

C. Critical Reconstruction Masterplan

The city also belongs to the prisoners!

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Ducpétiaux model
Stéphane Beel
new prison Beveren
new prison Dendermonde
reverse integration

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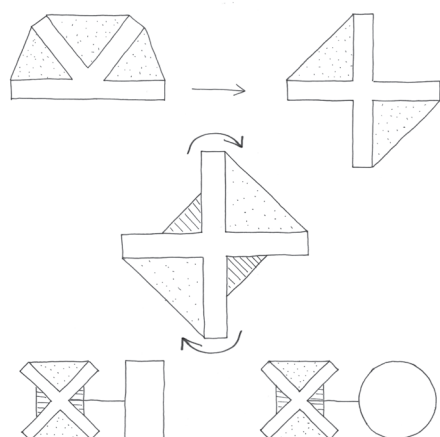
— Modernisation of prisons in Belgium is in full swing. The Valaar site in Wilrijk was recently announced as the location for the new Antwerp detention facility. With a view of the project definition for Antwerp, it is important to learn from the finalised design process of the prisons in Beveren and Dendermonde. Stéphane Beel's clean design can after all not disguise that prisons are already outmoded at the time of completion.

Form without content

It is thanks to Stefaan De Clerck, former Belgian Minister of Justice, that within the historic wave of renewal of prisons, substantial attention is being paid to the architectural and spatial qualities of prisons. With an ambitious Master Plan 2008-2012-2016 and a visionary offensive, expectations were certainly increased. The architectural and spatial qualities were also included as a criterion (20 points out of a 100) in the public tender for the so-called 4Gs – a public-private partnership (DBFM) for the construction of prisons in Beveren, Dendermonde, Leuze-en-Hainaut and Marche-en-Famenne.

The exaggerated ambitions met with fierce criticism from Peter Vermeulen (Ruimte Magazine #4, Jan-Feb 2010). He argued that the architectural quality impulse was unrelated to a well-thought-out vision on humane detention. After all, the first selection of candidate builders was based on financial capacity, references and an extremely modest 'vision on detention'. Vermeulen predicted that the introduction of well-known, prestigious architects is insufficient for a fundamental renewal of prison architecture.

This prediction is today confirmed by the construction of the prisons in Beveren and Dendermonde by Dutch developer BAM-PPP. The parties involved naturally boast about the realisation of quality architecture. It is however doubtful whether Stéphane Beel's signature architectural style also involves a renewal in content. An update in the criminal sentencing is nowhere to be found in the design; Edouard



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Ducpétiaux¹ nineteenth-century vision is maintained and the Basic Law 2005 (Basiswet)² is largely ignored.

The dominant position of the cell clearly shows that life in the prisons of Beveren en Dendermonde will be hardly any different from that in previous centuries. There is nothing to exclude the use of cells by multiple persons. The entire space outside of the cells is designed from a viewpoint of security angst – not from a more positive vision on work, recreation or reintegration into society. And again we see a generic design that, using some minor modifications, can be reproduced at various locations.

¹ Edouard Ducpétiaux (1804-1864) was the first inspector general of Belgian prisons and is seen as one of the most important reformers.

² The Basic Law concerning the prison system and the legal position of the inmates (2005) defines the human rights of prisoners for the first time in Belgian history.



Gate of Beveren - Gate of Dendermonde
De centrale as wordt geflankeerd door vier verschillende seizoenstuinen die de gedetineerde in contact brengt met de tijdelijkheid van zijn verblijf.
© BAM PPP



Beel model

Stéphane Beel's design for Beveren and Dendermonde shows how modernisation of the Ducpétiaux model ends with... the Ducpétiaux model. The design repeats and emphasises some of the basic qualities of the nineteenth-century model.

First, we see a return to open galleries in which natural light penetrates through an open attic room. According to the architect, the clearly defined living space improves contact amongst users and between users and prison warders. This is remarkable, seeing how in existing prisons the cell wings are clearly divided on each floor, in order to stop any unrest from fanning out. Any loss of security due to the open gallery is now compensated by designing the cell wings in such a way that they end in a point. The perspective thus created makes all cell doors visible in one glimpse from the central viewing point.

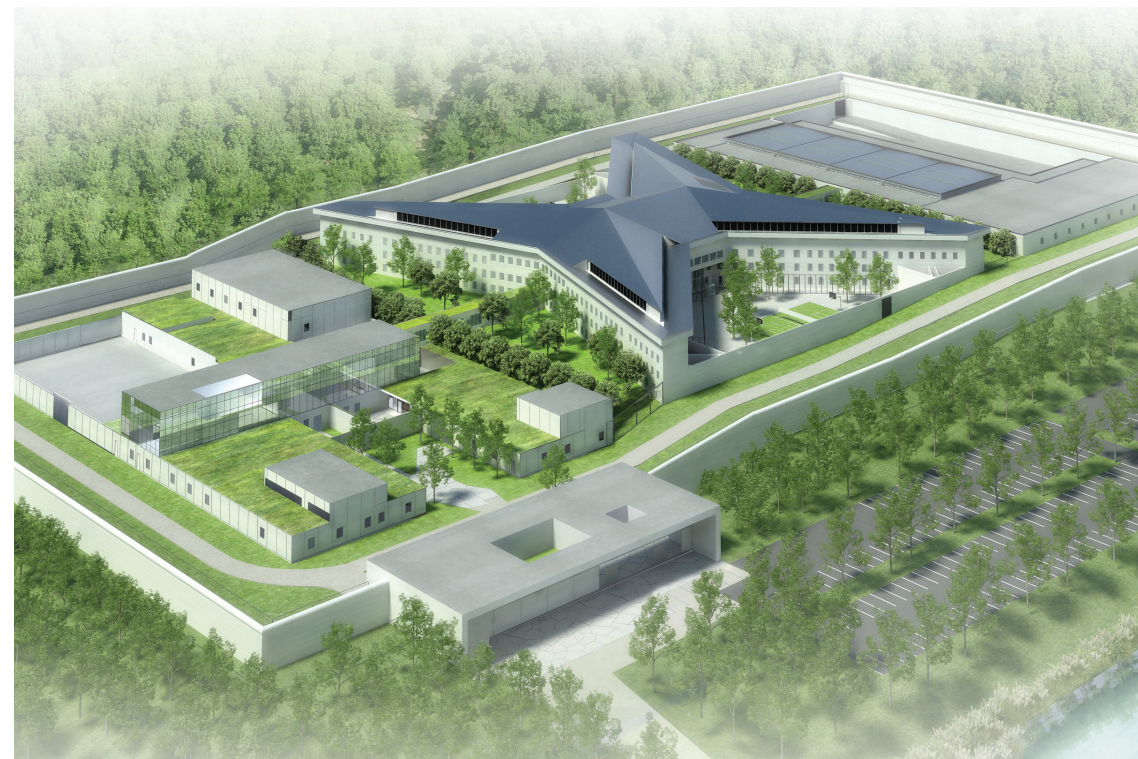
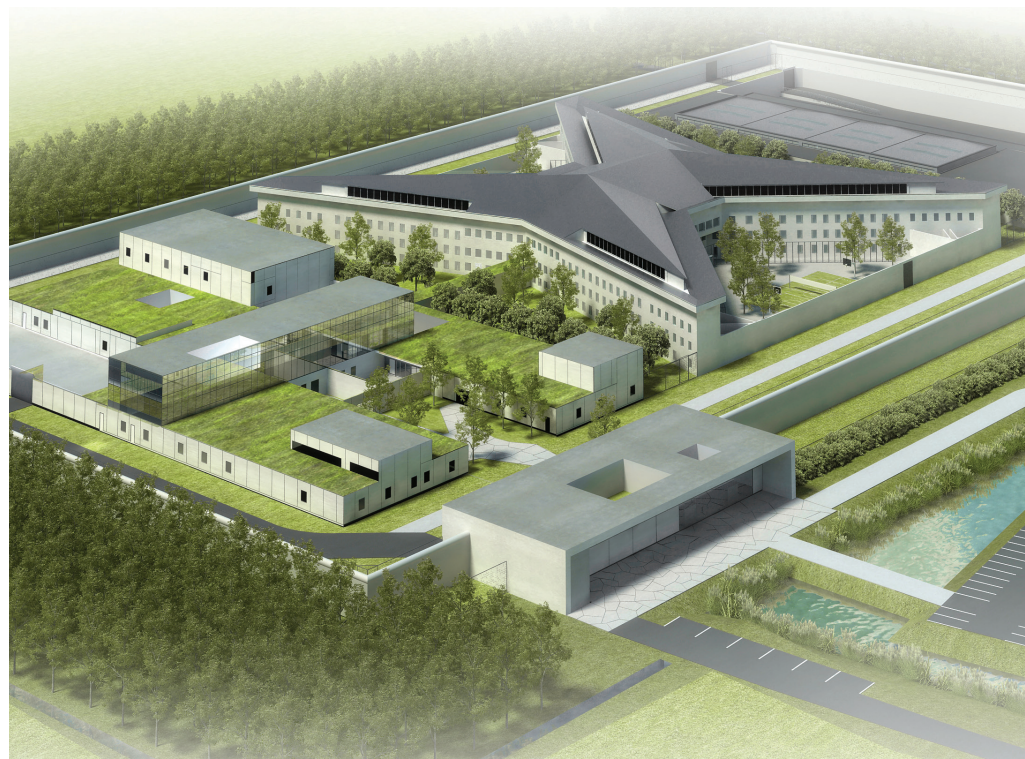
Second, the basic floor plan is a central, cruciform cell complex flanked on one side by an administrative and recreational department, which also includes the visitors' area (U shaped), with on the other side a logistical department in which prisoners

work (a rectangular floor plan). The various spaces are strung together by means of a narrow connecting hallway. A remarkable advantage of the spatial translation of the functional diagram is that the circulation of prisoners is concentrated in the backbone of the complex. The cells and outdoor areas – euphemistically named the 'living quarters' – are thereby isolated within a second, internal perimeter.

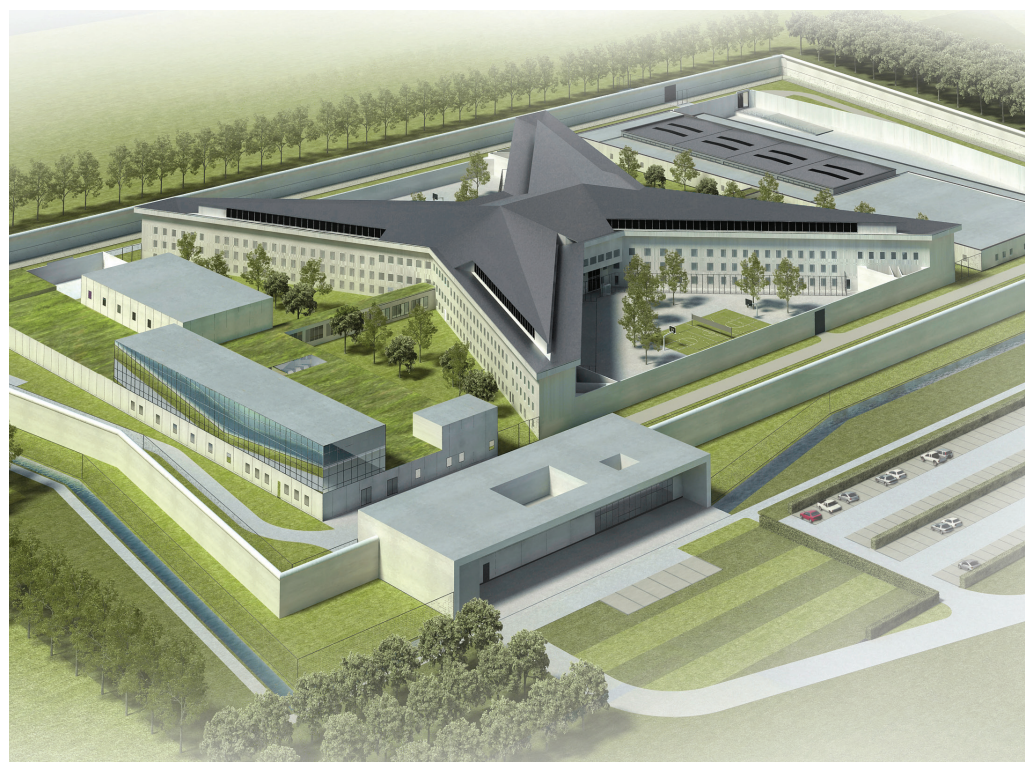
Third, we can see how the positioning at right angles with the motorway (E17 in Beveren) and the railway track (Gent-Dendermonde line) makes the prison complex highly visible from these main arteries. The prison thereby acts as a city gateway in both locations, which was also emphasised in the working titles given to the prison designs. In the 19th-century tradition of urban prisons, the new prison is a moral gesture towards the passer-by. Instead of the daunting Baroque Revival entrance ports, we now see a transparent and inviting building, surrounded by a green meadow with geometrically arranged trees and grazing sheep.

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Beel Model
The generic design is adaptable to several locations. BAM-PPP
reproduced the design by Stéphane Beel for the offering in Beveren,
Dendermonde (left), Leuze-en-Hainaut and Marche-en-Famenne (right).
© BAM PPP



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Back to the future

Stéphane Beel's design for the prisons of Beveren and Dendermonde elevates the hope for humane sentence implementation. The modernist form language is however geometrically opposed to the centuries-old idea of sentence implementation it embodies. Even though the three design interventions discussed are without a doubt an improvement on the 19th century prison complexes, the undifferentiated and individual isolation remains unchanged. The causal chains of criminal offences or perspective for the future of the prisoner are not much of a force to the sentence implementation.

Furthermore, optimum exploitation takes precedence over a humane prison climate. For instance, a strive for an optimum personnel ratio (personnel/prisoners) is disguised as a search for a maximum sense of security – in particular in the visual connection of units that are situated one above the other in the open galleries. This while the added value of the much-discussed private sanitary cell unit also stems from an average reduction in water usage and internal transfers, which has a direct impact on personnel cost.

However, the developer and architects cannot really be blamed when the tender itself contains the same contradictions. While the Sentence Implementation Bill (Strafuitvoeringsnota) was written on provisional terms, the Performance Plan (Performantiebestek) imposes the

ambiguous demand for offering maximum material possibilities for a humane sentence implementation while minimizing its operational cost. This while the architecture jury paid little attention to the wider context of the design tender and was convinced by the stimulating clarity of the functional diagram.

On top of all that former Belgian Minister De Clerck was also convinced of the capacity of the Ducpétiaux model in the 21st century, after, at the final hour, having removed the D word from the Performance Plan. The change of course took place at the initiative of the directorate general of the prison system and was based on its good experiences with the 'Nieuwe Wandeling' prison in Gent. But all the same, the developers had already excluded any possible risk while drawing up the tender when reading sentences such as "centrally controlled management entity with multiple wing structure."

Humane sentencing

Hope for modernisation of criminal sentencing was renewed with the Haren prison. The new complex was to replace the old prisons at Sint-Gillis, Vorst and Berkendael. Considering the extraordinary size, plans were made for a true prison village with a total capacity of 1190 spaces. The program includes a detention facility and a men's prison, an open and closed women's prison, a youth prison and a forensic psychiatric centre - all separated from each other.



Gate of Beveren - Gate of Dendermonde
The clearly defined living space improves contact amongst users and between users and prison warders. © BAM PPP



Gate of Beveren - Gate of Dendermonde
The perspective of the cell wings makes all cell doors visible in one glimpse from the panoptical centre. © BAM PPP

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Gate of Beveren - Gate of Dendermonde
Instead of the daunting Baroque Revival entrance
ports, we now see a transparent and inviting
building, surrounded by a green meadow.
© BAM PPP



Gate of Beveren - Gate of Dendermonde
The positioning at the motorway (Beveren) and the railway
track (Dendermonde) makes the prison highly visible.
© BAM PPP



After the experience with the 4Gs, a so-called intelligent specification report was drawn up at the initiative of the Brussels and Flemish Government Architect. It was assumed that the absence of the anticipated modernisation in Beveren and Dendermonde was the result of a lack of freedom of movement in the Performance Plan. Architectural consultants were then added to the team of legal experts which were hired by the Belgian Buildings Authority (Regie der Gebouwen). At the moment (Spring 2013) the result of the intelligent specification report cannot be assessed – whereby the benefit of the doubt remains.

What nonetheless still raises questions concerning the intelligent specification report is that the design process of the 4Gs suffered more from a lack of direction. The openness that the Belgian Buildings Authority created in the tenders up to a certain extent – by for instance removing the D word – made that developers used every opportunity to return to the established model. The conservative reflex will probably not be any different now that for the prison village in Haren the initial tendering procedure is estimated at 250 to 300 million Euros.

The main problem is rather the absolute refusal of the commissioning government to put forth a visionary framework for humane prison architecture in which candidate builders can make clear choices – according to the Flemish Building Master this is the necessary basis for a qualitative design.

Only within a visionary framework can there be room for the drawing up of designs/ tenders that speak the same language in terms of content, while using different spatial typologies and strategies.

Reverse integration

Today the first steps are taken to replace the detention facility (Arresthuis) in the Antwerp Begijnenstraat – in which 723 inmates now stay in a facility with room for 439. After a long search for a suitable location, the Belgian Council of Ministers chose the Valaar site on the A12 motorway in Wilrijk. The new cell complex is supposed to house 440 inmates, and will have a specialist forensic psychiatric wing. The preliminary openness in the program offers the chance to exclude the shortcomings of Beveren and Dendermonde at an early stage.

First there is the opportunity to stop the rethinking of the Ducpétiaux model and instead rethink the idea of prison as such. It is common knowledge that bringing together criminals with various backgrounds in one building complex greatly increases the occurrence of repeat offending. The dominant position of the cell for detention is no longer sustainable within the current views on individual detention paths aimed at reintroduction into society. This way, a visionary framework should not only refer

Ducpétiaux to the history books, but in particular the 19th-century idea of prison.

The new prisons in Beveren and Dendermonde are symptomatic of a lack of vision on a humane sentence implementation: everything that happens outside of the cell is seen as a potential threat. A reverse exercise shows more vision: moving the cell to the periphery of the prison complex makes it possible to organise a diversified activity zone which fulfils individual needs and a monitored reintegration into society.

The view on reintegration into society should take precedence in the prison design – especially in the living arrangements of a pre-trial detention facility in which people are temporarily detained. Spreading out inmates across the city also naturally remains a delicate undertaking which undoubtedly will meet with a lot of resistance. A scenario of reverse integration, as suggested by mayor Patrick Janssens – might be more successful. In that case the detention centre's activity zone can for instance be opened up for use by local residents.

Right to architecture

In the area of process management much can also be achieved. With the 4Gs, the development of design intelligence was limited to noncommittal and barely transparent advice in the process of the project definition – guided by former Minister of Justice Stefaan De Clerck. An advisory group should be created that will inform the design of the new detention centre in Wilrijk. The advisory group needs to give a permanent place to academics, professionals and practical experts in the creation of a humane prison. The first job is in assisting the commissioning government in drawing up a visionary framework from which a useful design process can emerge. A second job is in helping the private development company in the design and building process.

At best the advisory group will act under the guidance of the Antwerp Chief City Architect. This way we prevent the job of Chief City Architect to be hollowed out, as happened previously with the

Dentetion Facility Antwerp, Begijnenstraat
The ratio of coming and going in the prison of
Antwerp is among the highest in Belgium.
© Gazet van Antwerpen

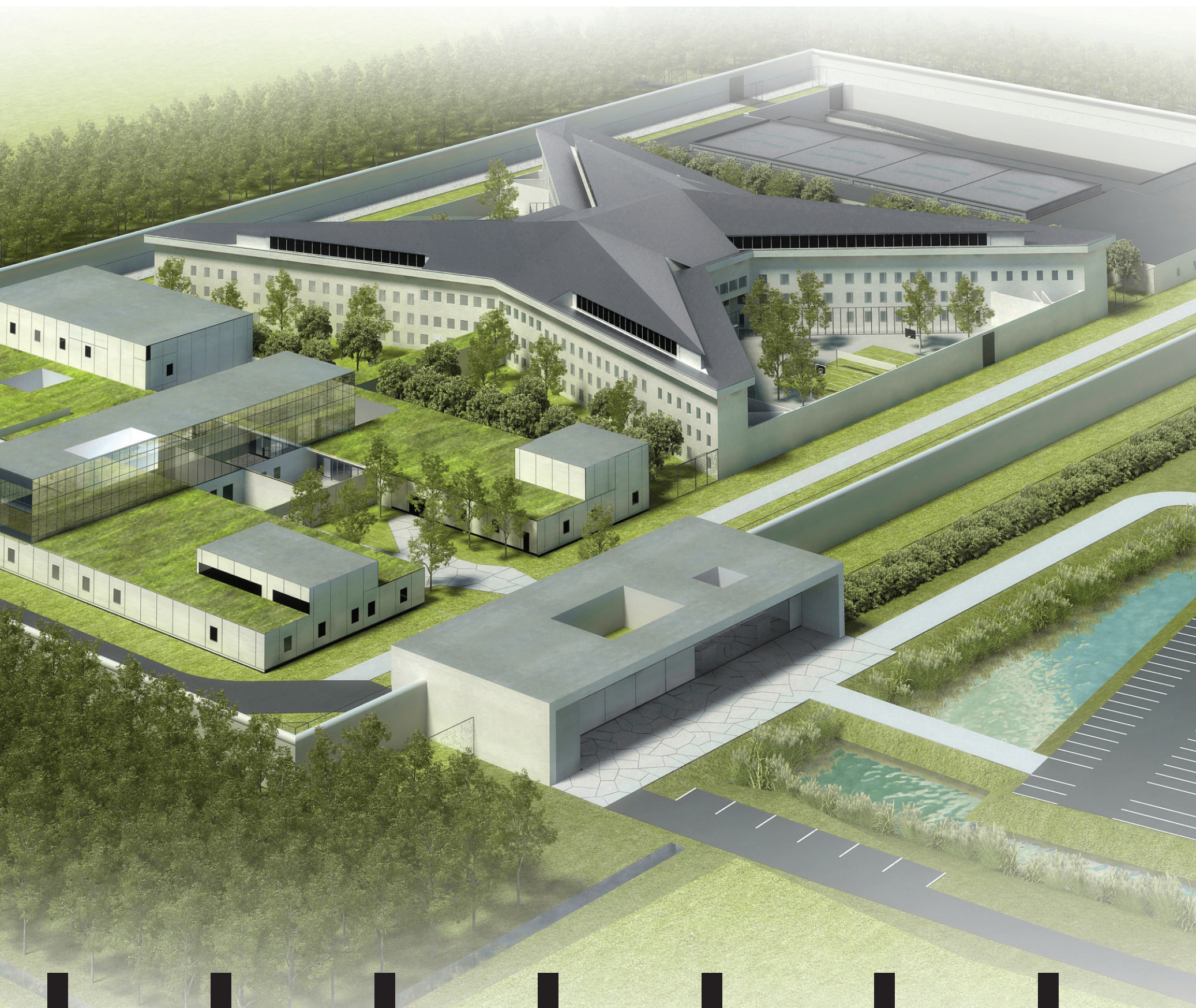


Flemish Government Architect in the design of the 4Gs. The Chief City Architect's actions are at risk of being reduced to a noncommittal advisory roll concerning the urban context of the prison complex – which is furthermore indifferent to the considerations surrounding the legal status of the prisoner.

A disassociation of the architectural design and legislation surrounding human sentence implementation is however unacceptable. Seeing how the mayor is chiefly concerned with the public safety of the city of Antwerp, it is clear that the Chief City Architect also takes responsibility for the internal organisation of the prison. After all, we need to emphasize that inmates will have their freedom of movement taken away, but not their human rights. In a city that belongs to all of us, inmates are also entitled to quality housing.

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Facts and figures

Gate of Beveren

CLIENT:

Buildings Agency

END USER:

Federal Public Service Justice

DBFM - CONSORTIUM:

BAM PPP

Dexia Bank NV - KBC NV - ABN AMRO (fin.)

Stéphane Beel Architects BVBA

Jaspers-Eyers & partners

Archivolt Architects

Landscape architect Lodewijk Baljon

Ontwerpbureau Pauwels BVBA (architectuur)

VK Engineering en Halmos

Adviseurs (technical studies)

Interbuild NV, Galère SA en Cegelec
(building and maintenance)

Eurest and Building Maintenance
(facilities service and maintenance)

AVAILABILITY PERIOD:

25 years (the federal government will
become owner after the period)

AREA SITE:

12ha 14a 21ca

AREA PRISON (BRUTO):

± 29.000 m²

CAPACITY:

300 places

START OF CONSTRUCTION:

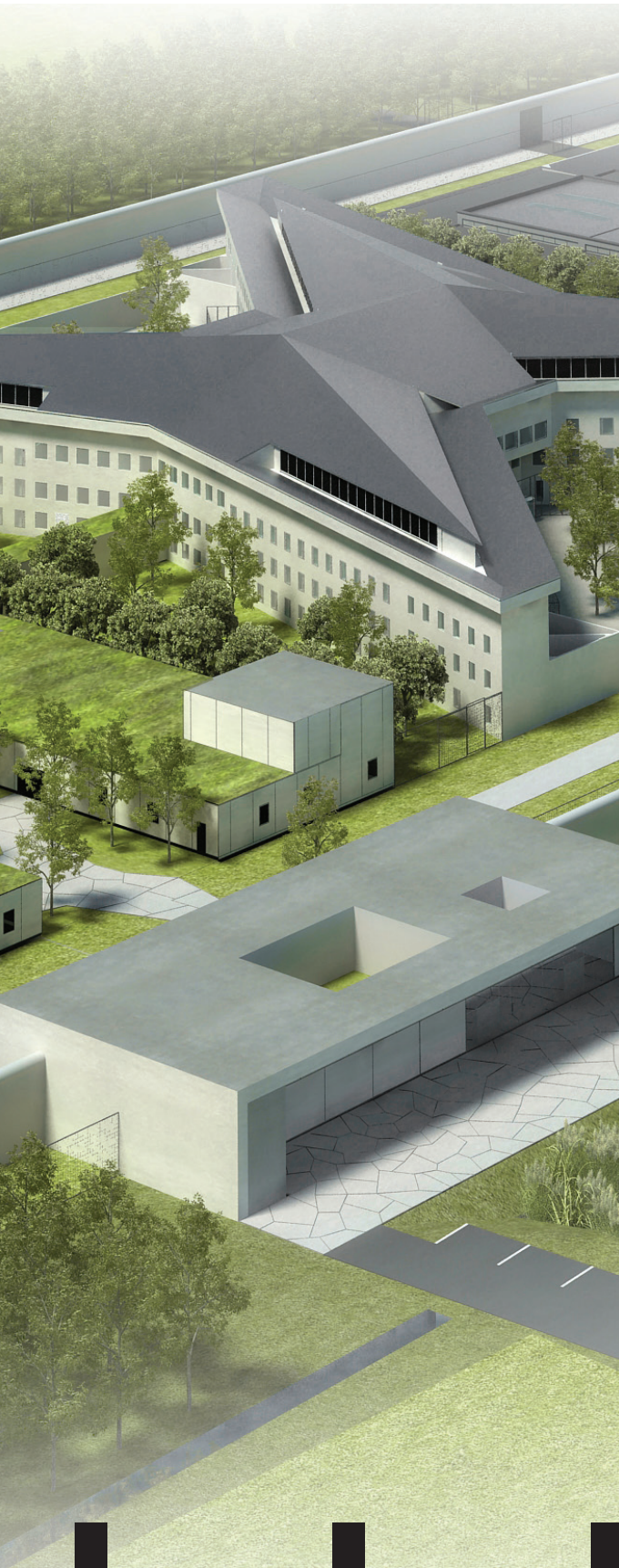
October 2011 - July 2013

RUNNING ROYALTIES:

From 2014: 13,7 million euro/year

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Facts and figures Gate of Dendermonde

CLIENT:

Buildings Agency

END USER:

Federal Public Service Justice

DBFM-CONSORTIUM:

BAM PPP

Dexia Bank NV - KBC NV - ABN AMRO (fin.)

Stéphane Beel Architects BVBA

Jaspers-Eyers & partners,

Archivolt Architects

Ontwerpbureau Pauwels BVBA

(landscape architecture)

VK Engineering en Halmos Adviseurs (studie)

Interbuild NV, Galère SA en Cegelec

(building and maintenance)

Eurest and Building Maintenance

(facilities service and maintenance)

AVAILABILITY PERIOD:

25 years (the federal government will
become owner after the period)

AREA SITE:

12ha 70a 99ca

AREA PRISON (BRUTO):

± 31.500 m²

CAPACITY:

444 places

START OF CONSTRUCTION:

Delayed (awaiting advice by
the Council of State)

RUNNING ROYALTIES:

From 2014: 14,9 million euro/year

Partners for a quarter of a century

The federal government chose a public-private partnership using a DBFM (Design – Build – Finance – Maintain) agreement for the construction of the 4Gs (Dendermonde, Beveren, Marche-en – Famenne and Leuzen-en-Hainaut). A construction team consisting of a developer, investment bank, architect and maintenance company becomes responsible for the design, construction, financing and maintenance of the prison. This way, the market participates and carries the risk of the modernisation of the prisons.

The DBFM contract links the public government to a private contractor for a period of 25 years. The DBFM encourages the contracting group to arrive at an appealing prison product through innovative solutions. The inclusion of maintenance in the public-private partnership guarantees the proper monitoring of the quality of the prison. On the other hand it is inevitable that the profit aim takes precedence over matters of content. As we saw in the prison of Beveren and Dendermonde, the fundamental design decisions were made based on a cost profit analysis.

The forced collaboration between architects and contractors in DBFM procedures is an old grievance. In an ideal world the joint expertise is a complimentary arrangement, but more often than not the collaboration results in each party trying to score points one after the other. Even more so because the contract with the Belgian Buildings Authority is made on a Best-and-Final-Offer (BaFo) basis. Architectural focal points can be laid out in a contract, but will be subject to the margins of interpretation enclosed within the text.

In the context of this discussion a visionary performance plan can also offer a solution. In that case, the formulated vision on humane sentence implementation acts as a frame of reference which the negotiating parties – architect and contractor – can fall back on. This way the presupposed policy concerning humane sentence implementation can be better secured within the design and construction process.

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The most important advantage of the DBFM is until now the attempt to clear the backlog of the Master Plan 2008-2012-2016. In the short term many new prisons are created while the cost is spread over a 25-year period by disposition. The government will become owner of the prison after 25 years. The initial advantage can easily turn into a disadvantage in the long run. There is a risk that the tender only takes responsibility for a period of 25 years, while a much-needed renovation will then be at the expense of the government.



PRISON GEAR

KENNISPLATFORM
VOOR HUMANE
GEVANGENIS
ARCHITECTUUR



With support of the
Flemish authorities

KU LEUVEN LUCA