

Ries van Lith – Waardwonen

From ambition to action: circularity as a matter of course at Waardwonen

For Waardwonen, circularity is not a buzzword or a gimmick, but a logical movement that is becoming increasingly intertwined with daily work. Project manager Ries van Lith explains how the housing corporation has translated its ambition to be as circular as possible by 2030 into concrete choices. Not through abstract policy, but by using data smartly, collaborating with the right partners and continuously learning from practice. “This ambition still stands, but its implementation has become much more concrete over the years,” says Ries. Circularity is a broad concept; that’s why Waardwonen keeps recalibrating and continuously looks for ways to make real impact within the boundaries of affordability and quality.

Ambition and recalibration

The organization Waardwonen works with indicators from Het Nieuwe Normaal, which are included as target values in the requirements program. Instead of rigid standards, Waardwonen consciously chooses flexibility for each project. “We had an ambition: 100% circular by 2030, but you notice that the definition of circularity is up for debate. It’s a catch-all term, after all. So now we’re recalibrating,” says Ries. This creates room to continually find the right balance between sustainability, quality and price. Circularity is not a separate goal, but a natural part of this process.

But how do you translate this from policy to practice?

Translating abstract policy into concrete implementation is a challenge that Waardwonen actively tackles. It requires a shared language, clear benchmarks and practical working methods. “By pioneering and learning from every project, a culture emerges in which sustainability becomes increasingly self-evident. It’s not a matter of waiting for policy, but of doing and showing that it works. We are a small organization. I personally have a strong drive, and now it’s much more bottom-up for us because we just do it and achieve great results we’re proud of.”

Which lessons have proven crucial for Ries?

“The power of the right partners is an essential starting point. A key difference from traditional methods lies in how you request and collaborate with the market. Instead of asking standard contractors to add a sustainability paragraph to their submission, Waardwonen deliberately seeks parties with circularity in their DNA. This ensures that sustainability is not an extra, but an integral part of the entire process. By selecting the right partners up front, circularity becomes a logical movement.”

How do you make a fair and correct choice?

“Data serves as the basis for transparency,” says Ries. Data and tools play an increasingly important

role. Waardwonen routinely requests an MPG calculation in tenders and sees almost all participants use the BCI Gebouw tool for this. This makes not only environmental performance, but also circularity and other relevant indicators transparent. Various concepts are assessed (based on clearly formulated rules) on MPG, BCI, and GWP_a, and contractors are asked to substantiate and guarantee their data towards realization. This ensures transparency and a level playing field.

Learning and improving with the market

“Comparing data is not always easy,” Ries admits, because differences in interpretation persist. Waardwonen therefore works with advisors and provides feedback to tool developers, so methodologies can improve further. It’s a learning process, with collaboration with the market and fellow housing corporations at its core. “Alone you go faster, but together you go further.”

What are you most proud of?

A great example of this approach is the Sallandsgoed project in Haalderen. “What started as a flexible housing project grew into a permanent living concept of high quality. By putting sustainability and data at the center from the start, an optimal result could be achieved within the existing budget. The party with the best architecture and the highest sustainability score emerged as the winner. This shows that affordability and circularity can go hand in hand.”

Where do you still see opportunities?

Ries still sees room for innovation and health. For the future, Waardwonen sees opportunities to create even more space for innovation. For example, by including a management reserve for sustainable opportunities that arise during the project, the organization remains flexible in responding to new developments. Project lead times are relatively long and developments are now happening very quickly. You want to be able to respond logically to this within a project. The theme of health is also receiving more attention: healthy, sustainable homes directly contribute to residents’ well-being, and this is our starting point! How we will translate this into data is still a work in progress.

How do you view circularity in the future?

“Circularity as a matter of course,” says Ries. The journey towards circularity is not a straight line, but a continuous quest. By using data smartly, collaborating with the right partners, and continuing to learn, circularity is increasingly becoming a matter of course in the daily work of Waardwonen and its partners. In a circular economy, there are no waste streams. In the future, we must also look differently at residual value, including from a financial/affordability perspective.