

Austurberg & Gerðuberg Breiðholt, Reykjavik

Students
Reinventing
Cities

Reykjavik is Iceland's capital and largest city with an area of 200 square kilometres and a population of 123,000. Breiðholt is a suburban area in the eastern part of Reykjavík, approximately 20 min car drive from the city centre. The site selected for this competition, Austurberg and Gerðuberg is located in the centre area of Upper-Breiðholt.

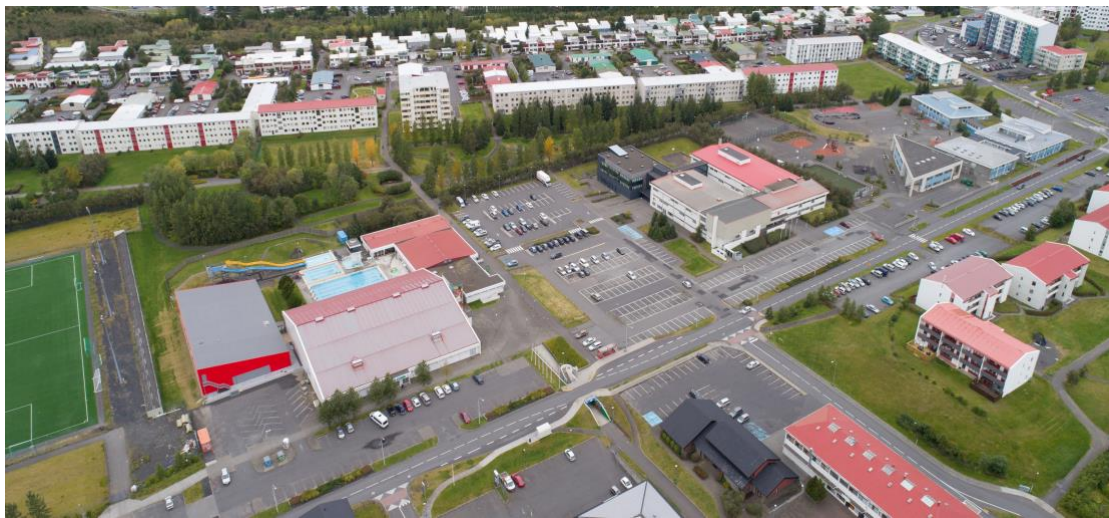
The Breiðholt district was built in the sixties as a solution to housing problems in Reykjavík. It has 10,000 residents and approximately 1,800 social apartments, most of which are located in Upper-Breiðholt. Due to the number of social houses in the area, there are also high numbers of immigrants. The area is home to a variety of industrial and service jobs and a pocket of residents in the Ivy City area.

Today the Austurberg streetscape is unsafe and unpleasant for pedestrians and cyclists. Travel by car is the most common way to get around. Currently, development is low density and there

is a lack of public space. However, underutilised land provides an opportunity to deliver a more dense and diverse environment.

Austerberg is set to receive a new BRT route and station in the near future. There is a need to deliver and commercial development these urban upgrades such as walking and cycling connections and infill housing to ensure the full benefits of the BRT investment can be realised. This also presents an opportunity to use these upgrades as an anchor and catalyst for wider climate action across the neighbourhood, while delivering social, economic and environmentally sustainable outcomes.

The site has been chosen as an interesting multi-cultural suburban area with opportunities to be developed as a place for people to live a more sustainable life. As part of the competition, students should look to develop a masterplan and suite of solutions or interventions to deliver district-wide improvements.



Approx. site area:

The proposed site Austurberg and Gerðuberg in Upper-Breiðholt's centre area is approximately 10 ha, of that the street is approximately 7000 m².

Demographics:

Poles, Danes and Lithuanians are the most common ethnic minorities living in Reykjavik. In the whole upper-Breiðholt area where our proposed site is, there are about 9.300 residents, many of whom live in social housing.

Priority areas & main City expectations:

The unpleasant open space and streetscape is the main challenge to be addressed. Attention could be given to repurposing parking lots, increasing multi-modal travel, increasing density and diversity of development and providing public spaces for leisure and gatherings. The improvements should deliver on climate goals and liveability outcomes. It should be a place that makes an environmentally friendly lifestyle seem attractive and easily obtainable. A space where you can live, work and play.

Presentation of the site

The name Breiðholt is derived from the farm Breiðholt, which is located nearby. The district is divided into three quarters, Upper Breiðholt, where our proposed site is, Lower-Breiðholt and Seljahverfi. To the west, the neighborhood is marked by Reykjanesbraut and to the north and east it is marked by Elliðaár, a southern branch. To the south, the neighborhood is marked by the municipal borders of Kópavogur.

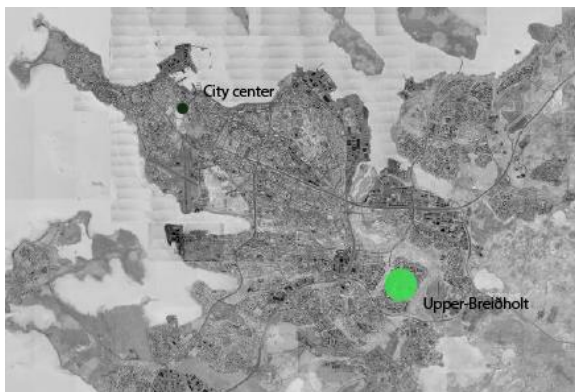


Figure 1 - Proposed site in context of wider city



Figure 2 - Proposed site of Austurberg and Gerðuberg

The Breiðholt neighborhood has a high percentage of social houses and immigrants and has undeservedly received negative press coverage through the years as being known as “a ghetto”. Despite that, the district is characterized by powerful community work led by the city of Reykjavík, with an emphasis on intergenerational communication. It has several good schools, good sports facilities, while natural recreational areas are easily accessible.

The proposed site is in upper-Breiðholt. It is approximately 10 ha and currently has about 9.300 residents. The site is centered around the main road through the neighborhood - Austurberg. Today the street has an elementary school and a college which is one of the largest secondary schools in Iceland. The college is divided into two schools, a normal day school and an evening school for adults. The school offers qualifications in specialized branches of vocational learning, licensed practical nursing, beautician, carpenter and electrician. In the area there is as-well a sports hall and 3 football fields, a swimming pool, Gerðuberg culture house, library, health care center and a few small retail units. 82% of the wider Breiðholt district is made up of blocks. These provide a strong identity for the area.

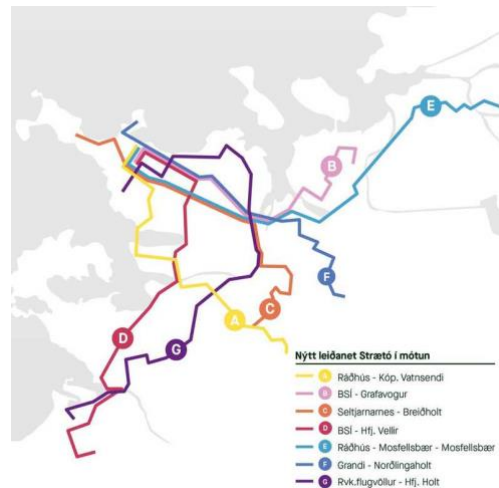


Figure 1 - Diagram showing the BRT route.
Route C is for Breiðholt

The site and areas surrounding Austurberg are currently car centric-with street frontages being dominated by car parks. This is at the expense of creating attractive and people-friendly public spaces. To help address this, in the near future Austurberg, will be upgraded into the main street or “Borgargata” (city-street) which will be used for the new Borgarlinan (BRT system). This BRT will improve connections across the whole Breiðholt area to other parts of the city. For this reason, the entire Austurberg road, surrounding street and public realm network should be considered as part of this project to ensure neighbourhood wide benefits are realized. In this context, the proposed site will act as a catalyst to wider neighbourhood regeneration.

City climate priorities and specific environmental issues to address

The city of Reykjavík takes responsibility and is in party to the Paris agreement. The city of Reykjavík has published a [climate policy and action plan](#) where it declares support to ensure that the goals of the agreement are achieved or even improved. The established goals are for a carbon-neutral city by 2040. The city intends to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and minimize the negative environmental impact through targeted action.

In Reykjavík all electricity is produced with hydroelectric power and houses are geothermally heated, energy usage in district heating releases no greenhouse gas. This means that transport is the main source for greenhouse gas emissions and is the largest challenge for the city. The release of greenhouse gasses in Reykjavík is minor compared with international figures, at 2,8 CO2 tonnes per person in the year 2013. However, action must still be taken to ensure Reykjavik can show leadership in taking climate action. Reykjavík was the first municipality in Iceland to make a policy on reduction on greenhouse gas emissions in 2009. In 2016 the Reykjavík City Council decided to go further and make even more ambitious goals that the city of Reykjavík will be carbon neutral by 2040 and adjust to climate change in a humane and eco-friendly fashion.

To help achieve this, the city’s Municipal Plan 2010-2030 sets the goal is to change travel modes so public transport will rise from 4% to 12% and the ratio of pedestrians and cyclists should rise from 19% to over 30% in 2030. By 2040 emissions from automotive traffic and public transport will be free of greenhouse gases. Public transport will be strengthened through the use of a bus rapid system, a Public Transportation corridor. In co-operation with Reykjavik, Energy support will be put behind energy exchanges in transport and an increased ratio of electricity-powered modes of transport.

Other important factors relevant to future development that are noted in the climate policy is land use where the city claims that 90% of all new residential units will be inside the current urban area borders to increase the close-proximity of public services and to reduce travel needs.

Ensuring the resilience of the area to future changes to the climate will also be essential. are no specific meteorological measurements available for the proposed site, however, the wind can always be a challenging factor in Iceland and should be taken into consideration. Emphasis should be placed on weather sheltering environment and appropriate orientations to the sun.

There is the risk of earthquakes in the entire metropolitan area. Most earthquakes measured in Reykjavik are below 5.0 at Richter.

Other expectations for the site's redevelopment

Building on the climate action plan and the challenges of population growth, the city along with other municipalities in the capital area have planned a BRT, public transport system, currently named Borgarlínan or the City line. On October 27th an agreement was signed for project management and consulting for Borgarlínan which means that the project has already started. It is planned that in the years 2023-2033, special lanes will be laid for Borgarlínan and the system will be up and running phase by phase until fully completed by 2033.

This new BRT system will bring a huge opportunity for the area to focus on increasing sustainable transportation. In doing so it should challenge traditional approaches to design as the area needs to be focused on creating a safe, sustainable and pleasant environment for everyone. Improving the streetscape and delivering a high-density central area will be critical to delivering this, and are key aims of this project.

The proposal needs to address or change the transportation culture - where people's first choice will be to walk, cycle or travel with the BRT system instead of taking the car. The main areas to address will be improving the streetscape and repurposing parking lots. Attention should be given to plots for densification, the square and open land by Gerðuberg culture center.

The space should increase the availability of both residential housing and commercial development. This will increase the balance between the number of apartments and employment opportunities as mentioned in the neighborhood plan for Breiðholt. The site needs to feel and look like a pleasant environment, where aesthetics, diversity in architecture, form, texture, sustainable materials, vegetation, green roofs, vegetable gardens and blue-green water solutions along with biodiversity will be a priority. Due to the high number of immigrants in the area, the place needs as-well to suit different cultural activities so everyone can feel like home. There is a lack of space for public gatherings or a space to rest or heal, the square and open land by the culture house can be an interesting object to take a look at.



Figure 2 - Breiðholt and its future designed in the neighborhood plan

Specific city planning rules and regulations

The proposed site is within the Reykjavik Neighborhood Plan for Breiðholt, which is a new planning device or policy that is based on the [Reykjavík Municipal Plan 2010-2030](#). The work of the neighbourhood plan is a result of extensive consultation with the residents of Breiðholt. The plan is meant to ensure a positive future for the city by encouraging modern urban development while also making the city's districts more sustainable and environmentally conscious. The plan's goal is also to restore and improve Reykjavík's cityscape and to encourage health conscious and beneficial activity. Furthermore, an integral part of the process is to encourage residents to take part in shaping their urban environment through an active consultation. All of the city's established neighborhoods will receive their own neighbourhood plans, which will propose policies for the alteration of properties, population increases, transportation, green spaces, improvements to shops and service within the neighbourhood and more.

The neighbourhood plan for our proposed site wants to strengthen this central area of Upper-Breiðholt, the plan is to allow the building of over 33,000 m² commercial and residential housing in the parking lots and unused land in the area. A neighbourhood square is already in place in Gerðuberg and needs to be developed further so it can be a more pleasant space for an increased population and so it can host public gatherings and other events.



Figure 3 - Overview of Austurberg and Gerðuberg and how the residents see the future in the area. Image from the Breiðholt neighbourhood plan.

The City's Municipal Plan proposes a policy for the development of the city towards the distant future. The Municipal Plan sets out where residential areas of the future and industrial areas are intended to be, where new roads and pathways should lie and which areas will be set aside as recreational areas.

Reykjavík is a young city and has grown considerably in the past decades. The main emphasis of the Municipal Plan in the past years has been to create suitable conditions for its continuous growth; to ensure that the city is ready to meet the demands of anticipated growth in population and industry. The project for the next decades is to fully develop the city on the peninsula. Over 90% of all new residential units until 2030 will rise within the current urban area if the Municipal plan's proposals are implemented. The municipal Plan as-well proposes a policy on sustainable design of neighbourhoods in Reykjavík. The policy's aim is that the city is built up as self-sufficient where the quality of the manmade environment and environmentally friendly solutions is a foundation for an environmentally friendly environment. The objective is as-well to create a coherent urban area with a city-oriented street system where environmentally friendly travel modes are a priority. Dense and mixed urban neighbourhood on a human scale will rise at developing areas, located within the current urban area. In such areas, residential units and offices, as well as commercial and service activities, will intertwine within the same street plots.