

Nivelles, 21 January 2021 – Inauguration of the ATHENA Residence in Nivelles by Mr Pierre Huart, Mayor of Nivelles, and Mr Peter Wilhelm, CEO of the Wilhelm & Co Group. This inauguration heralds a new era of exemplary reconversion projects.

Today, in the presence of Mr Pierre Huart, Mayor of Nivelles, the Wilhelm & Co Group inaugurates the ATHENA Residence. It is the Group's first project in city of Nivelles. The project is smaller than those that raised the Group's profile in Walloon Brabant – think about L'Esplanade in Louvain-la-Neuve – but particularly innovative in many ways.

It concerns a reconstruction/reconversion of a former retirement home. The project is fully in line with the concept of circular economy. Almost all of the structural work of the building could have been preserved, thus greatly reducing the production of waste.

From the very beginning of the ATHENA project, the idea was to realise a smart and sustainable reconversion. It was no question of following the latest fads, but rather of making technical and conceptual choices towards an approach that perfectly balances economic, social and ecological aspects.

An in-depth study of the existing situation was the starting point for the project. Particular attention was paid to the maintenance of the structural work, which proved to be of remarkable quality. The choice for parsimony in heavy interventions made it possible to limit the waste of means and energy while ensuring a high-quality result. Greater intelligence, creativity and transversality for less waste and dispersion of means.

The dismantled elements were systematically oriented towards recycling channels to reduce the ecological footprint of the reconversion.

At a time when Covid 19 did not exist, emphasis was put on the creation of housing units with a surface area often larger than the average for an identical programme, and systematically providing plenty of light. Thus it was also decided to provide each apartment with a large terrace (and not a tiny balcony), while ensuring the privacy of these outdoor spaces, in particular thanks to mobile cladding panels or the asymmetrical distribution on the façades. The new architectural expression itself had to be joyful and fresh, hence the brightly coloured frames.

The far-reaching reflection about life in a multi-residential building is apparent from the introduction of a shared zero-emission electric vehicle available exclusively to residents. The sharing spirit goes hand in hand with conviviality, and the idea is to reduce impact on the environment by providing access to techniques that are still expensive – few households have the means to access an electric vehicle today – and more environmentally friendly. Estimates indicate that one shared electric vehicle can save one household in three from having to buy a second car. In concrete terms, residents will have to download an application to reserve the vehicle and use it for a modest contribution. The Wilhelm & Co Group will finance the rental of the vehicle for 4 years.

In terms of heating, ventilation and electricity, the most appropriate choices were made: intelligent thermal regulation, centralised heat and hot water production, advanced ventilation technology, energy recovery from the elevator... In short: technology at the service of the residents with respect for the planet.

In the end, an insignificant, soulless building with standard and obsolete techniques was transformed and reborn for a new life in harmony with its environment, its residents, fully in line with the transition towards a greener economy.

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