

## Prokom plans a new Wilanów



INVI's Guy Perry describing Prokom Investments' new Wilanów project.

If you're going to develop, think big. That seems to be the philosophy behind Prokom Investment's plans to develop a massive 169-hectare site of land opposite the Wilanów Palace, eight kilometers from the city center.

Prokom, a name more associated with information technology than development, acquired the land from Warsaw's agricultural university. The plans it has drawn up are for a new town with a residential area for 12-15,000 people, office space, entertainment facilities and shopping complexes.

The combination of affluence and population density made it in Prokom's eyes an ideal place for such an undertaking. "The demographics here are the best in Warsaw," says Guy Perry, Managing Director of INVI, the devel-

opment consultant co-coordinating the project, "This area with Konstancin is not only one of the wealthiest residential areas in the city but also in Poland." This, he considers, makes it comparable to Western Europe. Perry also points out that people from these areas will have traveled outside Poland so the standards they have regarding the urban environment are high, "The people who live in this district are used to a level of quality not always provided by the Polish market today."

Also, its location opposite the Royal Palace excluded other development options, like hypermarkets or class B office space, owing to the impossibility of getting planning permission for anything that was not in keeping with the environment.

"Our objective is to create long term value for the investors and also for the people of Warsaw," explained Perry. "This is just across from the Palace—we can't treat it as just another site."

The residential aspect, which is the core to the site, will consist of an area of medium to high density housing around the town centre and a low-density area further to the west. Perry, being half American, half French, has drawn heavily on the influence of European models of residential areas in Paris and London's Belgravia and South Kensington. These areas, he feels, demonstrate the good combination of parks, squares and proximity to facilities that are essential for a good residential model.

"We are creating a new generation of European cities that respect the past," he said.

However, he has not excluded all traces of America, "The single family residential area will probably feel like some of the better American residential models." He said, though he stressed that they wanted to avoid the American model from the 70s and 80s, which, "is an inherently inefficient and unsustainable model of suburban development." He considers that some aspects of the residential areas will resemble certain American projects from as far back 1920s as well as more recent ones.

"It's a place where people have choices," said Perry talking about the project, "It's not like an area of Konstancin where every time you want a loaf of bread you have to drive five kilometers." Residents, he hopes, will appreciate the choice of being able to walk, drive or take a bike. Features such as reflective glass, large office complexes and entirely self-contained shopping facilities like Galeria Mokotów will not be included in the plans because in Perry's experience they do not facilitate a comfortable and integrated urban environment. "We're not looking to maximise the building area on the site," he explained, "We're trying to create a balanced environ-



Zbigniew Okoński  
Vice President, Prokom Investments

ment."

Prokom hopes to avoid the scenario that the new Wilanów will become a haven only for Warsaw's rich by organising long-term mortgages. Perry said that they are in discussions with Big Bank Gdański with the aim of providing financing schemes. This it is planned will allow first-time buyers access to the site.

The development is designed around high quality and a good environmental setting. Perry believes that increasing urban congestion in central Warsaw and lengthening commuting times will force some companies to forego their exclusive city-centre locations for something in the suburbs. Perry said that some high-tech and medical clinics have already expressed an interest.

A supermarket, a hotel and a cinema will anchor the town-centre amenities though so far no firms are confirmed in these rolls. However, Zbigniew Okoński, vice president of Prokom Investment, said interest is high and, "amongst other investors we are in talks with Skanska," he explained, referring to a portion of the proposed town centre district that will be situated in the proximity of the Royal Way.

Other aspects of the town centre include, an open-air market, a theatre and also a town hall on a piece of land given to the council. Some of the proposed features such as an ice-rink and the theatre will probably involve some form of co-operation with the public and private sector. A curious feature of the plan includes a Catholic edifice that has been on the drawing books of the

Church since the Constitution of May 3, 1791, but was never turned into reality owing to Poland's unfortunate historical circumstances. Prokom considers all of these to be essential if people want to feel part of a community.

Prokom hopes that the existing lines of communication between Wilanów and central Warsaw, the Royal Way and ul. Sobieskiego to the west will be sufficient to cope with an increase in traffic. This is important, as there is a need to avoid the curse of traffic congestion, which could act as a deterrent to people living in the new town. The city also has plans for a ring road linking with a bridge over the Wisla that could be used as to alleviate any possible congestion but, this is up to 12 years away.

Perry believes that one way to avoid traffic congestion is to encourage people to stay on site.

"Part of our job is to get people to walk on site as much as possible," he said. "Give them as many amenities as possible then they won't have to drive as often off the site." As part of this approach they plan to have all the houses wired up to the Internet so people have the option to work from home.

The issue of sewerage, is also being addressed. There should be enough capacity in the existing system to cope with the first phase of construction and a new treatment plant should be completed in about two years time, and at that time should be able to meet with any further demands.

Perry said that they received the initial permission from the authorities a month ago to rezone the land so the green light has been given. All the development will be carried out in four phases with phase one being nearest to Wilanów Palace. This incremental policy was chosen so to lessen the risks but as a television company is already signed up for an area in phase four, on the near edge of phase three, there is some flexibility.

Prokom's role in the project is a curious one for a company that made its name in the world of systems integration. Perry believes that they became involved in property two years ago because it was seeking to broaden its horizons. Now, with the benefit of hindsight and the crash in the high-tech sector.

Okoński explained that Prokom



Guy Perry  
Managing Director, INVI

obtained the land on a perpetual lease from the university. However, the bulk of it will not remain in Prokom's hands.

"Most of the land we are going to sell," he stated. To secure equity and debt financing for 'phase 1' development they have brokered an agreement with three Israeli companies: Rubenako, Olympic and Ben Yakarb Gat. With them there are also plans, however, for a joint venture to develop over 1,200 apartment units on eight hectares of land.

So though Prokom will not own most of the land it will be fully involved in the project.

"Although we are going to sell the land we have to know what will be constructed on it," explained Okoński, "We have certain clauses in every contract to harmonize and keep the land at its highest value. We're co-coordinating to maintain the long-term value of the site. It's important," he continued, "that every investor knows that the investor next door will be maintaining the value of the site." An example of this is the imposition of a height envelope of 14 to 24 meters.

In order to facilitate this Prokom stresses the importance of communication between them and the investors. "We're establishing general development guidelines that come from the dialogue with potential investors," explained Perry.

"We're listening very carefully to what they need." ■

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