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EUROPEAN UNION

Stakeholder Engagement in Flanders

Vlaanderen
is milieu

1 Complex projects on Flemish level

1.1 A new process approach

Due to the extreme protracted proceeding of some recent large-scale projects, in which the government has encountered strong protest from citizens and interest groups (nature, local governments, …), the Flemish Government has approved a new decree (25th of April 2014) for the approach of complex projects.

It is meant for projects with a major social and spatial impact which typically involve a long study phase and where a large number of stakeholders are involved. With the new process approach for complex projects, the Flemish government is committed to the realisation of projects within an acceptable deadline period and with the greatest possible level of support.

What projects?	**Principles for a qualitative approach**
Projects of major socially and territorially strategic importance	Open communication
Projects that require an integrated licensing and planning process	Participation
Both private and public projects	Customisation
Projects at municipal, provincial and Flemish administrative level	Solution-oriented collaboration
	Integrated approach
	Process management in the hands of the actors

Every project is unique and requires customisation. This means there is no fixed step-by-step plan for the process approach. This allows the solution to be optimally tailored to the specific project needs. The Flemish Government has set up an informative website www.complexeprojecten.be with a route planner and offers a complex projects team to guide project leaders, project staff, advisers, political decision-makers and citizens through the new process approach, providing valuable explanations and tips.

1.2 How are the projects accelerated?

The new process approach has **4 successive phases**: the exploration phase, the research phase and the development phase, each of which is concluded with a decision moment. The final phase is the implementation phase. In order to ensure accelerated implementation, the study work is carried out in parallel and in an integrated way as far as possible. This ensures efficient use of personnel and financial resources. Informal consultation and participation contribute to the development of a supported solution. The construction works start with the implementation phase.

1.2.1 The exploration phase

A project starts from a **problem situation** or opportunity. The purpose of the exploration phase is twofold: Arriving at a clear problem definition and project objectives that can be supported by as many stakeholders as possible, while also mapping out the project outlines.

The clearly defined objectives of a complex project are included in the go-ahead decision, which entails the commitment of one of the competent authorities to start up a process. When different public authorities or partners are involved, it may considered appropriate to work with cooperation agreements. In the exploratory phase, for example, you determine who bears responsibility for which aspects.

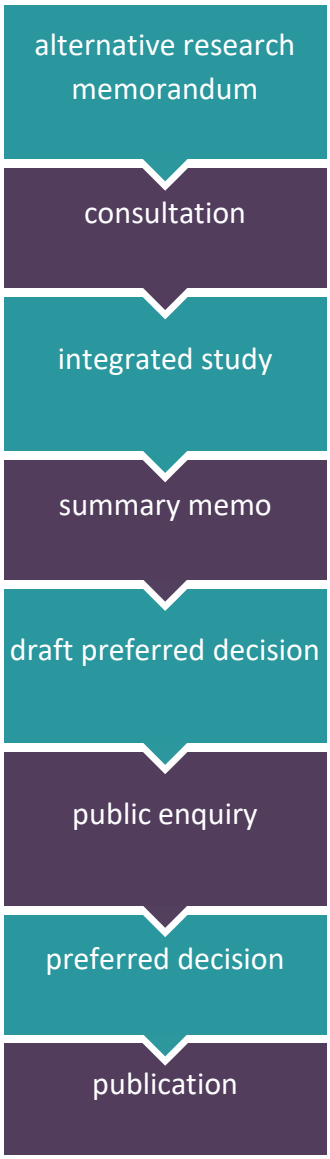
Informal consultation and participation are recommended to ensure that the problem is defined sufficiently clearly. To gain a better insight into all the parties involved, you conduct a stakeholder analysis. You also consult with possible opponents of the project.

You incorporate the results of the stakeholder analysis, the outlined participation and communication procedure and the process approach into a **process memorandum**. An estimate is also made of the possible bottlenecks for the complex project and the associated measures to mitigate the risks.

Because the exploration phase only leads to the effective start-up of a process, no formal consultation is linked with this phase. However, it is important to communicate clearly during each phase of the project. The process memorandum must therefore be published at the time of the **go-ahead decision**. The choice of the customisation option implies that the process memorandum will also evolve during the process.

1.2.2 The research phase

The research phase of a complex project begins when the go-ahead decision has been taken, including a clear project definition, objectives and possible solutions. The aim of the research phase is to filter the best solution from a wide range of possibilities. To this end, the various solutions must be examined and weighed up in an integrated manner.



All stakeholders and the general public are involved in the research phase. The participation and communication process, the outlines of which were set in the exploratory phase, is translated into practice. It is therefore best for all of the information, the study work and the history to be made available to all interested parties in a transparent way.

The **alternative research memorandum** is drawn up at the start of the research phase. This memorandum gives a description of the objectives and geographical scope of the complex project and defines the range of the integrated research. The memorandum describes what alternatives are possible and how the effects of the complex project will be examined. With the alternative research memorandum, you ensure that all of the studies can start at the same time with the same information and basic data. The alternative research memorandum is broader than the environmental study. Spatial and economic aspects are also discussed in this early phase. During the consultation, participation in the alternative research memorandum is possible. With the help of a consideration document, you indicate how you deal with the reactions of citizens and advisory.

The final results of the integrated research are compiled in the **summary memo**. Based on the research, alternatives are funnelled or refined until one solution remains that will form the subject of a preliminary draft version of a preferred decision. Advice is requested from the advisory bodies on both documents and in relation to the research reports. The draft version of the preferred decision is then formally submitted to the public via a public enquiry.

A definitive alternative is chosen in the **preferred decision**. Furthermore, it is important to show what legal consequences have to be linked to the preferred decision and what mitigating measures and accompanying actions will be applicable. Procedural or financial arrangements can be made and confirmed in cooperation agreements.

1.2.3 The development phase

The development phase of a complex project follows on from the approval of the preferred decision, which puts forward one possible solution. The aim of the development phase is to render the preferred decision in more concrete terms to turn it into a feasible project and determine the method of implementation.

The **project research memorandum** is drawn up at the start of the development phase. This memorandum describes, on the one hand, the project and accompanying measures included in the preferred decision. On the other hand, this memorandum defines what the integrated impact assessment should cover at the project level. Whereas the research in the previous phase was conducted at a strategic level, the focus here will be on the actual project level.

Publish the project research memorandum on the specific project website. Organise informal consultation sessions or information events to try and gain a good insight into the views and opinions of citizens.

The **summary memo** contains the final results of the integrated impact assessments. Based on the assessment results, the pros and cons of effects are compared with each other until, finally, one implementation method emerges as being the best. The selected alternative is formulated in a draft preferred decision. An opinion is requested from the advisory bodies on the summary memo and the preliminary draft of the project decision. The draft version of the preferred decision is then formally submitted to the public via a public enquiry.

The **project decision** is a decision by the competent authority on all the permits, authorisations, development plan and action programme so as to allow the timely deployment of the appropriate instruments. The project decision also contains aspects of management and monitoring.

1.2.4 The implementation phase

The implementation phase follows on from the approval of the project decision. The aim of the implementation phase is, on the one hand, to ensure that the work is carried out as efficiently as possible. On the other hand, it is important to take the necessary steps regarding project management, monitoring and evaluation.

The process structure needed in this phase may differ from that of the preceding phases. An adapted process structure geared to implementation and technical elaboration is recommended in this case.

The preferred decision will probably contain a number of measures to support or strengthen the selected alternative or eliminate possible hindrance. It is important to schedule these works in a timely manner when implementing the project. That is why you should draw up a management plan with an inventory of tasks and responsibilities, including the necessary commitments (financial, personnel).

Participation and communication continue to be crucial in this phase. Examples include a nuisance mitigation plan, information and guidance on the site area, residents' letters, information meeting, etc.

2 Case: Kerkebeek River (managed by Flanders Environment Agency)

2.1 Problem situation

The winter floods of 1964, 1998 and 2002, and the summer floods in 2005 and 2007 caused a lot of damage in, among other places, Zedelgem, Loppem and Sint-Michiels (Bruges). Fortunately, the water managers in the area have already made a great effort to reduce the risks of flooding. Although it may have been a while since there were major problems, we have to realise that it is impossible to reduce the risk of flooding to zero. In other words, there will always be a risk of flooding. The chances of this happening will also increase in the coming years due to climate change. The most recent studies indicate greater rainfall in the winter and more intense summer showers. However, additional building and paving/road surfacing is also putting extra pressure on the water system. In the greater Bruges area we are already feeling the consequences.

We are still insufficiently aware of the risks of flooding in the Kerkebeek river basin. A major challenge we will face in the coming years is to enhance the awareness and resilience of all those involved in relation to flooding. The water authority cannot solve the problems of flooding alone. We need the help of all those involved: citizens, companies and associations. Because flood risk management is a shared responsibility in which the water authority, together with spatial planning, local government, the emergency services, the insurance sector and the residents look for and develop solutions.

2.2 Procedure

2.2.1 Objectives

To deal with the problems in the Kerkebeek valley, we have chosen a participatory and multidisciplinary approach. Such an approach goes far beyond the approach in which we provide information just before or after the work is carried out. We allow the process to feed from the public at large and go beyond the jurisdictional boundaries in search of integral solutions. In this way, we set up new initiatives with all stakeholders, coordinate ongoing and planned initiatives, and create a resilient community that is more willing to support or take action. By so, we hope to increase the awareness and resilience of all those involved with regard to the current flood risks and the increased risks due to climate change.

2.2.2 Project coordination and organisation

The Flanders Environment Agency (VMM) has launched this pilot project for the Kerkebeek area. As the project coordinator, it is responsible for the general management, process control, central communication and development of the project content. To facilitate this participation, the VMM and the steering committee were guided by a participation agency.

By virtue of their expertise and policy area, the steering committee members or co-decision-makers form part of the steering group meetings, provide substantive support within and outside the steering committee and decide jointly on the actions in the river contract for the Kerkebeek valley. The steering committee consists of representatives from the public at large, the Flanders Environment Agency (VMM), Natuurpunt, the municipality of Zedelgem, the City of Bruges, the Province of West Flanders, the Flemish Land Agency (VLM), the Department of Agriculture and Fisheries (L&V), the Agency for Nature and Forests (ANB), the Basin Secretariat for the Bruges Polders, Vlaamse Waterweg nv and the Environment Department (OMG).

2.3 Process

The project process flow is outlined in Figure 1 and is based on the process approach for complex projects.

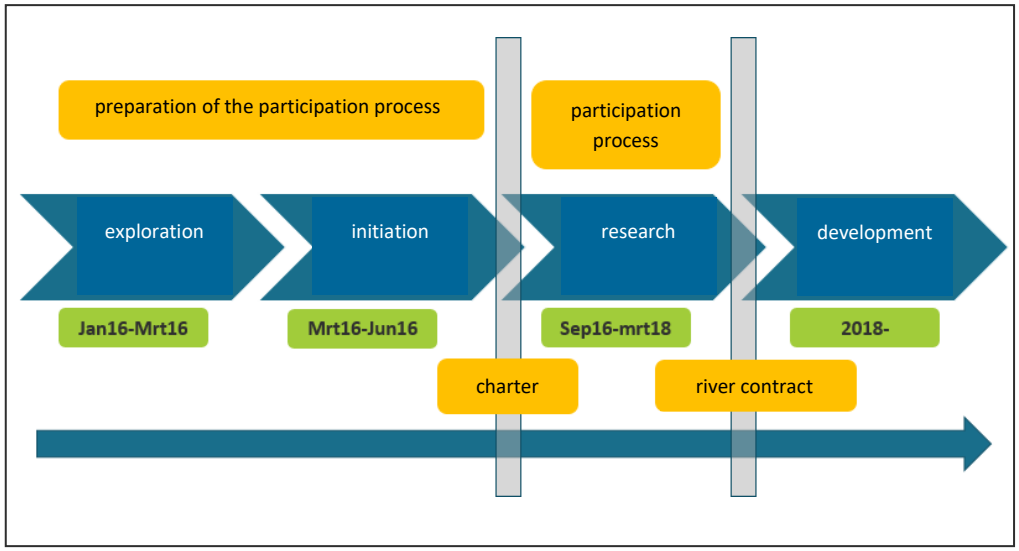


Figure 1: 'River contract for the Kerkebeek valley' process flow

2.3.1 Exploration and initiation phase – preparation of the participation process

As a first step, the VMM assessed the possibilities for collaboration on the basis of a number of bilateral discussions with, among others, the Province of West Flanders. To prepare for the participatory process, steering committee meetings took place with the relevant official and administrative representatives of various sectors. Initially, the following organisations were represented on the steering committee:

- municipal administration of Zedelgem
- city council of Bruges
- Province of West Flanders
- Flanders Environment Agency
- Flemish Land Agency
- Environment Department
- Flemish Department of Agriculture and Fisheries

- Agency for Nature and Forests

The joint commitment of the steering committee members is laid down in a charter, in which they declare their intention to jointly reduce the risk of flooding in a sustainable manner in the Kerkebeek river basin area with the added value that the waterways in the valley can imply for all users. The coordinated charter forms the starting point for the participation process with, among others, the public at large.

2.3.2 Research phase - participation process

The participation process goes beyond merely informing stakeholders, by involving them and getting them to cooperate (co-creation). Participation makes the authorities, owners and users the co-owners of a possible solution, meaning that this can result in a commitment to take responsibility oneself.

The mentoring assignment started in September 2016 and continued until 2018. The official signing of the charter and the launch of the online information, recruitment and participation platform http://kerkebeek.riviercontract.be in January 2017 (Figure 2) marked the official start of the participatory project.

Apart from additional information and guidance, minutes of meetings, blog posts, all kinds of initiatives and invitations to meetings, the visitors to the website were able to find out to what extent their house, garden or street is prone to flooding and how climate change impacts on them personally. During the research phase (January 2017 – April 2018) almost 1800 residents of Zedelgem and Sint-Michiels Bruges performed the test, i.e. more than 15% of the households. The test and the website is therefore not only the ideal platform for informing people but also for raising their awareness and sense of responsibility. The existing offline and online communication channels (newsletters and residents' letters, direct mailings, etc.) of the steering committee members were also used to maximum effect. In other words, a project environment was created in which the stakeholders were given the time and opportunity to be involved in finding out, thinking along and participating.

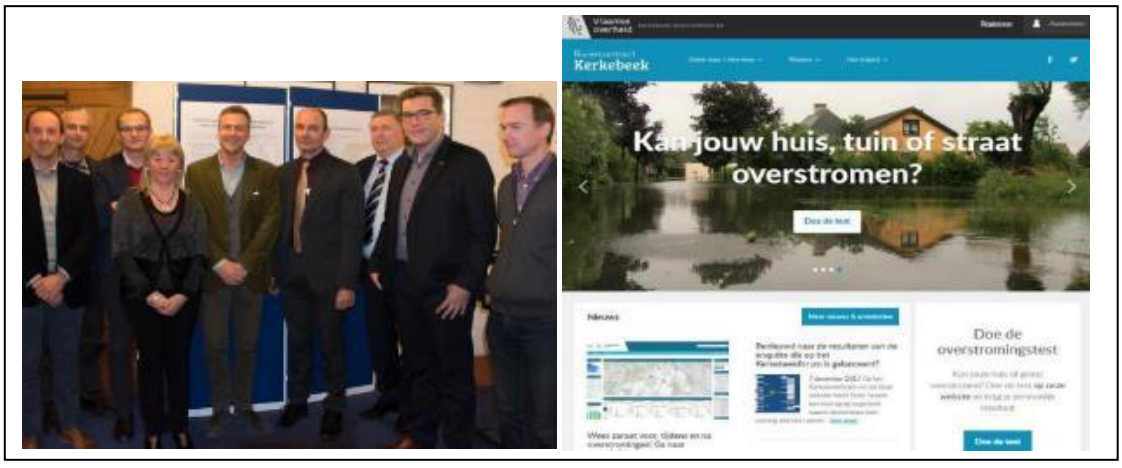


Figure 2: Signatories charter and launch project website kerkebeek.riviercontract.be

But it was not only possible to participate online. The residents were invited, via a personal letter among other things, to two well-attended start-up events (Figure 3) where they were informed about the project and given the opportunity for the first time to share their ideas, desires and concerns with each other.

The steering committee was also enlarged to include the sewage treatment operator, the water manager of the navigable waterways (Vlaamse Waterweg nv) and committed citizens who help to determine the decision-making process. This reduced the gap between citizen and government, and increased support for the measures in the river contract.

In the spring of 2017, ideas and solutions could be explored, presented and assessed online. On the website everyone could formulate their ideas related to the following questions:

- What can I do myself as a resident?
- What can I do as a resident with others?
- What can I do as an administration?
- What can I do as a company or association?

Start-up events and other meetings also produced civic ambassadors for the project. These are motivated residents and members of associations who want to work with their own ideas. This resulted in a large number of offline initiatives such as walking and cycling tours, meetings and information events which, in turn, led to valuable ideas.

Figure 3: Start-up event in Zedelgem

More than 100 ideas were presented from the public at large and the government as a basis. During the summer and autumn of 2017, the first steps were taken to turn the ideas into commitments. The Kerkebeek Forum in October 2017 built further on the ideas and proposals submitted via the project website or offline. It gave all of those involved the opportunity to discuss various ideas or commitments with each other in 9 workshops and to take the step towards commitment themselves.

The remaining months of 2017 and the first few months of 2018 were spent continuing to work together with the parties involved in the steering group to find specific solutions.

The research phase ended with the signing of the Kerkebeek river contract. The river contract for the Kerkebeek valley comprises an agreement framework ('who does what when') in which the parties involved see their ideas and plans as being intertwined. The intended outcome should be supported solutions with a sustainable reduction of the risk of flooding as a result.

The river contract was officially signed on 17 April 2018 and is valid for a period of five years. The river contract will be evaluated at the end of this period.

2.3.3 Development phase – implementation and follow-up

In the river contract, the partners include the specific solutions that they will implement over the coming years. Although the signing of the river contract marks the end of the research and participation project with the steering committee and the public at large, it is not the end of the process with all of the parties involved. The river contract is valid for a period of five years and will be evaluated at the end of that period.

The steering committee members undertake to consult regularly with each other and the general public to discuss the progress of the actions and make adjustments where necessary. The existing consultation platform of the steering committee is the most suitable forum to provide a structural basis for the communication between the steering committee members. At the half-yearly meetings, feedback is provided on the progress of the measures arising from the river contract, experience is exchanged and communication actions and events are prepared.

The website riviercontract.kerkebeek.be remains the central data and participation platform for communicating with the public at large. The website also serves as a central contact point where everyone involved in the implementation of the contract, e.g. ambassadors or citizens, has the chance to ask questions or report what has been achieved along the way. On the website, information is also given on the progress of the various projects, people are invited to events, and the online test 'can your house, garden or street flood?' can be completed at any time.

The steering committee members undertake to timely inform the public at large and other parties involved of the measures implemented. The steering committee members undertake to use the online and offline means of communication of their organisation and provide citizens with the relevant information concerning measures.

2.4 Measures

The river contract for the Kerkebeek valley comprises a mix of over 50 measures that are supported by different parties responsible. The measures not only ensure a reduction of the risks of flooding through the implementation of conventional protection measures, such as providing for additional buffering. They also reduce the flood damage, on the one hand by taking preventive measures (e.g.

keeping plots free of construction) and, on the other hand, by increasing responsiveness (e.g. providing additional measuring devices).

The measures in the river contract are divided into three categories:

- Investment and research projects
- instruments
- informing, communicating and raising awareness

The investment and research measures are concrete commitments to investments in the field or of research into opportunities for investment measures. The toolbox comprises the instruments, plans and processes that help to realise a specific vision or structure. Informing, communicating and raising awareness are the necessary conditions for promoting contact with the public, increasing responsiveness, being able to implement one's own measures and encouraging those involved to take action themselves.

There are actions that can be implemented immediately and also actions that depend on the following factors for their timing:

- spatial and/or participatory planning initiative needed
- technical design and land acquisition needed
- technical design needed where the land is already available
- actions that can be implemented immediately

The initiator is responsible for the implementation of the measure and acts as the main financier. In addition, partners are involved who provide the necessary substantive support or act as potential co-financiers.

3 Case: recreation areas on the Kleine Nete River (managed by Flanders Environment Agency)

In the Flemish pilot for the Building with Nature project, Flanders Environment Agency cooperates closely with the land owners / managers of the recreation sites. The number of stakeholders are limited, so the project is not defined as 'complex', cfr. Chapter 1. However, the approach shows some similarities.

The reason for this close cooperation is the 'insight' of Flanders Environment Agency that we have to offer more to the land owners then only money for the taken land, in order to make a project successful. The standard methodology is that a project is worked out by the engineers and that thereupon the needed land is purchased compulsorily. In case of strong disagreement of the land owner, the duration of a project can take more than 20 years. At the end, one party will always lose with a high chance of keeping hard feelings, which undermines the possibility for other projects.

In stead of offering money for the taken land, we wanted to create a win-win situation for both the river and the recreation areas.

3.1 Exploration phase

3.1.1 Problem situation

The Kleine Nete River was canalized in the seventies. To mitigate the major disturbance of the river system, a river restoration program was set up over a distance of 25km. Goals are:

- Creation of more water storage capacity
- Realisation of ecological added value
- Restoration of the structure of the water course

Figure 4: River restoration program Kleine Nete

3.1.2 Project objectives

Three recreation areas are situated along the Kleine Nete at the municipality of Kasterlee. These recreation areas have an economic function. It is not evident making alterations to the water course here. The economic sector is on the one hand vulnerable to the consequences of climate change, e.g. increased flood risk, and on the other hand not willingly to cede space with an economic function to river adaptation works, e.g. water storage areas. A challenge is present to find innovative solutions for multifunctional use of space. By rearranging the bank zone of the Kleine Nete, we intent to create a win-win situation for both the river and the recreation areas. It means that we are looking for an innovative solution in which the functions of the water course and the recreation are combined.

3.1.3 Stakeholder analysis

In the beginning of the project, the following stakeholders were contacted:

- Managers / land owners of the three recreation areas (camping site 'Korte Heide', amusement park 'Bobbejaanland' and recreation site 'Ark van Noë')
- Municipality of Kasterlee: they didn't wish to be involved from the beginning of the project, but only at the end of the research phase

- Flemish Department of Spatial Planning: possible conflict with spatial prescriptions
- Flemish Agency of National Heritage: possible conflict with protection of the landscape
- Flemish Agency for Nature and Forestry: possible conflict with nature area

The involvement of these partners in the project is meanly because they are inevitable. It was not meant to start a broad participatory process, as this was neither the wish of the managers of the recreation areas themselves.

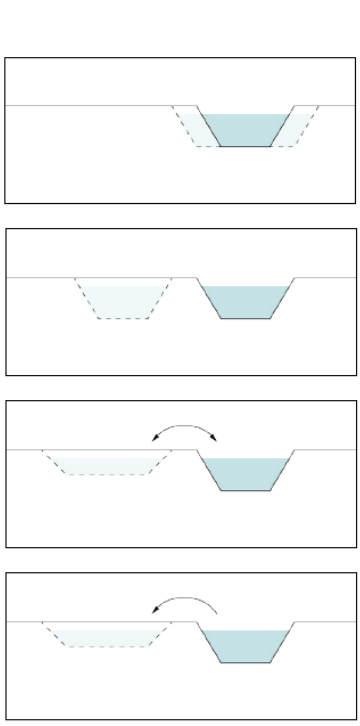
For that reason, no formal documents were produced like a process memorandum or an official go-ahead-decision.

3.2 Research phase

For the research phase, Flanders Environment Agency contracted a landscape architect. He executed a pre-design-study based on a methodological approach in which as many potential solutions and design scenarios as possible can be explored. First of all, various water storage principles were identified at conceptual level. A distinction was made between dike relocation, remeandering, buffering and sequential use.

The research started in December 2016. A preferred alternative was chosen in spring 2018. This preferred alternative was further elaborated in autumn 2018. The end report was finished in January 2019.

Here again, no large public enquiry was set up. The research phase was executed within the Building with Nature project. Project partners have given feedback on the different scenario's and the final proposed solution.



CONCEPT	OBJECTIVE
Dike relocation • winter dike	• extra storage capacity • ecological added value
(Re)meandering • existing watercourse versus new watercourse • main stream versus side stream	• extra storage capacity • ecological added value • structural watercourse restoration
Buffering • connected to the Kleine Nete river system • connected to the groundwater system • connected to the artificial water system	• extra storage capacity • ecological added value in relation to system
Sequential use	• extra storage capacity • multiple space usage

Figure 5: Water storage principles

3.3 Development phase

The development phase for the three recreation areas was split up. In fact, it are three separate location with their own specifications and difficulties, so also with their own timing.

- Camping site ‘Korte Heide’

For camping site ‘Korte Heide’ the preferred alternative consists of a re-meandering. By this measure, the camping will lose 54 places for caravans. These will be compensated in 2 parcels. To make this possible, a change is needed in spatial prescriptions. Such a procedure takes two years at least.

In the meantime the design of the compensation areas will be executed (Spring 2019), and also the final technical design of the whole area (Autumn 2019 – Autumn 2020).

Figure 6: Camping site 'Korte Heide' and compensation areas in the surroundings – old and new situation

- Amusement park ‘Bobbejaanland’

For amusement park ‘Bobbejaanland’ the preferred alternative consists of a re-meandering. By this measure, 214 parking places are lost. These will be compensated in a new parking deck.

After finishing the research phase, the municipality of Kasterlee made objection against a parking deck on the proposed location. New alternatives are now elaborated with an ecological buffer zone along the Kleine Nete and a parking deck in between this buffer zone and the park. In fact, this means a new research phase. The development phase will start after a new agreement is made.

Figure 7: Amusement park 'Bobbejaanland' – Old and new situation

- Recreation site 'Ark van Noë'

For recreation site 'Ark van Noë' the preferred alternative consists of a re-meandering. The area has to be re-organized a bit, but this is possible without major disturbances. For this site, the research phase can be considered as completely ended and the development phase can start. The technical design will start in May 2019.

Figure 8: Recreation site 'Ark van Noë' – Old and new situation