

PLANE TREES SPARKLE

The 'Europalaan' is one of the busiest entry roads into the Belgian city of Genk and was infamous for being a 'place of misery'. That was until 2000, when the city council together with the regional government came up with a new mobility and structure plan that would decongest the entire area. The plan would also connect the neighbourhoods north and south of the avenue and re-instate the road with eye catching materials both in hard and soft landscaping.

Additionally, the new avenue had to reflect Genk's label of being one of Belgium's greenest cities. Three hundred trees were planted in two by two metre plant squares and integrated both in the hard and soft surface areas. The choice fell on high-stemmed plane trees to give extra volume to the avenue and these were planted at a 90 degree angle to the road forming clusters of trees instead of planting them along the entire distance.

The trees were planted in a peat-based potting soil with bentonite and enriched with fertilisers and plenty of TerraCottem. The plant holes were covered with a 10cm lava mulch layer to prevent weed growth.

Peter Fabry, Public Green Spaces maintenance manager, said: "The urban environment offers limited free space for the trees to grow. To improve the growing conditions, TerraCottem was added to the soil mixture to increase its water and nutrient holding capacity. Despite being planted late in the season (spring) all the trees established well in their new environment with less than one per cent of the trees dying. During the Christmas season the intended effect of creating volume reaches its climax when all the trees are lit up."