansion 'Het Simonshuis', chapels in several hamlets etc.

#### *De Tomp*

Based on knowledge of that time, this building was restored in the form of a defence tower and forerunner of the larger water castle 'Grevenbroek' in 1968. The restoration also prevented further decay. More recent investigation, however, provided evidence that this building had been a unique tower mill, which was built in the beginning of the 15th century. It was made resistant to attacks by a moat. Belgium only has remnants of four medieval tower mills.

#### *De Achelse Kluis*

The origin of De Achelse Kluis lies in the 17th century, at a presbytery which was situated on the current border between Belgium and The Netherlands. A provisional church for the persecuted catholic inhabitants of Valkenswaard had been built nearby. Petrus van Eijnatten from Eindhoven founded a community of hermits on this place in 1686. From that time on the 'Achelse Kluis' has been a center of prayer, contemplation and spiritual life. This tradition was only interrupted by the eviction of the brothers from their convent as a result of the French Revolution. It was then continued by the Trappist monks from the abbey of Westmalle, who founded the St. Benedict-convent here in 1846, in order to live a life of prayer, labor and study in the spirit of the order of Cistercians. The monks reclaimed waste land and lived from agriculture and cattle-breeding. In 2011 the RLLK revalidated the site of the previous border church in co-operation with the town and with the financial support of the Flemish government.

#### *The Napoleon windmill*

The Napoleon mill is a high gristmill which was built in 1804, the year when Napoleon crowned himself to emperor of France. After Napoleon abolished the mandatory use of fixed milling places, some local merchants built this windmill near the city banks of Hamont.

#### *Het Simonshuis*

This mansion was built by the rich 'Teuten-family' Simons from Achel in the 1880s. Teuten were itinerant or traveling merchants who worked in companies and were touring from village to village in the Netherlands and Germany to provide artisan services like mending copperware and veterinary surgery and to trade in pottery, kitchen-utensils and textile manufactures. After the liberation on 20th September 1944 general Miles Dempsey set up the field headquarters of the British 2nd Army in this building and in the park. Nowadays this mansion houses the tourist agency and the Grevenbroek museum. This local museum, which is divided in five rooms, leads the visitors through the rich history of the region, from the Paleolithic to the Second World War.

#### *De Waag*

The foundations of this building, which was built in 1777 next to a wind mill and which fell into ruins, were repaired in 1984. A sworn weigher inhabited this place. He had to weigh the grain that was brought to the wind mill by farmers and also the flour that was taken back home by them. In this way, the mayors of Hamont, Achel and Lille St.-Hubert had the means to check the level of earnings by the inhabitants, as a basis to levy taxes. Part of the flour was taken by the miller as remuneration. The adjacent wind mill was destroyed during a storm in November 1800.



*Tomp tower*



*Napoleon mill*



*De Waag*



*Het Simonshuis*



Central park Achel

### Policy on sustainable energy

Promotional campaigns for energy reduction are launched and residents are given free advice about energy-saving measures subsidised by the town council, during information events and personal information sessions. The allotments at some locations as 'Klein Eind', have been oriented to capitalize on the sun's free energy and to take advantage of the warmth of the sun. Sustainable energy is promoted by installing photovoltaic solar cells on community buildings and by planning wind power generators with citizen participation. Photovoltaic solar panels have been placed on public buildings, e.g. on the community centre and on the community hall at Achel, and LED lighting is used in public buildings, like the town hall. A combination of LED lighting and sensors has also been implemented along a recreational cycle path on a former railroad at Achel.

The greatest potential for geothermal energy in Flanders is in the provinces of Antwerp and Limburg. In the north west of our province strata containing large quantities of hot water can be found. The major proportion of the potential is suitable for heating purposes, but locally water can be pumped up at 150°C and higher. In these locations, cogeneration of heat and electricity based on deep geothermal energy is a possibility. In 2018 prospection will be started for deep geothermal drilling in the region, in earth layers between 3 and 6 km.

### Water conservation

Owners of existing homes can apply for municipal subsidies to install tanks for the collection and re-use of rainwater and to install rainwater infiltration systems. Owners of newly built homes are required to install rainwater tanks. Where space is available on public territory (e.g. school environment of Achel centre), rainwater infiltration takes place in the open air, as in so-called 'wadis'. Roadbeds and conventional pavements that are not used anymore, are removed or replaced by permeable paving blocks (e.g. Bergwijk – Graansstraat).

### Quality of housing

Hamont-Achel stimulates the renovation of private houses by means of several kinds of grants (renovation, improvement and adaptation grants, among which insulation grants and energy certificate grants). In this way the inhabitants are enticed to invest in their houses and the quality of housing can be preserved.

### Derelict buildings

To avoid the appearance of derelict buildings, Hamont-Achel keeps a register of vacant and abandoned buildings. Fines are only given to house owners when no measures are taken. A new housing policy is on its way in order to be able to preserve the open spaces and as a consequence of the awareness that buildings should primarily be concentrated in the town centers, to organize public services.

### Dog droppings disposal

To prevent dog poop on the town pavements, the municipality has installed dog waste bag tubes at selected park locations and in the centres of Hamont and Achel. Signs stating pet owner's responsibilities for clean-up have been placed next to these tubes.



Dog waste bag tube



Michielshof





## 4. LANDSCAPE

### Landscapes

Hamont-Achel is located in the north of the green province of Limburg and is part of the cross-border landscape of the 'Grote Heide', an area which covers 6,000 hectares of woodland and exceptional moorland scenery. In the lower part, in the middle of its territory, 'De Warmbeek' has created a brook valley with a wealth of deciduous trees. On this fertile soil, also the first settlements, which date back to the Neolithic, were situated. As a basis to protect the small landscape elements, an inventory of trees, hedges and wooded banks was made in 1993.

### Nature protection areas

More than half of the town's territory is part of the Birds Directive Area '3.14. Hamonterheide, Hageven, Buitenheide, Mariahof en Stamprooierbroek', in which habitats of land dunes, dry and wet moorlands, swamps, lakes, forests and wooded banks receive special protection. About one third of this surface is also situated in Habitat Directive Area 'Hageven with Dommelvallei, Beverbeekse Heide, Warmbeek and Wateringen' (BE2200032). Many nature conservation projects are carried out in function of protected species in these areas.

### Nature reserves

The 'Grote Heide' is a varied and multi-faceted reserve of nature of high value, situated on both sides of the Belgian-Dutch border. Owing to its unique biodiversity, this reserve ranks in the top ten of European nature reserves. The town, the ANB and the KUL also own dozens of hectares of nature reserves. As nature conservation is a priority to them, it is obvious to co-operate in that field. As the ANB owns the surrounding area and to streamline conservation measures, the town of Hamont-Achel has given the management of the fens in the northern part of its territory to this government agency for nature and forestry.

### Managed areas (forestry)

About 1,200 hectares or 25% of the surface of Hamont-Achel is covered by woods. More than half of that is owned by the town. The agency ANB and the University of Louvain (KUL) each own about 75 hectares. Most forests in the higher parts of Hamont-Achel consist of pine trees (Scots pine or *Pinus sylvestris* and Corsican pine), which were cut for use in the coal mines in the first part of the 20th century. Nowadays the trees are harvested on a yearly scheme, which is made by the ANB. Harvesting of the trees is done by private companies and partly also by private persons, after an auction. In 2007 a common comprehensive forest management plan was approved by the Flemish government. This includes the forests of the town, of the ANB and of about twenty private owners, among which is the KUL. It focuses on the management of cleared spaces to stimulate the presence of dry and wet heather, on the replacement by native trees and on controlling invasive species. Plantations are managed mainly by thinning and natural rejuvenation. The wood from the forests in Hamont-Achel is also certified under the FSC system.



Hayfield mowing

### Managed areas (agriculture)

Wooded roadsides and hedgerows constitute important historic elements of our landscape, but as the up-keep is expensive, they were not maintained properly after the Second World War. Many wooded sides disappeared or changed into uniform tree lanes. To create more biological diversity and to create an ideal habitat for species like the yellowhammer bird (*Emberiza citrinella*) these places need to be maintained again. By using the cut branches and pruning waste for the production of wood chips to heat buildings or as the basis for energy production, maintenance costs can be limited. The oak eggar (*Lasiocampa quercus*) or 'Hageheld' in Dutch, is a large moth which lives in woody areas and on heathland. It thrives in wooded roadsides and banks. It is the mascot of the regional PDPO-project (1\*) 'Hagehelden' of the RLLK. As an integral part of this project the RLLK is making a wooded-roadside management plan in close co-operation with the municipalities in its working area. This plan is discussed with all potential partners in the agricultural sector and nature conservation sector. After that, local farmers will harvest the wooded roadsides and plant again where needed.

### Invasive species

To advance native vegetation, the American bird-cherry (*Prunus serotina*), which is an invasive shrub, has been removed manually in wooded areas that are owned by the town. This was started in the 1970s. At first, the clearing was done by town staff, but this job has now been contracted out to social employment service 'De Winning'. As a result of this, the underbrush in the woods now consists of indigenous shrubs like buckthorn (*Rhamnus frangula*), sorb (*Sorbus aucuparia*), young birches and oaks.

Parrot feather (*Myriophyllum aquaticum*), an invasive plant which has escaped cultivation in indoor and aquaria and in aquatic gardens, grows in lakes and rivers that have a high nutrient content. At domain 'De Bever' this plant, which has invaded a large part of the lake, will shortly be removed. The lake will be drained and the remaining sludge will be dug off.

De Winning and Regionaal Landschap Lage Kempen (RLLK) are partnerships between private and public partners. De Winning offers maintenance services in nature and green spaces via sustainable employment. The RLLK is responsible for nature and landscape projects and also offers environmental services. Invasive species which are controlled regularly and removed manually by De Winning and RLLK are: Japanese knotweed (*Fallopia japonica*) and Himalayan Balsam (*Impatiens glandulifera*).

1\* PDPO stands for 'Programmadocument voor Plattelandsontwikkeling' or the Flemish Programme for Rural Development



Wooded-roadside management



Parrot feather



## 5. GREEN SPACES

### Parks, gardens and green corridors

The town park in Hamont was redesigned in close co-operation with the inhabitants, to create a family-friendly area which stimulates encounters and where children can play freely. The most important conclusion of the participation process was that children and adults attach less importance to physical playground equipment, but are mostly interested in a creative playing atmosphere. In that sense the green playing ground is preferred to the classic playing ground. The town park will be divided in several zones that blend together, with elements as an infant playing ground and an open air theater. The so-called 'Huis van het Kind' ('child's home') is also located here. This consultancy and family supporting office addresses all items that are related to children and youngsters, as day care, education, work, spare time and well-being. One of the main links to nature in the town park is the brook 'Erkbeek', which flows in an open river-bed through the town centre here.

To restore its former function, the garden of the sisters' convent in Hamont will be changed into a green public space, which offers an enclosed quiet place that is complementary to the town park. It works as a link between the town park, the schools and the town centre. As it can also stimulate encounters, the convent garden will be used to enhance social cohesion. The infant school will receive a new entrance via this garden.

The Simonspark, the Michielspark and the place around the village fountain constitute a public green corridor in the centre of Achel.

Near the clubhouse of the boy and girl scouts an integral and multifunctional project was carried out in 2012. A corn field was transformed to a fen with a green buffer zone, a bank and a camping and playing ground.

### Sports and playgrounds

Locations for playing soccer in green open spaces are mainly concentrated at De Siggert in Achel and at two locations near the centre of Hamont. De Siggert and Voor-Lo also have a floodlit Finnish loop run. Sport fishing can be done in a green location at the fish pond of 'De Walvissers' near the Meuse-Escout canal. Achel has its own children playground, adjacent to the sports hall. Many neighbourhoods also have their own playgrounds.

### Cemetaries and botanic gardens

The old cemetery of Hamont dates from 1854, when there was not enough room around the church for burials anymore. It was used until 1977 and has now been repurposed as park cemetery. The aim of the heritage sector is to make it a symbol of transience and to refrain from harsh restoration measures. Five years ago this cemetery looked like a dense forest with a barren soil. The barrenness resulted from the use of pesticides, as was customary at the time. By switching to eco-friendly practices, Hamont-Achel seized the opportunity to redesign the cemetery and to change it into an open and more attractive park, without removing the graves. The presence of big trees is exceptional on Flemish cemeteries and the town council also wanted to preserve the forest atmosphere of this specific cemetery. The old cemetery also serves as a botanic garden, with educational equipment for school children in one of its corners.

The village cemetery at Achel is being transformed as a result of the introduction of pesticide-free green management.

The forest cemetery is situated between the communities of Hamont and Achel. It was established in 1978, immediately after the amalgamation of both former villages. Cutting of trees has been restricted and artificial roadbeds have been limited on this cemetery. The design refers to the 'cycle of life', where the



Forest cemetery



Old cemetery Hamont



Hanging baskets

deceased return to nature, and to the round burial mounds from the Bronze Age, which were found in this vicinity. The grave circles are bordered by low hedges and the natural vegetation leads to a decrease in maintenance. To limit the amount of waste, some low walls have been made from pruning material, which stimulate local composting and the occurrence of local wildlife and mushrooms. The grassy parts attract deer on early morning or late evening hours.

### Geological garden

This garden was made by the town in co-operation with the local astronomy association 'De Noorderkroon' (Corona Borealis). Along a circular path a collection of stones which represent 600 million years of geologic history, are shown.

### Inventory in GeoVisia

The public property, greenery and all objects in public outdoor space have been inventoried and have been included in the GIS application GeoVisia, which offers many options for inspection and planning. Organizing and authorization of the data rests with the GIS-functionary. The data can be consulted in the office and in the field by all authorized persons.

### Level of maintenance

Maintenance of all public green spaces is done by the town's Green Management Department (GMD). This department manages 7.1 hectares of green spaces or about 850 planting compartments in town centers, school environs, playgrounds and the railroad station surroundings. Besides, the GMD manages 18.22 ha of lawns, of which 5.62 ha are unused road parts and 11.6 ha are recreation and soccer fields. Planning of the maintenance work is partly event-driven and is made according to priorities. That is why the town is divided into zones: zone A contains the centres, zone B contains the zones on the outskirts, the playgrounds and the school environs. Zone C are the rural areas. In zone D maintenance is done on-call. The criteria stipulate that more maintenance is required for places which are near the town centres. All public green spaces are maintained without the use of pesticides.

### Machinery

In order to maintain public greenery, the town's environmental services have a sizable rolling and machinery stock at their disposal. These are used for mowing, brush cutting, mechanical weed control on pavements, etc. Beside the daily upkeep, there is time for specific projects as the revalorization of the old cemetery, the renewal of Finnish loop runs and new plantations.



Churchyard Hamont



Simons' park Achel



Soccer stadium De Siggert



## 6. PERMANENT AND SEASONAL PLANTING

### Street and park trees

The green character of Hamont-Achel is partly determined by roadside and park trees. These amount to 11,850 registered trees, with 74 species and 101 varieties. The largest tree circumference is 440 cm. During recent years planting of indigenous trees has been given preference. Apart from the yearly maintenance of 20 to 30% of the roadside trees in built-up areas, pruning is done as a result of inspections, possible complaints by inhabitants and of storm damage. In the autumn, leaves of roadside trees are collected, which amounted to 370 tons in 2016.

### Shrubs and perennials

Next to ornamental shrubs, the planting compartments mainly consist of hedges and shrub blocks, which represent a total pruning surface of about 26,000 m<sup>2</sup>. The most common species in these hedges are: *Taxus baccata* (5,712 m<sup>2</sup>), *Carpinus betulus* (5,484 m<sup>2</sup>), *Ligustrum* (1,928 m<sup>2</sup>) and *Fagus sylvatica* (424 m<sup>2</sup>). Perennials such as *Lonicera*, *Cotoneaster*, *Spiraea*, *Prunus* and *Hedera* have proven their reliability. In herbaceous borders, use is often made of *Lavandula* and ornamental grasses like *Carex*, *Miscanthus* and *Pennisetum* (e.g. at the railway station and in the centres of Hamont and Achel).

### Seasonal planting

As they have a positive effect on people's emotions, blooming town centres contribute to the well-being of the inhabitants. That is why combinations of plants have been chosen that give colour throughout the seasons. They are applied in flower beds and in containers.

#### *In flower beds*

In spring yellow daffodils can be seen in flower beds and in larger numbers near the railroad station, in parks and on the old town cemetery. Having perennial flowers that bloom all summer and continue their display into fall in the town centres is sometimes preferred to a multitude of plants that flower for but a brief time. Wildflower seed mixtures have also been sown on several locations. The aim of this is also to improve the living conditions of wild bees, honey bees and butterflies. To commemorate the First World War and the armistice, poppies and ox-eye daisies have been sown near monuments and alongside roads, in co-operation with the government agency ANB. At the Napoleon mill a small oat field has been placed, to make the link between plants and food and with the former economic function of the windmill.

#### *In containers*

Flower boxes and towers with annual plants are traditionally used on several locations to brighten up public places and to give colour throughout the seasons. Planting of flowers in these containers is outsourced to an external company, which prepares them in its greenhouses to improve root formation, which in its turn leads to healthier and more colourful flowers. Hanging baskets are a newer phenomenon. The zones with hanging baskets were extended last year, to provide valuable colour at eye level.



Poppy fields Achelse Kluis





## 7. ENVIRONMENTAL EDUCATION

The town of Hamont-Achel participates in environmental education **projects** and supports education **packages** to stimulate environmental awareness of children at an early age. It ranges from raising awareness about waste and litter, about sustainability of the food chain, to awareness about nature conservation. Every year in March, a major clean-up weekend 'Straat.net' is organized for schools and associations. Guided visits to the recycling centre are also part of the teaching programmes at schools.

### Projects

#### *Experience pathway at domain De Bever*

As stated in one of the earlier chapters, the lake and its surroundings at domain 'De Bever' will be upgraded during the coming years. The main objectives are the promotion of biodiversity and environmental education. The budget amounts to 300,000 €, which is mainly subsidised by the Flemish Community (ISN or 'Investeringsubsidie Natuur') and the European Community (LEADER).

In co-operation with the town of Hamont-Achel the association Regionaal Landschap Lage Kempen (RLLK) will install a nature, landscape, horticulture and agriculture experience pathway, along which educational equipment and information panels will be placed. This pathway will lead along ponds, brooks, a blueberry plantation and across moorland. Agriculture and nature are interwoven in and around the domain, with the brook De Warmbeek and its affluents as connecting structures.

#### *Eco-garden at infant and primary school De Horizon*

Primary school 'De Horizon' is the first school in town with an ecological garden, in which the idea of recycling is implemented in its pattern. In and near it, workshops are organized, as e.g. about composting, weaving branches and making insect hotels and birdhouses.

### Education packages

#### *Brooms for Butterflies*

In 2006 Hamont-Achel adopted the grayling butterfly (*Hipparchia Semele*) with reference to the charter 'municipalities adopt indigenous species from the province of Limburg' (GALS). The environmental education project 'Brooms for Butterflies' is an example of carrying out the intentions of this charter. The grayling butterfly is one of many insects that live on the moorland, which partly degraded into areas which are covered by purple moor-grass (*Molinia caerulea* or so-called 'pipe cleaners') and grey hair-grass (*Corynephorus canescens*). Schools and associations can participate in clearing the grass to offer opportunities for the heath and for the grayling. During a walk a guide helps them discover the heathland habitat and the living conditions of the grayling. After that, they help clearing the moor-grass and make brushes with it, according to an old local practice.

#### *Bazaar Kastaar*

The town of Hamont-Achel participates in this initiative, which is based on a permanent interactive exhibition that is organized by the rural education network 'plattelandseeducatief netwerk Kempen en Maasland'. It focuses on primary schools and shows children where food products like milk, meat, vegetables and fruits originate. Compliant with this exhibition a network of 25 farms, which are spread over the region, has been built. In this way the school children learn more about agriculture and horticulture in their own town and schools can limit transportation. Teachers are also trained to be able to give rural education.



Reference photo for experience pathway De Bever



Eco-garden De Horizon



Reference photo for experience pathway De Bever



Brooms for butterflies





Wildflower seeds and wildflower seed folder (right)

De bij hoort erbij!  
Zonder bij hebben we een  
'bijna' lege winkelkar van  
fruit en groenten.



## 8. EFFORT AND INVOLVEMENT

During Earth Hour and the Night of Darkness the municipality has the public lighting switched off, to make people aware of the necessity to reduce light pollution. Every year the municipality distributes wildflower seeds for free among the population to discourage the use of pesticides on uncultivated and fallow terrains and to improve the living conditions of bees, butterflies and other insects. In co-operation with the neighbouring municipality of Neerpelt, a bicycle tour is organized each year in June, which has the 'cycle of nature' as a theme. Voluntary work and citizen participation are deeply rooted into the traditions in Hamont-Achel and probably originate from hamlet traditions and neighbours' duty in earlier times:

- Each year the school children take part in the litter clean-up campaign 'Straat.net'.
- Permanent clean-up operations for citizens and associations ('digital claim card')
- Volunteers run a demo compost project, in co-operation with the towns of Neerpelt and Overpelt.
- The local shops participate in the so-called 'shopping by bike' action.

The town also co-operates with citizens and supports a large number of associations. Here are some additional examples of this co-operation:

### Flowering contest

The flowering contest was started in Hamont-Achel in 1979 to encourage the locals to plant up their front gardens and balconies with flowers. These contribute in large measure to an image of a green and flower-rich town. The jury will select fifty laureates, which will be invited to a daytrip in September.

### ZadenBib

De Zadenbib (seed library) is an initiative to share (bio)seeds. In this 'library' you do not take along books but seeds, for free. You can find seeds of edible plants, medical plants, ornamental plants, flowers, etc. All the ZadenBib asks in return is to harvest seeds from these plants, to return a part of them and to share knowledge and experience. The ZadenBib can be found in the libraries of Hamont and Achel.

### Land art

GAlandART is a biennial art event which takes places in the wooded area adjacent to domain De Bever. Artists from this country and from abroad present their 'environmental art' along a track of 5 km. The challenge for each contender is to start from nature in making and presenting a unique work of art which corresponds with the contest's theme.

### Tuinhier

Tuinhier is an association which is the intermediary for garden lovers who want information about and practical support for their garden. It also wants to enhance the group feeling of gardeners. At location 'De Kempkens' the town co-operates with Tuinhier to make allotments where the locals can engage in organic gardening.



Seed library



Compost project and organic gardening



GAlandART



## 9. TOURISM AND LEISURE



### Historical background

The name Hamont ('hameide' or 'hamoth') points to its origin: 'a place surrounded by a fence'. In earlier times Hamont was surrounded by a moat, a bank and a wall and had two gates: the Budelpoort and the Achelpoort. The name Achel ('a' or 'aqua' and 'lo') refers to 'wetland and forests'. Here the lords resided in the castle of Grevenbroek. During the late Middle Ages, Hamont along with Achel and Lille St.-Hubert, formed a small separate state called the 'free Manor of Grevenbroek'. This manor lost its independence in 1401 to the prince-bishop of Liege, after a border quarrel with the neighbouring village of Neerpelt... In the 15th century the local lord built a convent for the Franciscan Sisters at Catharinadal and also a large tower mill, later called 'the Tomp'. Unfortunately the large water castle of Grevenbroek was destroyed by the Duke of Marlborough in 1702. In 1944, Achel for a while became the centre for liberation actions: the Simons House (at present the tourist office and the museum) was the headquarters of General Dempsey and even the generals Montgomery and Eisenhower came to visit. Hamont and Achel were brought together again by a merger in 1977 and in 1985 the new town got back its city title which it had lost after the French invasion in 1794.

### Attractiveness

Hamont-Achel is **one of the greenest towns in Flanders**. The town partly owes its boundless charm to its rural character, which is made up by woods and an open landscape of moorland, meadows and fields. With its lush nature and rich history it radiates a quiet and hospitable atmosphere, which is adequate for a hike, a bicycle tour or tasting the Achel Trappist beer and cheese from Catharinadal. It cherishes its touristic catchphrase 'Between Teuten and Trappists', which refers to its rich historic and natural heritage. The 'Teuten' were travelling merchants who traded in quality products, as for example in copperware and textiles. They worked in companies and travelled to The Netherlands and northern Germany, to return to their families at the end of the autumn. In the 19th century Hamont-Achel was the most prosperous Teuten merchant centre of the region, of which the many sumptuous merchant mansions still bear witness.

### Accommodation and infrastructure

Hamont-Achel ambassador of 'Vlaanderen Lekker Land 2010-2012', a project to promote the Flemish food culture and local products inside the country and abroad, can be recommended for its delicious local products and countless lodging options. You can rest in one of the taverns or restaurants on your way and enjoy our local products. The Achel Trappist beer is one of them and another 'champion' is the Grevenbroecker blue cheese, which won the Lyon Caseus Award in 2009. Do you also want to spend the night? In that case Hamont-Achel offers a choice of more than 200 beds, spread over several hotels, hospices and B&Bs. You prefer to relax in the countryside for some days? In that case agri-tourism is an option. By this varied supply more than 20,000 overnight stays can be counted each year. Youth associations can find a place on several youth campsites and in this manner about 30,000 persons stay at Hamont-Achel during the summer.



Castle domain Genenbroek



Villa Christina







## Sport and leisure facilities

Cycling, hiking, riding on horseback, ... you have many choices. You can cycle along well-maintained cycling routes in nature, follow one of the ten signposted Trappist hiking routes through a varied landscape or find your way through the woods. All trails are marked and maps can be purchased at the tourist offices of Hamont-Achel.

### Cycling network

Hamont-Achel is also situated in the centre of a cycling network which consists of 450 km of quiet paths that intersect each other at different points. Thanks to this system you can make endless combinations of bicycle tracks. The mountainbike-network Noord-Limburg runs through seven municipalities. On several places you can switch to Dutch routes.

Some examples of thematic cycling routes are:

- The 'Grote Heide route', which is about 100 km, connects five municipalities on both sides of the Belgian-Dutch border and alternates colourfully with heath lands and meadow enclaves;
- The 'Sezoens route', which is 53 km, partly runs along the canal Bocholt-Herentals and lets you discover the cultural and historical monuments, including old farms, burial mounds, castle Genenbroek, the Napoleon Mill and the Abbey of Achel;
- 'Op de Boerenbuiten' is the name of a cycling route on which you can get acquainted with aspects of the local agriculture and horticulture.

### Hiking trails

Most of the walks cross the vast green area between Hamont and Achel.

- Ten tracks are named after an original Trappist beer. They cross both the green and the urban area and take you right past the beautiful and rich history of the region.
- Another extensive trail network is situated in and around the Warmbeek valley. You will find more details on the information boards along these trails.
- A city walk takes you along the stately Teuten houses in Hamont, the St. Laurence church and the grave of doctor Mathijssen, who invented the plaster bandage.
- A village walk brings you along the historic monuments in the centre of Achel.
- On the planetary trail you will discover the distances in the solar system on a small scale. The distance from the earth to the sun (150 million km) is scaled down to 45 meters here. More information about our solar system is given on a series of boards.
- Heritage walk 'De Doodendraad' is about the electrified wire fence which was placed on the border during the First World War. A reconstruction of this fence was made in Hamont-Achel in 2000 and was extended in 2015.





### *Equestrian and coach network 'Limburgse Kempen'*

This first Flemish equestrian and coach network looks impressive: 3,000 trail signs, 1,700 poles and 300 km of soft paths to spare the hooves of the horses. The trails form loops through an area rich in forests and heath in ten municipalities, including Hamont-Achel.

### **Promotion and events**

Promotion in the field of tourism and leisure is done by the town service 'Uitpunt' at Hamont and by the tourist office 'VVV' at Achel. This is done by means of leaflets and brochures, newspapers, advertising weeklies, presence at tourism fairs and the following websites:

[www.hamont-achel.be/dienst/2064/uitpunt](http://www.hamont-achel.be/dienst/2064/uitpunt)  
[aha.hamont-achel.be/](http://aha.hamont-achel.be/)  
[www.toerisme-hamont-achel.be/](http://www.toerisme-hamont-achel.be/)

Some examples of promoted events are:

### *Saint Anthony procession and village fair*

The worship of Saint Anthony of Padua is a two century old tradition at Achel, which originated in the sisters convent at Catharinadal. Each year after the eucharistic liturgy on the first Sunday after 13th June a statue of St. Anthony is carried through the streets, followed by devotees and associations. The procession is followed by a feast which includes food and shopping stands, games for children and live performances.

### *International March and Show Contest of the Low Countries*

Every two years on Whitsunday and Whit Monday the International March and Show Contest of the Low Countries is organized in Hamont, in a unique atmosphere of competition and solidarity between top groups and bands. There are four categories: march, marching parade, show and concert.

### **Special facilities**

#### *Pole camping site*

This simple tenting site for hikers is marked by a wooden pole or hand water pump and a sign, which confirm its status as a legal and free camping spot in a natural environment. Hikers can stay here overnight for one or two days, in tents that are placed in a radius of 10 meters around the pole.

#### *Dog off-leash area*

The town recognizes the importance of dogs to residents by providing an off-leash dog area of 3.5 ha in a wooded recreation zone at Haarterheide, which will be ready at the end of 2017. This 'doggie park' is a safe way to exercise dogs while people can socialize with other dog owners. This dog area provides a wonderful mix of trees, open space, benches, waste and bag recycling bins. Pet owners are asked to pick up after their dog and to bring extra 'doggie bags' and deposit them in the recycling bag dispensers.

### **and sustainability**

As you will have noticed, the town of Hamont-Achel has a stake in integrated tourism, which is sustained by and embedded in the local community. All factors, from Trappists to Teuten, recreative hiking and cycling, cultural-historical heritage and last but not least the breathtaking landscape, are interwoven. And for the romantic tourist there is always another famous local product: the Spaas brand candle.





## 10. COMMUNICATION

News about the participation in the international competition 'Entente Florale Europe', which is organized by the European Association for Flowers and Landscape, is published in the *municipal magazine "De Belleman"*. This magazine has been issued since 1977, upon the merger of Hamont and Achel. At first it focused on dry information, but after a restyling in 1990, more space was attributed to popular themes, as flowering contests and golden wedding anniversaries. After restylings in 2002 and 2008, the contents and the layout were updated to a more modern look-and-feel at the beginning of this year. To make this magazine more accessible, it is divided into news categories and more attention is given to interviews, local coverage, leisure activities and association life, with photos and illustrations. In order to respond more quickly to topics, it also changed from a quarterly to a bimestrial magazine.

Other publication means and channels are essential to organize the required daily communication, as about the Entente Florale Europe. *Advertisements, the electronic information panels and press releases* represent other aspects of this. To attain as many people as possible in a short time an optimal media-mix is applied. Each publication channel is used on the basis of its own strength and is linked accurately to other publication channels. New media as *the town website www.hamont-achel.be* and *Facebook* are being used continually. In this respect the "less is more"-principle is applied to the website, with user friendliness as a starting point. *The town's Facebook page* is not only used to publish news, but also to keep permanently in touch with the inhabitants.

Communication about what is happening in Hamont-Achel is also taking place outside of town. *Television coverage* about Hamont-Achel is regularly broadcast in this province and is placed on the town website and Facebook page.

Apart from the specific documents about the jury visit for Entente Florale Europe, *brochures and flyers* have been made and *panels and banners* have been placed to promote the competition.

News about the participation in Entente Florale Europe is also published in "*Groencontact*", the bimestrial magazine of the Flemish Association for Public Greenery (VVOG).



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