



# NETHERLANDS STUDY TOUR

Planning • Public health • Urban design

WHO Collaborating Centre for Healthy Urban Environments  
South West Regional Public Health Group  
27-29 February 2012

Summary record and photo report

edited by Sarah Burgess



# Netherlands Study Tour 2012

## Purpose

The purpose of the study was for participants, who all have leadership roles in relation to local authorities in the United Kingdom, to visit exemplary case studies overseas and to see how healthy sustainable urban development works in practice. This experience was an inspiration for better coordinated policy and action in the United Kingdom. The contextual elements leading to success in the places visited were examined and the necessary conditions for successful implementation within the United Kingdom policy and institutional environments were drawn out.

A key benefit from the study was building understanding between public health and planning professionals. This is especially important during the phase when public health are settling in to their new role in local authorities. Good working relationships and common agendas need to be established between Directors of Public Health and those taking a lead in city development and regeneration.

This report was compiled and edited by Sarah Burgess with photographs from Graham Sims, Pamela Akerman and Marcus Grant. Thanks also to our guide in the Netherlands, Jan Meijdam, and local guides Rob Derks in Houten, Annemiek Hakkers in Leidsche Rijn, Fritz van den Berg in Amsterdam, the residents of DWL Terrein and Pascal Bisscheroux in Rotterdam. © UWE

## Participants

Bath and North East Somerset	Pamela Akerman, Interim Director of Public Health, NHS Bath and North East Somerset Simon de Beer, Policy and Environment Manager, Bath and North East Somerset Council.
Bristol	Hugh Annett, Director of Public Health, NHS Bristol Graham Sims, Strategic Director for Neighbourhoods and City Development, Bristol City Council Stephen Hilton, Service Director, Bristol Futures, Bristol City Council Nick Hooper, Service Director, Strategic Housing, Bristol City Council
Devon	Debbie Stark, Director of Public Health, Torbay Care Trust Liam Montgomery, Planning and Housing Manager, Torbay Council Les Crump, Head of Planning, Torbay Council
Somerset	Caroline Gamlin, Director of Public Health, NHS Somerset Rachel Turner, Principle Estate Road Engineer, Somerset County Council
Places for People	Nigel Brewer, Project Implementation Manager, Places for People
Institute of Health Equity	Mike Grady, Senior Research Fellow, Health Inequalities Review for England
Sustainability South West	Lynn Gibbons, Sustainable Health, South West Project Manager
NHS South of England	Gabriel Scally, Regional Director of Public Health Gemma Dunn, Public Health Programme Lead Justine Womack, Associate Director of Public Health
Host and guide	Jan Meijdam, Senior Advisor Healthy Spatial Planning, GGD Rotterdam-Rijnmond / Municipal Health Department
UWE coordinators and facilitators	WHO Collaborating Centre for Healthy Urban Environments: Hugh Barton, Professor of Planning, Health and Sustainability Marcus Grant, Associate Professor and Acting Director Laurence Carmichael, Senior Lecturer in Urban Governance and International Links Sarah Burgess, Senior Lecturer in Healthy Urban Planning and Design

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# Foreword

*There is really no substitute for going and see how it is done! I'm very pleased to contribute a forward to this third and final report of the programme of visits undertaken by senior public health and local government officials from the South-West of England to the Netherlands and Germany. I have yet to meet anyone who took part in one of the visits who did not find it to be an enormously beneficial experience. We all know that England led the world in tackling ill-health in the mid-18th century. The enormously important efforts of the sanitary revolution tackled what were thought to be the causes of the epidemics of infectious disease that caused such misery and death in our expanding cities and towns. As well as killing enormous numbers of people, epidemic infectious disease also damaged trade and commerce. The success of the sanitary revolution paved the way for the building of successful towns and cities.*



*Today's threats to health come not from infectious diseases, but from the tidal wave of noncommunicable disease that is sweeping the developed world. A particular problem, which has reached substantial proportions in England, is that of obesity. We know that conventional medical treatment has little to offer in the prevention of obesity and, such is the scale of the problem, that looking to medicine for a cure would be foolish and wasteful. But the solutions are all around us. We need to not just change, but to transform the communities in which we live so that they support people living healthy, active lives. We also need communities that are inclusive and where the growing number of older people can feel safe and secure.*

*The visit that is the subject of this report and the two preceding visits to Freiburg in Germany demonstrate how communities can reinvent themselves and how development can serve the needs of population health. These are lessons that we must learn and implement.*

*Gabriel Scally*

Regional Director of Public Health  
for the NHS South of England

# NETHERLANDS STUDY TOUR 2013

## Programme

### Monday 27th February

Train travel to Harwich. Overnight ferry to Hook of Holland.

*Learning zone 1 - The Challenges*

### Tuesday 28th February

Disembark from the ferry.

08.10 Train from the Hook of Holland to Houten

09.50 Arrival at Houten.  
*Hire cycles and meet Rob Derks, town planner and 'the father' of Houten, and Anne Marie Gout, Municipal Public Health Service for a bicycle tour of Houten. Houten was the Dutch Cycling City in 2008.*

12.30 Lunch in Houten

13.30 Train to Terwijde via Utrecht

14.10 Arrival Terwijde for Leidsche Rijn  
*Meet Annemiek Hakkers, Ludarte, Bureau voor kunst, for walking tour and talk on infrastructure, safety, education, the special water system, city heating and public transport.*

16.30 Train to Amsterdam, via Utrecht, and check-in at IBIS Hotel Amsterdam Central

18.00 *Learning zone 2 - The Potentials*

19.45 Dinner ad lib in city

### Wednesday 29th February

8.45 Tram to GWL Terrein, Amsterdam  
*Residents provide a tour of the development and talk about the development process, sustainability features, consultation and role of the community.*

11.40 High speed train to Rotterdam and tram to Kop Van Zuid

Lunch at Hotel New York

14.30 Afrikaanderplein market and park

15.30 Metro to Rotterdam Healthy City Office  
*Presentation from Pascal Bisscheroux, Healthy City Coordinator, Rotterdam*

16.45 *Learning zone 3 - The Lessons*

18.30 Free evening until train to ferry

20.30 Arrive Hook of Holland and board ferry

### Thursday 1st March

06.30 Disembark ferry and train to Liverpool Street



# Learning Programme

As with the two previous study tours to Freiburg, the emphasis was on learning and extracting valuable knowledge from overseas exemplary case studies. Two key questions were posed:

What are the **ESSENTIAL** physical development characteristics for a healthy sustainable community?

What are the **ESSENTIAL** 'soft' development parameters for a healthy sustainable community?

A three phase learning programme supported participants reflections on these two questions through discrete 'learning zones' each day. These were as follows:

## Learning Zone 1: The challenges

What are the barriers and challenges to aligning regeneration and development in our villages, towns and cities to ensure better outcomes for health and health equity?

## Learning Zone 2: The potentials

From what we see and hear on the study tour, what is the potential for regeneration and development in our villages, towns and cities to ensure better outcomes for health and health equity?

## Learning Zone 3: The lessons

Given the differences in cultures, planning systems and development practice, what lessons should we be exploring, sharing and enacting in the south west?



Learning Zone 2: at IBIS hotel



Learning Zone 3: at the Rotterdam Healthy City offices

# Netherlands briefing

Investigating policy and design for healthy communities and sustainable settlements

## Introduction to the Netherlands

Planning and development in the Netherlands face similar challenging conditions to those we face in the United Kingdom: shortage of land and houses in view of population migration, in particular in urban areas, need to improve housing quality and its resilience to environmental pressures.

The creation of healthy communities in the Netherlands is assisted by good planning practice at all levels of governance, including national policies and strategies, flexible financing of development, the pro-active role of local authorities, and good urban design. Hence, 750,000 new houses have been created between 1996 and 2005 in the Netherlands. A majority of these have been through the creation of new settlements facilitated at a national level by a 10 year housing programme, VINEX, and at local level by power and leadership of local authorities in the development process. In addition, innovative designs such as home zones and shared spaces have also inspired practice in the United Kingdom.



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# Four Dutch cities

We visited four Dutch settlements on the study tour. Each of them have innovative features that stakeholders in the development process in the United Kingdom can learn from. They address housing shortages and regeneration of urban spaces.

**Houten:** a town is situated in the province of Utrecht. Settlement in Houten dates from Roman times, but its modern day growth as a commuter town started in 1966. It was developed to meet the housing needs of Utrecht, growing in population from 4,000 people at the end of the 1970s to almost 50,000 today. Well served by train, buses and motorways, Houten is famous for its status as Netherlands 'Bicycle City 2008'. The settlement has a wide network of bicycle paths that connect different districts in the town and relegates cars to the outer ring road.



The extensive cycle network in Houten

**Leidsche Rijn:** an urban extension to the city of Utrecht. Once complete, Leidsche Rijn will add an additional 30,000 homes and 180 commercial and public buildings. A new major transportation system is being put in place and neighbourhoods within the development are individually designed and constructed with varying architecture and layout. This allows flexibility to respond to local situations and meet the needs of 'target groups' such as communal elderly housing or live/work units for artists and former homeless.



Public transport in Leidsche Rijn

**GWL Terrein:** a former municipal waterworks located three kilometres from the centre of Amsterdam. The site was regenerated in 1989 into a car free residential area (645 dwellings with a mix of tenures) that has influenced not only car use as well as a shift in transport modes. It includes environmentally friendly design that is permeable to adjacent neighbourhoods. The development offers a vibrant example of how low carbon community and sustainable practices in the urban environment that encourage community engagement and activities.



Community allotments in GWL Terrein

**Rotterdam:** a former harbour area, Kop Van Zuid is located on the south bank of the Meuse River in the city of Rotterdam. It was redeveloped into a new mixed use town centre thanks to the vision of the local authority. Afrikaanderplein is a former football ground that is adjacent to the Kop Van Zuid area. This site was redeveloped into a very functional public park offering a weekly market, play ground and aviary in an area of the city characterised by cultural diversity.



A public park overlooking the Meuse River in Rotterdam



# Key lessons for the United Kingdom

Each of the settlements visited were different in both scale and setting. They have been developed at different times and under different circumstances. This meant that participants on the study tour were able to appreciate different challenges and approaches that have varying applicability to the British context.

The key lessons from these developments that were identified by participants were:

- **Vision and Leadership**  
The importance of proactive and integrated planning
- **Maximising Assets**  
Building on people and place
- **Planning for Movement**  
Integrated transport solutions that prioritise the pedestrian and cyclist
- **Flexibility and Creativity**  
Innovative solutions that provide adaptability for future use



Integrated transport in Rotterdam

## Vision and Leadership

### *The importance of proactive and integrated planning*

Participants were particularly inspired by the way that the Dutch have managed to have a holistic view about what is needed for a place to grow, plan for it and then see it through to completion. This requires support and coordination from the top levels of government right down to individual communities. It requires communities and decision makers to be bold and creative. Plans need to be realistic but also ambitious. In Utrecht, they have plans to build over a motorway, creating a space for a new public park, linking two parts of the city currently divided by the motorway.

Healthy communities should be on every politician's agenda. We should have the confidence to deliver sustainable and healthy developments over the long term and to manage the short term challenges.

Sustainable transport, green space, shared community facilities, good quality housing (both market and socially rented), schools and jobs were all evident in the developments visited. It was clear that these are important elements of the community and act as a focal point for activities in the neighbourhood.

Participants on the study tour recognised that land control is critical to delivering a development such as the ones visited in the Netherlands. But even though the framework for development is quite different in the United Kingdom than in the Netherlands, participants emphasised that this should not be used as an excuse not to try to deliver the same level of quality and consideration. There are projects moving forward in the United Kingdom where opportunities for land assembly, land capture and development commissioning can help to deliver exemplary developments like GWL Terrein.



A resident of GWL Terrein explains the masterplan

# Maximising assets

## *Building on people and place*

A key feature that participants highlighted was the asset based approach to the design of developments. This included focussing the development on aspects of both people and place, such as utilising the knowledge and experience of the community and the history and physical features of the place. For example, in GWL Terrein, a regeneration project, the old waterworks buildings are incorporated successfully into the layout of the development and features of these historical buildings are integrated into the design of the new buildings. This creates a sense of place and a respect for the history of the site.

In the Netherlands, people are engaged to define the problems in the area, to identify values and to help develop solutions. This was particularly pertinent in the GWL Terrein development in Amsterdam where residents were empowered to participate in the design stage of the development, designing homes, gardens and facilities. There was a greater delegation of responsibility to communities and the sense of ownership of common facilities and open space is evident.



The old waterworks tower and historic buildings are retained at GWL Terrein

# Planning for Movement

## *Integrated transport solutions that prioritise the pedestrian and cyclist*

One of the most striking things about the Netherlands is that car ownership levels are similar to those in the United Kingdom, but the car in no way dominates the ambiance of the settlements. It is clear that the pedestrian and the cyclist have priority. People can still access their cars, but the layout of the development, the design details and traffic management make walking and cycling the easy option.

The public transport is sustained, affordable, high performing and interconnected. In particular, the successful implementation of an integrated system that effectively brings together different modes of transport and provides appropriate facilities to encourage multi-modal travel. Homezones are also well design and successfully implemented.

# Flexibility and Creativity

## *Innovative solutions that provide adaptability for future use*

The settlements and developments that participants visited in the Netherlands exhibited a high level of creativity, both in finding solutions to critical problems (e.g. flooding) as well the use of buildings and spaces.

Creative solutions for flooding often provided multiple benefits for the community, such as the provision of green space, improved biodiversity, food growing areas and community involvement in the management and maintenance of common space.

Local issues, such as making the most of assets and ensuring their sustainability were also creatively addressed. Buildings were designed to be flexible in their use, both for different purposes. For example, including flats on the top floor of a school building that could be converted into classrooms if the school needed to expand. Another example was using the roof space on buildings for play space. Children's playgrounds were also integrated into the neighbourhood design. They were unfenced areas and were within the view of homes.



Children's play areas are overlooked by housing in Leidsche Rijn

# Case study: healthy urban environments in practice

## Houten: a cycling city

Houten is a new town which was conceived in the 1960s. It earned the title of 'Cycling City' in 2008. The design of the settlement prioritises the cyclist by having a wide network of cycle paths within, and connecting, different districts in the city. The car is relegated to the city ring road on the outskirts of the city while pedestrians and cyclists have an intricate network of paths to use. The city is well served by trains and buses and has good connections to other parts of the region. The current population is almost 50,000.

There are two main centres in the city, each with a train station, as well as a historical village centre which the development was built around. Houten North (Houten-Noord) was developed in the 1990s and Houten South (Houten-Zuid) is a more recent urban extension.



Crossing the road 'the easy way' in Houten



Cycle parking outside the school in Houten

Attention has been given to the cycling experience and the comfort and convenience of the cyclist. Cycling infrastructure is integrated into the layout of the settlement and facilities are located in convenient and accessible locations making cycling the easy option.

The function of the settlement has been considered at all scales - from small pocket parks to the overall transport network. Parks and water bodies are incorporated into the settlement layout and have been treated differently in Houten North and Houten South. In the north, the green spaces and waterways have been designed in a linear pattern, while in the south they are incorporated as a central feature and focus of the area.



Cycle parking facilities at the local supermarket



A comprehensive network of designated cycle paths



# Houten: a cycling city

## Key learning points from participants



Housing fronts on to pedestrian and cycle lanes with access at the rear of dwellings for cars. Houten is an extreme example of a settlement that has cycling at its heart.



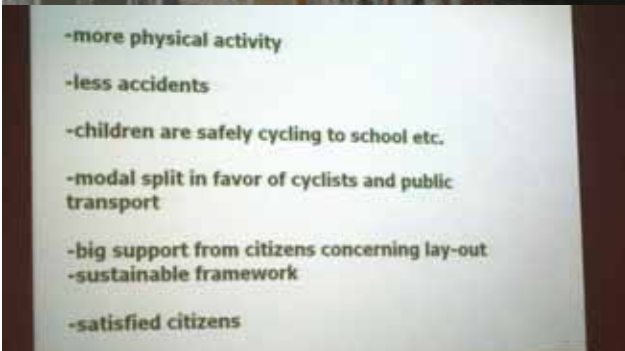
Cars are provided for but they are not prioritised. Residential streets and spaces are therefore designed in a manner that they can be utilised for play as well as movement.



A strong philosophy for the settlement was adopted from the start. The implementation of this philosophy required strategic and long term planning and it has been sustained over many decades.



The extension to the south of Houten is a totally new development, however, even though it is only fairly recently completed it still achieves a sense of community. The design of the development in this area maximises the water as an asset as well as a functional necessity.



Houten has sustained buy-in from residents and businesses over a long period of time and has been successful in providing a safe environment for the community.



# Case study: healthy urban environments in practice

## Leidsche Rijn: building a new community



The development uses the natural features of the site to enhance the neighbourhood

The neighbourhood centres seek to provide local shops and services. They are mixed use and incorporate public art and high quality landscaping. Shared facilities and community spaces are a fundamental part of each neighbourhood. The integration of private and social housing is a key feature of the Leidsche Rijn. Some of the neighbourhoods provide co-operative housing that have shared communal laundry and dining facilities and services.

Attracting inward investment and involving local businesses in planning and design was important in maximising opportunities for training and apprenticeships in construction as well as future management and service delivery. The local authority has sought to encourage an alignment of strategies for local jobs and skills with the housing development.



Each neighbourhood has a local centre which provides a mix of retail and residential uses.



Common space overlooks by residential dwellings



Sustainable urban drainage systems are well-designed

# Leidsche Rijn: building a new community

## Key learning points from participants



Children's play space is integrated into residential areas that provide passive surveillance and no need for fencing. The tenants and resident groups have a say in how space is used so they have a feeling of ownership and responsibility to the public spaces.



There is an efficient use of land - both in the multiple uses for buildings as well as in the common space. For example, school buildings are 2-3 storeys and the roof space is used as a play ground.



Landscaping, community art and children's play spaces are used to enhance public areas, in particular in smaller spaces.



Good sustainable drainage systems are integrated into the design and layout of the development. Creative solutions are maximised to enhance the appearance of the area and provide effective flood and water management - over 80% of surface water is retained within the settlement.



Good traffic management systems are in place, which prioritise cyclists, pedestrians and public transport.



# Case study: healthy urban environments in practice

## GWL Terrein: car-free and community-led

GWL Terrein is an urban infill development on the site of an old waterworks, about three miles from the centre of Amsterdam. The development is almost car free and had a heavy input from the local community and future tenants.

The development is built on the principles of ecological living, providing areas for local food growing and play, encouraging biodiversity and fostering community events. The site also has grey water recycling (although not as much as was originally envisaged) and energy efficiency measures.

The development has good connectivity and fits well in the urban form of the area. It has also successfully utilised the existing buildings on site, creating a sense of place and link to the history of the site.



Community gardens and the old pump house



There is a regular tram service with a tram stop at the edge of the development site

Only one in six dwellings have a car parking space, but there is a car pool available which as a supply of electric cars. Housing blocks also have shared bicycles with baskets and trailers for loan. The site is well serviced by public transport, including a regular bus and tram service.

The development has successfully created well-used green space that is protected from the noisy surroundings of city life. Art, furniture and facilities for games are a key feature of the development. The development also has a very successful community allotment and has an abundance of bird life in the many bird boxes and nests incorporated into the building fabric.



Higher density apartments. The ground floor are assisted care units



Community chess board in the public realm

# GWL Terrein: car-free and community-led

## Key learning points from participants



The old waterworks buildings have been preserved and re-used on the site. The development also includes elements of the site's past use, including piping used as artwork and some of the buildings use concrete from the waterworks in their building fabric.



Good use of small spaces. Allotments and fruit trees are incorporated into the development and common spaces are used for community events, such as community parties, apple sharing and an apple pie festival.



Open space includes a variety of uses and is segmented to encourage community ownership. This includes children's play space, basketball courts, grassed areas, allotments, fruit trees, table tennis and outdoor chess sets.



There has been a variety of plant species and habitats created in the development to encourage wildlife. This has been delivered through careful layout and design of buildings and green spaces as well as the community-based management of common space.



The community was involved in the design and layout of the development as well as individual buildings and dwelling units. Ground level entry to dwellings were included where possible and designs avoided long corridors to encourage neighbours to meet in communal spaces.



# Case study: healthy urban environments in practice

## Rotterdam: developing a healthy city

Rotterdam is part of the WHO European Healthy Cities Network. The city is currently trying to increase the number of people living in the city centre, and is aiming to double the 20,000 dwellings that currently exist in the city centre. They are actively trying to promote this through a number of methods, including:

- encouraging high rise buildings;
- promoting development of dwellings on the water;
- building additional dwellings above existing terrace homes;
- converting old offices into residences;
- improving green space to make the area more attractive to live in; and
- improving public transport and decreasing parking.



Additional dwellings built on top of existing terrace houses



The Kop van Zuid neighbourhood

In Kop van Zuid, south of the city centre, a former harbour area has been redeveloped into a vibrant mixed use residential area. The local authority has tried to encourage families to move into the area through the provision of family housing, schools and playgrounds.

Young professionals are also being encouraged to move into the area through the promotion of creative housing solutions. For example, apartments in traditional terrace buildings are sold as the 'shell only' which new occupants are able to add their own fittings and finishings.

On the edge of Kop Van Zuid is the Afrikaanderplein, a former football ground which has been redeveloped into a functional public park that includes a children's playground, aviary and hosts a weekly market.



Afrikaanderplein, a catalyst regeneration project



The weekly market at Afrikaanderplein

# Rotterdam: developing a healthy city

## Key learning points from participants



New residential development and public park in Katendrecht, an area that was previously port land.



New terrace houses and pedestrian street with the skyline of Rotterdam in the background.



Children's play space outside the Hotel New York on the Wilhelminapier.



The Rotterdam floating pavilion, a showcase of the City's water management, sustainability and the ambition for a floating residential community in this area previously used as a dock.



'Shell only' apartments are made available for young professionals to buy and fit out themselves. In the foreground is part of the weekly market at Afrikaanderplein.

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