



Fortress belts of Antwerp. Towards a strategic vision for urban forts and archaeological sites

City of Antwerp – Karen Minsaer

EFFORTS ANNUAL CONGRESS 2026, Diest 8-10 June 2026

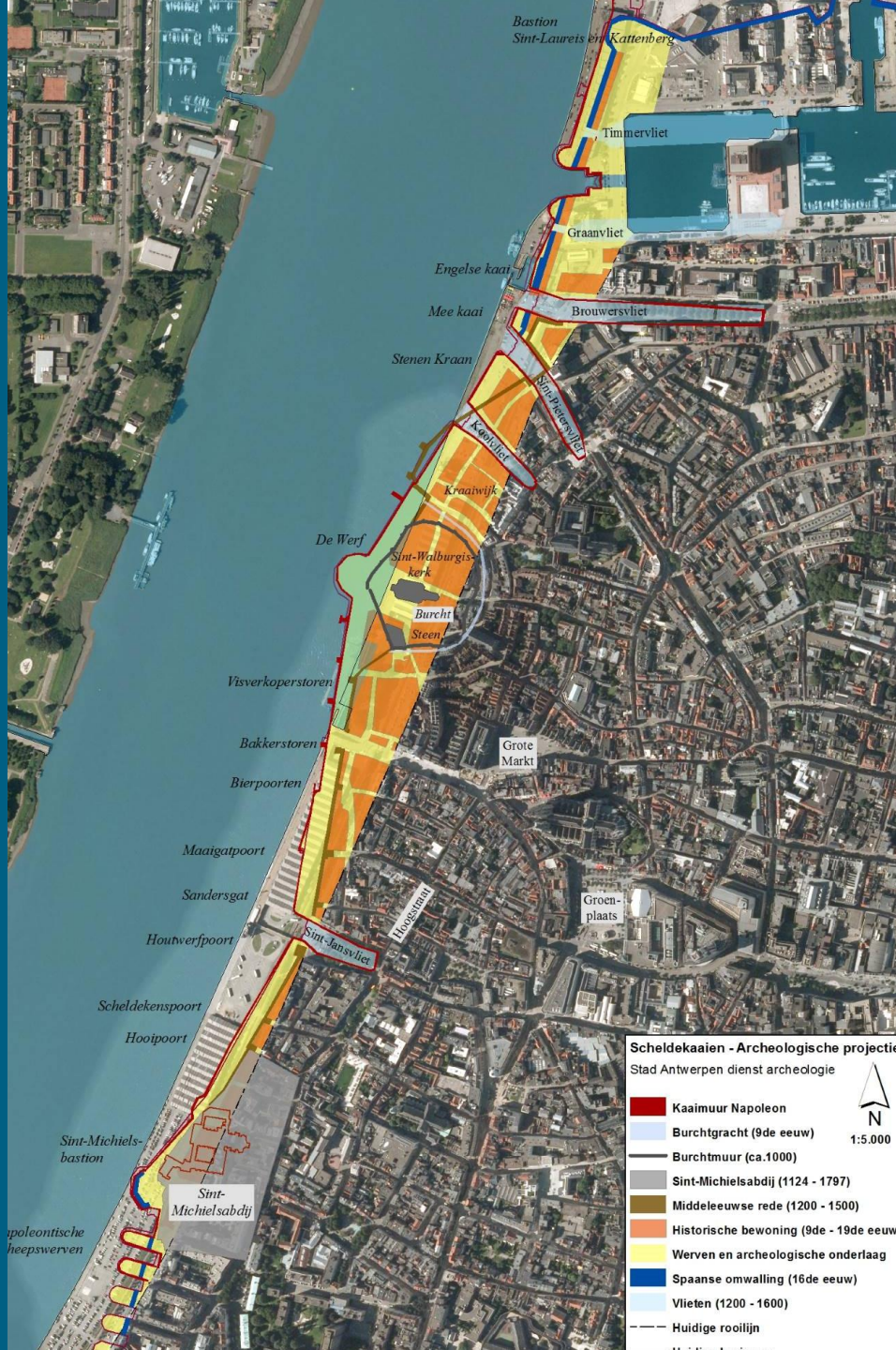


Content

1. The Stronghold of Antwerp
2. 16th. Century City Walls – *Spannish Rampart*
3. 19th Century City Walls – *Great Rampart*
4. The Inner Fortress Belt
5. The Scheldt Forts
6. Conclusion

The Stronghold of Antwerp

Reviving the Burcht site (9th-12th C.)



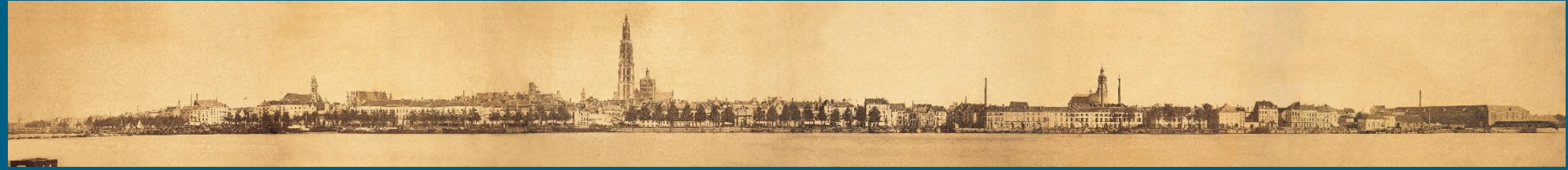
- Scheldekaaien - Archeologische projectie**
 Stads Antwerpen dienst archeologie
- Kaamuur Napoleon
 - Burchtgracht (9de eeuw)
 - Burchtmuur (ca.1000)
 - Sint-Michielsabdij (1124 - 1797)
 - Middeleeuwse rede (1200 - 1500)
 - Historische bewoning (9de - 19de eeuw)
 - Werven en archeologische onderlaag
 - Spaanse omwalling (16de eeuw)
 - Vlieten (1200 - 1600)
 - Huidige rooilijn
- 1:5.000



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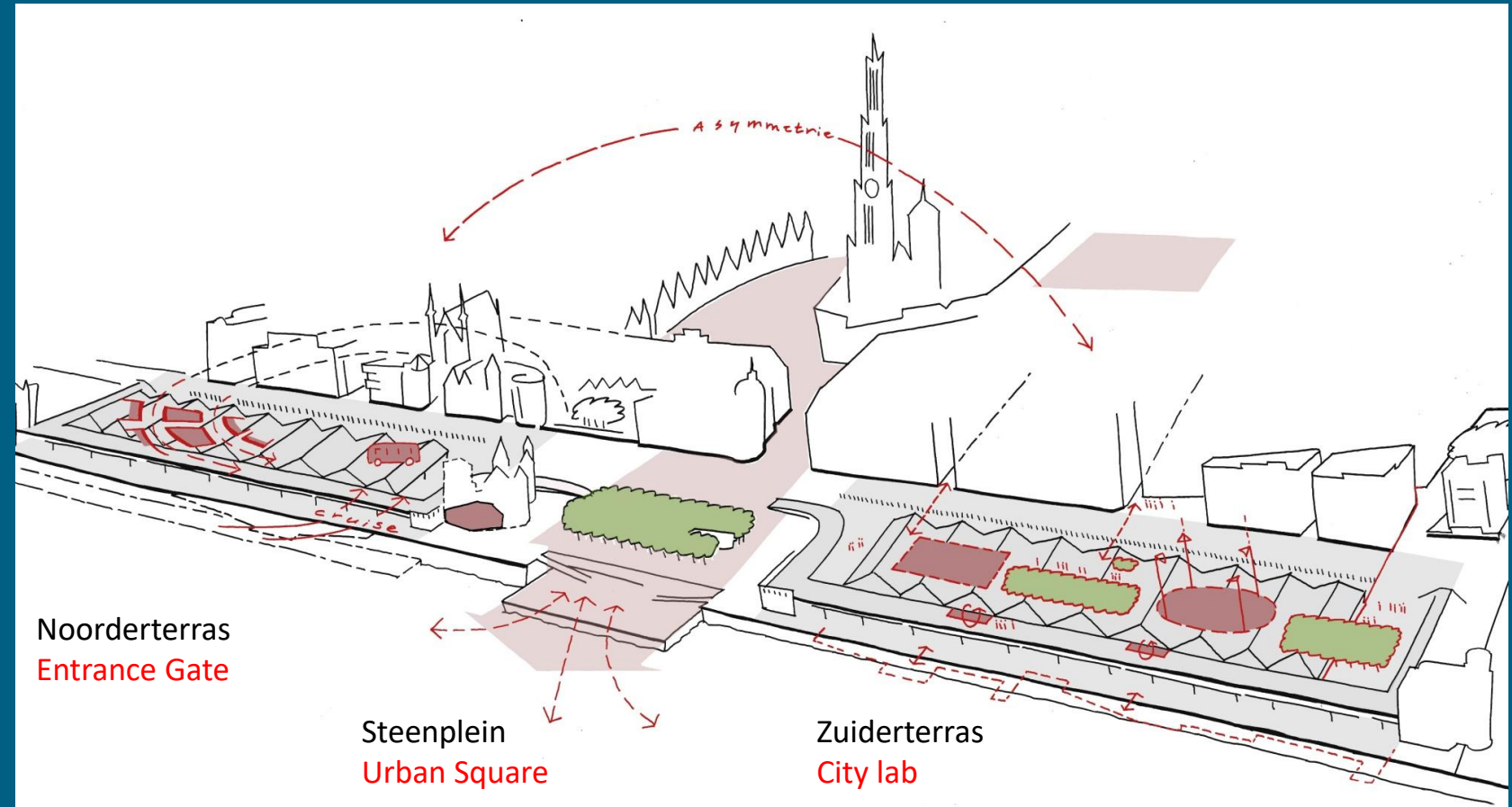
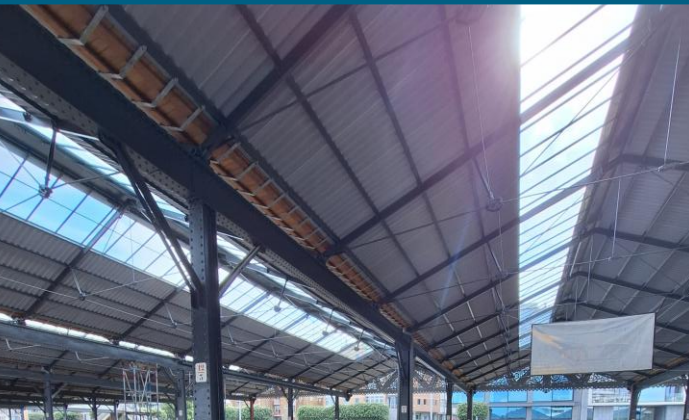
1600



1850



2000



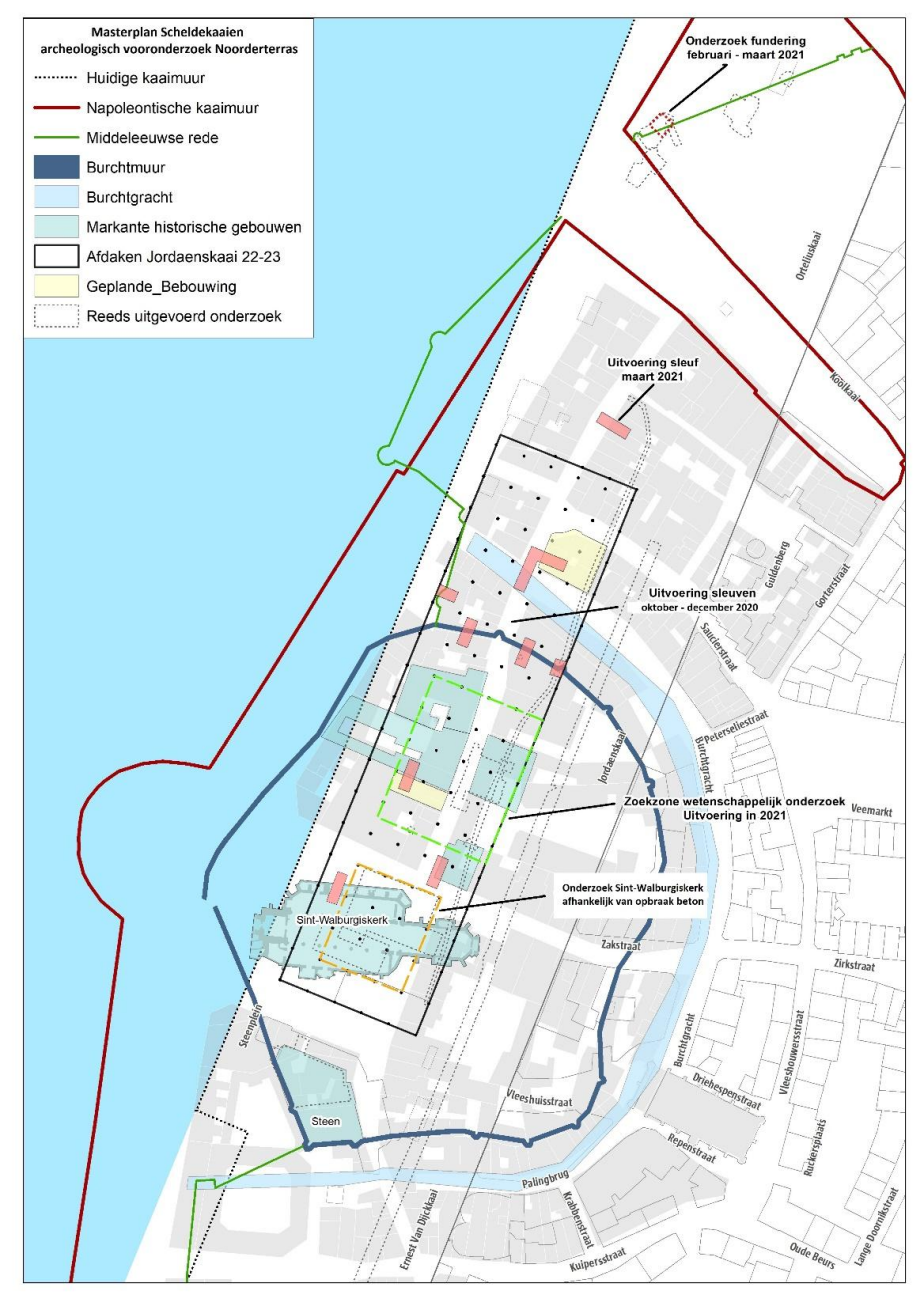
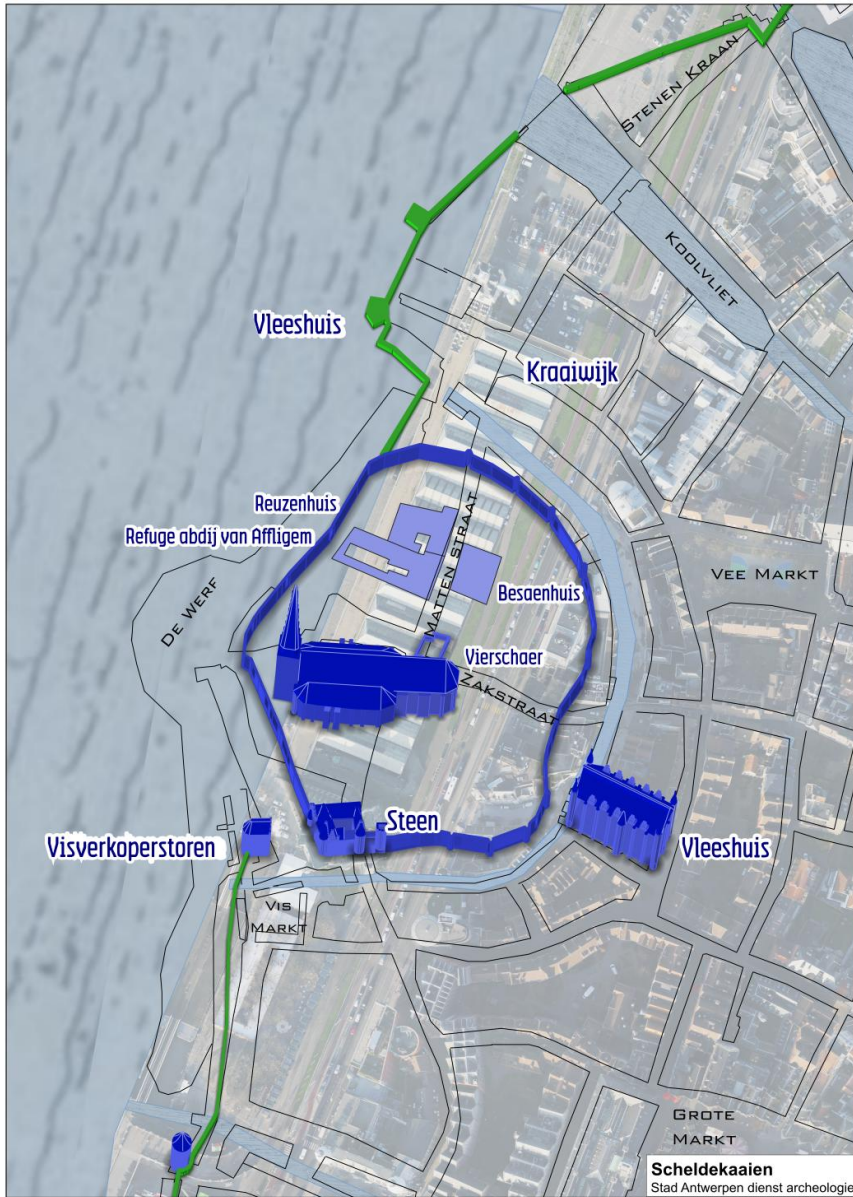
Masterplan Scheldt Quays

- 2010 Approved by City Council
- 7 km long, 7 sub zones
- 2020-2026 New design Central Zone
- 2027-2029 Excavations and construction works

Objectives

- Renovation of the quay wall
- Floodwall raised
- High-quality public space

Topsite Burcht en Noorderterras - Inspiratiekaart teaser (draft)



- Masterplan Scheldekaaien
archeologisch vooronderzoek Noorderterras**
- Huidige kaaimuur
 - Napoleontische kaaimuur
 - Middeleeuwse rede
 - Burchtmuur
 - Burchtgracht
 - Markante historische gebouwen
 - Afdaken Jordaenskaai 22-23
 - Geplande_Bebouwing
 - Reeds uitgevoerd onderzoek

Onderzoek fundering
februari - maart 2021

Uitvoering sleuf
maart 2021

Uitvoering sleuven
oktober - december 2020

Zoekzone wetenschappelijk onderzoek
Uitvoering in 2021

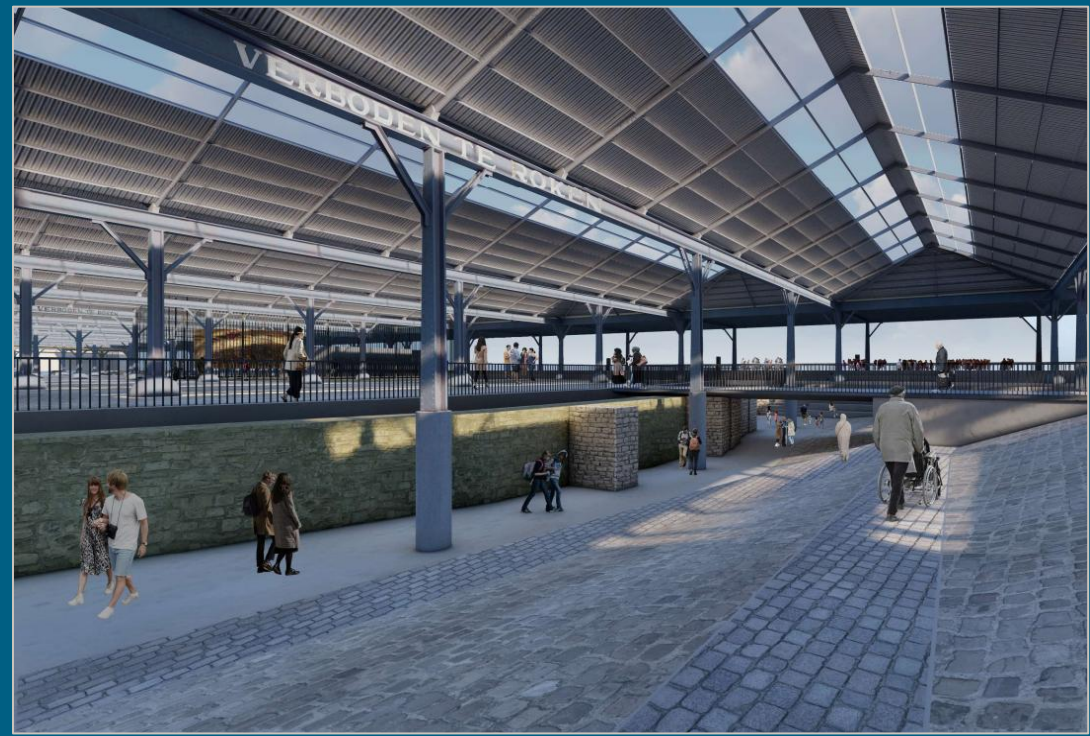
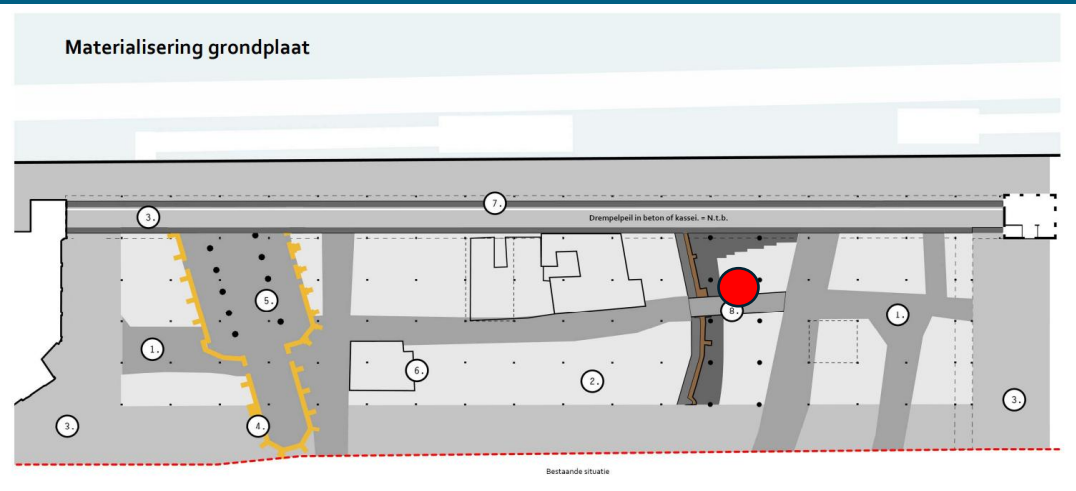
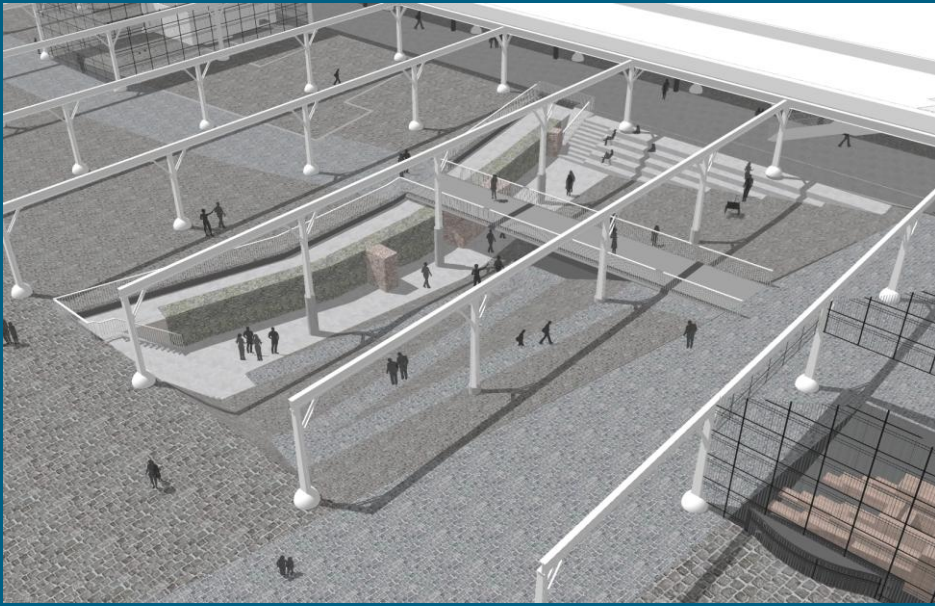
Onderzoek Sint-Walburgiskerk
afhankelijk van opbraak beton

0 14 28 42 56 m

Scheldekaaien
Stad Antwerpen dienst archeologie



Burchtmuur

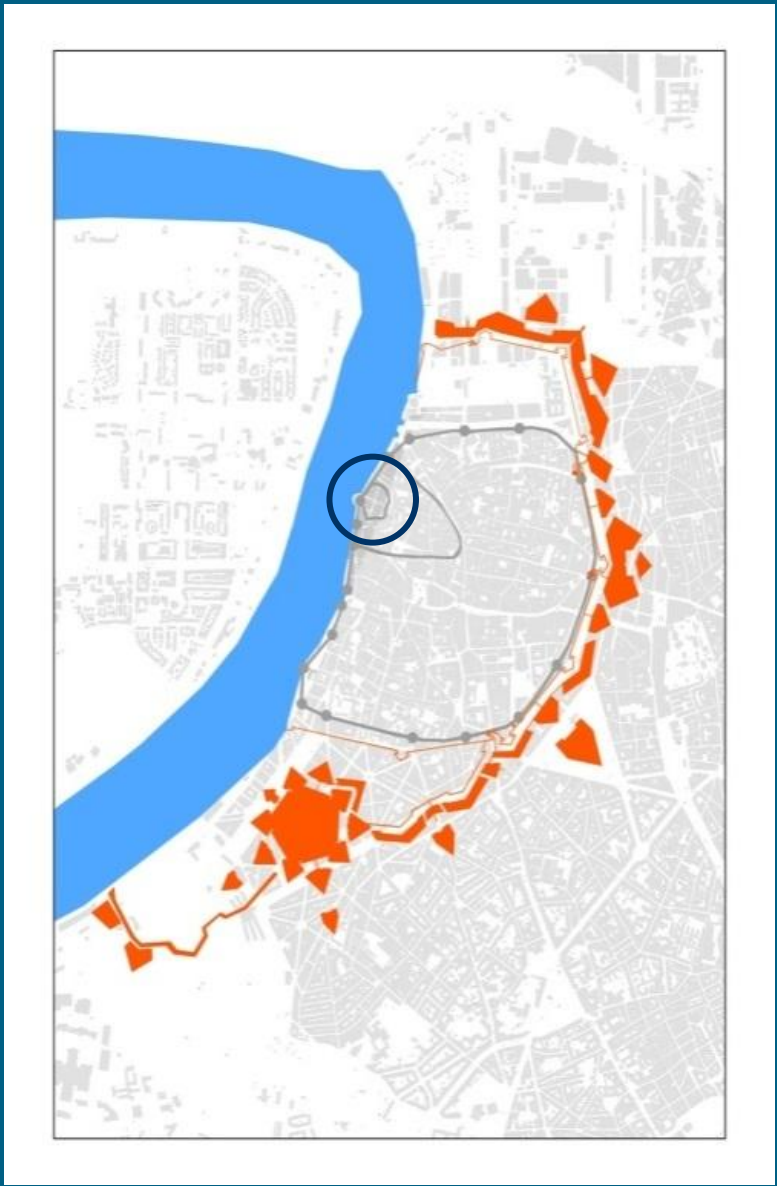
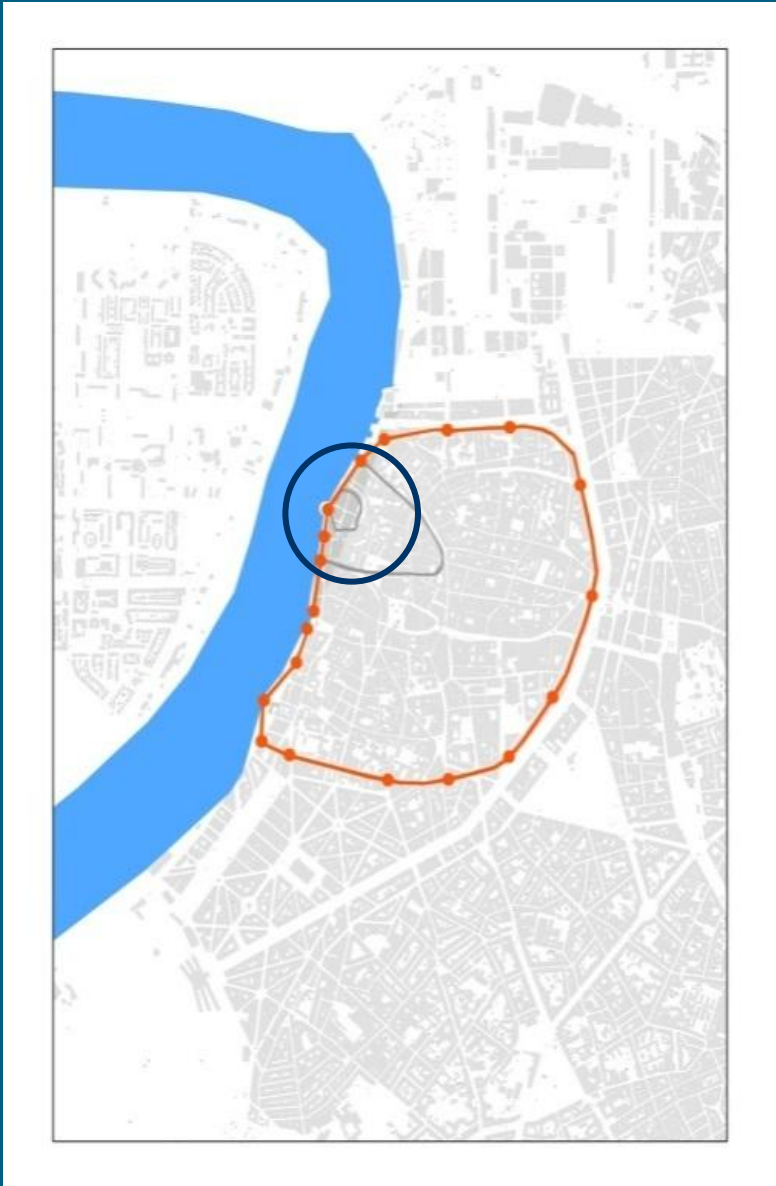


Integration of the burcht wall in the new quays – start large scale excavations in 2027

The 16th Century City walls

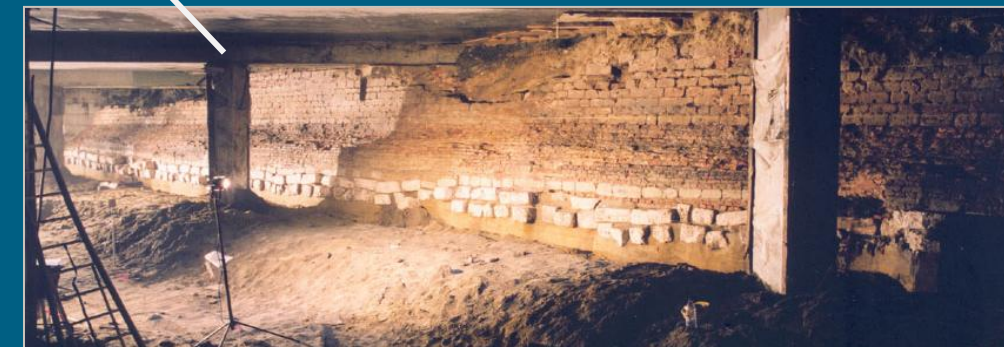
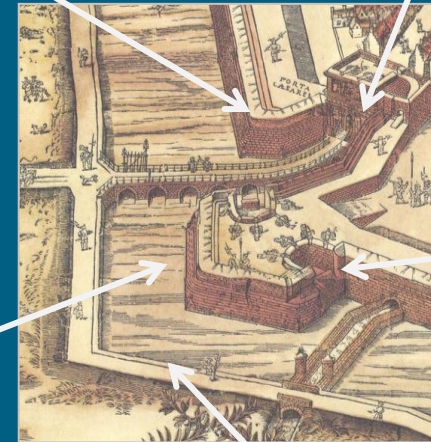
Sites of the Renaissance or *Spanish* Fortification

1200 – 1900 Radial expansion of Antwerp



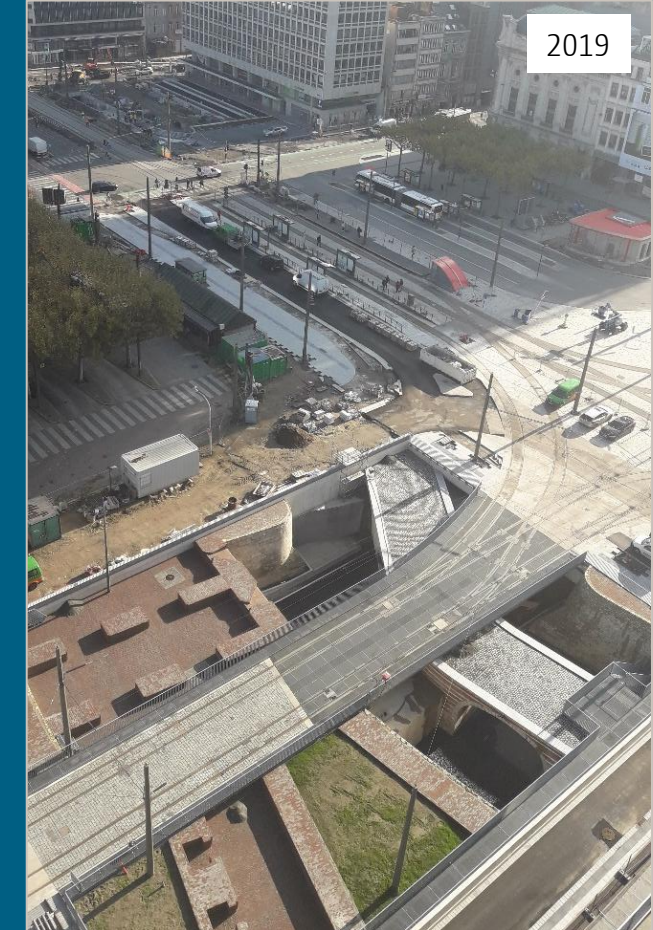
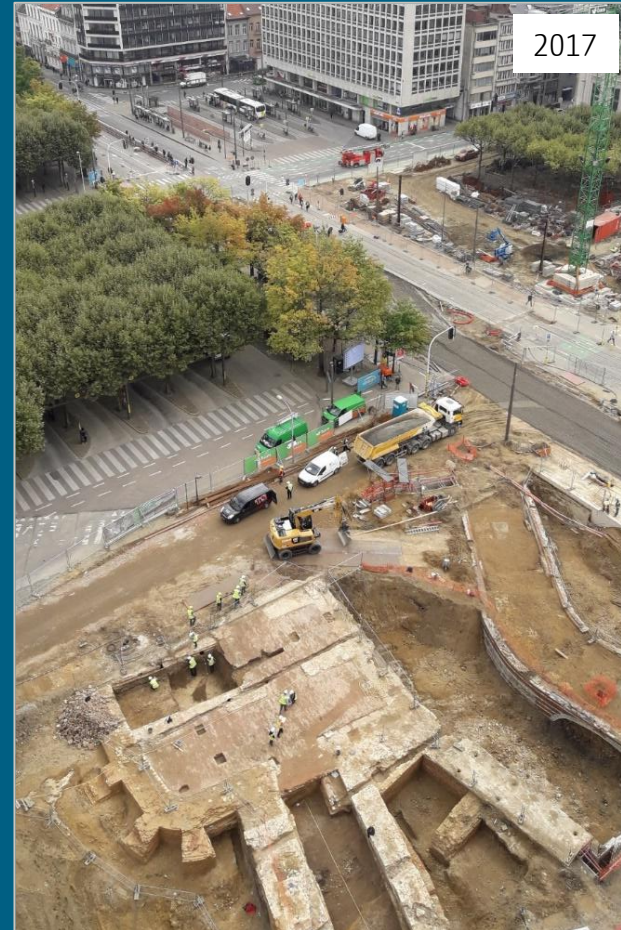
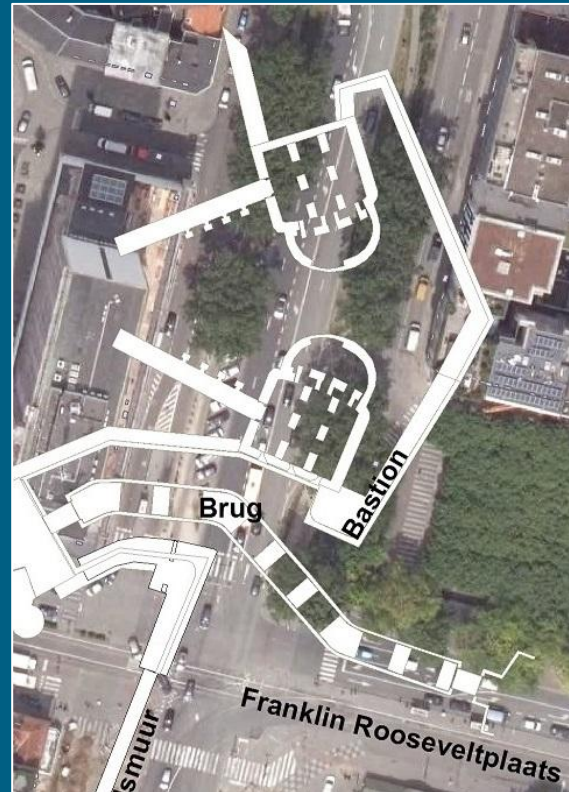
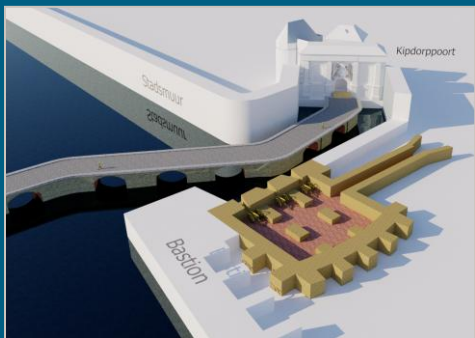
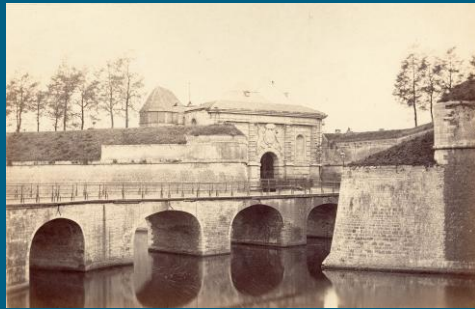
Emperor's Gate and bastion - 1545

- Excavations 2003
- Rescue operation approved by the Flemish government (rebuilt 2006)
- Interreg IVA-Program Forten en Linies
- Towards 'Welcome Gate' 2026-2029



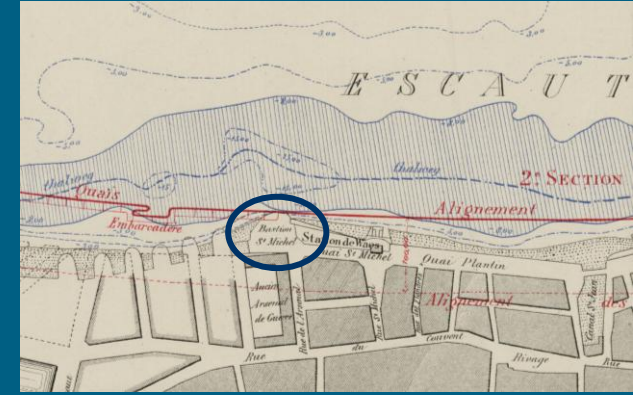
Kipdorp site 1545-50

- Excavations 2017-2019
- Integration in Public domain and complex with tunnels, tramway
- Reconstruction of bridge, bastion and city walls
- 19th C. demolition maps, 19th C. casemate phase



Sint-Michael's bastion 1550, 1608

- Excavations 2010, 2022-2023
- Not endangered; large potential
- Integration in Scheldt Quays
- Green - blue Experience
- Link of Heritage Program Historic Harbour



Vision for the 16th C. bastioned fortification

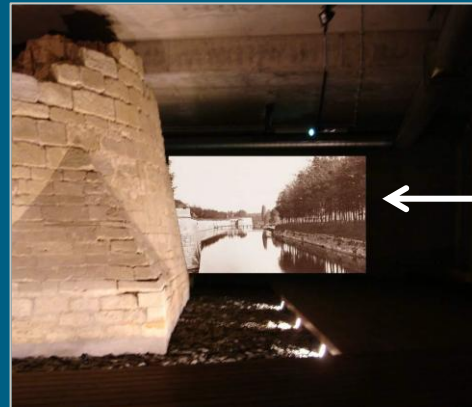
- Pearls in a necklace
- **Kipdorp**: Unique military site
- **Emperor's Gate** – Entrance/ Welcome Gate for visitors
- **St.-Michael's bastion** link to Eighty Years' War and the history of the Harbour



St.-Michael 's bastion, 2023



Mud Gate, bastion visualization



Emperor 's bastion, 2006



Bastion 'Schijn', visualization



Kipdorp site, 2019



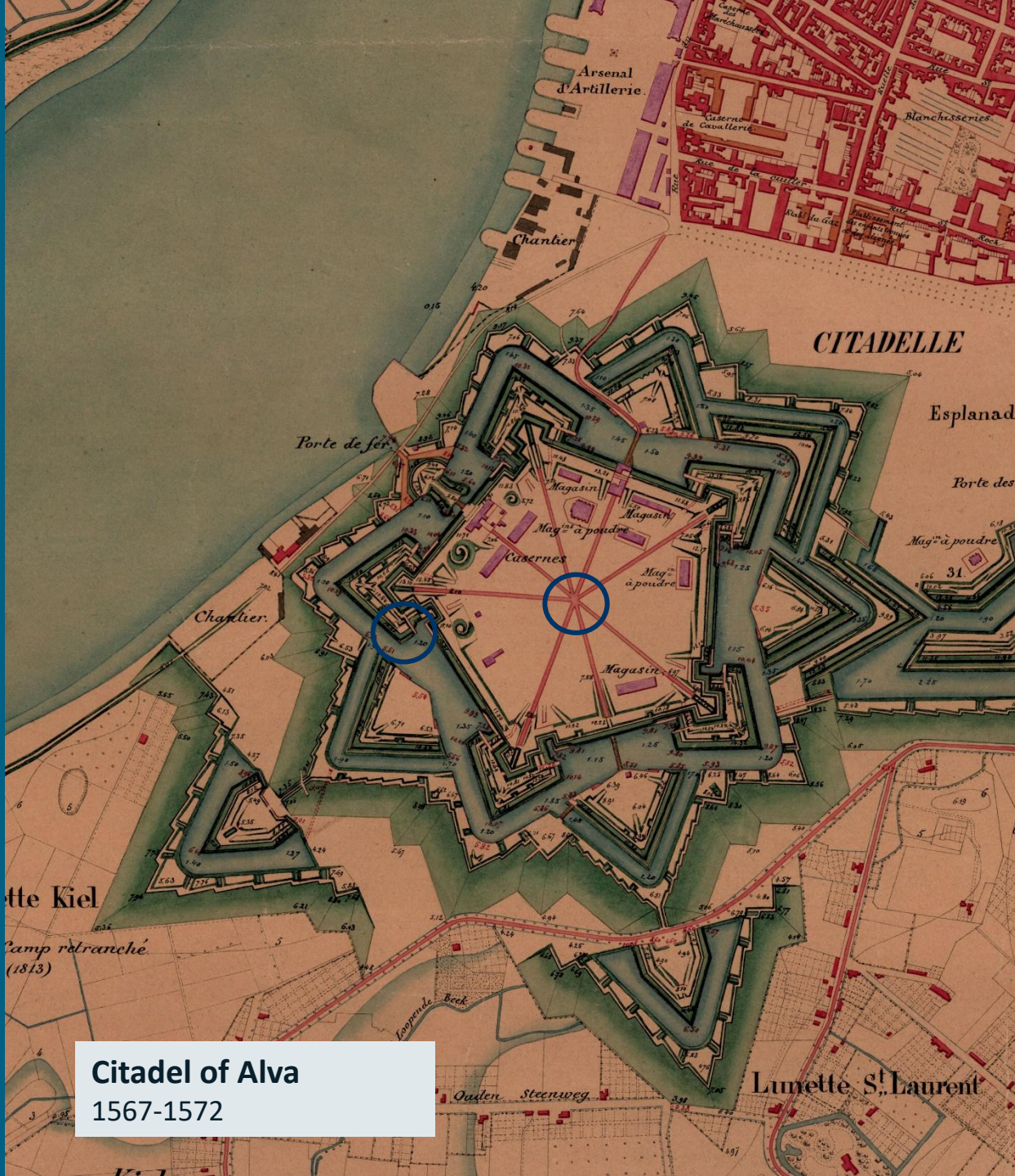
Blue Tower, impression



Brewery cellar, visualization



'Schijn' lock, impression



Citadel of Alva
1567-1572



Citadel Vase, 2023



Bastion Alva, Konhef expo, 2022

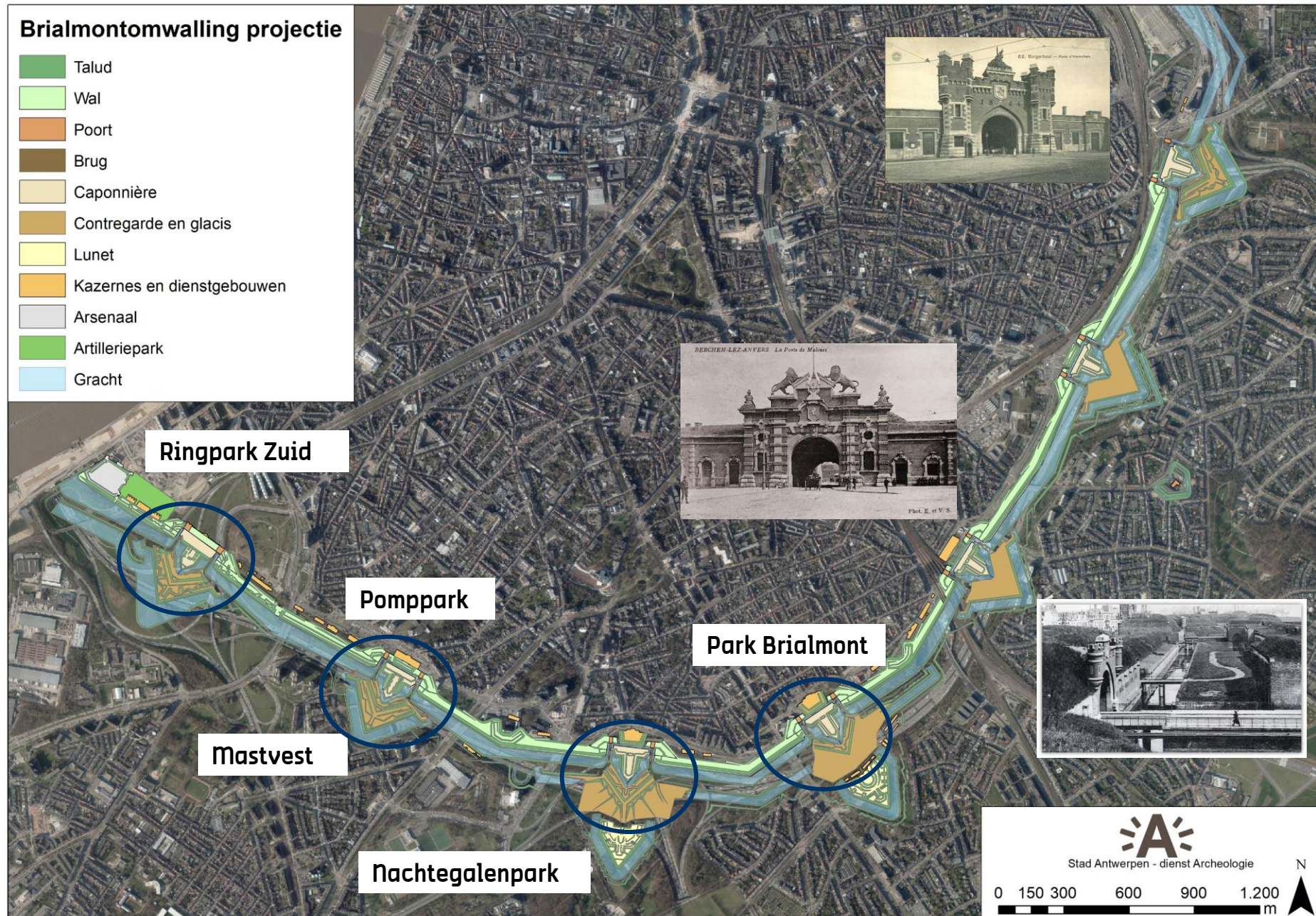


The 19th Century City walls

National Redit – Great Rampart and Inner fortress Belt (brick forts)

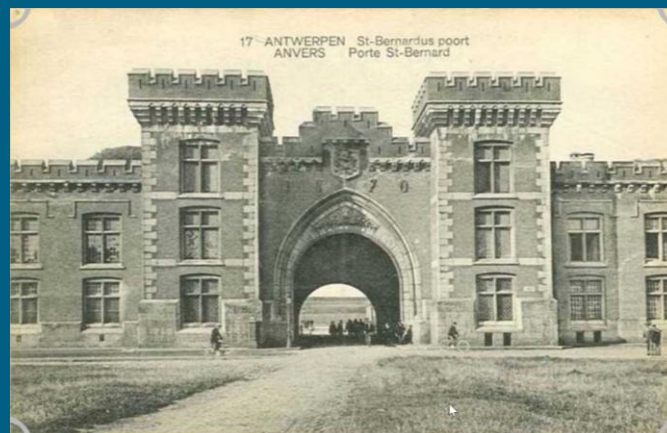
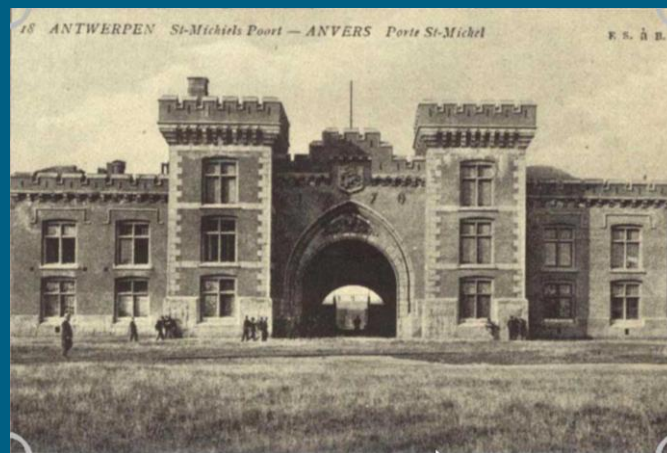
Great rampart

- Ring fortification (wall and forts)
- Polygonal system
- 19 Gates
- Demolished during 20th Century
- 15 km long archaeological zone



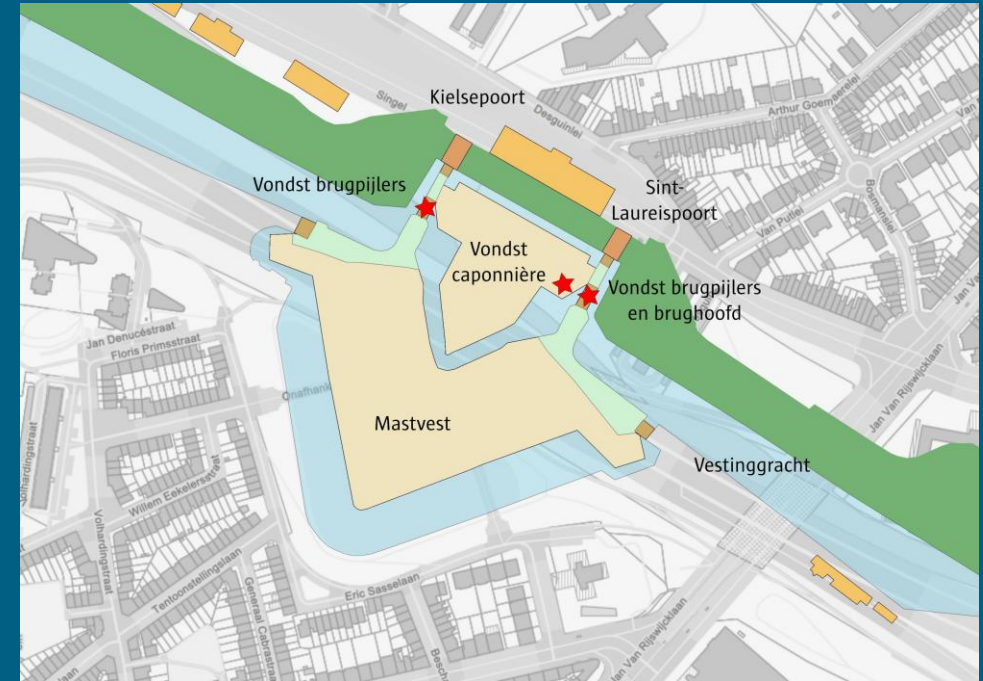
Ring Park South

- *Sint-Michiels- en Sint-Bernardus Gate*
- Design process 2021-2025
- Integration of archaeological remains - caponnière
- Nature – Heritage balance
- Asset for tourism and recreation



Pomppark South

- *Kielse- en Sint-Laureis Gate*
- Design process 2025-2026
- Integration of archaeological remains of bridge and caponnière
- Nature – Heritage balance
- Part of Ring Parks



The Fortress belt

National Reduit – Great Rampart and Inner Fortress Belt (8 brick forts)

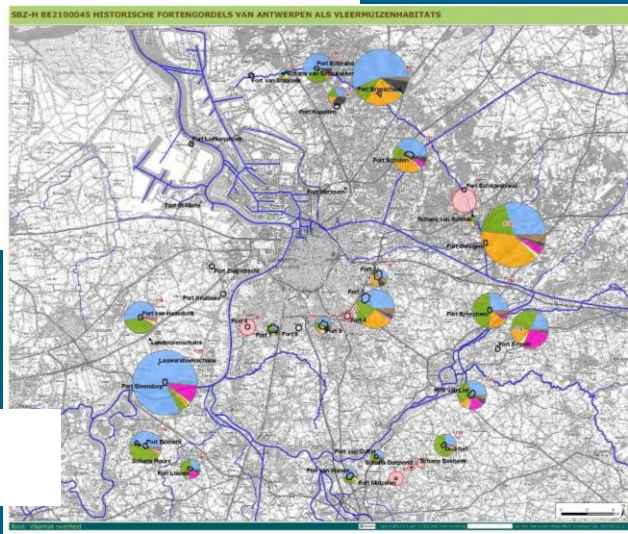
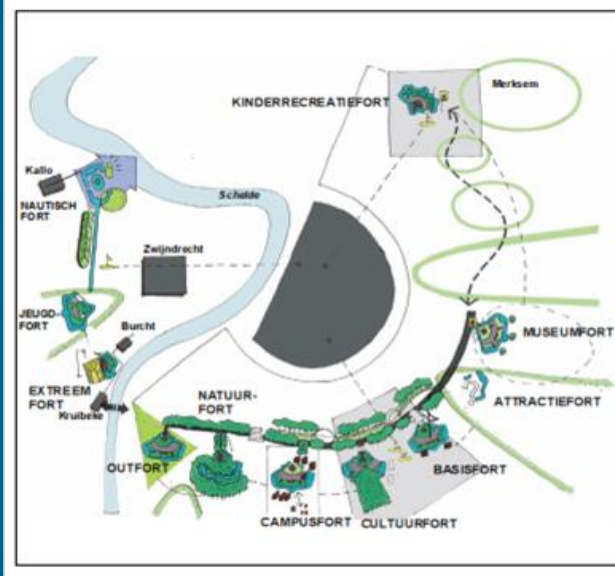
Strategic Vision

Province of Antwerp

- *Study Herover de forten 2002*
- Interreg IVA project *Forten en Linies* (2009-2013)
 - Interreg projects
 - Strategic projects
 - Visitor Gates
 - Logo
- **Kaderplan** Interreg projects
 - Fase 1 Analysis
 - Fase 2 Vision
 - Fase 3 Action Plan



Study by Stramien Architects 2002



Analysis habitat of bats (macro)



Ecological study (macro)

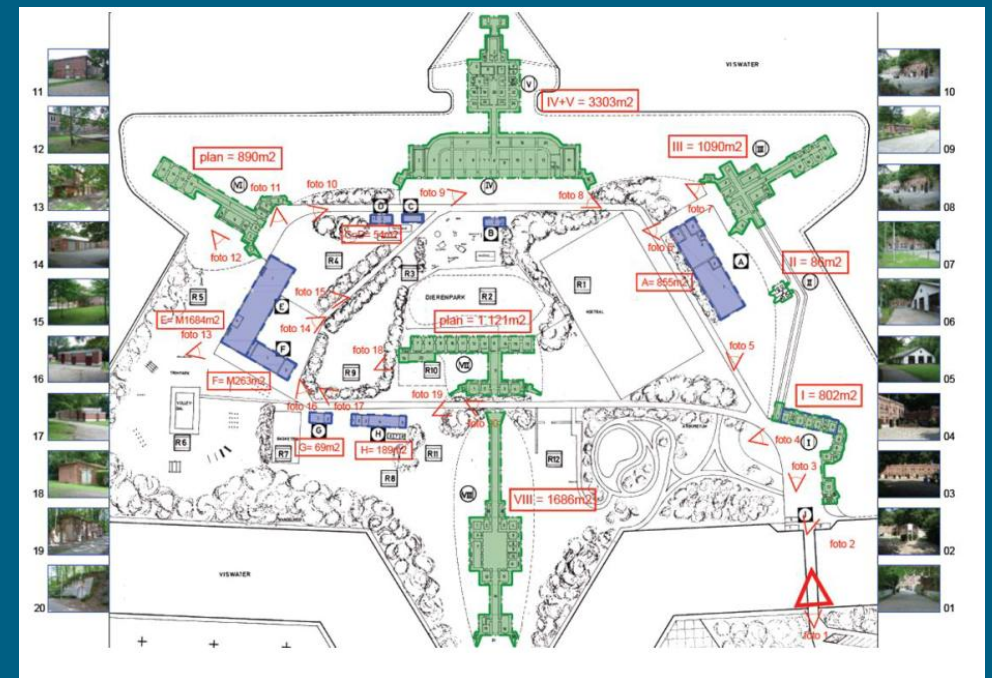
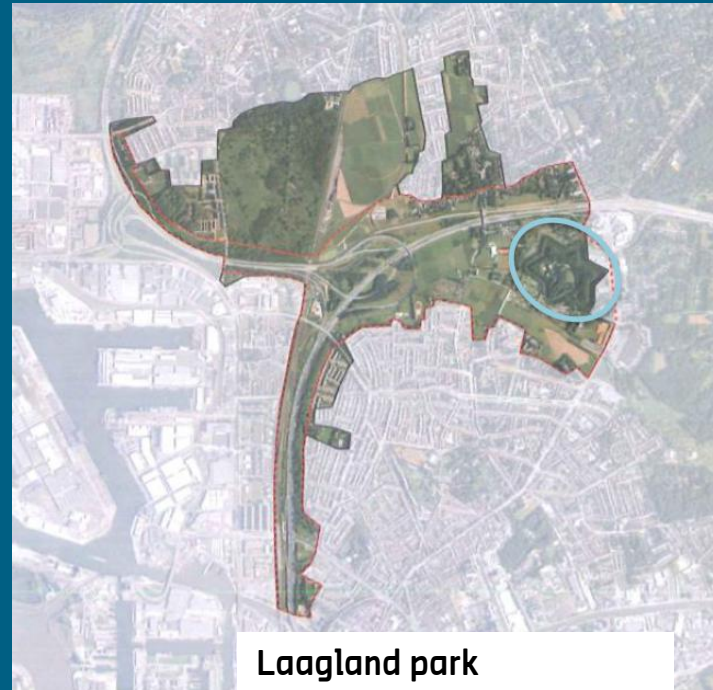


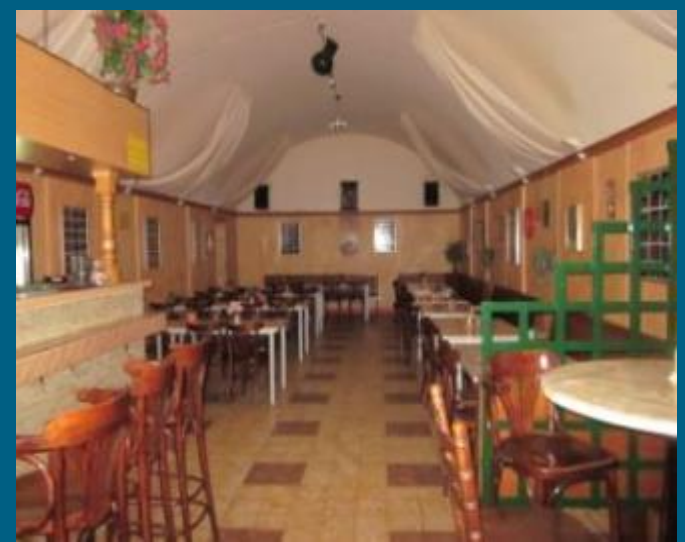
Vision for *Antitankgracht* (meso)

Kaderplan 2012

Fort Merksem AG Vespa

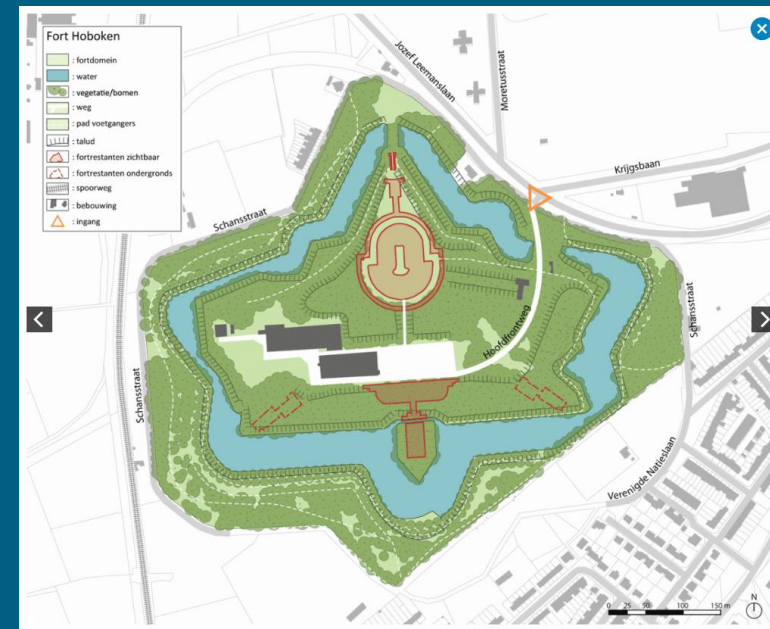
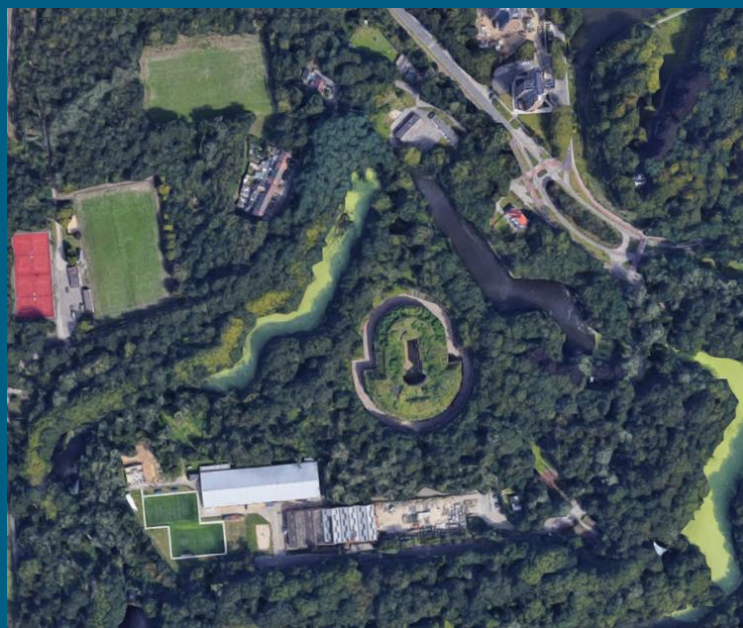
- 25 ha
- Military infrastructure 9.000m²
- Later additions 3.100m²
- Monumental Heritage (invent.)
- Recreation and Park Zone (Part of Laaglandpark/ Noorderpark)
- Used by sport clubs, associations and community life
- **Focus:** security of buildings and structures, contracts, attractive public domain



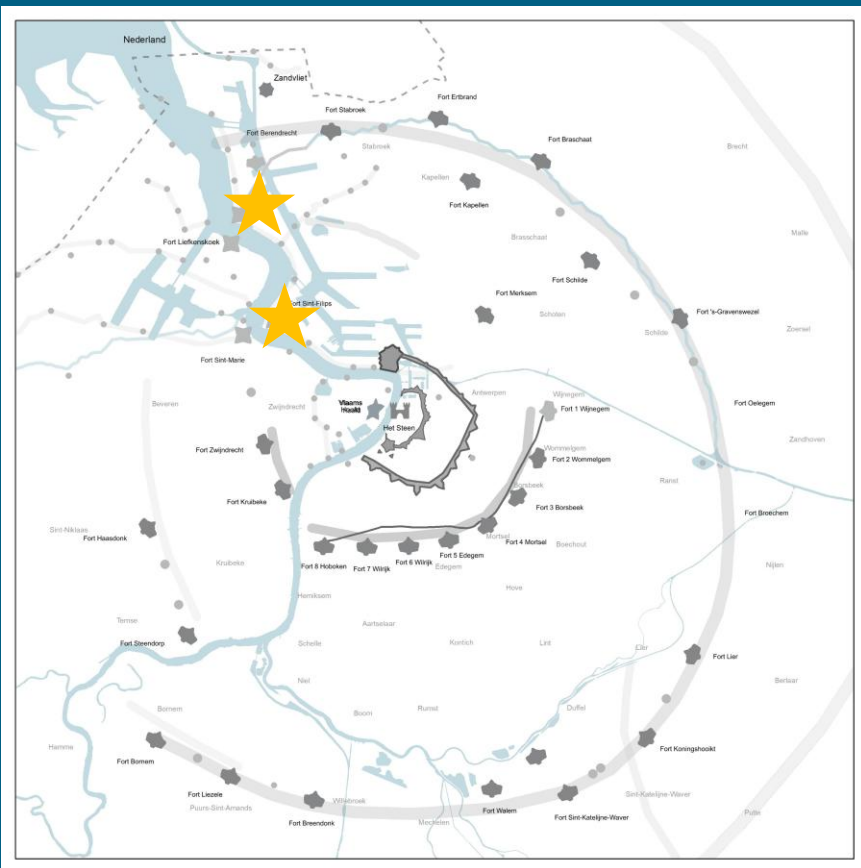


Fort 8 Hoboken AG Vespa

- Masterplan 2012
- Reduit 12.307m², Contrescarp 2.465m²
- Later additions
- Used by sport and hobby associations; outdoor events (private concession)
- **Focus:** security of the buildings, contracts for users, strategic plan for continuation of investments

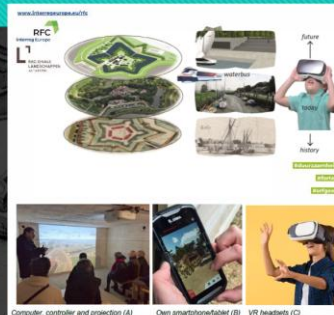


The Scheldt forts



Pilot Action 'Virtuafort'

- VR Application Lillo
 - Immersive technology
- Switch between past – present – future
 - Past = ca. 1640
 - Future = masterplan



Fort Lillo

- Masterplan 2009
- Reconstruction of 5 bastion 17th c. design
- Reconstruction Entrance bridge (model fort Liefkenshoek)
- VR-project 2022 (UA and Visual Dimension (RFC))



Conclusion

Oldest parts: archaeological remains

-> vision for valorization (pearls in a necklace)

Burcht site on Scheldt Quays, Spanish and 19th C. fortification and fort Lillo

Sites in public domain with recreative and tourist assets

Priority increasing visibility and enhancing the narrative

Forts of the Inner Belts

-> Vision on city management by AGVespa

Fort Merksem, Fort 3 Borsbeek and Fort 8 Hoboken

Large forts, used by clubs and community; large restoration costs and security issues

Priority security, investment in quality, developing an action plan

Networks

- Forten en Linies in Grensbreed Perspectief (Interreg 2009-2013)
- EFFORTS Annual Congress (2019)
- Recapture the Fortress Cities (Interreg, RFC 2019)
- Peer review Fortress Belts 2021
- Interl_Linie (Regional Landscape)
- Platform Vlaamse Vestingsteden (2022)
- **PROTECH 2024** (Interreg) Preventive Conservation of European Heritage (2025-2029)

