



## Joint Press Release

Brussels, 19 November 2020 – 11 a.m.

**KBC reaches agreement with Katoen Natie group & ION on the redevelopment of the KBC Tower into a tower of culture.**

**KBC appoints consortium APB-Libreco-Monument Vandekerckhove-MRT for full remediation of the KBC Tower.**

**KBC has successfully completed the tendering process for the full remediation, renovation and redevelopment of the iconic KBC Tower in Antwerp.**

Based on the insights gained during the tendering process, the fact that the iconic building will be in an almost shell state after the remediation and the fact that the subsequent renovation will be a virtually new building project, KBC has decided to sell the building.

Following careful consideration of the redevelopment proposals and after a dialogue with the City of Antwerp, the Antwerp City Architect and the Flanders Heritage Agency, **KBC has decided to sell the building to the Katoen Natie group.**

**The professional real estate developer ION will act as project manager for the Katoen Natie group.**

KBC hopes to be able to conclude a final sales agreement before the end of the year so that the **works can start in the spring of 2021.**

KBC is also still awaiting Antwerp City's approval regarding the transfer of the historical concessions associated with the building.

**The Katoen Natie group wants to transform the tower into a tower of culture supplemented with a mix of retail, catering, offices and housing. With its spaces for temporary and long-term exhibitions, art depots, restoration workshop, sculpture garden, cinema, auditorium, panoramic rooms, bookshop, and more, the tower will have a place among Antwerp's other major heritage and cultural institutions. The 'tower of culture' also broadens the city of the Scheldt's appeal as true cultural city.**

**Prior to this redevelopment, ION will have a thorough and high-quality remediation carried out by the consortium of specialist firms, the Tijdelijke Maatschap Asbest Partners België BV (APB), Libreco NV, Monument Renovatie Technieken NV (MRT) and Monument Vandekerckhove NV from Ingelmunster, which was appointed by KBC itself to carry out the demolition, asbestos remediation and stability works on the KBC Tower.**

**With a view to this remediation, KBC obtained an integrated environmental permit from the city of Antwerp and will carry out the quality control of the asbestos remediation works to ensure that the highest standards are met under all circumstances.**

**These works, which will start in the spring of 2021, will last 36 months and subsequently ION will be responsible for the further redevelopment.**

The partners of the Tijdelijke Maatschap (TM) have already carried out the following projects in Brussels in the past: the restoration of the Museum of Fine Arts (KMSKB), the renovation of the National Bank (NBN), the Royal Library (KBR) and the asbestos remediation works on the Leopold II tunnel.

They also formed a collaboration in the restoration and renovation of the Antwerp Town Hall. Among their other references are the asbestos remediation works on former warships of the French Navy in Ghent, the restoration, renovation and new construction of the CERA head office in Leuven, the redevelopment and restoration of the Predikherenklooster in Mechelen, the asbestos remediation works on the Antwerp University Hospital (UZA) and the Ghent University Hospital, etc.

**The TM regards the KBC Tower as 'an exceptional mission in which heritage, people and the environment are given the leading roles and challenge each other'.**

**Johan Thijs, CEO of KBC Group, explains the decision:** *'I would like to start by expressing my sincere thanks to the Antwerp city council, the municipal departments of the city of Antwerp, in particular the City Architect, his staff and the department responsible for the preservation of monuments and historic buildings. I would also like to thank the Flanders Heritage Agency for its excellent cooperation. Throughout the whole process, we have been able to count on their constructiveness and their willingness to contribute with an open mind to the redevelopment of the iconic building in an important district of Antwerp.*

*It isn't surprising that we have opted for the combination Katoen Natie group – ION that wants to transform the KBC Tower into a tower of culture in the future. KBC has been committed to art and heritage for many years, including the well-known Snyders & Rockox House in Antwerp. We firmly believe that the wonderful cultural-historical and forward-looking solution we have chosen for the KBC Tower not only underlines our love of culture but is a win-win situation for all parties – KBC, the Katoen Natie group, ION, the inhabitants of Antwerp and, by extension, the entire community'.*

**Wim Eraly, Senior General Manager of Corporate Banking & Facilities at KBC, adds:** *'The full remediation and thorough renovation of the iconic KBC Tower in Antwerp is an important project for us. So we're delighted to have been able to enter into a partnership with the Katoen Natie group and a professional real estate developer such as ION. ION will deal with the redevelopment of the KBC Tower, as opposed to us remaining*

*the owner of the building ourselves, remediating it and carrying out the subsequent renovations. In making the selection, we also paid particular attention to the sustainability of the design and the destination. The KBC Tower has been owned by KBC since 1930. So, we took our time in deciding to sell it. Nevertheless, KBC will stay connected with the tower in the future **as the KBC logo will remain visible on top of it. We will also continue to welcome our customers in a KBC Bank branch on the ground floor. That way, a small part of the tower will remain ours.***

**Fernand Huts, chairman and CEO of the Katoen Natie group, explains why this project is so close to his heart:** *'Born in Antwerp, having grown up in the Seefhoek and been educated in the Sint-Jan Berchmanscollege on the Meir, I have a great connection with Antwerp and its icons. As a native of Seefhoek, it gives me an intense satisfaction to develop a company – Katoen Natie – that can give the KBC Tower ('Boerentoren') new vitality with a cultural foundation. The project is a huge challenge. But it is precisely this challenge that is driving me to use all my experience and talent, as well as that of my family and company, to write history with the KBC Tower. It will be given a place among the city's other major heritage and cultural institutions. The 'tower of culture' broadens the city on the Scheldt 's appeal as true cultural city. The KBC Tower will be a gift to the people of Antwerp, the Flemings, the international visitors. It will be their tower, and we aim to open up as much of the tower as possible to the public. So that they can visit numerous exhibition spaces with temporary and long-term exhibitions, the art depots, the restoration workshop, the cinema and panoramic rooms, the sculpture garden, the various catering establishments, the auditorium and conference rooms, the bookshop and other shops, the markets and the courtyards. As a result of its accessibility and new features, it will become a real and fundamental part of urban society and a tower we can all be proud of.'*

In the appendix to this press release, Mr Fernand Huts explains in more detail why he considers it so important to develop the KBC Tower into a tower of culture.

**Davy Demuyne, CEO of ION is very pleased that ION has been allowed to redevelop the iconic tower on behalf of and in cooperation with the Katoen Natie group:** *'From the off, we knew that it would not be easy to win the tendering procedure. The scale of this project and our desire to have a single hold on this iconic building made us decide pretty quickly to go in search of a partner. Preferably a local partner who could ensure Flemish roots. I immediately thought of Fernand Huts and the Katoen Natie group, where I started my career. We quickly came to an agreement about our partnership. ION acts as project developer in this project and will tailor the large-scale project from A to Z for the Katoen Natie group that acts as long-term investor. ION is a Flemish project developer with offices in Waregem, Brussels and Antwerp. With a team of 100 employees, we develop projects with a total market value of 2 billion euros throughout Belgium. The KBC Tower will of course be our biggest challenge and confirms our ambition to also become a major project developer in Antwerp. Being allowed to realise this project makes us and our employees extremely proud.'*

## **What will the tower look like in the future?**

Culture will be the beating heart of the tower, together with future-oriented retail on the ground floor and first floor (along the Schoenmarkt, Meirbrug and Eiermarkt). Visitors will be able to stroll the building. There will also be a mix of food & leisure as source of experience, while in the narrow part of the tower (from the 11<sup>th</sup> to the 23<sup>rd</sup> floor), there will be flats like the old times. To top it all off, there will also be an observatory and panoramic room spread over the top three floors (24<sup>th</sup>, 25<sup>th</sup> and 26<sup>th</sup>). They are an integral part of the cultural operation and will be open to the public so that everyone can fully enjoy the exceptional 360° view.

The KBC logo will remain visible on the tower and on the ground floor KBC will continue to welcome its customers in a KBC Bank branch.

## **Background**

At the end of 2019 ([press release of 4 December 2019](#)), KBC wrote out a request for proposal for a complete remediation of the building by a specialist asbestos remediation company. In addition, KBC considered the

option of a possible partnership and explored the possibility of a real estate developer taking on the redevelopment of the KBC Tower, instead of KBC retaining ownership of the building, doing the remediation work itself and then subsequently renovating it.

Various specialised firms responded to KBC's public tender for a full remediation of the KBC Tower. KBC also received a response from several professional real estate developers for the redevelopment and/or sale of this iconic building.

The KBC employees who had been working in the KBC Tower until the summer of 2018 and who are still spread over various temporary workplaces today, will all – as announced in August – be centralised in the Kievit IIb building near Antwerp Central train station as from the beginning of 2021.

### **Some historical figures about the KBC Tower, the first skyscraper in Western Europe:**

- 87.5 m was the original height in 1931
- 95.75 m is the height since the top of the building was rebuilt in 1975
- The shell: 3 500 tonnes of steel
- Reinforcing bars: 500 tonnes
- 430 000 rivets
- 180 000 bolts
- 3 500 000 bricks from Boom
- Schwenstein stone for the inner walls – 350 000 stones
- Cement: 3 550 tonnes
- Rhine pebble stones – 5 000 m3
- River sand – 6 000 m3
- White Burgundian stone – 1 400 m3

### ***For more information, please contact:***

**KBC Group:** Viviane Huybrecht, General Manager, Corporate Communication/KBC Group Spokesperson  
Tel.: + 32 2 429 85 45 | E-mail: [viviane.huybrecht@kbc.be](mailto:viviane.huybrecht@kbc.be)

**ION:** Davy Demuyne, CEO  
Mobile: + 32 473 67 07 15 | E-mail: [davy.demuyne@ion.be](mailto:davy.demuyne@ion.be) | [www.ion.be](http://www.ion.be)

**Katoen Natie group:** Fernand Huts, CEO and Chairman  
Tel.: + 32 3 221 68 11

**Tijdelijke Maatschap:** Tine SCHOTTE, Project Director  
Tel.: + 32 9 364 44 11 | E-mail: [info@monument.be](mailto:info@monument.be) | [www.monument.be](http://www.monument.be)

---

#### **KBC Group NV**

Havenlaan 2 – 1080 Brussels  
Viviane Huybrecht  
General Manager of Corporate Communication/  
KBC Group Spokesperson  
Tel.: + 32 2 429 85 45

#### **Press Office**

Tel.: + 32 2 429 65 01 (Stef Leunens)  
Tel.: + 32 2 429 29 15 (Ilse De Muyer)  
Tel.: + 32 2 429 32 88 (Pieter Kussé)

E-mail: [pressofficekbc@kbc.be](mailto:pressofficekbc@kbc.be)

KBC press releases are available at  
[www.kbc.com](http://www.kbc.com)  
Follow us on [www.twitter.com/kbc\\_group](https://www.twitter.com/kbc_group)  
Stay updated on all our latest innovations

## **APPENDIX: Fernand Huts explains in detail why he wants to develop the KBC Tower into a tower of culture.**

The more culture a city has to offer, the more character it has and the more appealing it becomes for visitors, tourists and business people. Look at Florence, Venice, Paris, London, Amsterdam. They all add to, nurture and cherish their cultural heritage, and turn a visit to the city into a real experience.

Antwerp has a very rich history, much and beautiful heritage, and a number of really important museums. Adding the KBC Tower ('Boerentoren') to all this as 'tower of culture' means a substantial addition to Antwerp's cultural heritage. With its spaces for temporary and long-term exhibitions, art depots, restoration workshop, sculpture garden, cinema, auditorium, panoramic rooms, bookshop, and more, the KBC Tower will have a place among the city's other major heritage and cultural institutions. The 'tower of culture' broadens the city on the Scheldt's appeal as true cultural city.

As a tower of culture, the KBC Tower will become an important player in our society. Thanks to its architectural status as monument as well as its purpose, it will become a key to our past, our culture, our history. As far as we are concerned, knowledge, heritage, art and culture must be open and available to everyone. With the KBC Tower, we want to fit in with the 'Traditio Clavium', in which we consider the passing on of these essential pillars of our society as the backbone of civilisation.

### **The tower of culture and the cultural, heritage and museum happenings in Antwerp**

The tower of culture has substantial added value for and is a supplement to Antwerp's already existing cultural heritage and patrimony. The monument is in itself already an icon. But the cultural happenings in the KBC Tower will also be an original and even unique experience. A visit to an exhibition or event in the tower will become dynamic, accessible, pleasant, child and family friendly. As visitor, you will be immersed in the theme of the exhibitions, through playful scenography, multimedia and through the works of art on display themselves. The paintings, sculptures, artefacts and films in the tower of culture will also have their very own emphases and will therefore differ in type, theme and approach from what can be seen at other museums.

That's also what makes cooperating with the broad cultural field extremely useful. The tradition of partnerships, gratuitous loans of works of art and shared projects as they exist within the cultural sector therefore becomes a fundamental principle of the tower of culture. National and international collaborations will be highly valued here. Such an intensive partnership with other dynamic forces in the field will have a sustaining leverage effect for Antwerp – and in a broader sense, for the whole of Flanders – and will contribute to a strengthening of the cultural networks in our society.

A good example of such integration and collaboration is the current **Blind Date** exhibition in collaboration with the KBC, the Snyders&Rockox House, the Emperor's Chapel (Keizerskapel), the municipal museum Butchers' Hall (Vleeshuis) and the fabric committee of the St. Charles Borromeo Church (Sint-Carolus Borromeuskerk). We strongly believe in the cooperation between the public and private sectors, and already have an excellent experience in this. The ambition, of course, is to further integrate the tower of culture into international cultural happenings. We want to place the tower on the world map, literally and figuratively.

### **The character of the tower of culture**

We want to return the tower to the inhabitants of Antwerp, the Flemings and the international visitors. That is why we aim to open up as much of the tower as possible to the public. So that they can visit numerous exhibition spaces with temporary and long-term exhibitions, the cinema and panoramic rooms, the sculpture garden, the various catering establishments, the auditorium and conference rooms, the bookshop and other shops, the markets and the courtyards. As a result of its location at the end of the central axis between Central Station and the Meirbrug, the tower is already inextricably linked to the urban fabric. Its size causes it, together with the cathedral, to dominate Antwerp's skyline. As a result of its accessibility and new features, it will become a real and fundamental part of urban society.

De KBC Tower already has substantial heritage value in itself. Integrating the new cultural functions and the full restoration make it an artistic and social reference point for the inhabitants of Antwerp, and for Flemings in general. Due to its status as a 'tower of culture', the first skyscraper in Western Europe will gain an even more unique position in the world. It has already given Antwerp international appeal, and now the cultural aspect will add another dimension. The result will make people proud – of their tower, but also of the heritage and culture exhibited in it. That feeling of pride will grow as the tower becomes an international household name.

And that the cultural tower will actually become an international concept simply makes sense. As entrepreneurs, it's in our DNA to invest in marketing and promotion. In this case, we are thinking very specifically of cooperating with Toerisme Vlaanderen, the municipal departments, VOKA, and anyone else who would like to do their bit.

Moreover, the added value of the tower is not only cultural or touristic. It will also play a political and economic role, thanks to its new purpose. After all, the hard power of politics and economics benefit from being diplomatically supported by soft power: heritage, art and culture. These are the supporting forces in numerous international political, diplomatic and economic exchanges. Just think of giving added cultural value to the port's promotional consignments, the foreign missions and state visits, economic and industrial summits. As a result of integrating soft power in the bilateral and multilateral political and economic landscape, relationships between various parties are relaxed and improved. In this sense, too, the intention is to allow the tower of culture to play a prominent role, both outspoken and unspoken. Because culture brings people closer together.

### **Cultural entrepreneurship creates added value**

The cultural environment is in a constant state of flux. It's a pleasure to join in as spectator, participant, collaborator and above all as an active and dynamic player. Culture has positive, connecting dynamics and is an antibody against going sour. Entrepreneurship beats in the heart of the cultural environment: doing and realising.

The Katoen Natie group uses financial resources and its entrepreneurial know-how to create added value in the cultural environment. This added value is for the citizens, the city, Flanders and the international world of culture – in short, for society.

The entire project is supported by the Katoen Natie business group and is a non-profit activity. Financial sources of money will be used for the purchase, renovation and going concern of culture. This whole project is based on the willingness, commitment and familiarity of the business group with cultural entrepreneurship and its funding.