

HOLWERD

THE NETHERLANDS

SETTING

- **Timeframe:** as of April 2025
- Small rural village near the Wadden Sea coast in the northern Netherlands.
- **Community-driven efforts** to reduce light pollution in Holwerd as part of the DARKER SKY project, despite funding delays.

MAIN STAKEHOLDERS

- Local residents
- Local entrepreneurs and business owners (especially industrial area)
- Landmakers Cooperation (project initiators)
- Municipality of Noardeast-Fryslân
- DARKER SKY project partners (e.g., Hamburg University of Applied Sciences)

KEY APPROACH

- **Community meetings, street walks, demonstrations using VR and lighting simulations**
- Survey to assess perceptions and awareness of light pollution
- **Plans to dim or switch off lighting in selected streets and adopt motion sensors in industrial areas**
- Awareness-building through school visits, public events and peer-to-peer engagement
- Supporting DIY changes among residents and businesses while awaiting funding

KEY TOPICS

- Light pollution and its impact on health, nature and energy use
- **Community engagement and bottom-up participation**
- Smart and sustainable lighting solutions (dimming, motion sensors)
- **Youth involvement and long-term village identity**
- Setbacks due to paused funding and ongoing advocacy

IMPACT

- Increased awareness and understanding of light pollution across all generations
- **Strengthened community bonds and shared sense of responsibility**
- Residents and entrepreneurs already adopting voluntary lighting adjustments
- Project was temporarily paused due to funding issues, but momentum and support remain strong
- Inspiration spreading to neighbouring communities (e.g., Nijlân initiative)

*“THIS WASN’T A TOP-DOWN PLAN;
IT WAS NEIGHBOURS TALKING TO NEIGHBOURS.”*

Holwerd Reaches for the Stars Despite Setbacks



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In the small northern village of Holwerd, near the Wadden Sea coast, people are used to thinking big. Though less than 2.000 residents strong, the village once set out to break open its sea dike and bring the tide back in - a bold plan called Holwerd aan Zee (“Holwerd at Sea”), aiming to reconnect land and sea and bringing new life into the region. While that dream is temporarily on hold, it shows just how much courage and vision this small community holds.

So, when Holwerd became one of nine pilot sites in the international Interreg North Sea DARKER SKY project, aiming to reduce light pollution, it felt like a natural step. And for the local initiators - Landmakers Cooperation, who had also collaborated in the Holwerd aan Zee initiative - the path forward was clear: **this has to be a project done with the people, not just for them. To Landmakers, lighting isn't just a matter of infrastructure, but is strongly connected to health, nature, safety, tourism and energy savings, but above all, it concerns everyone in the village.**

A bottom-up beginning

Reducing light pollution can be simple but powerful by introducing smarter, more sustainable solutions. That means dimming or turning off lights in four streets in the village centre and exploring smart lighting options, like motion sensors, in the local industrial area called Lands Welvaren. But first, they had to talk to the people.

Landmakers invited residents to evening meetings, walked the streets with them at night, and even brought in virtual reality glasses to show how different lighting setups would look and feel. They organized a big event during the national “Night of the Nights” initiative with stargazing, an astronomy talk and the 3D lighting demo, established by the DARKER SKY project partners from the Hamburg University of Applied Sciences in Germany.

They listened to business owners who were concerned about safety and insurance, to older residents unfamiliar with the idea of



light pollution and “dark sky,” and to the youth, who often already knew about the issue of about light pollution and climate topics. Young people, in particular, quickly understood the benefits of reducing light pollution. Many of them plan to stay in Holwerd and therefore care very much about the village’s future.

A youth sounding board, set up originally for Holwerd aan Zee, became part of the lighting conversations. In a visit to a local school, children learned about light pollution and its effects on the environment. Everyone in the village got a chance to learn about light pollution and the lighting modification plans and to give their input.

Strong ties, new insights

At first, many in Holwerd thought it was already dark enough. During the initial meetings with residents, a survey was conducted to better understand how people perceived light pollution, what their lighting needs were, and how they felt about the current situation. The responses confirmed that many believed the village was sufficiently dark, until they were shown photos comparing true natural darkness with the village’s existing light levels. These visuals helped people begin to grasp the wider impact on health, energy use and nature. The survey also served as a baseline to track how opinions and experiences might evolve as the project progresses and changes to lighting will be made.

Crucially, Holwerd has a strong sense of community to build on: people were closely connected to one another, to the area, and to the landscape that surrounds them. Trust was already in place thanks to earlier village-wide initiatives.

The Land-makers team has lived and worked among them before. This wasn’t a top-down plan; it was neighbours talking to neighbours.

Even in the industrial area where safety is a key concern, especially with reports of past burglaries and valuable goods stored on-site, local entrepreneurs showed genuine interest in reducing light pollution. While some worried about insurance requirements that might mandate certain lighting levels, they were still open to explore alternatives. The idea isn’t to simply turn lights off, but to implement smarter solutions: dimming lights at night, using motion sensors, and switching to more nature-friendly technology. The approach aims to improve both safety, energy costs and sustainability, showing that better lighting doesn’t have to mean more lighting.



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A pause, not an end

Things were going well. The village was engaged, motivated and ready. But then, a challenge: funding that had been promised was suddenly paused. No money meant no way to move forward as planned with installing new lights or continuing community workshops for now.

It was frustrating. But Holwerd is used to setbacks - and to dreaming big despite them. While the progress is on hold on the forefront, behind the scenes Landmakers is doing everything they can to get the financing back on track, including legal steps if needed.

The Municipality of Noardeast-Fryslân, Holwerd's local authority, has expressed clear support for the DARKER SKY project, especially for its focus on community engagement and ecological awareness. A new officer responsible for public lighting has just taken up his role. He already confirmed that lighting will be adapted at a site on the edge of Holwerd where biodiversity

has been measured and discussions are ongoing about a second potential site within the village.

Beyond official steps, several residents and entrepreneurs have already started adjusting their own exterior lighting by installing timers, motion sensors or simply turning off unnecessary lights. These small-scale changes are visible in the village and already help normalise the idea of light-conscious living.

The knowledge is there. The connections are strong. And the people of Holwerd now have an understanding and an opinion. They've learned about the topic. They've talked about it with their neighbours. They understand the possibilities and have taken first steps themselves.

For the team, this growing awareness is seen as an investment in the community's future —because when the government asks and the village stays silent, nothing changes, but when people speak up with knowledge and motivation, it can truly make a difference.



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The awareness-raising is also spilling over to other places. After attending the “Dark Affairs – The Importance of Dark Nights” event in Leeuwarden in October, two residents launched their own citizen-led initiative against light pollution in their neighbourhood of Nijlân (Leeuwarden). The Landmakers team is supporting them with funding applications and programme development, while DARKER SKY experts Piet Zijlstra (lighting) and Arjen Strijkstra (biodiversity) are advising them.

What comes next?

If the funding returns, the team plans to bring in the 3D planning tool that can help people further visualize lighting changes in their own streets and yards. Not just telling them what might change but showing them and giving them a say.

Small changes, like dimming a few glaring lamps or adding motion sensors, could have a big impact. And Holwerd’s example might guide even more villages across the North Sea region.

For now, the stars above Holwerd still shine perhaps a little too dim behind the lights. But the people below are watching more closely than before. And when the time comes, they’ll be ready to make their village a place where darkness, safety and nature are integrated in their community.



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ABOUT

Interview took place in **April 2025** with Jan Zijlstra (Landmakers Cooperatie U.A.)

Main project partners

- Landmakers Cooperatie U.A., Jan-Willem van Kruyssen & Jan-Zijlstra
- Van Hall Larenstein University of Applied Science, Arjen Strijkstra & Ate Boerema

LEARN MORE

about Holwerd and current progress

- 🌐 [First Smart Streetlight Shines in Holwerd!](#)
- 🌐 [DARKER SKY Pilot Sites in Holwerd](#)
- 🌐 [DARKER SKY News](#)
- 🌐 [Holwerd aan Zee \(Dutch\).](#)

REDUCING LIGHT POLLUTION IN THE NORTH SEA REGION

GOOD PRACTICE STORY COLLECTION

This story is part of the Good Practice Story Collection of the Interreg North Sea DARKER SKY Project. The stories are gathered by our project partners and connected stakeholders, based on their work and experiences in different regions. They were collected during the first two years of the project (2024–2025). **Some reflect earlier stages and in many places further progress has been made since then.** For updates, please visit the project website and LinkedIn.

The collection aims to inspire and share practical insights into how different places reduce light pollution. **The stories come from diverse settings but are connected by a common approach:** bringing people together, balancing safety, everyday use and nature and learning through practice.

Enjoy reading! We hope the stories offer ideas and perspectives you can take with you.

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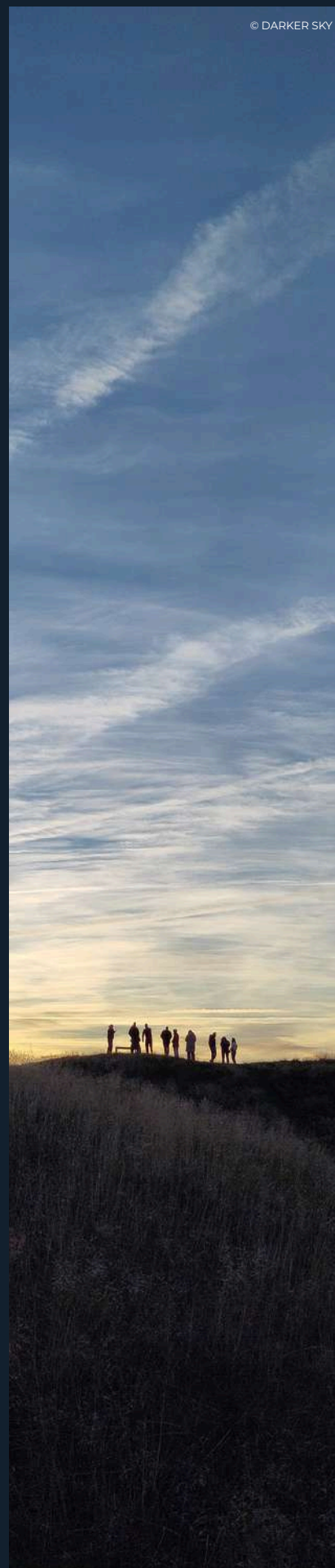
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