Lörrach plans Germany’s first timber-built commercial area

A climate-neutral and sustainable commercial area is taking shape on the site of the Lauffenmühle, a former textiles factory.

Overview

There is more than enough wood available in the town of Lörrach and its proximity to the Black Forest. The idea was born to build a climate-neutral industrial estate in timber construction on the Lauffenmühle site. To date, there have only been individual commercial buildings constructed from wood in Germany, but no industrial estate with a comparable concept. Parts of the historic factory buildings on the site with their natural stone façades are to be integrated into the new utilisation structure.

Background

In 2020 the town of Lörrach purchased the 8.5-hectare Lauffenmühle site which had formerly been home to a textile factory. The purchase was made possible by urban development grants worth €9.1 million from Germany’s federal government and the state of Baden-Württemberg.

Following discussions with the Potsdam Institute for Climate Impact Research, the idea arose of creating a timber-built climate-neutral commercial area on the site. The Lörrach team also wanted to put climate neutrality on show for all to see, and they felt the best way to achieve this was by building with timber.

There are more than adequate supplies of wood in Lörrach and in the nearby Black Forest. The town’s administrators and policymakers are convinced that timber is competitive in terms of price and does not present a limiting factor in buildings for commercial use. Compared to concrete or cement, timber has many advantages such as improved fire protection and earthquake resilience.

Until now individual commercial buildings have been built of wood in Germany, but no commercial area with a similar scale and purpose has yet been created. In contrast to this, timber has enjoyed success in housebuilding, even for larger projects such as Prinz Eugen Park in Munich, which consists of 600 timber or timber-hybrid houses and is currently the largest timber housing development on a single site in Europe.

Objectives

The aim is to create a climate-neutral commercial area for sustainable businesses on the Lauffenmühle site. However, the focus on sustainability does not end when construction is completed. Under the motto of “sustainable businesses need a sustainable commercial area”, the plan is for businesses in manufacturing, research, services and innovative skilled trades to make the site their home. These companies will be pursuing sustainable business ideas, and be committed to circular and regional economies, sustainable supply and value creation chains, and energy efficiency. At the same time, the project planners also intend the site to be a place for people to live and work, with an attractive mix of high quality places to spend time, leisure activities and services, along with cultural spaces that enrich society in Lörrach.

The historic factory buildings on the site and their stone facades are not protected monuments, but the project still plans to repair and retain their basic structure in order to utilise them for new commercial purposes. By doing this, the project hopes that people will be able to identify with the project, particularly in the surrounding areas.

Project manager Alexander Nöltner, Mayor Monika Neuhöfer-Avdić and project manager Burkhard Jorg (from front to back)

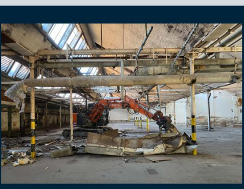
Activities

The town of Lörrach conducted a plausibility check and potential analysis to refine the profile of the commercial area. The town also developed the framework for a dedicated certification process to ensure the timber construction meets legal standards. The certification process is similar to the A-G energy efficiency ratings for electrical equipment. As part of a timber building campaign, the town of Lörrach developed best practices to promote commercial timber builds in Baden-Württemberg. They plan to work with timber processing companies which primarily use regional products and process storm-damaged timber wherever possible.

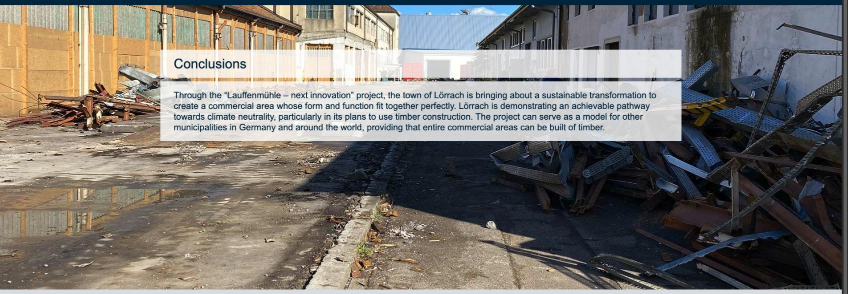
In March 2024, up to 14 architecture firms will present their ideas for the Lauffenmühle site. Their proposals will form the basis for the town of Lörrach to develop its own construction plan. The competitive and forward-looking commercial area will be as energy-self-sufficient as possible using the sun and wood, employ innovative transport ideas and include high-performance digital infrastructure.

Around 4.5 hectares of the site are set aside for new builds while some existing buildings will be retained on 4 hectares in order to maintain the site’s character. The commercial spaces are expected to be between 1.000 and 10.000m².

Effects



After more than a century and a half of textile manufacturing came to an end on the Lauffenmühle site, the “Lauffenmühle – next innovation” project marks the beginning of a new forward-looking era which continues the tradition of regrowable resources. The first businesses are expected to put down roots on the site by 2026. Lörrach hopes that the site will bring fresh momentum and new jobs to the region.



Conclusions

Through the “Lauffenmühle – next innovation” project, the town of Lörrach is bringing about a sustainable transformation to create a commercial area whose form and function fit together perfectly. Lörrach is demonstrating an achievable pathway towards climate neutrality, particularly in its plans to use timber construction. The project can serve as a model for other municipalities in Germany and around the world, providing that entire commercial areas can be built of timber.

ℹ

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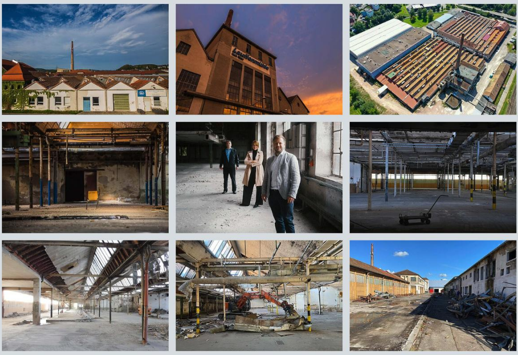
Images



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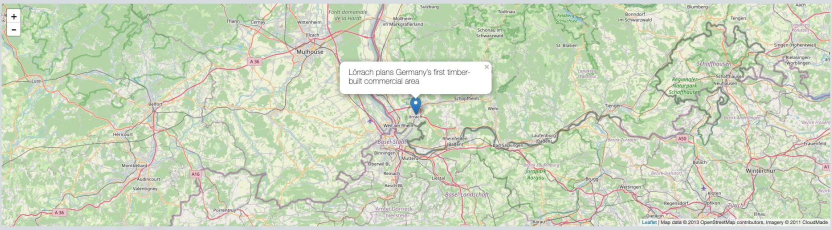
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