

Summary of Draft Provincial Strategy on Spatial Planning and the Environment for Limburg (NL)

Foreword & reader's guide

Dear sir/madam,

Welcome to the draft Strategy on Spatial Planning and the Environment (*Omgevingsvisie Limburg*) (draft POVI) for the Province of Limburg. The Province is legally obliged to draft a strategy on spatial planning and the environment. This is now an update of the 2021 POVI.

Under the current Environment and Planning Act [*Omgevingswet*], we are required to publish a strategy on spatial planning and the environment in the Digital System for the Environment and Planning Act (DSO). We do so for the consultation period of the draft POVI.

The DSO offers the possibility of reading the text as a book. But a reader can also select and retrieve all the information related to a specific theme, region, task, etc. In addition, it is possible to see on the map which rules, ambitions, challenges, etc. apply to that specific location, and from the text one can directly see the locations and/or areas that a piece of text applies to by linking to the map. The links are easy to find in the text as they are coloured blue. Blue text without icons links to additional information on the topic, to another section in the strategy or to an external website. The blue icons in the text link to a map link, a definition (i) or an external location (file or website). They become visible when the reader hovers over them with the mouse. The draft POVI can be found via:

- Serach – Rules on the map- Environment and Planning Act – Rules on the map – Environment and Planning Portal: <https://omgevingswet.overheid.nl/regels-op-de-kaart/document?documentID=/akn/nl/act/pv31/2025/ProvincialeOmgevingsvisieLimburg>
- Preview Draft Provincial Strategy on Spatial Planning and the Environment for Limburg – Plan Viewer for Environmental and Planning Documents for Limburg (POLviewer): <https://www.polviewer.nl/polviewer>

It is important to note that the Dutch national government created the DSO so that all the maps of public authorities can be found in one system. For this

reason, it is possible to zoom in down to plot level (20m). However, the Province does not make policy at plot level – not even at municipal level. It does make policy at supra-municipal level and for specific themes. As a result, it is possible for a theme to lie straight across your plot. You may be taken aback by this. After all, what does such a colour mean? But it is also handy, as it enables you to see exactly which themes apply to your plot. Then, if you want to do something on your plot in the future, you will know exactly which themes you might need to consider. When initiatives are assessed, the actual situation on the ground is taken into account. During 2026, the Environment and Planning Decree will also be amended based on what is in the final POVI. If provincial rules apply to a particular theme, they will appear in the Environment and Planning Decree.

The draft POVI that is now available for inspection, together with the results of the consultation period and the discussions still to be held with municipalities and water boards, will form the input for the final proposal for updating the POVI, which will be submitted for adoption by the Provincial Council in late 2025.

The draft Provincial Strategy on Spatial Planning and the Environment for Limburg will be available for inspection for six weeks.

Introduction

The world and Limburg are changing. Global factors such as climate change, technological innovations and geopolitical tensions are also affecting our province. In Limburg, space is becoming scarcer. The availability of sufficient water can also no longer be taken for granted. Grid congestion is increasing, air, water and soil quality are under pressure, and the region's population is ageing faster than elsewhere in the country. This calls for clear choices to be made. We are responding to these developments with the update of our Provincial Strategy on Spatial Planning and the Environment (POVI). This strategy provides long-term direction for the physical environment. It is in line with the Environment and Planning Act and provides tools for the national government, municipalities, water boards, civil society organisations, businesses, residents and partners, so that they can work together to ensure that Limburg remains liveable, attractive and future-proof.

Limburg's main challenges and ambitions

We have formulated four overarching ambitions:

1. **Strong cities and villages with a good business climate:** Making optimum use of space in existing towns and villages, improving liveability and strengthening economic innovative strength.
2. **Balance between functions in rural areas:** Balancing the interests of agriculture, nature, water, the landscape and the leisure economy, through area-based zoning, among other methods.
3. **Future-proof mobility and energy systems:** Sustainable energy supply and smart mobility solutions.
4. **Healthy soil and a robust water system:** Restoring soil quality and ensuring that our water system can cope with periods of drought as well as periods of high water discharge.

How will we achieve our ambitions?

We address the challenges comprehensively, seeking clear guidance and cooperation. We work according to four guiding principles – the Limburg principles:

Principle 1 – Healthy and safe living environment: Prioritising health, safety and welfare of humans, animals and plants. The living environment must help prevent, for example, heat stress, air pollution, noise pollution and risks such as flooding.

Principle 2 – Identity and characteristics of areas: Policy choices are in tune with unique landscapes, cultures and area characteristics. Developments should strengthen regional identity.

Principle 3 – Careful use of scarce space and resources (above and below ground): We need to make the best possible use of our space, networks (traffic and energy) and resources. Multifunctional use of space is encouraged.

Principle 4 – Strengthen urban as well as rural areas: We cherish the variety in urban and rural areas. We want to keep cities and villages compact and concentrate urban functions in existing built-up areas as much as possible.

A **general zoning plan**, consisting of seven zones, gives direction to the desired spatial development of Limburg:

- Limburg Ecological Network
- Primary agricultural area (highly productive agricultural area)
- Green-blue Agricultural Zone (agriculture with focus on water and nature-related challenges)
- Convergence area (agriculture with focus on urban/rural challenges)
- Urban area
- Rural population centres

- Work locations (business parks and office and shopping areas)

We work in an area-specific way and put a strong emphasis on cooperation with fellow public authorities and social partners. The Province is taking the lead in working with others to make the choices that are necessary for Limburg. We have an extensive set of tools at our disposal, which we deploy for matters of importance for the Province. Where necessary and/or appropriate, we deploy legal instruments (especially the Environmental and Planning Decree).

Regional emphases

Design studies prepared for and with the three regions of Limburg are a key element for drawing up the POVI.

North Limburg

North Limburg focuses on strengthening green-blue structures such as the Maasduinen (dunes) and the Peelvenen (raised bog landscape). The region wants to make its economic strength in agrifood and logistics more sustainable. There will be room for nature development and raised bog restoration, combined with innovative agricultural models. The Meuse, as a blue 'spine' running through the region, offers opportunities for water management, nature and recreation.

Central Limburg

Central Limburg focuses on systemic restoration of water and soil. Weert and Roermond act as central cities for housing construction and economic development. The stream valleys will be given more space to collect water and the Meuse zone will be used for water safety, nature development and sustainable industry. There will be special attention to challenges related to ageing and liveability in smaller villages.

South Limburg

South Limburg is developing as an international knowledge region. Chemelot, the Brightlands campuses and the Einstein Telescope are drivers of economic growth. At the same time, the focus is on protecting the unique 'Five-Star landscape', including the Heuvelland hill country, biodiversity restoration and climate adaptation. Panorama South Limburg, the South Limburg Agenda and the NOVEX development perspective together form a key guideline for integrated area development.

NOVEX development perspectives

For both the Peel region and South Limburg, we are working together with the regions, the water boards and the national government to elaborate the development prospects that have been drawn up. These development prospects are important elements of the present Strategy on Spatial Planning and the Environment .

Themes

1. Spatial quality and landscape

We see spatial quality as a foundation for sustainable development. New initiatives should contribute to the recognisability of landscapes such as the Meuse Valley, the Heuvelland and the Peel. Area passports describe area-specific characteristics. Design principles provide inspiration for municipalities and initiators.

There will be a stronger focus by the Province on preserving and strengthening the core landscape qualities of the South Limburg National Landscape and the Green-blue Agricultural Zone.

Spatial quality requires cooperation between government, developers and residents. We promote initiatives that contribute to a recognisable and future-proof environment that people can experience.

2. Nature

In Limburg, the natural world is under pressure from nitrogen deposition, fragmentation, and climate change, among other factors. Maintaining and restoring the qualities in the Limburg Ecological Network – and especially the Natura 2000 areas within it – requires good water, soil, and air quality. We are committed to completing the Limburg Ecological Network and nature restoration. Robust ecological links improve migration opportunities for flora and fauna.

In the Green-blue Agricultural Zone, especially in the transitional areas around sensitive Natura 2000 nature reserves, we encourage agriculture that is good for nature, water, and the environment.

Nature and recreation will be cleverly combined. We support the development of attractive recreational networks, such as walking and cycling routes that enhance the experience of nature without harming the fragile natural environment.

3. Water

Water has a more prominent role in Limburg's spatial planning than in the past. Climate change increases the likelihood of both flooding and drought.

We are working to restore natural stream courses and increase water storage capacity in stream valleys and along the Meuse.

Drought is a growing problem for nature and agriculture, but our groundwater and drinking water may also come under pressure over time due to increasing dry spells. We want to reduce the effects of drought in Limburg as much as possible by developing resilient water systems that can cope with periods of drought, but also with excess water, and by using the available water sustainably.

To anticipate drinking water needs in a timely fashion, we are taking on two search areas for drinking water supplies. We are also considering whether we need to enlarge existing groundwater protection areas to secure long-term drinking water supplies.

We are introducing regional water safety zones next to streams to protect residents of towns and villages as well as possible from flooding from the regional water system.

Cooperation with water boards, municipalities and farmers is essential. Integrated area processes combine goals for water safety, nature, agriculture and recreation.

4. Soil and subsoil

Healthy soil is the basis for agriculture, nature and climate adaptation. We are committed to restoring soil structure by increasing organic matter content and limiting soil compaction. Soil use should be sustainable and tailored to the carrying capacity of the soil.

In areas with intensive agriculture, measures are being taken to reduce nutrient leaching. In urban areas, soil quality is included when considering redevelopment and new construction projects.

The subsurface is becoming increasingly crowded with cables, pipes and possible CO₂ storage. We are working on underground planning, in which spatial developments above and below ground are better coordinated.

5. Healthy and safe living environment

Physical and environmental safety are prioritised, especially around high-risk sites such as Chemelot and border areas. Risk-oriented working, licensing, monitoring and cooperation with security regions form the basis of safety policy.

There is also attention for environmental aspects such as air, noise, waste, nitrogen and Substances of Very High Concern, and quiet areas will be

protected. Over the long term, the Province will also close provincial landfills and we will ensure follow-up management.

6. Energy

The energy transition requires space and smart choices. We encourage renewable energy generation in locations where the spatial impact is limited. And we aim to balance energy supply and demand as well as possible to avoid unnecessary or undesirable transport over possibly overloaded energy infrastructure (energy planning).

We support the development of energy hubs that cleverly combine generation, storage and consumption. Energy infrastructure is being strengthened to solve the problem of grid congestion. Limburg is connected to national projects such as the Delta Rhine Corridor for hydrogen and electricity transport.

Exclusion areas have been designated for wind power generation. For solar farms, the order of preference according to the scale known as the 'Limburg solar ladder' applies. In search areas for wind and solar power, we want to take an active role in implementation. Local ownership and local use of energy are guiding principles, as is the goal of achieving good spatial quality.

7. Housing

Limburg has the challenge of building some 30,000 homes by 2030. For the period after 2030, we aim to develop a mix of living, working, facilities and green spaces around the six Limburg Intercity stations (IC stations) (Limburg Central: at least 30,000 homes). Housing construction should help create a varied supply for all target groups, with a special focus on first-time buyers, the elderly and single people.

Affordability and quality are key. We encourage municipalities to make specific agreements on housing construction programming, choices of location and traffic flows. Liveability and sustainability are key prerequisites here: new buildings should be climate-proof, energy-efficient and nature-inclusive.

We also support initiatives for new forms of housing, such as collective housing projects, sheltered housing and flexible housing concepts, which are in line with demographic trends and changing housing needs.

8. Agriculture and horticulture

The agricultural sector has traditionally been an important part of Limburg's economy. Agriculture and horticulture – a general term by which we mean arable farming, horticulture (including greenhouse horticulture), livestock

farming, fruit growing and ornamental horticulture, among others – are, as the main users and managers of our rural area, very important for food production and the appearance and quality of our cultural landscape. The agricultural sector in Limburg is facing major changes. Sustainability, reduction of nitrogen emissions and adaptation to water and climate challenges are essential goals. We encourage circular agriculture, which focuses on closed systems for raw materials, water and energy.

Agriculture is the dominant function in the Primary Agricultural Area. The rules in these areas related to the environment and water are relatively minor, compared to the other parts of the rural area. Limburg provides support for innovation in agriculture, for example through new revenue models such as agroforestry and bio-based products.

Vacant agricultural buildings are reused as much as possible for agricultural purposes. The scope for reuse with non-agricultural functions varies from one zone to another.

We work together with farmers, land managers and water boards to create a future-proof rural area.

9. Economy and work locations

Limburg is developing as a knowledge and innovation region. Priority areas are chemistry (Chemelot), agrifood (Greenport Venlo), logistics, manufacturing (all regions) and the Brightlands Campuses. With a view to the circular transition, port sites and sites where companies with substantial environmental space/usable space are permitted are important.

We invest in sustainable work locations, infrastructure and cooperation between educational institutions, the business community and public authorities.

Strategic work locations are future-proofed, so that they are energy-positive, climate-adaptive and circular. New business parks face a planning challenge in the period to 2035. We will tackle that challenge as much as possible through intensive use of existing sites.

We designate sites of provincial importance, which, based on their scale, potential for circularity and transshipment capabilities, are essential for the functioning of our province from a spatial and economic point of view.

Cross-border cooperation is being strengthened to boost economic growth and innovation. EU programmes and funds are actively used.

10. Mobility

Sustainable, smart and cross-border mobility is essential for Limburg's future. We are investing in better international train connections, including the Drielandentrein (Three-Country Train), and multi-modal hubs that facilitate transfers between train, bus, bicycle and car.

Smart mobility solutions, such as shared mobility, electric vehicles and traffic management systems, are actively encouraged. We are improving express cycle routes and investing in an accessible and reliable public transport network, also in sparsely populated areas (rural population centres).

Sustainable freight corridors by water, rail and road are being developed to future-proof the logistics sector and reduce congestion on the road network. Coordination between mobility policy and spatial planning is being improved.

11. Heritage and culture

Heritage and culture are important drivers of Limburg's identity and attractiveness. We protect national monuments, municipal monuments, archaeological features and cultural and historical landscapes. The conservation and enhancement of heritage are paramount in new spatial developments.

We encourage repurposing heritage properties for living, working or recreation, for example. This contributes to sustainable development and the preservation of listed characteristic villages and townscapes.

Cultural and historical structures such as old roads, castle parks and estates will be better protected and connected to recreational networks. Heritage is also given a role in tourism profiling and area marketing.

Closing remarks

This new Provincial Strategy on Spatial Planning and the Environment for Limburg makes clear-cut choices. It is not possible to do everything everywhere. Limburg is opting for healthy growth, the protection of nature and the landscape, future-proof energy and mobility, prospects for agriculture, and boosting economic strength, while taking account of our cross-border character. Flexibility and cooperation with our partners, both inside and outside the Netherlands, are essential to achieve our ambitions.

With this new Provincial Strategy on Spatial Planning and the Environment, Limburg is building a sustainable, vital and connected province.