Holland Metropole

What you need to know about **Europe's best connected region**



TOP INVESTMENT PICKS

WANTED 1,000,000 new homes

INCLUSIVE CITIES NEED AFFORDABLE HOUSING

SUSTAINABILITY IS KEY TO HEALTHY GROWTH

Four cities, one European region primed for the future

Amsterdam, Rotterdam, The Hague and Utrecht are thriving cities in their own right. Together they form one of the most competitive urban regions in the world.

Urbanisation, globalisation, demographic change, technology disruption and cross-border capital flows are changing the face of cities as we know them. By working together, however, the four cities of the Holland Metropole are perfectly poised to make the most of the challenges awaiting them to ensure a stable, innovative and inclusive future for all their inhabitants. After all, the path to long-term competitiveness is achieved by making the most of short-term opportunities through adaptable and well managed growth. That is where Amsterdam, Rotterdam, Utrecht and The Hague excel. With a combined population of over 7.5 million, total GDP of €330bn (and forecast growth of 3.3% this year), top flight universities and science parks and exceptional regional infrastructure connectivity, the four cities of the Holland Metropole can rival London, Paris, New York or Hong Kong.

A new benchmarking study by The Business of Cities, a pioneering research group keeping tabs on the world's metropolises, shows just how strongly the Holland Metropole performs against nine of its global peers when measured as a single region. 'Amsterdam, Rotterdam, The Hague and Utrecht routinely share infrastructure, resources, commuting patterns and economic specialisations,' says its chairman Greg Clark. 'This gives them a combined scale, common factors and complementary assets which allow them to punch above their individual weight.'



A new dawn for the four cities of the Holland Metropole. Photo: Claire Drop

300 indices

Drawing on a database of over 300 city and regional performance indices, alongside numerous metropolitan datasets, Clark and his research team show that the Holland Metropole is the seventh most important regional economy in the world, and is close to that of both San Francisco Bay Area and Greater Boston. In the current cycle it has attracted more foreign direct investment per capita than Paris, Munich and Berlin.

But the Holland Metropole's particular strength comes from the way each city has developed its own specialisms. Amsterdam, for example, is the gravitational centre for finance, the creative industries and IT. Utrecht, with its young, well-educated population, excels in life sciences, healthy living and serious gaming; while Rotterdam's key drivers centre around the port, advanced manufacturing and clean-tech. The Hague, the Netherlands' political capital, is home to many key international organisations as well as The Hague Security Delta, Europe's number one cyber security cluster. It is perhaps unsurprising that the World Economic Forum ranked the Netherlands fourth in its Global Competitiveness Report 2016–2017, thanks to its world class infrastructure, health service, higher education and innovation apparatus.

Key advantages

The Business of Cities report shows that Holland Metropole has advantages in three key areas: connectivity, innovation and livability. The Holland Metropole's airports have direct international links to over 240 global destinations. The region is a major port and sea hub but also has excellent links between its four cities. The average travelling time by public transport to key destinations within the region is comfortably lower than its peers in Europe and North America. More than that, the Holland Metropole has excellent digital connectivity, with high internet speeds and broadband penetration rates.

The region's digital and knowledge infrastructure helps explain why it is also competitive with the top innovation eco-systems around the world. The region has also made a point of encouraging start-ups. Last year, the government extended its ambitious Startup Delta project for a further 4.5 years. It is also working to remove obstacles to entrepreneurship and provide incentives such as a special visa system for start-up founders.

A future-proof region

'Amsterdam with its regional partners is becoming a world beater', says Clark. 'And, what is clear is that these regional partners are themselves also leaders with a great opportunity to use the region as their common borrowed scale in their fields of expertise in law and justice, health and education, circular economy and innovation. Four distinctive cities with a common regional platform allows for each city to be in leadership and in partnership at one and the same time.' 'The battle to capture the spoils in the innovation economy is heating up,' says Clark. 'The likes of San Francisco Bay Area, London City and Greater Boston are out in front in terms of size and maturity, but the Holland Metropole is one of the fastest improving innovation eco-systems. And its competitive system of universities provides a unique supply of scientific, tech and business skills.

This opportunity is also reflected in the Holland Metropole's scores for quality of life, affordability and sustainability. The region has a very strong environmental profile, high uptake of public transport and appeal as both a place to visit and live. The region's number of cultural attractions surpasses every other region in the study apart from London and Paris.

'Holland Metropole inherits a distinctive development and infrastructure model' says Clark. 'This model gives it plenty of options as to how future growth is accommodated, and offers potential for the region to become a global benchmark of what it means to be a sustainable, innovative and competitive metropolis.'

Well-connected

The Holland Metropole region is super-connected by car and public transport – enabling someone who works in Rotterdam but lives in Utrecht to easily meet friends for dinner in Amsterdam. But the region is also super-connected to other European metropolitan areas, thanks to its central location, excellent air and road links and digital infrastructure.



Wanted:
one million new homes

The Dutch economy is growing and the lure of the big cities is drawing in ever more people. This, planners say, means Amsterdam, Rotterdam, The Hague and Utrecht need to build an increasing number of new homes to house their growing populations.

Earlier this year officials in Utrecht opened the first section of what will be the world's biggest underground bike park to international media acclaim. The bike park itself may be big, but it is just one small part of a massive bicycle network being expanded throughout the Netherlands – which includes 'bike motorways' for fast travel between towns. After all, more than a quarter of trips made by the Dutch are by bike.

The bike park and the bike 'motorways' are just part of a major effort underway in the Netherlands to future proof the country which is one of the most densely populated parts of the world.

'If you don't facilitate your growth properly and in a healthy and sustainable way, you will face serious issues in the years ahead,' says Dick van Hal, CEO of Dutch institutional real estate investor Bouwinvest, and one of the driving forces behind the Holland Metropole project. 'We have to rise to the challenges of population growth, otherwise we will end up with increased pollution, congestion and other urban problems.'

Economic growth

The four big Dutch cities have been working together under the Holland Metropole flag for several years now. Being a metropolitan region with four powerful and complementary centres, they are able to compete with the biggest and most successful cities in the world. The Dutch economy is forecast to grow 3.3% this year but the economic upturn has come at a price. The lure of the big cities is drawing ever more people and, planners say, this means they need to build an increasing number of new homes to house their growing populations.

Challenge

The Netherlands is well-poised to rise to the challenge, given that is it wealthy and politically stable innovative in maintaining its competitive position. And the practice of working together to reach a common position or consensus – known as 'poldering' in Dutch – is a key part of the country's tradition.

This strategy of discussing complex issues and finding solutions together is now being applied to the housing market within the Holland Metropole. Developers and institutional investors have joined the four cities in starting a wide-ranging and serious debate about how to drive forward housing development. The main priority, they say, is to create 700,000 new homes to head off future housing problems and ensure cities remain attractive places to live.

Chris Choa, an architect and urban performance expert, helps cities across the globe deal with the changes which are heading their way. By 2050, he says, 70% of the world's population will live in cities and the global balance of wealth will have tipped from Europe to Asia. The four cities of the Holland Metropole, Choa points out, already operate like a single city region.

'They have a connected population with that magic one-hour commuting time between them,' he says. 'That hour is key to becoming a mega urban city region. London is just an hour away as well. In an age characterised by urbanisation, cities are becoming more important than countries.'

Climate change is another key issue, Choa states. As huge areas become uninhabitable or very expensive to live in, billions of people will move, and that makes further urbanisation inevitable. Technological developments such as the sharing economy and the widespread use of self-driving cars will have a further significant impact on how cities evolve.

Long term

What is key, Choa argues, is how today's popular cities prepare to cope with the challenges of the future. 'You have to think long-term,' he says. 'You have to prepare for change and decide how you will attract the next generation of wealth creators. And it is the biggest, best connected regions which will win.'

In the Netherlands, building new infrastructure can get bogged down endlessly in red tape and regulations. So, developers argue, a concerted effort needs to be made to develop a region-wide view. Land must be made available, planning procedures should be streamlined and speeded up and cities, provinces and national government should be stimulated to work closely with the private sector and pension funds who have the means to finance development. From the cities' perspective, ensuring that their populations are on board is crucial, particularly when the identity of parts of the city could be challenged by growth. 'The city authorities might be mainly responsible for policy and programming but if we did that without consulting our citizens and the private sector, we would not be able to get houses built, says Robert Simons, the City of Rotterdam's alderman in charge of urban development. At the same time, he



The Dutch have always taken an innovative approach to spatial planning

Consensus-building is key

The process of reaching agreement by building consensus – as witnessed in the Holland Metropole new homes' project - is a key part of the way the Dutch economy works. The process in Dutch is known as 'poldering', from the word 'polder', the name given to new dry land created by draining lakes or reclaiming parts of the sea bed. It derives from the way everyone has had to work together to keep the sea and rising water levels at bay. Nowadays polder is often used to refer to discussions between unions and employers on controversial or difficult issues, during which they aim to come up with a package of measures to present to government that will be accepted on both sides. In the same way, the agreement between city planners, developers and investors on the need for a united front to build more new homes is a typical example of the polder in action.



Amsterdam is expanding on both sides of the IJ waterway

acknowledges: 'the expert knowledge of the private sector and its willingness to invest is vital to our spatial development.'

To create one million new homes:
- A long-term vision is essential
- Major infrastructure developments need to be made now
- Cities, investors and developers must work together
- Planning procedures and red tape should be cut
- The 'green heart' should be protected
- Cities must remain inclusive for all

Demand

Amsterdam, Rotterdam, Utrecht and The Hague all have their own housing development programme but will, planners predict, not be able to meet demand in the coming years. 'One million new homes by 2030 means 80,000 a year, but we are currently only building around 50,000,' says Desirée Uitzetter, head of area development at real estate developer BPD. 'When we look at what is in the pipeline, we can see that the land for building will be sold out in three to four years. So it is crucial to work together with local and national government on this, as a matter of urgency. We need to speed up procedures and we need the human capacity as well. We have to look at the entire residential market and the long-term view is vital.'

That long-term view means looking at more than simply building houses. Urban planning is key and that means roads, railway networks and bike paths are also an important part of the process. 'The government has to take the lead when it comes to mobility. We must be able to guarantee there are roads, trains and public transport,' says Daan van der Vorm, CEO of developer VORM. 'The housing crisis is just one part of the whole,' says Lex Brans, head of real estate marketing within the Amsterdam metropolitan area. 'We have a common problem and we have to solve it together and that means involving everyone – investors, developers, cities and locals.

And you can't build on such a massive scale without the infrastructure. What we are doing now is building around stations and close to roads. Homes need to be close to public transport, or no more than 10 bike minutes away.'

Joris Wijsmuller, alderman in charge of housing in The Hague, says more than just good infrastructure needs to be taken into account. 'The private sector needs certainty and as little risk as possible. A clear vision will help to create an attractive investment climate. And that means clear conditions about what we are building,' he says. 'We also need to ensure good public facilities as well.'

Green heart

After all, with clever planning, there is plenty of room for further residential development in the areas around the big cities themselves. Building outside city boundaries is a much more complicated issue and, says Bouwinvest's Dick van Hal, it is crucial to avoid the central rural area known as the 'green heart' which borders all of them, providing a rural escape just minutes from motorways and the urban sprawl. 'You could say the green heart is like the Holland Metropole's Central Park,' he says. 'It is a key part of the entire project.'

'We have to take a long-term view. It is the big picture which is important. It will be an expensive process to carry out but if we do nothing, we will have to pick up the bill for solving pollution, congestion and growing ill health.'

Cars as guests

Encouraging a healthy lifestyle is key to the Holland Metropole plans. 'There is major demand for housing in Utrecht and we want to meet that demand in a healthy way,' says Paulus Jansen, alderman in charge of housing at the City of Utrecht. 'We are stimulating the use of bikes and public transport and see cars more as "guests".

'We all see the need for an increase in the amount of housing,' says Nicole Maarsen, CIO Real Estate at Syntrus Achmea. 'And ensuring that we have inclusive cities is key as well. We can also learn from each other. What works well in, say, Utrecht, can work in other places too. The whole point about the Holland Metropole project is sharing best practices and working together towards the same end. The Netherlands has a problem. We need more housing throughout the region. We need healthy cities, we need to ensure mobility. We really must think about the city of the future, about different housing concepts.'


Rotterdam is redeveloping its waterfront

Amsterdam

Amsterdam is the cosmopolitan cultural capital of the Netherlands and its entrepreneurial and creative spirit has a unique global reach. The population is growing by some 11,000 extra inhabitants each year. In the comprehensive Amsterdam Metropolitan Area as a whole, some 60,000 residential units will be developed in mixed use districts over the next five years.

Lelystad Airport Business park

Lelystad Airport Business park is located between Lelystad airport and the A6 motorway and was the first to receive BREEAM local development certification as a sustainable work site. A new international airport terminal will open in 2019, allowing the business park to act as a stepping-stone to Europe and the rest of the world
Planning status: the focus lies on innovation, mobility and sustainability. Plots of between 5000 m² and 2 hectares are available. The excellent ground structure and short permit process facilitates fast and low-cost building.
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Amsterdam South East

The Community Campus in Amsterdam South East is a big housing development which will have 1,500 apartments in a multifunctional living and working complex aimed at young professionals and students.
The district of Amsterdam South East covers 250 hectares and will be transformed into a modern multifunctional urban district over the next few years. This project shows the potential for investment in this area, as more development plots in the district will become available in the coming months.
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Rotterdam

Rotterdam is a young, dynamic and international city and offers a gateway to Europe thanks to its smart port and logistics facilities. The city authorities are transforming the centre and old harbour areas into high-quality, modern, sustainable living and working environments. Growing international attention and investments have resulted in a lively and vibrant city.



Feyenoord City

The new 63,000 seat stadium will act as a catalyst for the further development of Rotterdam Zuid with space for sport and leisure as well as residential units. The new infrastructure and stadium development will be accompanied by an extensive social programme with sports at its core.
Planning status: The project involves 180,000 m² of housing and 64,000 m² of commercial space, including a cinema, restaurants, hotels and shops. A further 83,000 m² will be devoted to a new sports experience centre and sports fields.
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Rotterdam Central District

Rotterdam Central District is an appealing business location offering several opportunities to build or redevelop residential properties and offices. The location is extremely central, has excellent transport links and is particularly suitable as a headquarters location for companies, as well as for startups and short-term rentals.
Planning status: The district is currently home to a mix of multinationals, local businesses, cultural institutions and housing. Various plots are on offer for further development.
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The Hague

The Hague is home to some 240 international organisations and this has made it an attractive location for companies such as Shell, Total and Siemens. The city's international character and excellent standard of living attract 6,000 new inhabitants every year, making it an interesting location for investors in real estate.



Redevelopment
Koningin Julianaplein

Koningin Julianaplein, the main square in front of the city's central railway station is being overhauled to provide a striking new entrance into the city. Koningin Julianaplein The Hague is a new housing complex with shops and cafes as well as an underground parking area for 8,500 bikes. The 350 new housing units, spread between two towers both 90 metres high, will be a combination of social and non-rent controlled rental apartments and owner-occupier homes, of between 47 m² to 200 m². The project also includes 2,000 m² of retail and f&b, and 2,200 m² of conference and meeting facilities.
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Redevelopment
Scheveningen Haven

Various projects are currently underway or in the pipeline for the brown field site in the port area of Scheveningen. Housing corporation Arcade is developing the New Norfolk project with a mixed housing supply of rental apartments and owner-occupier homes, which is due to be completed by mid 2018. Developer MRP is currently working on the ZuidDuin project which will have 99 apartments and 14 family homes.The project includes a total of 658 houses, 4,000 m² of marina facilities and approx 600 m² f&b.
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Utrecht

Utrecht is described as the beating heart of the Netherlands. Utrecht is developing from a medium-sized provincial city into a regional capital of European importance. In fact, the Utrecht region has one of the most favourable economic growth forecasts of all the city regions in Western Europe, thanks to its knowledge-based economy and young, highly educated population.



Utrecht Science Park

Utrecht Science Park is the largest in the Netherlands and a hotbed of growth and innovation in the most competitive region of Europe. Over 24,000 workers and 51,000 students use the area on a daily basis. The campus offers high-quality institutions, companies and facilities with a focus on healthy urban living. Planning status: Between 2016 and 2019 a further €1.2 bn is being invested in the science park and the number of jobs will grow by 5,000.
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Leidsche Rijn Centrum

Utrecht is building a new urban centre on the west side of the city – Leidsche Rijn Centre. The development will have a big city feel, with high-value architecture housing shops, homes, offices and recreational options. Development is now in full swing and a number of interesting plots are on offer. Leidsche Rijn Centre lies in the centre of the Netherlands with its own railway and bus station, a new cycle path network and direct access to the A2 motorway. Planning status: current development opportunities include several office plots adjacent to the A2 and, in 2017/2018, a high-rise project.
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Four cities, innovating for smarter, sustainable and energy-efficient housing

Maximising mobility, energy efficiency, sustainability and social cohesion are the foundations of the Dutch approach to urban development. Throughout the Holland Metropole region, smart buildings are springing up that aim to slash energy bills and create a sustainable housing stock.

In Rotterdam ground-breaking projects are underway involving sustainable building techniques. In the Concept House Village, products and techniques are being tested to develop housing which is both innovative and energy-efficient. The Rotterdam innovation centre for sustainable construction on the RDM Campus is another project to help developers go green. These are just two of a raft of projects underway within the Holland Metropole which have sustainability at their core. 'The biggest challenge we face is keeping cities diverse, accessible and sustainable as places to live and work,' says Ronald Huikeshoven, director of developer AM.
In Amsterdam, Rotterdam, The Hague and Utrecht, Haarlemmermeer, Lelystad, Amstelveen and Zaanstad, new housing developments are springing up in which energy efficiency is central. The drive to build energy-neutral homes is, says Utrecht's alderman for housing Paulus Jansen, the most important innovation in current housing policy. 'Rules for new projects are getting tougher and have led to better quality, stimulated innovation and boosted market security,' he says. 'But we need to move in a similar direction for existing buildings as well.'



The Sluishuis in Amsterdam will have 380 energy-neutral homes – both rental and owner occupied – as well as catering facilities and dock facilities for houseboats. The innovative shape allows for maximum sunlight and makes sure residents and other locals can make best use of its waterfront location. VORM is part of the development team.



BPD and The Hague city council are developing the Proeftuin Erasmusveld project, a sustainable complex of some 350 homes in the city's green zone. The project involves a great deal of input from locals to create residential district in which recycling, sustainable materials and energy efficency are central. Van Wijnen is building team partner for the first 100 homes.



Haarzicht in Utrecht will be the first gas-free residential development in Utrecht which is not connected to the district heating system. The first 126 energy-neutral homes are being developed by AM and Bouwinvest. In total, the district will have 550 sustainable homes built in a village style with a primary school, sports centre and shops.

District heating

One step toward this is changing the way homes are heated. Many apartments throughout the Holland Metropole region, for example, are kept warm by district heating schemes, whereby heat created by industry or purpose built power-plants, is piped directly into homes from a central point.

District heating is seen as key in the drive by both Rotterdam and Amsterdam to phase out the use of gas as a source of heating and to cook on. 'This is a massive, far-reaching project which we are already working on,' says Rotterdam alderman Robert Simons. 'But in doing this, we are working towards cleaner air, jobs, comfortable homes and contributing to the Paris climate agreement targets.'

In The Hague, by contrast, a ground-breaking project is underway to use geothermal heat from two kilometres underground to warm houses. The source, says alderman Joris Wijsmuller, is right in the city, near a hospital, and will be able to heat a large number of homes. The project has the potential to make a major contribution to boosting the sustainable housing stock in the southwest of the city and help The Hague become energy neutral by 2040 – a key council target.

Housing concepts

After all, says Desirée Uitzetter, director of area development at BPD, sustainability is not just about building enough homes. 'We have to look at the type of housing and ask who we are building it for.' This also means new developments need shops, places of entertainment and schools. 'The area itself needs to be interesting,' she says.

'We need to look much more thoroughly at different housing concepts,' argues Nicole Maarsen, CIO Real Estate at Syntrus Achmea. 'We need to look at how can we facilitate mixing in cities and we should invest in other spaces which support living as well. If you live in a micro apartment, you will move on to a different sort of house as you get older and your needs change. That will bring more dynamism into the housing market.'

Flexibility

Flexibility is another key trend. As well as being energy efficient, new homes must also be more adaptable to the changing needs of their residents. One example of this is Syntrus Achmea project De Makroon. This involved redeveloping a 175-year-old care home for the elderly in central Amsterdam into a modern facility with 134 apartments for people aged 55+ which can be adapted as they grow older.

The demands of an ageing population add another dimension to the housing debate. After all, the need for more sustainable housing within the Holland Metropole is just one part of a complex package of issues relating to climate change and population shifts, says Lex Brans, director of real estate marketing in the Amsterdam metropolitan area. 'We all agree that we have a major problem,' he says. 'Paris was a wake-up call… it was a signal. We have a common problem and we can only solve it if we are both proactive and work together.'



Eiland de Oevers is a project to develop 51 energy-neutral homes on the edge of Rijswijk near Rotterdam. The homes will all have an energy system based on geothermal energy with solar panels and under-floor heating. The brick buildings' design is inspired by traditional Dutch countryside dwellings. AM is joint developer.





Holland Metropole: future proofing the inclusive city

You won't find gated estates for the wealthy and ghettos for the poor in the Netherlands. Ensuring socially mixed cities with sufficient affordable housing is a key component of Holland Metropole housing poli

The lack of affordable housing is a key issue facing the four big cities of the Holland Metropole as more and more people move into urban areas. 'The shortage of mid-priced rental accommodation is one of the most pressing problems we have,' says Robert Simons, alderman for urban development at Rotterdam city council. 'It means that families, for example, stay in social housing or move out of the city. This is why we are working with developers, investors and housing corporations to plan the proper amount of affordable housing and make sure we have the right zoning requirements.'

The town of Hoofddorp in the municipality of Haarlemmermeer is close to both Amsterdam and Schiphol airport and is a typical example of a large town being transformed by the urbanisation drive. Lincoln Park is a project to create 800 new homes in the south of the town which will range from temporary accommodation to flats and large family houses. The backbone of the project will be a ribbon park with watercourses and a rural planting scheme.

Affordable

Utrecht too is undergoing major expansion and is the fastest-growing city within the Holland Metropole. Houses which fall into the middle segment are becoming smaller – so don't meet demand – or are so expensive that they are not an option for starters and people on medium incomes, says Paulus Jansen, alderman in charge of housing in Utrecht. 'This is one reason why we are going to take steps to ensure that the homes being built remain affordable, while making sure that the return on their investment meets developers' needs for continuity.'

Among the projects Jansen is particularly proud of is Place2BY, a project where refugees with residency permits live alongside people who have been in some form of residential care home and 'ordinary' people. Another similar mixed-use development is De Saffier, where students and the elderly live alongside each other and a real effort is made to get the two groups to mix.

Diversity

'There simply isn't enough social housing in our region,' says Joris Wijsmuller, the alderman in charge of housing in The Hague. 'In new housing developments, we strive to ensure 30% are rent-controlled. We want to ensure The Hague is an inclusive and attractive city with a very wide selection of living environments. It should be possible for everyone to live in the city and residential districts must be mixed. That demands diversity and flexibility in the way we live. We are experimenting with niche types of living such as self-build, home office concepts, full service apartments, tiny houses and housing co-ops.

Hurks' Plan Celsius development in Eindhoven will replace 400 outdated homes with wide green spaces, colourful accents on the buildings and homes for artists. An Rotterdam, The Hague and Amsterdam, redundant offices are being turned into housing units aimed at young people in their first jobs. In The Hague, for example, the office complex which used to house the national statistics office CBS is being converted by BPD into part of a car-free housing complex with 235 homes and two large enclosed gardens. Also in The Hague, MRP Development is finding a new use for the former Social Affairs and Employment Ministry building, designed by innovative Dutch architect Herman Hertzberger. At least part of the complex will be turned into housing units.

Traditional households

The trend towards niche housing, particularly targeting the young, is apparent across the Holland Metropole. 'Young people live in a different way to those in traditional households,' says Lex Brans, director of real estate marketing at the Amsterdam metropolitan area. 'They are used to sharing common spaces and being part of community activities. We want to create a mixed city, where poor and rich live side by side, and that is a deliberate part of our policy. We don't want homes where the rents are too high. Amsterdam must remain an inclusive city.'

↖ Van n and IC Netherlands' Utrecht project Op Dr ll include micro-apartments, homes for sharing with friends and homes for people with mobility issues.

↖ This AM project on the site of the former NPD parcels delivery centre includes 350 apartments spread ov ee buildings, most of which will be affordable homes.

The Dutch rental housing market

Social, or rent-controlled housing, comprises homes with a rent of up to €710 a month. The rent is determined according to a point system based on size, facilities (such as outside space) and location. Affordable, or middle-rent housing, is generally accepted to mean housing with a rent of €710 to around €1,200 a month. Free sector, or non-rent controlled property, includes all property with a rent of over €710 a month. Landlords are free to set the rent level but Amsterdam and Utrecht have introduced plans requiring developers to agree to keep rents in new developments affordable for a certain number of years.

The Holland Metropole: a public private initiative

The Holland Metropole initiative is an alliance between Amsterdam, Utrecht, Rotterdam and The Hague and a number of development and investment partners. The aim is to highlight the development opportunities available in the Netherlands' four biggest cities. All four are well known in their own right, but together they form one of the most successful city regions in the world. As Europe's best-connected region, with many international and innovative institutions and stable economic growth, the Holland Metropole offers investors a world-class business and investment climate.

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