



Local Action Plan

URBACT REPAIR New Dutch Waterline (NL)



The Local Action Plan (LAP) of New Dutch Waterline June 2011

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Summary

Development of Utrecht forts

The municipality of Utrecht owns eight forts of the New Dutch Water Line (*Nieuwe Hollandse Waterlinie*), including Fort de Gagel. The municipality wishes to draw up restoration, redevelopment and management plans for each of the eight forts. Four of the eight forts have already been redeveloped and have been given new and contemporary land use designations. This is the right moment to tackle the redesignation of Fort de Gagel, because various large-scale developments are planned or are already underway in the immediate vicinity of the fort which offer opportunities. The municipality of Utrecht has therefore asked BMC to draw up a future scenario for the redevelopment of Fort de Gagel before the 2009 summer recess.

Investigating a new land use designation

This report marks the end of the first phase of the investigation into the redevelopment of Fort de Gagel and closes with a recommendation for a preferred scenario. To help clarify the redesignation options, we have described the current situation, major spatial and social developments, current policy and the stakeholders in and around Fort de Gagel. On the basis of documentation study, workshops and many bilateral discussions with the organisations concerned, local residents and other interested parties, we have listed a large number of possible and desirable functions. We have clustered these into three possible development variants, which we have in turn discussed with the stakeholders. We have combined the strongest points from the three variants into an attractive future scenario which it seems can count on a positive response from the stakeholders. Throughout this process, the official supervision committee has been constantly involved and consulted.

Objective of the future scenario

This report concludes the study into potential development directions for Fort de Gagel and sets out a preferred scenario which we consider likely to meet with success. The intention is that this report, together with an official recommendation, will enable the Utrecht municipal executive to acquaint itself with this scenario for the future land use designation and redevelopment trajectory of Fort de Gagel. The official recommendation asks the executive to order a feasibility study into the spatial, organisational and financial aspects of the future scenario described. The results of such a study will need to be presented to the municipal executive before the municipal assembly elections of March 2010 so that the executive can decide on a proposal to the assembly.

Policy and developments around Fort de Gagel

Fort de Gagel is governed by the policy principles of the municipality of Utrecht, the

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provincial government of Utrecht and the central government, because the fort forms part of the New Dutch Water Line National Landscape and the National Project for the New Dutch Water Line. With regard to the Water Line forts, central government, the province and the municipality aim to preserve their cultural-historical, monumental, civil engineering and military-historical assets, to enhance the landscape and wildlife value and the experiential quality of the Line's landscape structure, and to achieve sustainable development by adding publicly and socially relevant functions.

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Various large-scale developments are planned or are already underway which may yield both opportunities and limitations for Fort de Gagel. The first is the development of the Noorderpark as a wildlife area and within it Ruigenhoek as a sports recreation area. Within the context of this development, Fort de Gagel may take on the function of a bridgehead between city and countryside. The second development is the possible upgrading of the northern Utrecht relief road (NRU) as a motorway with two-level junctions for local and slow traffic and possibly a tunnel where the current roundabout by Fort de Gagel is situated. This development could make Fort de Gagel much more easily and safely accessible from the city of Utrecht. It also offers the possibility of restoring the navigable waterway from the Vecht via the Klopvaart to the Noorderpark. The final development is the designation of the district of Overvecht as a “Show District”, involving an ambitious physical and social programme to improve the living environment. In this connection, the land use redesignation of Fort de Gagel could contribute to the identity of Overvecht and to quality of life in the district. As an intersection of routes and a centre for activities, the fort could also contribute to strengthening Overvecht’s connection with the city and its hinterland.

Fort de Gagel *Vitaal*

There is broad support for assigning Fort de Gagel a new function which is accessible to the public and relevant to society. Linking in with the policy principles for the redesignation of Water Line forts, the developments and opportunities around the fort and the ideas and wishes expressed, we have developed the preferred scenario *Fort de Gagel Vitaal* (working title).

Fort de Gagel Vitaal is based on the belief that *nature is fun, tasty and educational*.

Visitors will find the following functions at Fort de Gagel *Vitaal* (vitality):

- an information and education centre about nature, the recreational routes and sports activities in the Noorderpark and Ruigenhoek
- an information centre about the New Dutch Water Line and the forts of the *Stelling van Utrecht* (a series of defensive works in and around Utrecht)
- an information and knowledge centre about nature, environment and urban agriculture
- rental of outdoor equipment such as bicycles, canoes, electric boats, satellite navigation systems
- jetty for canoes, accessible for disabled visitors
- cafe with terrace for visitors and passers-by
- kitchen facilities for cooking courses, with a focus on healthy eating and regional produce
- picnic places at the fort
- hire of educational and work spaces to groups and sustainable and socially responsible entrepreneurs
- centre for silence and reflection

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- centre for activities connected with recreational and educational facilities and businesses in the vicinity of Fort de Gagel, such as the Overvecht nature garden, school gardens and allotments, the riding school and the sports facilities in Ruigenhoek and Wellantcollege

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Follow-up Process

The final report Future Scenario Fort de Gagel marks the transition from the exploratory phase to the follow-up feasibility study for the scenario set out above. This follow-up phase will involve a more in-depth study of the organisational, spatial and financial aspects of the redesignation of Fort de Gagel. This phase will also see extensive consultations with the current tenants of Fort de Gagel about their possible aims within the framework of the future scenario Fort de Gagel *Vitaal*. Where necessary, agreements will be made regarding an alternative location. Potential partners will be identified more closely and opportunities for cooperation investigated. A proposal will also be made concerning the future organisational structure.

In the spatial sphere, a sketch plan will be made of the layout and a programme of requirements drawn up that fits with the future function(s) of the fort. In the financial sphere, an estimate of the rebuilding and development costs will be made and an operating budget drawn up. An overview of target groups and market opportunities will be made in cooperation with the project partners.

Finally, a risk analysis will be made, bringing into focus the risks which exist in the spatial, organisational and/or financial spheres and the measures which need to be taken in order to reduce those risks.

Issues

The researchers believe that a next step should be for the municipality of Utrecht to push for a variant of the northern Utrecht relief road with a two-level junction for pedestrians and cyclists adjacent to the fort and restoration of the Klopvaart between the Vecht and Fort de Gagel/Noorderpark. The municipality should remain open and transparent about the future of Fort de Gagel (website, newsletters, meetings) and continue to involve experts and interested parties in this process. Where possible, a plan for the future designation of the fort should already be included in the new land-use plan for Overvecht which will be put to the assembly later in 2009.

CHAPTER 4 Preferred variant

We propose a synthesis between elements of the three variants put forward based on the criteria formulated in chapter 3 which we consider most likely to meet with success. We have given this variant the working title Fort de Gagel *Vitaal*.

4.1 Fort de Gagel *Vitaal*

Concept

The starting point for Fort de Gagel *Vitaal* is that ***nature is fun, tasty and educational***. The fort connects nature to the visitor's own living environment in various ways: by being an intersection of nature and recreational routes, by providing information about the Noorderpark and the New Dutch Water Line, by teaching people how to cultivate their

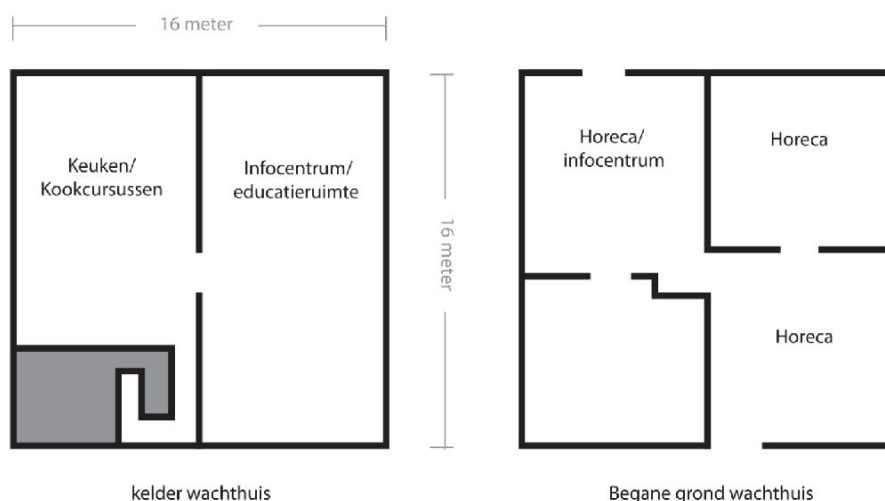
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own food close to home, by cooking tasty food and eating healthily together, by pausing to think about how we can live and do business sustainably, and by playing and learning in a green environment. The fort offers space for green and socially responsible organisations and entrepreneurs in the fields of information, education, reflection, green space, sustainability, etc.

Use of space

- [16 metres]
- [Kitchen/cookery courses]
- [Information centre/educational space]
- [Guardhouse, cellar]
- [Cafe/information centre]
- [Cafe]
- [Cafe]
- [Guardhouse, ground floor]



The guardhouse is the first eye-catching building on the fort. The guardhouse will be assigned a catering and information function on the ground floor, with a terrace at the front extending as far as the bridge over the fort's moat. The catering space will be designed so as to also accommodate cookery courses. Part of the ground floor and the cellar space will be fitted out as an information and educational space about the cultural history of the Water Line, Fort de Gagel, the Noorderpark, the Ruigenhoek recreation area, nature and recreational routes in the area, regional produce and vegetable gardening.

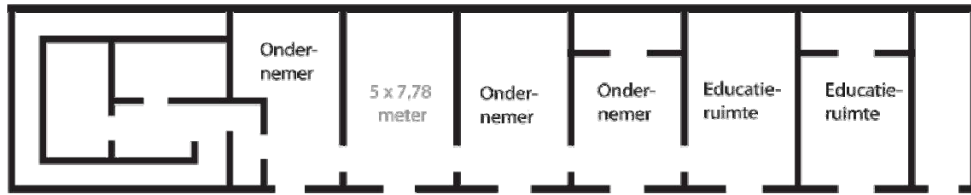
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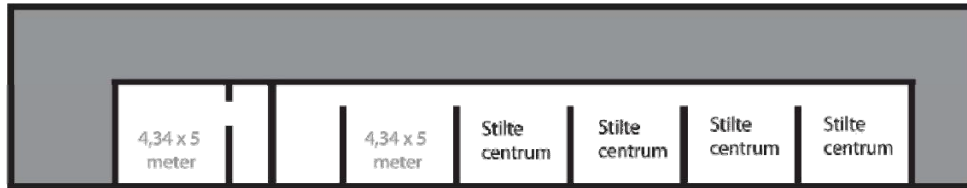
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European Union
European Regional Development Fund



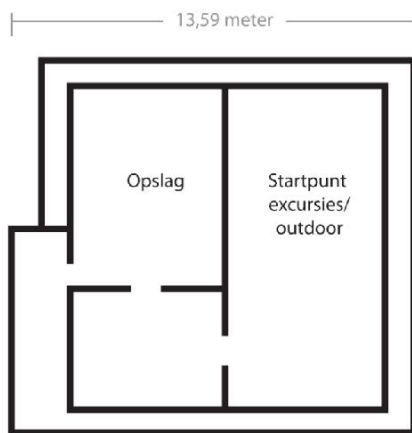
Begane grond bomvrije kazerne



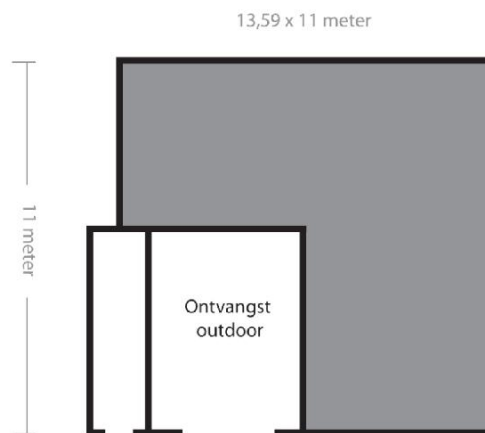
1ste verdieping bomvrije kazerne

[Business 5 x 7.78 metres Business Business Educational space
 Educational space]
 [Shellproof barracks, ground floor]
 [4.34 x 5 metres Area for reflection]
 [Shellproof barracks, first floor]

The shell-proof barracks will be utilised by renting out the various spaces on the ground floor and the first floor to green, sustainable and socially responsible businesses and organisations.



Kelder remise



Begane grond remise

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[13.59 metres 13.59 x 11 metres 11 metres]
[Storage Starting point for excursions/outdoor activities]
[Magazine, cellar]
[Reception outdoor]
[Magazine, ground floor]

The magazine will be fitted out as an information and rental space for outdoor recreation. Here, visitors will be able to obtain/buy all the information they need about the routes in the area. In addition, bicycles, canoes and electric boats will be for hire here. The magazine will be the starting point for groups making trips in the Noorderpark and the further surroundings of the fort.¹⁵

The outdoor space at the fort will be used for both information and recreational purposes. There will be a walking tour around the fort with information panels about the structure of the landscape and the defensive operation of the Water Line, with further panels explaining the past and current functions of each individual building. Picnic sites and seats will be created with views over the landscape. A canoe jetty will be built, which will also be suitable as a pick-up point for the disabled. Naturally, the animals and plants present at the fort will also be taken into account in order to ensure that it will also provide a safe stopping place and eco-passage for animals.

¹⁵ N.B. Functions detailed on the floor plans are for indication purposes only.

The paved outdoor space in front of the barracks and the guard-house could be used for a periodic green market for regional products and produce cultivated by the residents of Overvecht themselves.

In partnership with Nature and Environmental Communication, a model permaculture garden will be created in the Klopvaart nature garden (just on the other side of the northern Utrecht relief road). The same could be done in the Noorderpark (immediately to the north-east of the fort), in partnership with the Forest Management Agency. There will be an information point at the fort providing practical help for people who want to set to work in the nature gardens.

The cultural and urban landscapes of the Noorderpark and the Overvecht district will also be actively linked to the spatial use of Fort de Gagel. On the one hand, the fort will be an intersection and information centre for recreational routes through the countryside and urban nature; on the other hand, it will be an educational and trial centre for urban agriculture on collective green strips of land and parks in Overvecht and kitchen gardening in private gardens and on balconies.

Goals and target groups

In the first instance, Fort de Gagel Vitaal offers a stopping place and a green information and education centre for all Utrecht residents. In addition, it will have a positive impact on the Show District Overvecht. Finally, the fort will perform a model function for urban agriculture and sustainable development.

The most important target group for the fort is the wider population of Utrecht. The fort will offer information about the Noorderpark and Ruigenhoek, and active day-trippers will be able to hire bicycles, canoes and electric boats. Families, young professionals and old people alike will find something at the fort to their taste: education, recreation or good food. Visitors will come into contact with subjects such as the history of the New Dutch Water Line, local food production or exercise and health in a relaxed, informal setting.

Next, the fort focuses on the residents of the Overvecht district. For this second target group, the fort will offer the opportunity for groups of various cultures and ages to garden, cook and eat together. Fort de Gagel *Vitaal* aims to deliver a positive contribution to their health by stimulating healthy eating and exercise. The fort also aims to contribute to a more attractive living environment in the district by encouraging the collective use of green space and by making gardens and galleries green and usable. In the longer term, this will help make residents feel more connected to their living environment and generate a more positive image for the district.

In addition, holidaymakers and tourists from Utrecht and the region around are a good target group for Fort de Gagel. The string of forts around Utrecht and the link to varied wildlife areas make the fort an attractive stopping-off point and a base for getting out into the great outdoors. This broadening of the target group is important in order to

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make the operation of the fort pay for itself in the longer term.

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4.2 Organisational structure

The organisational structure of the fort may take different forms in the future, depending on the number and type of businesses and organisations which find a home there. As the owner, Utrecht municipality has a preference for a single main tenant who will also be its point of contact. The organisational structure will need to be worked out in consultation with the future stakeholders at a later stage.

4.3 Funding

Funding for the future function of Fort de Gagel will need to cover the one-off development costs and the annual operating costs.

Development costs

The development costs comprise the cost of building and fitting out the buildings for the purposes of the desired function, plus the cost of architectural advisers and the improvement of the outside space. The fort is in a good condition in structural terms, so no major restoration costs are expected. The roof and the floor of the guardhouse have recently been replaced. The masonry and pointing are in a good condition. Windows, doors, locks and hinges are in a reasonable condition, but will need to be inspected and where necessary maintained, restored or replaced. The need for extra insulation in the buildings (particularly under the floor) needs to be investigated. Electricity, gas and water supplies are partly in place, but will of course need to be adapted – naturally sustainably – to the future function(s).

The possibility of preventatively removing the earthen cap of the magazine and barracks and replacing the roof covering may be considered. This is not essential, because there are no leaks in either building. Further advice from a building expert is advisable in this matter. The quality of the soil at the site is unknown. It is not known whether Utrecht municipality had soil samples taken when it purchased the fort. Whether a soil survey and any decontamination work are necessary needs to be looked into.

We assume that the cost of making the fort site reachable and accessible will be met by Utrecht municipality. This will at least include the construction of a car park (on the land of the Forest Management Agency) and an access path to the fort site, an additional access bridge for walkers and cyclists, and a bicycle shed.

Operation

The annual operating budget comprises firstly the rental, lease or contribution payable to the municipality as the owner of the fort. The municipality intends that this should in any event cover the costs of periodic major maintenance. It will also include the cost of management activities, such as the manager, cleaning, minor maintenance and administration. In addition, costs will be incurred for the tenants' activities themselves and for publicity. The use of the utilities will also fall under the operating budget. Finally,

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there is an item for other costs, including telephone, office costs, accountancy costs and insurance.

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The income generated by the operation of the fort will be heavily dependent on the activities which ultimately take place there. In any event, income may be generated from the rental of space, from the sale of materials and products, the hire of recreational equipment and fees for taking part in courses and activities. Incidental subsidy and funding requests can be submitted for the development costs and for project costs. Suitable subsidies may be sought, depending on the choice of future functions and organisations.

More information about possibilities for subsidies is included in Appendix 5.

CHAPTER 5 Conclusions and recommendations

5.1 Conclusions

The workshops, discussions and document study provide a first indication that there is support for the redesignation and development of Fort de Gagel with a publicly accessible and socially relevant function. This support exists not only among possible partners at the fort (including the current tenants), but also among local residents, residents of the adjacent district of Overvecht, businesses, community organisations and government bodies.

SWOT analysis and relevant developments

The SWOT analysis showed that the strategic location of Fort de Gagel is advantageous both for the development of the fort itself and for opportunities for the recreation area and the district of Overvecht. The fort can be used to support other developments in the area. It is the case that the reachability and accessibility of the fort needs to remain a point of attention.

Variants

In the course of the study, three variants emerged which may represent suitable future land use designations for the fort: Fort de Gagel *Groen* (Green), Fort de Gagel *Sociaal* (Social) and Fort de Gagel *Kinderfort* (Children's Fort). Each of the three concepts has strong elements. When we take into account limiting conditions such as the operation of the fort and its spatial possibilities as a monument, we are left with a preferred variant which has a green character and contains elements of the three variants.

Preferred variant

In the preferred variant, Fort de Gagel will be developed into Fort de Gagel *Vitaal* (working title), establishing a link between city and countryside and between the forts of the New Dutch Water Line around Utrecht. In this way, Fort de Gagel will acquire a recreational, educational and social dimension, making it attractive to visitors from Overvecht and around and giving it a broader appeal at the city and regional level.

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Functions which will be housed at the fort are:

- an information and education centre about the wildlife, recreational routes and sports activities of the Noorderpark and Ruigenhoek
- an information centre about the New Dutch Water Line and the forts of the *Stelling van Utrecht*
- an information and knowledge centre about nature, environment and urban agriculture
- hire of outdoor equipment such as bicycles, canoes, electric boats, satellite navigation systems
- a jetty for canoes, accessible for disabled visitors
- cafe with terrace for visitors and passers-by
- kitchen facilities for cookery courses, focusing on healthy eating and regional produce
- picnic sites at the fort
- hire of educational and workspaces to groups and sustainable and socially responsible businesses
- centre for silence and reflection
- centre for the activities of recreational and educational facilities and businesses in the vicinity of Fort de Gagel, such as Overvecht nature garden, school gardens and allotments, the riding school and sports facilities in Ruigenhoek and the Wellantcollege

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Spatial

The various spaces at the fort offer opportunities for entrepreneurs to fully develop their specific activities. Further research is needed to draw up a Plan of Requirements with parties and to achieve a good match between the nature of the businesses and the potential of the spaces at the fort.

Organisational

Before further research is carried out into the organisational aspects of the redevelopment, further consultation with the current tenants will be necessary. Greater clarity is needed regarding their future position, either at the fort or elsewhere. Based on the development of the role and function of tenants, we can enter into discussions with other stakeholders.

A number of businesses will together start to give shape to the fort's new identity. There are two options for structuring the partnership with them. The first is to set up a management foundation with a coordinator who would link the parties together and also be the contact person for the municipality of Utrecht as the owner of the fort. It is also possible that a single entrepreneur might become the chief tenant of the complex and take care of coordination with other users by means of contracts.

Exploring shared responsibility

During workshops and in bilateral talks, policymakers from various layers of government, tenants at the fort, entrepreneurs, community organisations and residents' groups were involved in developing the initial plans for the fort. There was contact with some of these parties about possible participation in the project, with a condition being that parties affirm the principles for a public and social function and preservation of the fort's cultural-historical value. These discussions provide a good starting point for extending cooperation and giving further shape to the development direction of the fort.

Cross-cooperation and consortium-building

In terms of its size, the fort is both large and small at the same time. The area is too limited for an outdoor sports centre or a model permaculture garden. On the other hand, the fort is very large for just an information centre about the surrounding area. In our view, a multidisciplinary approach will have the greatest chance of success, with some parties focusing purely on the fort and others also focusing on the district and/or the hinterland. Introducing diversity will enhance the quality of the activities at and around the fort because everyone will be playing to their strengths. Current users might also have a role to play in developing a joint venture. The scope for this has yet to be explored further.

Financial

We do not currently have a clear picture of either the development costs or future operating costs. The size of the development costs will depend heavily on the extent of restoration/maintenance required in order to be able to operate the fort. This may involve both maintenance to the buildings and possible decontamination of the soil on the site.

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Further investigation is needed to clarify these costs.

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Based on a comparison with other forts, an estimate needs to be made of the operating costs which will have to be covered by the businesses at the fort in the future. These costs consist of rent to the municipality as the owner, the cost of management activities and the costs of developing activities, promotion and marketing.

The operation of the fort will need to be based on a number of different parties, which will jointly bring in the rent. This means that rents may vary per organisation, depending on the function and identity of the organisation in question: whereas the cafe may be expected to pay rent at market rates, this need not be the case for a space for young people. What matters to the municipality of Utrecht as the owner is that the costs of periodic maintenance are covered by operating income; there is no profit motive.

5.2 Recommendations

Based on our findings, we make the following recommendations:

Accessibility of the fort

The accessibility of the fort needs to be improved by creating parking spaces and a walking route with a bridge to the fort. Two-level crossings for slow traffic are also essential for the development of Fort de Gagel. Water recreation and a fauna passage should ideally be included in the modification of the northern Utrecht relief road.

Partners

Discussions have been held with tenants about development opportunities which fit with the redesignation of the fort or about finding a new location. At a subsequent stage, we need to explore what might be a good organisational form for the fort in consultation with participating stakeholders.

Spatial measures

A programme of requirements needs to be drawn up for the redevelopment. Research into the desirability of preventative replacement of the earthen cap of the barracks and the magazine forms part of this. In addition, an investigation will be carried out into soil quality at the fort. Agreements will be made concerning a car park, bicycle shed, access footway and an additional access bridge.

Operation

An estimate needs to be made of the rebuilding and development costs and a rough operating budget needs to be drawn up.

The municipality of Utrecht will apply for subsidies as the commissioning body in order to be able to set in motion the redesignation and development of Fort de Gagel.

Publicity

During the redevelopment process, it is important that the municipality of Utrecht is

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transparent about the choices made and the steps taken to achieve the desired development in order to maintain optimum support and involvement. The municipality of Utrecht will keep those involved updated on progress through meetings and newsletters, and will also take responsibility for an up-to-date and complete website.

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5.3 Follow-up process

This future scenario for Fort de Gagel marks the transition from the orientation phase to the follow-up study into the feasibility of the scenario described. In this follow-up phase, a more in-depth study will be carried out into the spatial, organisational and financial aspects of the redesignation of Fort de Gagel. In this phase, there will also be extensive consultations with the current tenants at Fort de Gagel about their possible aims within the framework of the future scenario Fort de Gagel *Vitaal*. Where necessary, agreements will be made about an alternative location. A proposal will also be made about the future organisational structure. As regards planning, a sketch design of the layout will be made and a programme of requirements drawn up corresponding to the future function(s) of the fort.

On the financial side, an estimate of the rebuilding and development costs will be produced and an operating budget drawn up. An overview of the target groups and market opportunities will be made in collaboration with the partners. In addition, it is advisable that the municipality of Utrecht should order a Social Cost-Benefit Analysis in order to make clear the short-term and longer term social benefits, expressed in economic terms, besides an estimate of the costs. The outcome of such an analysis may be helpful in tapping further funding sources, such as area funds, plan equalisation or compensation payments.

Finally, a risk analysis will be made to identify what risks there are in the spatial, organisational and financial fields and which measures can be taken to reduce these risks.

The follow-up phase will be concluded with a Future Plan Fort de Gagel. Based on this Future Plan, Utrecht's municipal executive will be able to take a final decision about the future designation of Fort de Gagel. Following the decision by the municipal executive, design and specifications can be drawn up and a partnership agreement concluded between the municipality of Utrecht (owner) and the management foundation/main tenant.

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