

Tenant and landlord fully support

The Hendrik Conscience building at Koning Albert II laan, Brussels, belongs to AXA Belgium and houses the Flemish Ministry of Education and Training. Checking the user's real-estate needs compared to the building's properties is an ongoing task for facility and/or real-estate management.

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A building serves the life of the user" says Frank Geets, Administrator-General of the Facility Management Agency. "The building no longer met our current expectations in terms of sustainability, but as the Flemish Government, we prefer the North District of Brussels because of the excellent access by virtually all forms of public transport. No fewer than 90% of the users in the Hendrik Conscience building come by train!"

The lease on the **Hendrik Conscience** building did not expire until 2023, but in March 2015, owner AXA Belgium put forward a proposal for a thorough renovation of the building with a view to improving its sustainability and introducing the new way of working. In practical terms, the aim of this far-reaching renovation was to bring the building up to date. In return, a nine-year extension on the lease was expected, from 2023 to 2032. An open communication procedure with owner AXA Belgium was set up and this ultimately led to a 100% partnership and a win/win situation for both parties.

Focusing on BREEAM Excellent

The Flemish Ministry for Education and Training is to remain in the Hendrik Conscience building until 2032 while AXA Belgium will bear the cost of the major conversion work. The Flemish Government gave the go-ahead for this at the end of 2015 and the contract was signed at the end of January 2016. Frank Geets: "The building will be modified in phases so that it can remain operational. So there is no question of temporarily relocating to another site."

Sustainability is a key word in the Flemish Government's real-estate policy. One example of this is the new Flemish administrative centre, VAC Brussel, on the Tour & Taxis site, which when complete will be able to claim to be the biggest passive office building in Belgium.

Recycling buildings to improve them and ensure that they remain useable in the future is fully in line with this sustainability policy. What is more, it is a prime example of using tax revenue in an economically responsible manner.

AXA Belgium shares this same philosophy and aims to have its entire real-estate portfolio certified with the highest possible BREEAM label by 2020. "There is a lot of vacant property in the Brussels Noordwijk and we want to deal with that by optimising our buildings" comments Johan Pillaert, Key Account Public Sector at Axa Im Real assets. "The favourable location of the North District remains an attractive element in terms of business economics."

The Hendrik Conscience building is now around 15 years old and the far-reaching renovation will earn it BREEAM Excellent' label. The main focus in order to obtain this label is the technical installations, including passive cooling, as well as acoustic comfort.

"The new VAC Brussel complex is going for an A-energy performance label, which is extremely difficult to obtain for existing office premises like the Hendrik Conscience building, particularly given the fact that the building envelope, for instance, is not being modified"

Frank Geets admits. "Nonetheless, that's our goal for the highest possible percentage of the total surface."

100% partnership

Architectural rejuvenation cure

The plan developed by the two parties together includes both architectural adaptations and a complete refurbishment. The entrance to the building is being repositioned and redesigned to create more openness. The ground and first floors are intended to be a public space, set out as a meeting centre.

The company restaurant will close temporarily, but this is being offset by a pop-up unit and a new sandwich bar that will be completed by that time. The project is being carried out under the joint responsibility of both parties, paying strict attention to the schedule drawn up.

Attractive working environment

The renovation of the Hendrik Conscience building also provides an opportunity for the transition to the New way of working for public servants. That means, among other things, giving up individual workstations in favour of an open-plan layout.

At the moment, around a thousand people work in the Hendrik Conscience building. After the renovation work, the capacity will increase to 1,600 workstations. Each workstation will cover an average net surface area of 12.5m². Frank Geets: *"The quality of the working environment that we offer our staff was the top priority when developing the renovation concept. The entire phase plan for the renovation was discussed with the staff and this resulted in a workstation relocation arrangement."*

With a view to ensuring that it remains as operational as possible, the total office space is being divided into 16 zones.

"To support the continuity of the work, the building site and the office area will be strictly separated," Johan Pillaert explains. "The site section is only accessible directly from outside to take out construction rubble and bring in materials. This approach was inspired by the renovation/extension of shopping centres and other office buildings in our portfolio."

The Hendrik Conscience building has two underground levels, used for parking and archives. This project does not include any plans to extend the parking and archive capacity. Frank Geets: *"The education department has to keep teachers' dossiers for 20 years after their death! The aim is to evolve towards a department for centralised archiving for the Flemish Government outside the centre of Brussels."*

The renovated Hendrik Conscience building is to set an example in terms of ICT. In addition to a cable and wireless IT network, mobile phone network cover will be provided throughout the entire building (4G). DECT telephony will no longer be used. Instead, 'unified communications' will ensure that all forms of communication reach the right staff member.

The Hendrik Conscience building is the Flemish Government's second largest office building in Brussels, after the VAC. Frank Geets: *"The intention is to evolve from six to three locations, which should be feasible as a number of lease contracts expire from 2023"*.

Eduard CODDÉ



The ground and first floors are intended to be a public space, set out as a meeting centre. Inner courtyards will serve as terraces for staff in the summer.