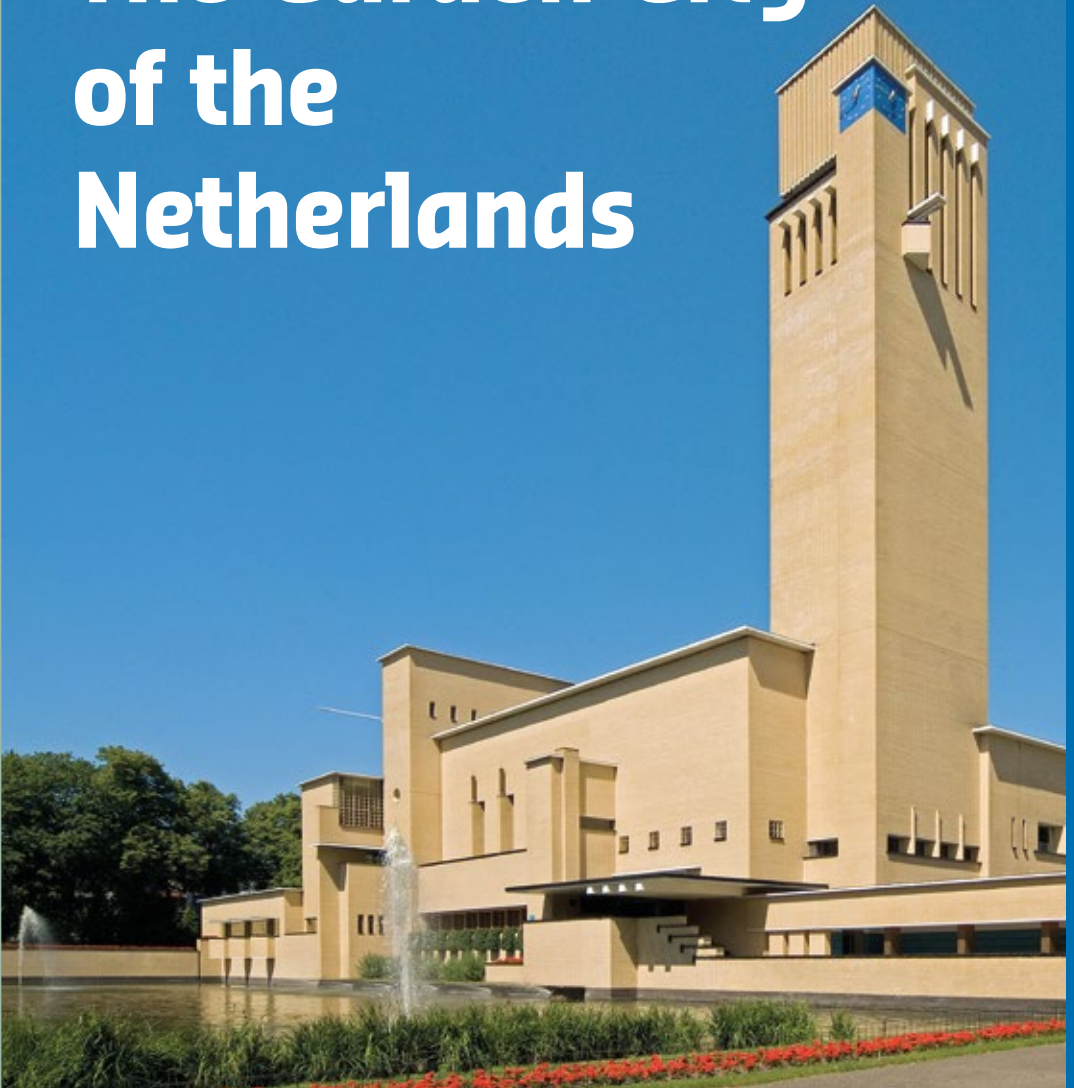


Hilversum The Garden City of the Netherlands



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Colophon

Municipality of Hilversum
Department of Heritage
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Hilversum is the only true Garden City in the Netherlands, boasting numerous housing complexes designed as garden villages or districts. Here, the Garden City concept has been fully realized on a citywide scale, forming an essential part of Hilversum's identity and guiding its future development. But what defines a Garden City, and what features are crucial to preserving its character? Let's explore these questions.

What is a Garden City?

The Garden City idea emerged in the 19th century as a response to the overcrowded, polluted, and impoverished urban centers that posed significant public health risks. At that time, many city centers were densely built with slums, especially in courtyards, where living conditions were dire. These areas often featured low, damp cellar houses and dark slums, where large families lived in cramped quarters. While profitable for landlords, these conditions prompted socially conscious politicians and doctors to advocate for improved sanitation and better access to light and air in homes.



Bloemenbuurt



The Lorentzvijver (Lorentz pond) in the protected district of Hilversum Oost fills one of the green fingers that directly connects the city with the surrounding nature. The pond also functions as a retention pond.

Historical Context

In the latter half of the 19th century, building regulations were introduced in many cities to curb urban sprawl, but they were initially insufficient to improve living conditions in overcrowded working-class neighborhoods. Speculators still had the freedom to overcrowd homes and fill courtyards. However, influenced by English and German engineers, initiatives began to emerge to enhance urban living conditions. As cities expanded after the demolition of their fortifications, there was room to experiment with new urban planning ideas.

Health, Social and Economic Benefits

The realization grew that healthy living conditions for workers benefited the economy, leading to the development of spacious garden villages. These villages, often initiated by industrialists who valued their employees' health, featured greenery for clean air, well-being, and home-based food production. Parks, like Amsterdam's Vondelpark (1865), were also designed for public health by philanthropic organizations.

City Beautiful Movement

City Beautiful Movement of the 19th century emphasized aesthetically pleasing urban design and a beautiful living environment. Elements included varied building blocks, curved street walls, a hierarchy of streets, and the use of greenery in avenues, parks, and gardens. Special buildings such as schools and churches were placed as landmarks within sight lines. Austrian architect Camillo Sitte (1843-1903) considered greenery the "lungs of the city" and a tool to improve living conditions, especially for the working class.

The Evolution in England

In England, Garden Cities were built near factories, with Raymond Unwin creating the first Garden City, Letchworth, north of London in 1905. Ebenezer Howard (1850-1920) further developed the Garden City idea, envisioning satellite cities around existing ones, characterized by spaciousness and greenery. These cities were to be socially balanced and self-sufficient, with employment opportunities and agricultural production. Howard's ideas, detailed in his book 'Garden Cities of Tomorrow' (1898), laid the foundation for the Garden City movement.



East view of the Garden City
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The Garden City Concept in the 20th Century

In the 20th century, housing associations, influenced by Howard's ideas, began constructing garden districts. Examples include Philipsdorp in Eindhoven (1910), Tuindorp 't Lansink in Hengelo (1910), and Tuindorp Vreewijk in Rotterdam (1913). Hilversum, however, stands out with numerous garden villages and neighborhoods designed by municipal architect Willem Marinus Dudok, transforming it into a true Garden City. Hilversum therefore is the only city developed as a Garden City on city scale with 25 housing complexes, schools and greenery.

Unique Housing Complexes and Garden Districts

Hilversum boasts unique housing complexes and garden districts, including the Bloemenbuurt, Zinniastraat, Larenseweg, Lorentzvijver, Eemnesserweg, Jan van der Heijdenstraat, and the Chestnut Pond. These areas, along with villa districts, surround the medieval city center like protective hands. The villa area emerged in the 19th century, when affluent city dwellers from Amsterdam sought the healthy environment of Het Gooi.

Dudok's Urban Development Plan

Dudok's ambition extended beyond garden suburbs to a harmonious urban development unity. He introduced the value of beauty. His 1934 urban development plan for Hilversum envisioned a city with coherent districts connected to nature through "green fingers." He aimed to prevent unplanned urban sprawl and create a Garden City where people could live healthily and happily close to nature, resulting in a city surrounded by protected nature areas.



Dudoks urban development plan

Valuable Features of Hilversum's Garden City

The garden villages and districts of Hilversum are widely appreciated for their special residential quality, cultural and historical value. These areas remain sustainable and valuable for the future, emphasizing the importance of preserving their essence.

Social Cohesion

Social cohesion is a cornerstone of Hilversum's Garden City concept. This environment promotes strong community bonds at neighborhood, district, and city levels. Active neighbor interactions encourage social safety and strong local connections, while local identity is reinforced as residents easily identify with their city, neighborhood, and home.



Openbare leeszaal, Neuweg



Kamrad, Hilversum Oost

Accessible Facilities

Accessible facilities are another key feature. Shops, schools, medical care, and public transport are all within walking distance, ensuring convenience and promoting a sense of community. Homes in Hilversum are land-bound, featuring both front and back gardens that provide private outdoor spaces for residents.

Public Greenery

Public Greenery is integrated throughout the city, offering play areas for children and rest areas for the elderly. Streets are lined with trees and greenery, creating scenic sight lines and enhancing the overall aesthetic of the city. Special buildings, such as schools and churches, are positioned as visual landmarks, adding to the city's charm.



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Duivenstraat

Unified Aesthetic Design

Hilversum's streets feature a unified and aesthetically pleasing design, maintaining a coherent street scenery. The characteristic architecture of the buildings, with careful detailing, contributes to the city's unique style. Despite some recent changes, Hilversum's urban image predominantly reflects a characteristic unity, essential for preserving its Garden City heritage.

Building Design

Building design in Hilversum typically consists of one or two-story structures with tiled roofs. The uniformity of red-tiled roofs enhances urban cohesion. Facade details, such as roof overhangs and protruding gutters, provide distinct terminations, adding to the visual appeal of the buildings. Masonry in red or yellow brick, painted in a variety of careful chosen colours, adds to the city's architectural charm. Homes feature private front and back gardens, and yard fencing is defined by low walls or hedges, maintaining a harmonious streetscape.

By maintaining these features and values, Hilversum can continue to thrive as a Garden City, offering a high-quality living environment for its residents. The careful balance of social, architectural, and environmental elements ensures that Hilversum remains a model of sustainable urban living, preserving its unique character for future generations.



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Hilversum is the Garden City of the Netherlands, uniquely embodying the Garden City concept on a city-wide scale. In the early 1920s, it gained global fame for its exceptional Garden City design, featuring high-quality public housing and schools. This history shapes the city's future vision.

The Garden City is a social and economic concept, not just spatial. Well-designed homes in green spaces foster strong communities and opportunities for all. The 1901 Housing Act significantly boosted this ambition, with municipal architect Willem Dudok leading the way for over 40 years. The municipality's own construction company built homes and public buildings, ensuring a harmonious urban environment with a blend of urban planning, green spaces, and beautiful architecture.

The Garden City's success stemmed from political will, innovation, and a long-term vision. Hilversum evolved the concept to meet new societal needs, boasting over 1100 protected monuments and three protected districts. Today, the Garden City's qualities remain valuable, offering a pleasant, varied, and healthy living environment with strong social cohesion, affordable housing, schools, and accessible nature, making residents proud of their community.