



VROM*raad*

Viab**le** and vibrant countryside

Summary Advice Strategies for the rural areas of the Netherlands

The Council for Housing, Spatial Planning and the Environment (VROM Council) was established by an Act of 10 October 1996. The task of the VROM Council is to advise government and parliament on an overall policy with regard to the sustainable quality of living environment and on other aspects of national policy which are relevant for this overall policy. The VROM Council also has the job of advising on the government's environmental policy activities at the international level.

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Viable and vibrant countryside

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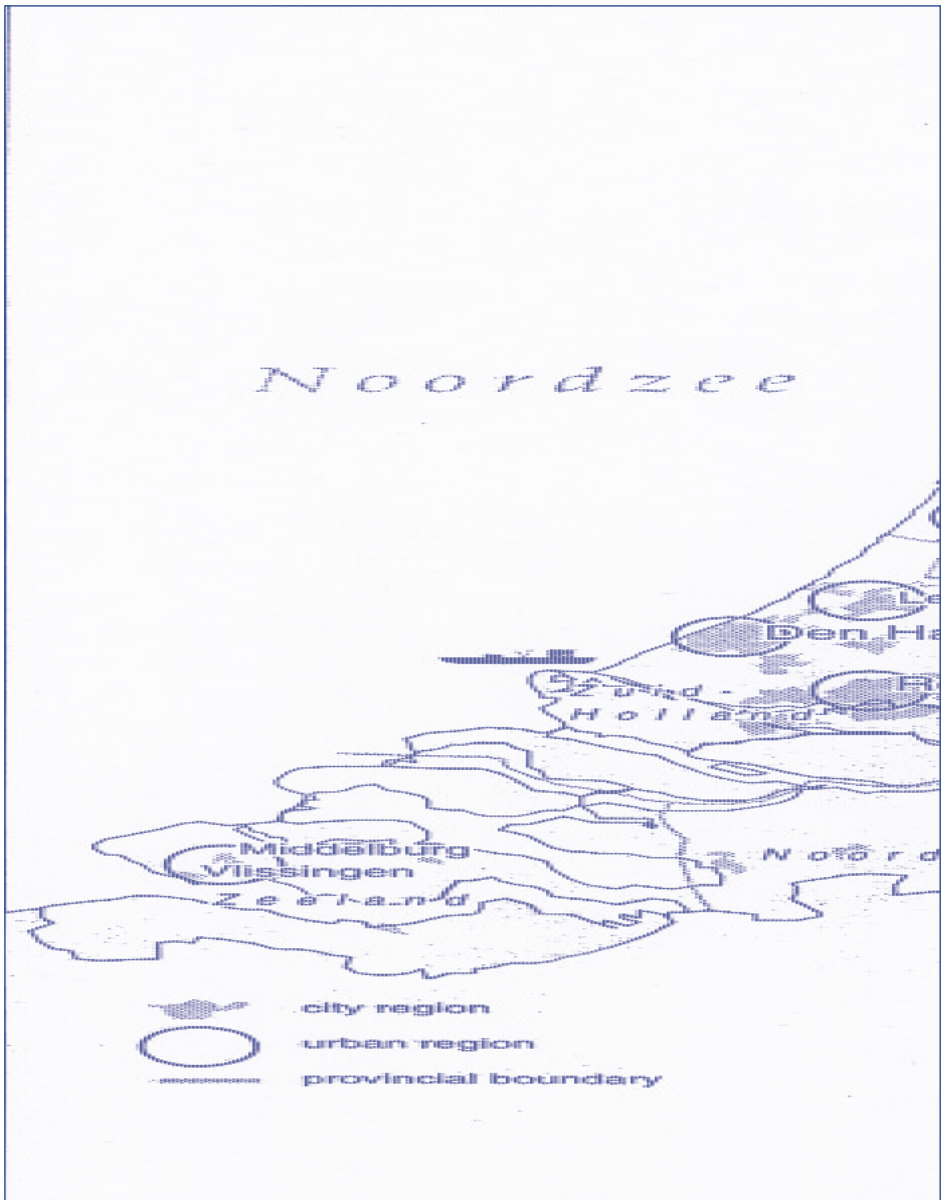


Figure 1. Administrative boundaries and names of provinces, main urban agglomerations and some complementary toponymes

Source: Dutch Spatial Planning Agency (RPD)

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Introduction and structure of the brochure

The Advisory Council for Housing, Spatial Planning and the Environment

This Council advises the government and parliament in the Netherlands on policies related to the quality of the living environment and other aspects of housing, spatial planning and the environment.

The Dutch minister of Housing, Spatial Planning and the Environment and his colleague, responsible for Agriculture, Nature and Fisheries, requested the Council for advice on the long term policy for the rural areas in the Netherlands. This policy is laid down by the government in national policy documents on spatial planning and on the management of nature and landscape¹. The Council published its advice in September 1999 under the title 'Viable and vibrant countryside – strategies for the rural areas'. The Council had published at an earlier stage an advice entitled 'City Land-Plus', in which a number of spatial strategies on perspectives for urbanisation in the Netherlands were recommended. This advice 'Viable and Vibrant Countryside' is complementary to this.

For whom is the brochure intended?

With this brochure the Council wishes to communicate to policy makers and academics, who are interested in the spatial problems of rural areas which are under extreme urban pressure. In this sense the Netherlands can be compared with urban regions elsewhere in Europe such as the London metropolitan area, the Ile-de-France, the Ruhr area and the so-called Flemish Diamond (Brussels-Antwerp-Gent). The Council also requests special attention for the border regions between the Netherlands and Lower Saxony, North Rhine Westphalia, Wallonia and Flanders. Especially in the border regions problems have to be solved which become more important as the national frontiers disappear. In these regions green space can still be found which can be given a strategic importance within the central urban system of north western Europe.

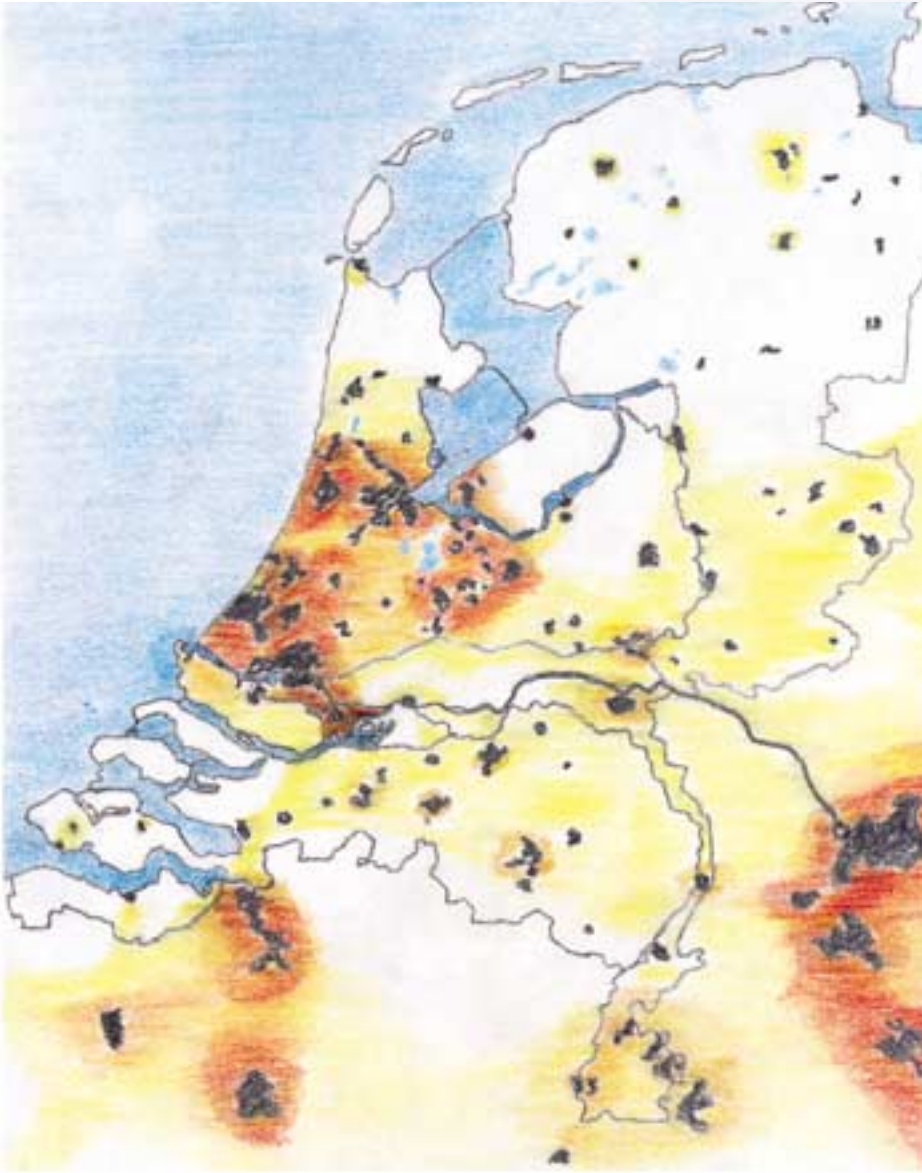
The Council published some time ago the brochure 'City Land-Plus',² in which the urban developments in the Netherlands were the central theme. In this brochure policy recommendations for the rural areas are briefly summarised.

Spatial planning: pure necessity in the Netherlands

With 15.7 million inhabitants and a total surface area of around 40,000 square kilometres the Netherlands is a densely populated country, The cities are growing rapidly and there is considerable pressure to expand the infrastructure. The increasing demands and possibilities of the urban inhabitants to live and spend their leisure time in the rural

¹ The policy resolutions of the Fifth National Policy Document on Spatial Planning will be published at the end of 2000.

² City Land-Plus, advice on the national policy documents 'Netherlands 2030 – an exploration of spatial scenarios' and 'Housing scenarios 2030', Advisory Council for Housing, Spatial Planning and the Environment, The Hague, July 1998.



- urban area
- rural area with high urban pressure
- rural area with urban overspill
- rural area with low urban pressure

Figure 2. Impression of the locations of three types of rural area distinguished by the Council in the context of this advice: high pressure, overspill and low pressure areas.

Source: Advisory Council for Housing, Spatial Planning and the Environment, 1999; underlayer supplied by the National Spatial Planning Agency, *The Urban Systems, European Spatial Development Perspective*, 1995.

areas are increasing the pressure in the rural areas. Despite the high degree of urbanisation agriculture is the dominant land use category with approximately 60% of the total surface area. The total area of forest and woodland (8%) and other nature areas (4%) is expanding slowly. Water is responsible for an important proportion of the surface area, especially in the west and north of the country, where it accounts for around 15%. Biodiversity in the Netherlands is still fairly widespread and especially in the wet west of the country and the north the nature areas are internationally significant. In brief, space is scarce and spatial policy must help ensure that what remains of the rural areas is used efficiently and sustainably. This is, however, not an easy task because the traditional functions in rural areas, in particular the agriculture, are undergoing significant changes.

Structure of the brochure

The advice on the spatial problems of the rural areas is presented below. After a brief description of the assessment criteria used by the Council, the most important trends in developments and problems that can emerge are described. Then the actual advice is presented: strategic recommendations are made per function, per region and also with respect to implementation and preferred policy. The brochure ends with a summary of the conclusions of the advice.

Assessment criteria

In assessing the developments in the rural areas the Council starts in its advice 'Viable and vibrant countryside' from the proposition that decisions about land use and the spatial planning and design of the Netherlands and their effects must be evaluated according to four criteria: economic efficiency or viability of the land use, social development possibilities related to the land use, ecological sustainability and the cultural identity of the living environment and associated perceptions. Moreover, in the assessment account must be taken of the influence of the level of urbanisation on the rural areas. Since this can vary considerably the Council has distinguished three types of rural areas, both in the assessment of the problems and the formulation of strategic recommendations (see Figure 2):

- *High-pressure areas*. Within these areas, mainly situated in the Randstad³, the pressure from the cities on the rural surroundings is greatest.

³ The Randstad is defined here as a continuous area in the west of the Netherlands that covers (large) parts of the provinces of Zuid-Holland, Noord-Holland, and Utrecht, and the Almere urban agglomeration in the province of Flevoland. The four largest cities (Amsterdam, Rotterdam, The Hague and Utrecht) are situated in this urban field. 6 million people live in the Randstad (total population of the Netherlands is 16 million). The average population density varies between 800 and 1100 inhabitants per square kilometre. Even if the cities with more than 500,000 inhabitants are not taken into consideration, the population density in the rest of the Randstad is still very high, varying from 300 to 450 inhabitants per square kilometre (Figures based on averages per province; see advies 'Viable and vibrant countryside', Table 2).

- ↪ *Overspill areas.* These are the rural areas situated in the growth regions in the east and south of the Netherlands. In these regions the urban pressure has up to now been accommodated by relatively unbridled overspill of urban land use to the rural surroundings.
- ↪ *Low pressure areas.* These are mainly but not exclusively situated in the north and south west of the Netherlands, relatively peripheral rural areas where up to now there has hardly been any systematic urban pressure on the rural surroundings.

Trends and problems in the land use of the rural areas in the Netherlands

Agriculture

Per job agriculture contributes more than its fair share to the Dutch economy. Agriculture generated in 1997 a net added value of 5.7 billion Euros, representing 2.7% of the Dutch economy (1997) produced by 1.6% of the economically active population. Employment productivity is continually rising because the prices of agricultural products are under pressure, land prices are high and expensive technology must be applied to be able to meet ever stricter environmental and veterinary norms.

The importance of agriculture as an important economic base in rural society is diminishing due to the continual loss of jobs in the production process. The agricultural sector does remain, however, the most important manager of green space in the Netherlands. An increasing number of agricultural enterprises is developing supplementary activities such as nature management and recreation alongside basic food production.

The integration of town and country

The urban pressure exerted on rural areas is increasing rapidly. The rural areas are becoming more and more public open spaces, accessible to everyone. Urban inhabitants are moving into them, to start an enterprise or to live in converted farms. There is a great deal of interest in good quality planning and design of landscape and nature areas, which enable joint recreational use to take place.

Low pressure

The most remote parts of the north and south west of the Netherlands require special attention. They have no clear spatial-economic perspective so that the quality of life of the rural communities can suffer as a result. The possibilities for nature development and the maintenance of valuable cultural landscapes are extensive in these regions, partly due to the relatively low population density there.

As a result of the diminishing job opportunities many people left the rural areas in the 1960s. Buildings became derelict and the level of services in the villages declined. Now interest in living in these areas is growing and entrepreneurs are showing interest in

the generally affordable farm buildings. These developments are contributing to the revitalisation of the countryside. The spatial planning policies of some provinces and municipalities are, however, resisting these developments.

Locational preferences of economic activities

Just as elsewhere in north west Europe economic activity is growing in the Netherlands fastest in the areas where the concentration is already greatest ('high pressure areas'). The overspill areas too – especially the zones along the arterial routes to the hinterland – are popular also locations for non-agricultural economic activities. In the low pressure areas it appears that the firms are attracted mainly to the urban regions. In the context of regional policy, pursued in the Netherlands in the 1970s and 1980s, some large scale port, industrial and other economic activities were generated in the low pressure areas. These have never, however, produced the employment opportunities envisaged.

Recreation and tourism

The employment opportunities in the recreation and tourism sector are growing fastest in the rural areas. This employment is, however, still strongly tied to the summer season. In the coastal areas of Zeeland the combination of mass tourism based on water sports and entertainment, on the one hand, and nature, landscape and culture, on the other, leads to a number of considerable problems. The existing small scale tourism infrastructure cannot cope with the mass demand and there is too little regional specialisation.

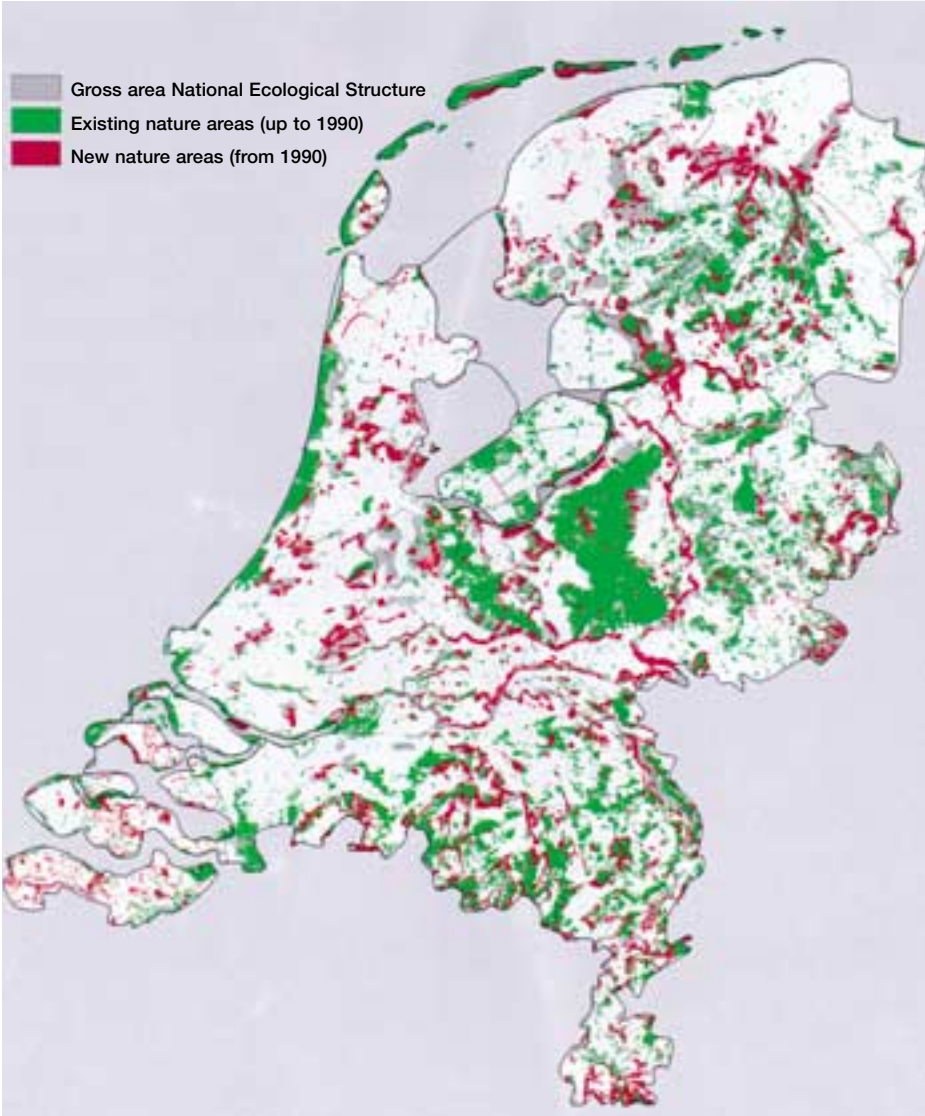


Figure 3. Present boundaries of the national ecological structure (Gross area National Ecological Structure: preferred boundaries according to Nature Policy Plan, 1990).

Source: Nature Review, 1998; National Institute for Public Health and the Environment-Commission for International Environmental Issues.

Nature development

Choices must also be made for the preservation and development of nature in the Netherlands. In the peat areas of the low-lying west of the country and in the Wadden Sea area wet nature areas unique in Europe can be found. The recreational joint use possibilities are limited in these areas. The 'dry nature areas' on the higher sandy soils (woodlands, heathlands, sand dunes) are not unique but attract a great deal of tourism and recreation.

In 1989 the government published a Nature Policy Plan, which introduced a so-called National Ecological Structure into the Netherlands: a system of interconnected wet and dry nature areas in which flora and fauna can survive. This structure must be realised over a period from 1990 to 2018 and increase the total area of nature in the Netherlands from 450,000 to 750,000 hectares. That is achieved by purchasing land and by encouraging farmers to manage nature areas. Farmers appear, however, to be less inclined than expected to devote more space to nature, despite financial incentives. Large nature areas in agricultural landscapes are in practice best realised by purchasing land and creating reservations. As a result of a shortage of funding and rising land prices, however, the purchase of land is not taking place as quickly as was envisaged.

Water

Water is demanding more space in the Netherlands in the context of protection against the threat of flooding, the expected rise in sea level and the continuing sinking of the level of the land. A large proportion of the Netherlands consists of polders (reclaimed land) which are kept artificially dry: this task is becoming more and more difficult. The large rivers can no longer be kept under control only by raising the height of the dykes. More space is required in the Netherlands to ensure sufficient good quality water. The demand for good quality water is increasing while the available supplies are vulnerable to pollution, becoming brackish and depletion. The policy issue is how water can once again become a 'structuring principle' in the Netherlands, something that was the case for centuries, and which combinations of functions are possible in relation to water management.

Assessment

Integration of town and country

The traditional functional differentiation of urban and rural land uses is giving way to all sorts of combinations with various levels of spatial quality. As a result of continuing urbanisation and transport movements, the countryside is threatened by fragmentation and literally 'being concreted over'. At the same time the demand for accessibility to the rural areas is growing, so that people are able to experience the nature areas and cultural landscapes for themselves.

Economic efficiency

Dutch agriculture is flourishing as a productive form of land use, even on expensive land. The intensity of agricultural land use is constantly increasing. This is also the case in the low pressure areas in the north and south west, where agriculture remains the dominant land use type.

Social justice

Only in the most peripheral parts of rural Netherlands is the shortage of non-agricultural job opportunities a problem. It is expected that these areas will become more integrated into the urban economic network through the emergence of ‘new forms of living and working’⁴.

Ecological sustainability

The remaining nature areas in the Netherlands are seriously threatened by fragmentation, especially in the high pressure and overspill areas. In the low pressure areas nature is threatened by the poor environmental conditions in and around the agricultural areas.

Cultural identity

The Dutch countryside can in cultural terms be seen as having been shaped by man⁵. Suburban intensification disturbs the cherished ideal of the contrast between town and country, especially in high pressure and overspill regions. The rejection of this type of occupation of the countryside is not, however, universal. The suburban landscapes, developed at the end of the 19th century, are among the most popular residential areas in the Netherlands⁶.

The advice*Structuring principle: regional diversity*

The Dutch delta as a whole is heavily urbanised. There are, however, wide regional variations in population density and in the nature and intensity of rural land use. For that reason there is a wide variety of residential and employment environments. Strategies for the optimal planning and design of the rural areas must use this regional diversity as a starting point. National blueprints are in the opinion of the Council of little use.

⁴ This refers to the location of firms and households away from the traditional employment centres, influenced by the revolution in information and communication technology, so that physical distance is less important as a location factor.

⁵ The word landscape (Dutch: landschap) means literally ‘shaped land’.

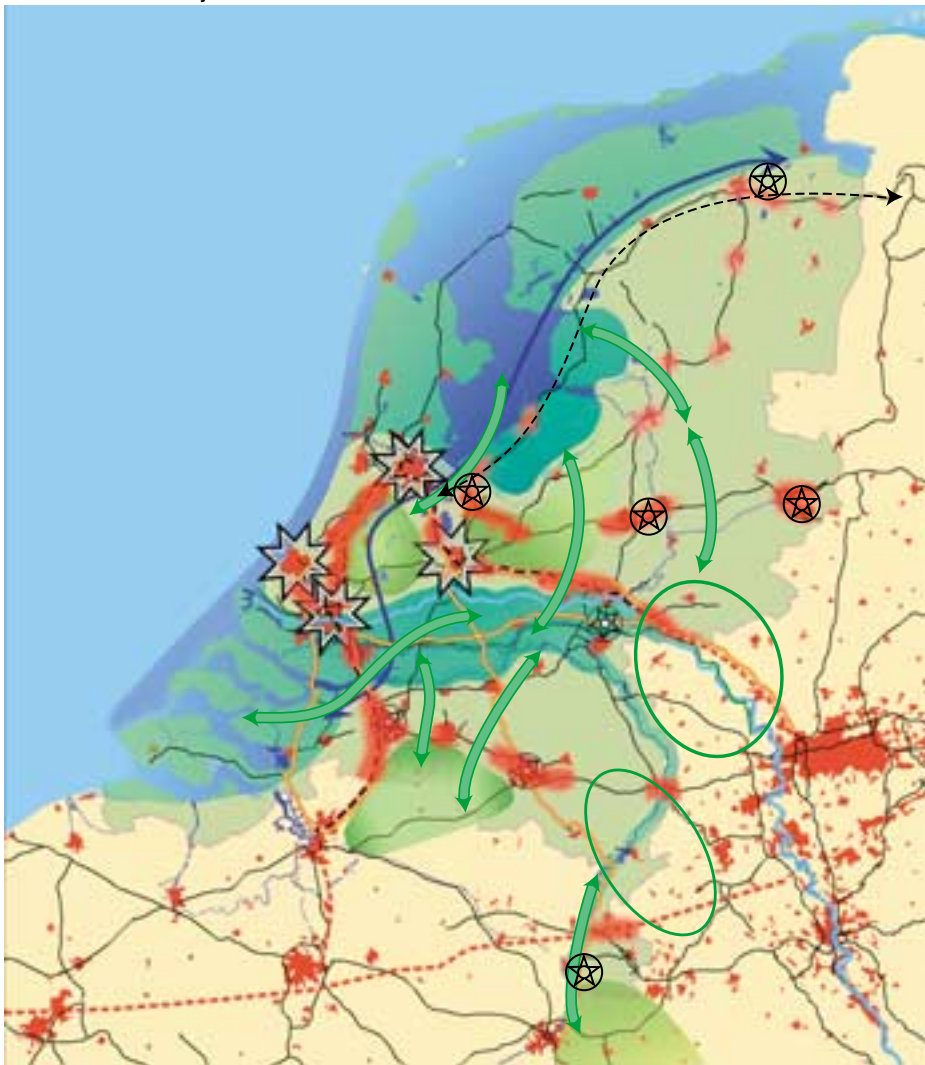
⁶ At the end of the 19th century in attractive areas such as the Gooi and the Utrechtse Heuvelrug beautiful country estates, park woodlands in the English landscape style and residential neighbourhoods were laid out by well-off private individuals.

The most important task for spatial planning is the creation of conditions to meet the real needs of society, using the regional variation of living environments described.

General strategic recommendations

- The scarce countryside must be developed according to a vision and be stringently protected where necessary.
- Many landscapes derive their value from the strong interrelationship of functions. Where functions conflict with each other they must be separated.
- The rural areas are becoming more and more important for urban dwellers. More spacious and accessible nature areas and cultural landscapes are therefore needed.
- The main principles of spatial planning, including the reservation of strategic areas and the identification of corridors, must be laid down at the national level. Over and above that spatial planning of the rural areas is mainly a question of regional planning in which the provincial authorities should have a leading role.

National spatial infrastructure City Land-Plus



bron: VROM-raad

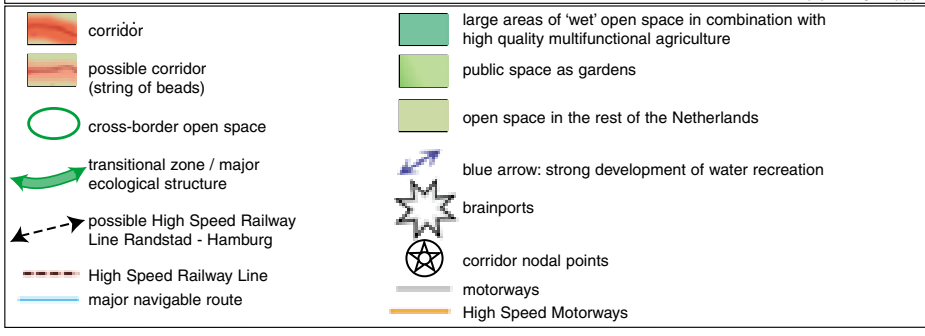


Figure 4.

Recommendations per function

- The Council is of the opinion that new urban expansions⁷ must be contiguous to existing cities. In addition to that in the west of the country corridors⁸ could be the solution to the shortage of (sub)urban locational environments for economic activities. In the overspill areas in the south and east of the Netherlands, where there is a wide dispersal of economic activities and housing, corridors can encourage spatial concentration. In these corridors the infrastructure nodes and the ecological and landscape infrastructure should be planned and designed sustainably.

In the low pressure areas, which are situated a long way from the north west European urban network, the application of the corridor concept is unnecessary, There the larger cities are the most important centres of socio-economic and cultural interaction. With respect to the rural parts of these low pressure areas the Council advises that urban expansions be carried out on a small scale in the context of the rural revitalisation. The most suitable locations are closely related to landscape, cultural-historical and ecological criteria.

- In the high pressure areas, where approximately half of the population in the Netherlands lives, additional amenities for day and outdoor recreation must be created. In the north of the Netherlands the developments in agriculture and the proposed realisation of the National Ecological Structure provide the framework for the realisation of high quality tourism and long stay recreational facilities. In Zeeland a regional spatial restructuring of the recreational and tourism facilities is desirable, so that greater benefit can be derived from the wide variation in the landscapes, the cultural heritage and the cities. In the overspill areas of the east and the south of the Netherlands the capacity and the quality of the day recreational facilities require some improvement. The corridor zones in the overspill areas can provide good locations for attractions of national and international importance.
- The Council suspects that in the Netherlands there is wide support for preserving the cultural heritage related to the Dutch cultural landscapes. The national government should make the population aware of the 'core cultural landscapes' and guarantee the resources to keep this core intact.

⁷ The Council refers here to urban expansions not foreseen in current national policy in the Fourth National Policy Document on Spatial Planning. This policy programme contains the construction of large new urban districts close to the large cities.

⁸ In its advice 'City Land-Plus' the Council defined a **corridor** as 'an urbanisation axis along arterial rail and road, and where possible, water links, comprising (existing) urban nuclei in combination with intervening areas, built-up zones to be implemented at suburban densities, intended for industry, offices, services and housing. The corridors are intended to accommodate in a controlled way the urgent location demands of households and firms and thereby form a feasible integration framework for the clustering of decentralised urban land use'. **Figure 4** illustrates the national spatial structure as a development perspective, containing an indication of possible corridor areas.

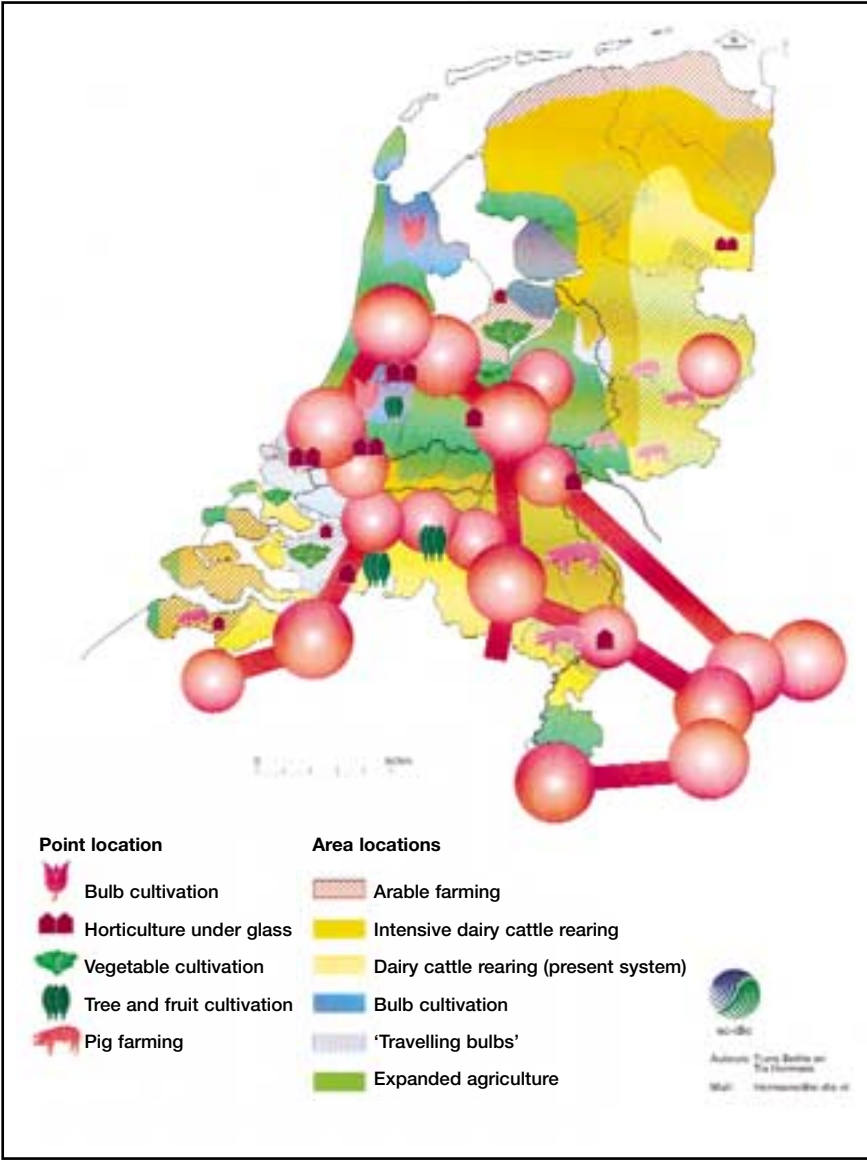


Figure 5. Agricultural-spatial structure in the world market strategy

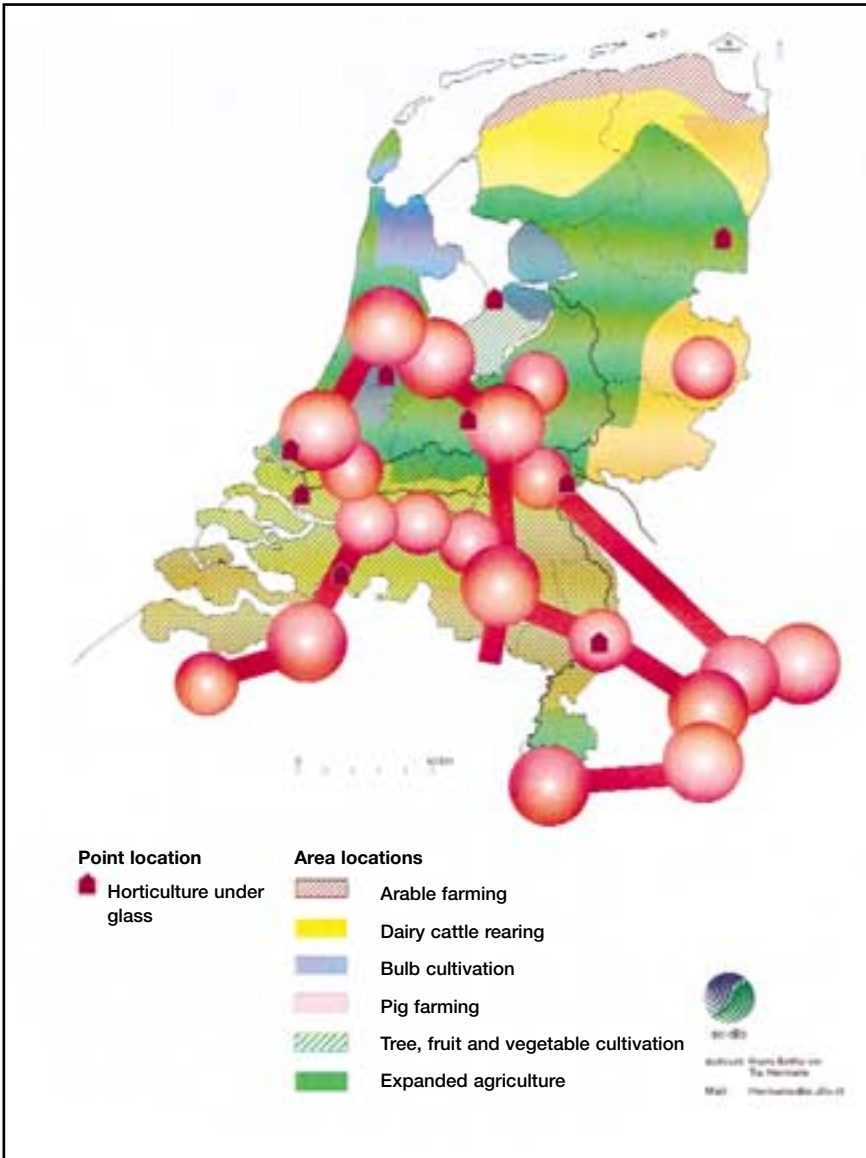


Figure 6. Agricultural-spatial structure in the rural economy strategy

- Agriculture in the Netherlands is going to develop in many different forms in the future. **Figures 5 and 6** give an impression of the conceivable scenarios. The modern land-based livestock breeding will in the medium term have to meet strict environmental requirements. It will be nevertheless difficult to combine with nature management, so that the separation of these functions by purchasing land and creating reservations is likely. This separation must become sustainable by means of restructuring activities. A modification of the land use in rural areas will also be necessary with respect to arable farming, which will be characterised by increase in scale and intensification.



Figure 7. Cross-border spatial planning can strengthen the ecological and landscape structure in the Rhine-Waal river area, that still forms a relatively continuous rural area in the corridor between Arnhem and Nijmegen and the Rhine-Ruhr region.

Source: Spatial Reconnaissances 1989, National Spatial Planning Agency, Ministry of Housing, Spatial Planning and the Environment.

'Expanded' agriculture offers the possibility of preserving landscapes which are threatened by modern production methods. In exchange for the sustainable management of the agricultural cultural landscapes the farmer must be guaranteed certainty in terms of income and continuity of agricultural functions.

- ↪ The development of *non-land based agriculture* can lead to a concentration of livestock breeding and horticulture in agribusiness complexes. In this way the number of dispersed horticulture enterprises can be reduced and nuisance from smell and environmental pollution can be counteracted in many areas. For the exporting firms a location close to the major transport axes in the high pressure and overspill areas is an advantage.

Without financial incentives from the public authorities this spatial-economic restructuring of non-land based agriculture will not be achieved. Moreover there are restrictions on the location of non-land based firms in certain areas. To give proper guidance to this restructuring a location strategy is needed, that has as its starting point the pre-conditions at the national and regional levels as well as for the firms themselves.

- ↪ The National Ecological Structure is essential to the recovery of the biodiversity in the Netherlands to an acceptable level. The policy to compensate farmers for a practice that allows more space for nature and thereby the National Ecological Structure has been too ineffective. More land has to be purchased which is immediately allocated the function of a nature reservation.

This land could later be leased to the farmers, who would manage it according to the function allocated.

- ↪ *Water* must be given more space. It must become, more than in the past, a starting point for spatial planning and design in the Netherlands. In river beds and flood plains but also in higher areas nature development and water recreation can benefit from 'more space for water'. In new residential areas attractive water areas can at the same time fulfil the function of overspill areas.

⁹ 'Agrarische-ruimtelijke ontwikkelingen in Nederland', strategie 'wereldmarkt' en strategie 'plattelands-economie' (Agricultural and spatial developments in the Netherlands, world market strategy and rural areas economy strategy), C. Hermans en F.H. Bethe (ed.), assisted by W. van Eck, B. van der Ploeg, and P.J.A.M. Smeets, 1998, Alterra, Wageningen.

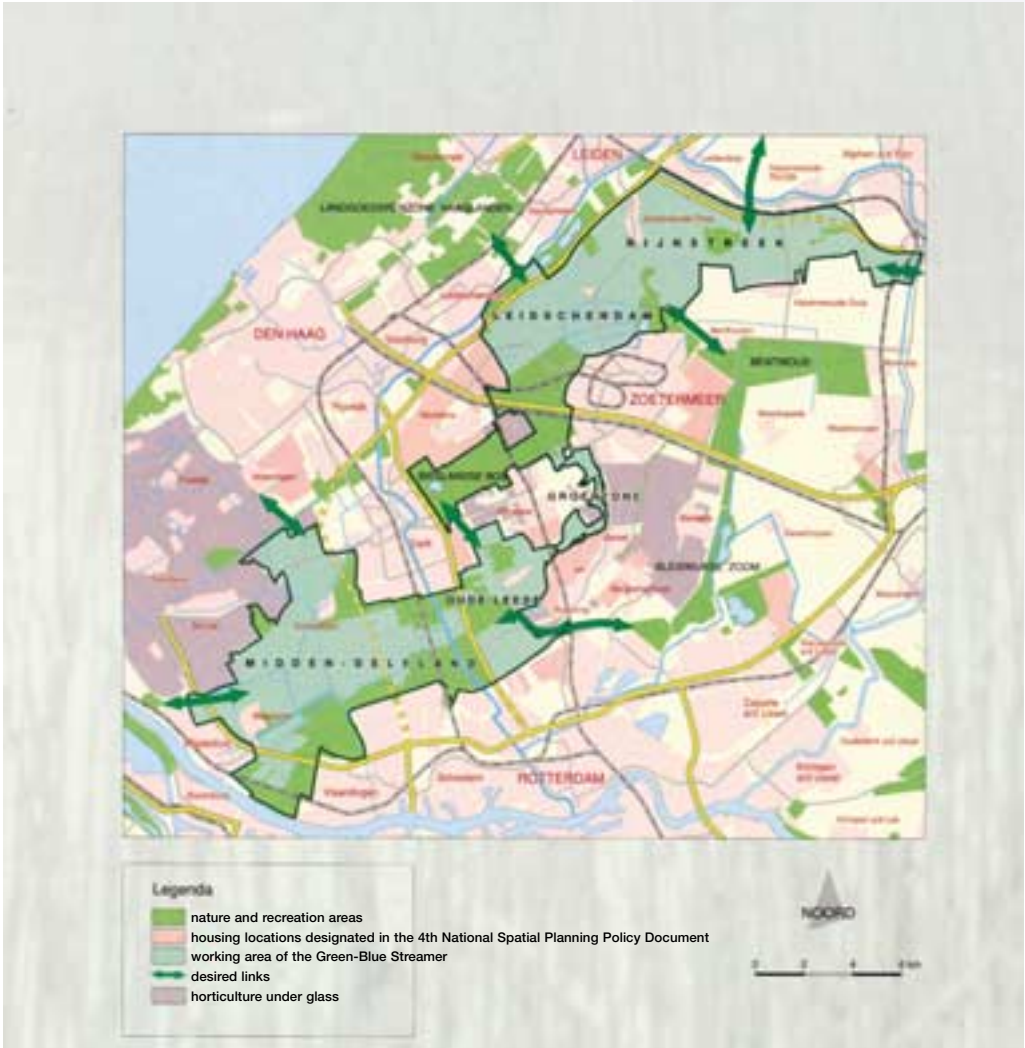


Figure 8. Situation of the 'Green Blue Streamer' project area, that must become a vital lifeline in an ever-growing urban region. Through this project the quality of the flora, the fauna and the water has been considerably improved and new recreational opportunities have been created. The restructuring covers 1050 hectares and new green links have been constructed to a length of 80 kilometres.

Source: 'Green Blue Streamer' project office, Province of Zuid-Holland, The Hague, May 1998.

Recommendations per region

Regional strategies for the rural areas are, of course, influenced by planning principles which are essential for the Netherlands as a whole:

- ⊣ the modification of the major water infrastructure in view of the expected climate change and sinking of the level of the land;
- ⊣ the question whether relatively peripheral areas should be brought into the north west European urban network by constructing new infrastructural links and regional-economic structural development; this also applies to a number of border regions, which can be still regarded as relatively sparsely populated green areas (Figure 7);
- ⊣ the determination of the preferred land use within the water and transport infrastructure. The existing urban pressure on the rural areas per region is the important factor here.

In the *high pressure areas* new residential and employment locations will have to be contiguous to the existing cities. Outside these a controlled development of housing and employment in designated corridors between the largest cities is advised.

For the 'Green Heart' (the open area in the Randstad encircled by Rotterdam, The Hague, Amsterdam and Utrecht) (see Figure 8) an offensive planning and design strategy is required:

- ⊣ the area is planned and designed to better serve the production-oriented and 'expanded' agriculture;
- ⊣ the water management is better related to the nature development within the National Ecological Structure;
- ⊣ the Green Heart is made more accessible for recreation, including water recreation;
- ⊣ well-equipped visitors centres are introduced, which at the same time contribute to the zoning of the nature areas into more accessible and more tranquil areas;
- ⊣ the construction of new dwellings in the Green Heart is restricted, although former agricultural buildings may be used for housing or office purposes.

Within the *overspill* areas corridors are essential for a better structure, planning and design of the rural areas. Non-land based agricultural firms (horticulture under glass, intensive livestock breeding¹⁰) and non-agricultural firms can be concentrated in these corridors, with green spaces in between. Outside these areas these functions must as far as possible be excluded from the rural areas. Nature, attractive cultural landscapes and outdoor recreation must be dominant here.

The *low pressure areas* comprise parts of the Rivers area (Rivierengebied), Flevoland, the northern part of the province of Noord-Holland, the Wadden islands, the northern provinces including north west Overijssel and Zeeland. A number of border regions also reveal the characteristics of low pressure areas.

With respect to the north of the country and Zeeland the Council advised the government in 'City Land-Plus' to make a *fundamental choice* for these regions, namely:

- ⊣ either include these regions in the north west European central urban network and focus policy on increasing the economic dynamics, (extra) population growth and urbanisation; included in this strategy must be measures to reduce the journey time between these regions and the aforementioned urban network;
- ⊣ or choose to reinforce the ecological and recreational potentials, whereby water-based nature, sustainable, partly multifunctional agriculture and recreation and tourism are encouraged. In their request to the Council for advice on possible strategies for the rural areas the two ministers specifically asked for an exploration of this question.

The Council advises the north and Zeeland to opt for conservation and sensible use of the strong environmental qualities in these areas, namely:

- ⊣ the openness and the prevention of large urban entities;
- ⊣ the available potentials for a (wet) ecological structure in larger units;
- ⊣ the cultural historical heritage, that is hidden away in the landscape and the built environment;
- ⊣ the good external production circumstances for land-based agriculture in larger units in addition to the possibilities for farmers to manage nature areas in the agricultural landscape;
- ⊣ the possibilities of these areas to store strategic water reserves and to develop bioenergy and wind energy.

The Council points out the value of the areas which, as far as the Netherlands is concerned, are relatively peripheral and have a low population density. These characteristics are related to something which is becoming more and more scarce in north west Europe, namely the spatial quality of the living environment, which is present in the north of the country and the other low pressure regions named. The Council strongly advises to carry out investment which reinforces these specific regional qualities. Investment that would improve the accessibility of the north, such as a high speed train connection with

¹⁰ As long as livestock breeding farms have a more damaging effect on the environment than permitted by EU regulations relocation of them to relatively environmentally clean areas such as the north and Zeeland must be resisted. As soon as technology ensures that this process is environmentally safe, non-land based agricultural firms can be moved to logistically strategic locations in the corridors. The choice of these locations must be in consultation with the agricultural organisations.

the Randstad, are regarded by the Council as less urgent and desirable taking into consideration the need to preserve of the diversity of the Dutch regions. The Council advises that investment be focused on the good planning and design of the agricultural sector, which is dependent on increase in scale, and on the realisation of a robust ecological structure.

The distinction between town and country must also remain clear in the peripheral areas but the Council recommends in addition a rural revitalisation strategy that facilitates ‘new forms of living and working in the countryside’¹¹.

The Council favours this strategy because it is convinced that it will have positive effects for the regional population. Moreover the Council is conscious of the rapidly increasing scarcity of regions in Europe possessing high environmental qualities in the middle of the rapidly expanding urban field of north west Europe¹².

In this connection a more urgent, short term strategy is needed for Zeeland, as a ‘Blue Heart’ encircled by the expanding agglomerations of the Randstad and Flanders, than in the north, that lies outside the direct influence of the north west Europe urban network.

Recommendations with regard to implementation

The Council advises the government to modify its policy on the rural areas to the regional diversity that makes these areas so valuable. Regional policy requires good cooperation between the administrations of the provinces, the municipalities and central government.

The main elements of spatial policy for the rural areas must be determined at the national level in proper consultation with the lower levels of government. In the opinion of the Council the designation of large nature areas, the designation of corridors for the realisation of housing and employment locations in the rural areas, the protection of cultural historical values and the reservation of areas for water management should be the main elements of spatial policy. New policy instruments are needed to facilitate the management of nature areas and landscapes of outstanding natural beauty in agricultural areas. Where possible farmers should be involved in the management. If this is not possible the most important areas must be purchased. The Council advises that existing policies for nature and landscape conservation be continued and the realisation of the National Ecological Structure be completed by 2018, also if more resources are required to achieve this than in 1990 was foreseen.

¹¹ New locational possibilities for housing and employment are referred to here, arising as a result of the application of modern information and communication technology. For this reason interest in rural locations is increasing, which means a welcome strengthening of the socio-economic structure in some peripheral regions.

¹² Zeeland is not yet a green-blue oasis in the central urban field of north west Europe: the north of the Netherlands is part of the North Sea region (Scotland, north east England, northern Netherlands, northern Germany, and Jutland). This region is more sparsely populated than the urban system of north west Europe. Nature, agriculture and landscape can be created here in much greater units.

The provincial spatial plan provides the framework for regional landscape restructuring projects, for encouraging the sustainable management of nature and landscape and also the evaluation framework for municipal land use plans. The provinces will also play a decisive role in the preparation and realisation of co-financing for the 'rural development plans' in the context of EU agricultural and regional policies.

Conclusions

1. Viable and vibrant countryside

The countryside in the Netherlands is a scarce commodity. It deserves a conscientious approach. The policy for the rural areas must be a wise one from the viewpoint of economic efficiency, ecological sustainability, social justice and cultural identity.

2. Opt for regional differentiation

Regional differentiation is the starting point in choosing the planning and design strategies for the rural areas in the Netherlands. Making a distinction between the different types of urban pressure on the rural areas – resulting in high pressure areas, over-spill areas, and low pressure areas – was regarded as relevant for the analysis of the policy requirements.

3. Dynamic agriculture, changing landscape

Agriculture and horticulture remain the dominant land uses in the Dutch countryside. Their involvement is therefore an absolute pre-condition for management. Society must be conscious of the dynamic character of vital agricultural land use: just as in the past the landscape will change with the agriculture.

4. Integrate where possible, separate if necessary

The development of various agricultural sectors has different consequences for the planning and design of rural areas and the possibilities of allowing the farmers to carry out the management of nature and landscapes. Moreover society is setting new requirements for the planning and design of rural areas. For this reason situations arise in which the agricultural production function cannot be combined with the preservation of the biodiversity of the landscape elements. In these cases the Council advises the separation of the agricultural production areas from the nature areas. The national government ought to provide the resources for, where necessary, facilitating the exchange of land and the restructuring of rural areas.

5. National Ecological Structure to be realised as planned

The national government should provide more resources to be able to realise the National Ecological Structure according to plan. Private finance could be involved in view of the growing general interest in the management of nature and landscape. Wet ecosystems must receive extra attention; where possible large nature areas must be created.

6. Opt for cultural landscape heritage

The national government has the important task of making the citizens and local

and regional authorities aware of the cultural heritage that is hidden in the Dutch landscape. Just as the National Ecological Structure must guarantee the biodiversity in the Netherlands, 'core cultural landscapes in the Netherlands' must be created with full financial backing.

7. Nature and cultural landscapes more accessible

Large groups in the population like to visit the rural areas. For this reason nature areas and cultural landscapes must become more accessible. Bottlenecks in the accessibility of recreational honey pots such as in Zeeland must be removed. Solutions are regional zoning of recreation and tourism products, the development of transfer points and special public transport facilities.

8. Design at the transition between town and country

Urban expansions have an enormous and irreversible impact on rural areas. The (new) transitional areas between town and country require, therefore, careful design and offensive landscape strategies. A 'hard boundary' can be formed using a waterfront between town and country. In other cases the boundary consists of special combinations of urban and rural functions, such as parks and country estates. A pre-condition for careful planning and design is proper consultation with and cooperation between the authorities involved, focused on equal contributions from urban and rural interests.

9. Corridors: well-considered experiments

Alongside urban expansions, corridors form, in a few carefully selected cases and only in high pressure and overspill areas, a second planning strategy for accommodating expanding urban land use. The national government is responsible for the designation of corridor areas, to be further developed by provinces and municipalities. Experience has to be gained with this planning instrument so that the urban functions can be properly located in relation to the ecological structure and the high value landscapes of the open spaces. The Council therefore advises this process to be started by introducing experiments in two corridor areas: the A4/A13 Amsterdam-The Hague-Rotterdam corridor and the A58 Breda-Tilburg-Eindhoven corridor.

10. New life for the low pressure areas

The Council recommends 'rural revitalisation' in order to increase socio-economic acceptance in parts of the rural areas that are confronted with low pressure phenomena. The creation of attractive locational possibilities for small urban firms and well-off citizens who migrate from elsewhere will increase demand for amenities. Locations in former farm dwellings and buildings must be encouraged in the planning policies. Moreover new building on a small scale is acceptable in rural locations, provided it fits into cultural historical occupation patterns.

11. Opt for quality in the north and Zeeland

The Council advises the north and the south west of the country (Zeeland) to opt for conservation and a sensible use of the good qualities of the living environment in these areas. A government policy of financial incentives is required to alleviate the poor situation in parts of these areas with respect to employment, income and level of amenities (see also point 10). Heavy investment is necessary to create good spatial planning and design for a strong agricultural sector, a healthy economic development of recreation and tourism and in the medium term an ecological structure with abundant water.

12. Space for water

In the coming decades more and more account will have to be taken in the spatial planning and design of rural areas of the possibilities and limitations of water management. The combination of water storage with other functions such as housing, recreation and nature management is a likely scenario. Limitations arise where existing land use must make way for water management. The Council advises the government to carry out a study in consultation with all parties of where new space for water actually can be found.

13. Provincial administrations with initiative

The national government lays down the main principles of the spatial planning and design of the rural areas. Regional planning is necessary for the development of these policies, whereby the provincial governments have an initiating role and the national government supplies the necessary financial resources and the land use, design and management instruments. The Council advises the national government to evaluate the policies of the regional and local authorities against the criteria of economic efficiency, ecological sustainability, social justice and cultural identity.

Previously published advices

-	29 april 1997	Grondexploitatieheffing (in briefvorm)
001	2 oktober 1997	Interim-advies Scheiding wonen en zorg
002	23 januari 1998	Advies over Wonen met zorg
003	30 januari 1998	Advies over het concept Europees Ruimtelijk Ontwikkelingsperspectief (EROP)
003E		Advice on the Draft European Spatial Development Perspective
004	7 juli 1997	Advies voor het Nationaal Milieubeleidsplan (NMP3)
005	16 april 1998	Stedenland- <i>Plus</i> , advies over 'Nederland 2030 - Verkenning ruimtelijke perspectieven' en de 'Woonverkenningen 2030'
005E		City Land- <i>Plus</i> , advice on 'Netherlands 2030 - an Exploration of Spatial Scenarios' and 'Housing Scenarios 2030' (summary)
006	24 april 1998	De sturing van een duurzame samenleving: advies over de sturing van het leef-omgevingsbeleid
006E		Managing policy for a sustainable society (summary)
007	14 mei 1998	Advies over het derde Nationaal Milieubeleidsplan
008	29 mei 1997	Advies over de Ontwerpnota Stedelijke Vernieuwing
009	4 juni 1998	Naar een duurzamer ruimtelijk-economische structuur: advies over de ruimtelijk-economische structuurversterking van Nederland
010	23 december 1998	Transitie naar een koolstofarme energiehuishouding: advies ten behoeve van de Uitvoeringsnota Klimaatbeleid
010E		Transition to a low-carbon energy economy: advice for the Climate Policy Implementation Document
011	14 januari 1999	Corridors in balans: Van ongeplande corridorvorming naar geplande corridorontwikkeling
012	20 januari 1999	Advies Leefomgevingsbalans (in briefvorm)
013	19 april 1999	Stad en wijk: verschillen maken kwaliteit Advies Visie op de Stad
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019	21 december 1999	Nederland en het Europese milieu Advies over differentiatie in het Europese milieubeleid
019F		Les Pays-Bas et l'environnement européen Avis portant sur une différenciation de la politique environnementale européenne
019D		Die Niederlande und der europäische Umweltschutz Stellungnahme zur Differenzierung in der EU-Umweltpolitik
019E		The Netherlands and the European Environment Advice on Differentiation in European Environmental Policy
020	23 maart 2000	Het instrument geslepen Voorstellen voor een herziene WRO en voor een betere kostenverdeling bij grondexploitatie
021	11 mei 2000	Op weg naar het NMP4 Advies over De agenda van het NMP4
022	28 september 2000	Betrokken burger, betrokken overheid Reactie VROM-raad op de ontwerp-Nota Wonen
023	29 september 2000	Dagindeling geordend

