



'Knooperven (or Hub Farms)' a new strategic project for residential development in rural Dutch landscapes

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My name is Nico Beun.

After studying agricultural economics at Wageningen University, I held various posts in the Netherlands in such diverse areas as:

- land use development / land exchange and consolidation
 - innovation of agricultural education and
 - countryside renewal
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More recently, I have been working for InnovationNetwork, InnovationNetwork develops radical new concepts in agriculture, agribusiness, nutrition and green space and ensures that these are put into practice by interested parties.

The Ministry of Economic Affairs, Agriculture and Innovation initiated and finances InnovationNetwork. A Board oversees and directs our activities. We have 12 staff members. There are also numerous network partners such as municipalities, provincial authorities and businesses.

The project I will present to you this afternoon is one of more than 60 concepts that we are working on.

Our main planning priority in the Netherlands after the second world war was to clear the way for large-scale agricultural development and to make and keep as much land as possible available for agriculture.

But there was another priority too: namely to build houses for people...lots of houses for lots of people. So we adopted compact planning strategies. This meant that residential building was mainly confined within the boundaries of existing towns and villages and in a limited number of new-build areas that were designated at centralized level.

Immense numbers of houses were built. Which was a great achievement.

But there were also disadvantages

- We did not cater to the diversity of housing requirements
- Virtually no new housing was built in the rural area and the rural housing that was built is no longer attractive



- Builders, architects, urban developers and planners have forgotten the art of rural building

The prevailing notion was that in a densely-populated country like the Netherlands housebuilding should be heavily concentrated in a limited number of places. This approach broke with our age-old tradition that had produced an attractive landscape in the preceding centuries, where buildings could play a significant role in harmony with the countryside.

There is a great demand among citizens for new opportunities to live in the countryside but the restrictions of the existing policy prevent this. Strict regulations make it almost impossible to build new houses in rural areas. Overcoming this barrier is an enormous challenge in the Netherlands. And we need to devise new concepts and develop new policies in order to rise to this challenge.

New concepts for rural building can be combined with our search for opportunities to give citizens more responsibility for managing and maintaining the landscape and nature. Precisely now, at a time when subsidies are being abolished in our country and much less public funding is available for nature, ideas for new ways of managing and financing our rural area are very welcome.

The example that we highlight today also seeks to contribute to new sustainable ways of achieving and maintaining spatial quality. The sustainability of the concept rests on the fact that the citizens are directly responsible for the countryside that they live in.

There are 26,000 farms in the province of Overijssel, of which 10,000 are still used for agriculture. In the future the number of agricultural farms will decrease to 3,000. This means that alongside the 3,000 working farms, 23,000 farms will pass into the hands of non-farmers.

So two important trends are taking place in rural areas: farmers are stopping and citizens are migrating to the country. This offers opportunities both for landscape development and for the further reinforcement of the agricultural structure – a surprising combination that rarely goes hand in hand and is often considered impossible.

Knooperven consist of paths and planted greenery linking farms together. With their tentacles of routes and greenery, these Knooperven organize the landscape and thus serve as an ordering principle in rural Twente. The challenge in this concept is to facilitate the development of farms in a small-scale landscape, whilst simultaneously offering citizens opportunities



to live in the countryside and take responsibility for the management and maintenance of the characteristic planting that gives shape to these areas.

The parties working on this project are seeking to achieve the following objectives:

1. Strengthen the quality *and* sustainable maintenance of the **landscape**
2. Develop future-proof **agriculture** in a small-scale landscape
3. Broaden the range of rural **housing, working, recreation** and **care** options
4. Improve the **accessibility** of the rural area
5. Preserve and develop our **agricultural heritage**

Knooperven aim to preserve and develop the historical farmstead character. Beautiful buildings are kept intact, while all necessary alterations are carefully designed to blend in with the old structures. Less attractive buildings, such as stables, can be pulled down. The Knooperv can accommodate several homes, which combine characteristic heritage buildings and new-build additions. This creates space for new functions including living, work, care and recreation.

The new residents not only look after their own home, but also the farmyard and immediately surrounding countryside. The Knooperven are all connected via historical or new routes and planting with their surroundings. The residents not only own their home, but also parts of the landscape in their proximity. They are responsible for its development and maintenance. They can either take this into their own hands or outsource it to e.g. an agricultural association, a farmer or gardener. In this way, residents of Knooperven share responsibility for their splendid views and the walking, cycling and horse-riding routes that connect their homes to the countryside.

Vital transformations in thinking in the concept Knooperven

- Citizens will once again take responsibility for nature and landscape as owners and managers
 - Large-scale farming in a small-scale landscape is also possible if the landscape design is adapted to fit this in
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- Farmers give up part of their responsibilities for nature and the landscape by giving the new local inhabitants planted land in exchange for agricultural land



- Building in the countryside is a good thing – we are going to re-develop the art of rural building
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- Financing of landscape and nature is not left to government organizations and subsidy schemes, but will once again become a direct responsibility of the citizens themselves
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For sale

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