



"We want this development to be around for generations. We're trying to build a scheme which gives people choices, which allows you to drive a car but which also allows you to walk to the shops, restaurants, cinema or whatever" says Guy Perry, Managing Director of IN-VI, designers of the Wilanów Town scheme, pictured with Director Alexandra Cwilewicz

On a prime 169 hectare site owned by Prokom Investment in the Warsaw suburb of Wilanów, 8 km south of the city centre, a new town costing over USD 1 billion is to be built over the next 10 years. Wilanów Town, next to the 17th Century Wilanów Palace, will contain institutional, office, retail, leisure and residential elements and be a home to 12-15,000 people. The development is indicative of a more mature stage in the evolution of Warsaw's dynamic real estate market.

"This is one of the most special and most challenging projects I've ever worked on" said Guy Perry of Investment Environments, overall planners for the scheme.

Guy Perry

- prior to forming IN-VI (Investment Environments) was Senior Vice President with TrizecHahn.
- programmed and designed the world's largest multiplex in Mulhouse, France, while Vice President of HOK International
- over the last 2 years has led research efforts for design and development strategies at Harvard University and the University of Toronto

"It's a site of enormous historical significance for the Polish people. We need to respect that but we also need to take Warsaw into the 21st century." Zbigniew Okoński, vice-President of Prokom Investment, is confident of the project's success. "It will be a showcase for Warsaw for a few dozen years" he said.

A master-planned town

The idea is for a master-planned town with all the elements an established town develops naturally over decades - but without

such reliance on the automobile. The scheme places a huge emphasis on underground parking and pedestrianized zones. Phased over time, it will contain a new town hall, a shopping area including a farmer's market, offices, residential units, a hotel and conference centre, leisure facilities including a swimming pool and ice rink in winter, a German school and a large church. Although Prokom owns the land, the company is looking for other developers and investors to take on individual projects within the overall scheme. The developer will then be largely independent in everything but site usage. The gmina (local council) spatial plan is now awaited before construction permits can be obtained.

Retail to start next year

Already things have started to take shape. Trizec Hahn Europe, represented by their former subsidiary IDM, plan to develop a covered shopping arcade with between 200-250 units on a 12 hectare site. "Everything is at an early stage" stressed Sean Briggs of IDM. "But we are responsible for the retail area. We expect to start preliminary work next year and completion should be up and running at the end of 2003."

Israeli developers involved

On the residential front Prokom Investment has formed a joint venture company with 3 Israeli companies, Olimpia Real Estate Holdings, Ben Yakar Gat and Rubanenko, to build apartments and houses. "We have started conception designs and we are confident of receiving a building permit in around June next year" said Zbigniew Okoński. The idea is for apartments to be built close to the centre, terraced type houses further out and stand alone houses near the western edge of the site. Okoński believes the final total will be

A new town arises from the fields

over 4,000 flats and houses. On the municipal side, the local authorities lack capital to finance a new town hall so they are selling 2 hectares of their allocated 3.5 hectare site to a developer. In return that developer will build them a town hall, with offices planned for the remaining 2 hectares.

A surprise announcement

Prokom's announcement after 2 years of silence has caught many by surprise. A number of property insiders Eurobuild talked to had little idea of what the project was about. The 169 hectare site (the size of an average small town), purchased by Prokom Investment on perpetual

Prokom Investments

- is a holding company in which Mr Krauze, Managing Director of Gdynia based Prokom Software, owns 90% of shares
- owns a 30% stake in Prokom Software, which is the biggest software integrator in Poland. The Prokom group employs over 2000 people in Poland
- is developing several smaller projects in Poland, including a 45,000 sqm leasable area residential and office project on Warsaw's ul. Grójecka, an aqua park in the seaside town of Sopot, and Prokom's 20,000 sqm head office building in Gdynia

usufruct from the Agricultural College (SGGW) 2 years ago, lies on a 480 hectare greenfield area called Wilanów Zachodni (West Wilanów) and was once earmarked as a plum residential location for Poland's communist elite. Problems with infrastructure, however, ensured this never got off the ground. Gmina Wilanów has been working on an overall plan for the 480 hectare site since 1998. In 1996 an

architectural competition was held to develop designs ideas for the area. This was won by architects Detko & Owadowicz and certain elements of their design have been incorporated into the final plan. Architects Guy Perry, then with Trizec Hahn Europe, and Alexandra Cwilewicz, then with Prokom Investments, worked on the design from the beginning and recently formed Investment Environments to take control of the design aspect of the scheme. Architects HOK were bought in to design the retail and entertainment components.

A town to stand the test of time

Guy Perry wants Wilanów Town to stand the test of time. "There are many buildings being put up around Warsaw which won't last" he said. "We want this development to be around for generations. We're trying to build a scheme which gives people choices, be it hi-tech, driving a car or being able to walk to the shops, restaurants, cinema or whatever." To this end a lot of attention has been paid to the 200 or so questionnaires that have been filled in and returned by members of the public. "The results have been very interesting" says Perry. "For example, highest on the list of people's concerns was purified water. Another striking thing was that 61% definitely wanted high speed internet access while only 31% definitely wanted air-conditioning. At the same time the farmers market was very popular. It seems people want technology in their homes but to live in traditional surroundings. We don't, however, want to make the town into a miniature 18th Century replica. I for one like the modern design for the new town hall." The importance of tradition is born out by the fact that, when asked their favourite place to shop in Warsaw, more than 75% of respondents said Nowy Swiat (the major retail high street) or the Old Town, according to Perry.

The element of soul

While the scheme has aroused a great deal of interest, obstacles still need to be surmounted. The major one is the absence of a sewage system, which will have to be put in place. The site also has a high water table which varies from 80 cm - 2 m underground. To dry the land is not complicated, according to Cwilewicz, but it requires thinking about. Then there is the church. The design has not yet been finalised due to wrangling over the architect's fee, but a dominating architectural monstrosity, as many modern churches in Poland are, could overshadow the town. There is also the intangible element of a town's soul. The name of postwar masterplanned town Milton Keynes in England is synonymous with urban dreariness and concrete conformity. Guy Perry acknowledges this danger but believes Wilanów Town won't fall into this trap. "Milton Keynes won't happen because developers will have architectural freedom within urban design guidelines and because Milton Keynes was

"We expect to start preliminary work next year and completion should be up and running at the end of 2003" says Sean Briggs of IDM, the company responsible for developing the retail part of Wilanów Town on behalf of investor Trizec Hahn Europe.



designed for a one-dimensional motorized society whereas people are now seeking multi-faceted environments. In Wilanów Town everything will be within a 1 km walk," he said.

Warsaw heading in the right direction

It is inevitable that there will be some mistakes, but most issues will doubtless be sorted out over time. What is important is that the development is an indication of where Warsaw's property market is now heading. The 90's was a decade when many developments (but by no means all)

were put up to make a quick buck and satisfy the demands of the time without thought to posterity. This was highlighted in a recent article in leading newspaper Gazeta Wyborcza, "A great weakness of the last decade was the lack of detailed urban plans." The article then goes on to say, however, that "the coming years promise enormous investment in infrastructure." Warsaw is a city of mixed blessings. The lack of decent real estate a decade ago meant that buildings were constructed which ordinarily shouldn't have been. At the same time, not many capital cities can boast an open space on which to build a new town so close to the centre. □



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