

VILVOORDE

City baseline

Facts and figures

Population: currently 45.000 inhabitants, 12% increase of the population planned between 2016-2025.



Location: ideally situated at the crossroads of the Belgium biggest airport and between the two main economic centres of the country (Antwerpen and Brussels); it is both an advantage and a weakness as it is a territory with heavy traffic.

Economic indicators: There is a low unemployment rate, but a lower income per person (around EUR 17.000) compared to the Flemish Region (an average of EUR 20.000). 54% of the population is not Belgian, representing one of the highest diversity in the country. The population is also in average younger than in the region. The city has a heavy industry history and some of them are still running.



General context

The city has a local long-term vision called “Our Vilvoorde Tomorrow” and energy and climate aspects are integrated in it. This future plan consists of 4 storylines that the city of Vilvoorde wants to develop and realise together with its inhabitants in the future:

Vilvoorde is a 'city in the landscape' that uses greenery and space in a sustainable way. Nature provides food, more oxygen and absorbs rainwater. These are all natural advantages that we can enjoy if we reserve enough space for them.

Vilvoorde remains a 'inhabited city' where everyone can live in a pleasant way. Because Vilvoorde is a city that is growing, we are investing in new sustainable homes in well-situated locations and with attention to public facilities in the neighbourhood.

Vilvoorde is a 'connected city' in which everyone can live and work in easily accessible places. We strive for a balance between accessibility and quality of life in our city.

As an 'active city', Vilvoorde remains an attractive place for numerous companies and organisations. By offering opportunities to high-tech, creative and sustainable businesses, we contribute to the creation of local jobs for the low- and high-skilled.

In the next years, the challenge for Vilvoorde is to translate this vision into realistic action plans as a guideline for future developments.

Vilvoorde is currently working on the follow up of the Sustainable Energy Action Plan (SEAP) 2020 via the Sustainable Energy and Climate Action Plan (ECAP 2030). Vilvoorde is also developing a City Climate Plan 2025 in line with the needed climate goals for 2030. This is important to have calculated goals in Vilvoorde for the current city council (legislation until 2025).

The local CO₂ emissions can be broken down to the different sectors as follows: households 35%, businesses 29% and mobility 20%. It needs to be mentioned that these emissions do not take into account the highways that cross Vilvoorde: the ring around Brussels and the E19 (Brussels-Antwerp). If the highways are considered, then the break down would be as follows: mobility 46%, households 24% and businesses 20%.

In terms of housing, the housing stock is mainly constituted of semi-detached one-family houses and 4% of the housing stock is unhealthy and needs urgent renovation.

In Vilvoorde, 9% of the housing is social housing consisting of mainly private single family homes, of which approximately 10% do not have central heating, but gas convectors.

In Vilvoorde there is 32% rental out of 17.000 housing units. In Flanders, there is an obligation for owners to install double glazing and roof insulation if they want to rent an apartment. It is the municipal housing department that needs to check if this obligation is met, however in Vilvoorde they do not have the required human resources to do so.

In terms of citizen participation, involving the different communities is a real challenge, especially on the climate change issue as it is not a priority for many households. A new city official will be appointed in 2020 to be in charge of participation.

The overall main issue faced by Vilvoorde is that as the city is attached to Brussels, it faces the same problems as a big city, however with a considerably lower municipal budget. In order to be on track with its transition path Vilvoorde would need EUR 1000/inhabitant/year¹ and since the city only has a fraction of that budget they are facing problems with reaching their ambitions.

Institutional context

The advantage of being a rather small administration is that it is possible to have a closer contact with the political level than in bigger cities which enabled Vilvoorde to have a creative and structured approach on climate issues. With the SEAP, Vilvoorde tried to involve all departments, however in terms of energy transition the decision making lies more in the hands of higher authorities.

On energy and climate policies

➤ Local

Vilvoorde is currently considering whether to use the Covenant of Mayors “linear approach” with the goal of 40% CO₂ reduction in 2030 or the backcasting approach towards 2050 climate neutrality.

➤ Regional

Because of its geographical location, Vilvoorde is very impacted by decisions taken in the Brussels region, especially in terms of transport, but cannot influence them much. Energy and climate policies are a regional competency in Belgium and recently the regional Government in Flanders has cut a number of subsidies to energy advice, decentralised energy production and energy efficiency measures.

¹ Source: Futureproofed

➤ National

The energy mix in Belgium is of 1/3 of nuclear; 20% of gas; 17% of imported electricity from neighbourhood countries and the rest is renewables. Climate issues are not high on the agenda and the negotiations of a new government at this point are not helping. The provinces are currently trying to bring the cities together and get a group dynamic in place.

Important aspects of climate and energy planning

In 2017 Vilvoorde started a learning network with the Futureproofed Cities. Initially there were 6 cities and currently the network is counting 132 members.

Signing the Covenant of Mayors is not enough for Vilvoorde as reaching -40% in 2030 would not be in line with reaching carbon neutrality in 2050. In addition, a shorter term action plan and budget by 2025 is proposed by Futureproofed who calculated the impact of Vilvoorde for the next 6 years based on demanded budgets and it is possible to reduce approximately 0,85% of CO₂ emissions. With the inevitable budget cuts still to decide it's fair to say that the impact will be marginal in 2030.

The climate action plan 2025 will be budgeted for the next legislature.

Main achievements in past SEAPs

Vilvoorde submitted its SEAP in 2015. Currently, Futureproofed is doing the monitoring report. It seems like Vilvoorde will reach maximum 17% of CO₂ reduction in 2020 instead of 20% in the case all measures planned are delivered which is quite unlikely. Vilvoorde will not reach the energy efficiency, nor the renewables targets.

Projects to build on

In the province there is a renovation programme running in cooperation with the intercommunal organisation 3Wplus. It consists of mobile offices that are touring across the province. In Vilvoorde they financed a mobile office exclusively for the city. This bus (WOON+bus) has been touring in all the communities of Vilvoorde for the past 3 years.

In this framework, in Vilvoorde, this "housing renovation bus" (mobile office) has been key to convince people in the first stage (in front of school doors or on visible public spaces). The renovation manager on board helps citizens with all questions concerning renovation, discounts, public grants, makes energy audits of the houses and provides advice to the inhabitants. Citizens can consult in the bus the city's thermographic picture including all roofs. In winter, citizens can benefit of a visit with the thermos camera for free.

This bus will be upgraded into the "energy house" bus to go beyond the hard renovation and include also renewable energy and advice on energy efficiency.

The same project is also used in the city's urban block renovation where a whole neighbourhood was activated to join in a renovation project involving social policy departments and organisations. In addition, the province has also a project that consists in a grant of EUR 30.000 per house; open to low income households. The focus is set on better houses and low energy bills and climate change is not issue that is communicated on in this framework. However, for each house, the needs for renovation are almost of EUR 60 000.

The Climatekid is an educational project involving schools. The Climatekid returns from the near future 2050 to tell his story of climate change and what children have to do to help the planet. At the end of the school year there was a theatre play about climate change where all the schools could present the work they did for the Climate kid.

New urban development

A whole new city district is developing on the formal industrial sites along the canal. The city has an intensive public private partnership with the developer to create a sustainable new part of the city. “4 Fontains” is mostly a residential neighbourhood that is future proofed and car free as the environmental impact is as low as possible. The city’s officials have well seized the opportunity to rethink with the developers the use of these brown fields and even engaged an external expert on sustainable urban development as an adviser for the city.

A second development “Groenloo” on the border with Brussels is also being supervised by the chamber of quality and sustainability. The goal is to have a new housing development where sustainability is key with a focus on nature, water and energy.

The city bought a former military area (ASIAT) to refurbish into a possible recreational, sustainable and cultural neighbourhood. This project has a lot of potential as it includes also a community garden and a lot of collective spaces to be re-invested. Also the energy supply has to be renewed and an energy research will be carried out with a number of stakeholders of the broader area to study possible sustainable and innovative energy solutions and engage possible partnerships.

The URBACT Local Group

The impact of the municipality on climate change mitigation is very low. Although the municipality gives a good example by renovating its own buildings and buying electric cars, the biggest challenge will be to get all key stakeholders and citizens involved.

The municipality launched a communication campaign called Vilvoorde Climate-Active to promote all climate actions. The SEAP 2020 was the first plan that was realised with the participation of different stakeholders. Vilvoorde then used a similar process to create the long term vision “Our Vilvoorde Tomorrow”.

In the URBACT local group, Vilvoorde could consider including the Club of entrepreneurs, representatives of the different advice commissions of the city, the local shop owners, commercial centres, cultural organisations etc.

The city has a very good collaboration with the Province of Vlaams-Brabant which is one of the most active regions on Energy and Climate programmes. The energy agency of the province is an important actor to mobilise in the Urbact Local Group.

Initial SWOT

Strengths	Weaknesses
Part of the Futureproofed network Woon+ bus “Chamber of quality and sustainability” for two urban developments (4 Fontains and Groenloo) New urban development to foster “alternative culture” and youth participation: the Asiat project Having a special energy local agency to do the one-stop-shop for renovations	2 important highways are crossing the city Climate change is one of the priorities of the new city’s government but has not been translated into the work programme (ambition/ action gap) More knowledge about water management and adaptation measures is needed as Vilvoorde is surrounded by water (river and canal) but the competency on these major axis for transport/ nature are not at the city but at the Canal authorities level or the Brussels region level

Opportunities	Threats
<p>The municipal councillor for economic development is convinced of the need to include the fight against climate change into the local policy; especially, to renew small retail shops in the city centre as the city is surrounded by huge commercial centres.</p>	<p>Big commercial centres on the outskirts of the city Vilvoorde is attached to Brussels and facing big city problems, with low local budget</p>

How Vilvoorde wants to use the ZCC project?

Zero Carbon can become a shared objective as the overall landscape in Belgium is open for long-term objectives with a very vibrant youth for climate movement. However, in Vilvoorde a carbon budget approach might be difficult to apply as the city is both a transport hub and an old industrial place, which most probably will give as a result that they already overshoot their carbon budget. The Futureproofed approach, with which they have started to work looks more adequate, both because they are a trusted partner with the relevant expertise and knowledge of the local context and because it identifies clear “first priority” actions. They propose a multi-annual action plan drawn from a 2050 climate neutrality objective. It can develop climate impact measurement for actions which are not under the direct competency of the city but which are necessary to include.

Vilvoorde could benefit from the ZCC project to:

- Reshape the internal governance of the city’s departments/actions: first with the energy, social and health departments.
- Communicate basic facts/projects on climate change
- Involvement of civil society and citizens into municipal decisions. This is not in the culture of the city as the population is so diverse and rather socially deprived. It would also be difficult to build on educational institutions as they are all in the neighbourhood cities. A new city official will be appointed in 2020 to be in charge of participation, so participation tools from ZCC would be a great opportunity to be used.
- Set up a policy to integrate climate in all departments and actions.
- Set up a “carbon literacy unit” in the city administration, with the mission to explain the consequences of the climate change and how to take decisions on it. Here, the carbon literacy programme of Manchester can be transferred as well as Futureproofed tools. it could be proposed to the Chamber of Commerce, to the local schools and sports centres.
- To organise an “urban village” culture as a new concept for community centres as a place to meet, connect urban and rural aspects, set up fab labs etc
- To consider “urban mining” and linking to the local resources (example of Brussels where a community started to fabric lime stone each time there is a new building site and that the building company is extracting soil). Urban Mining in old industrial cities can be a great economic development path and should be further investigated.

Sources:

Interviews with:

- Pascal Moons – Sustainable expert of Vilvoorde
- Annelies Van Der Donckt – Head of Strategic projects and city development
- Tim Romeyns – Head of the housing department
- Steven van Praet – Consultant Futureproofed
- Klaas Meesters – Project manager 4 Fonteinen and Groenloo

- Luc Eeckhout – Consultant sustainability in the chamber of quality and sustainability
- Tine Paredis – Municipal councillor for sustainability, tourism, digital development and Housing
- Barbara De Bakker – Municipal councillor for urban planning, mobility and environment
- Didier Cortois – Municipal councillor for local economy and citizen engagement
- Fatima Lamarti – Municipal councillor of social policy and equal opportunities