

## Hoge Kempen National Park, Regionaal Landschap Kempen en Maasland vzw

In the early 1990s, the situation in the Hoge Kempen region was as follows: its four coalmines were on the point of closing and the landscape was intersected by roads and fragmented, due to poor spatial planning. Several smaller nature reserves existed in the area but were separated from each other. The creation of the Hoge Kempen National Park (started in 1998, opened in 2006) turned this trend around. It is the framework that brings together every stakeholder or involved party. It is the tool for spatial and visual unification of the several nature reserves into a combined heathland and forest area of 5 700 hectares. It is also a means of combining local economic activities and the chance of employment for socially vulnerable people, the blossoming of biodiversity, integrated landscape quality and sustainable tourism. It is a supported bottom-up approach.



The Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe recognised the great value of the project. Hoge Kempen National Park uses an integrated approach which enables greater coherence and defragmentation in an area from which the mining industry has departed, and gives it new impetus. The park, adjacent to a garden city, remains faithful to the principles of such cities, fostering co-operation and stimulating the parties concerned. This project is intended to increase public interest in the protection and enhancement of this landscape.