The central design idea of the new city centre in Böblingen is to use light to both illuminate and to shape the public space. The pedestrian zone now features 31 light rings that together represent a connecting element.
Most architects tend to leave the plans for the lighting until the very end. Yet the concept for the redesign of the railway station area in the German town of Böblingen turned this convention on its head, putting light first and using it to form the very foundations of the project. The German-Austrian landscape architects and urban planners Bauchplan started their plans by developing a luminaire, the so-called “Lichtring” (ring of light), to enable the creation of decelerated spaces.
The 230-centimetre-diameter rings form an upper boundary of the space. From their 8 metre mounting height they reflect the daylight and cast distinctive shadows on the expressive floor of Böblingen’s newly designed pedestrian zone.

In the beginning there was light – not only in Genesis, but also in the minds of the landscape architects from Bauchplan. During the workshop that was organised to gather suggestions for the central urban redevelopment of the Böblingen railway station area, planners came up with the idea of using light not only for night illumination, but also to mould and shape the public space. A lot to ask from the lighting solution, but certainly not impossible, as shown by the specially designed Lichtring luminaires, developed by Bauchplan in collaboration with the Bergmeister Leuchten luminaire manufacturer.

Visual overlays. For a long time the station area was little more than a transport space without any real amenities. The relocation of the bus station parallel to the railway by the local authorities offered the chance to reduce and reorganise the transport areas. As a result, Bauchplan transformed the Bahnhofstrasse (station street) into a pedestrian zone, framed neatly between two squares – the Bahnhofsplatz (station square) and the Elbenplatz. At the same time a new shopping centre was built nearby at the railway station. “The open space is designed to act as a strong counterpoint”, explains Tobias Baldauf, partner of the planning studio. It was necessary to strengthen the small-scale structures along the open pedestrian zone in relation to the private commercial spaces of the shopping centre, whilst also creating an alternative offer. As a result, Bauchplan broke up the linear design of the transport axis. The designers distanced themselves from the typology of the road by devising annular islands of light in the pedestrian zone. The defined space is illuminated with at least one lux, the minimum level of standards-compliant light to meet the necessary security requirements.

New spatial system. The planners created a “window to the old town” just south of the Bahnhofstrasse at the Elbenplatz, once one of the busiest squares for traffic in Böblingen. As a link between the adjacent old town on the top side and the new pedestrian area below, this key addition sets itself above the busy street space and incorporates water features to form an impressive prelude to the Bahnhofstrasse. A bunch of striking light rings indicate the new spatial system. They round off the large, centrally located body of water, strengthening the character of the space with their annular design. The Bahnhofplatz is formed by the beginning or the conclusion of the installation on the northern side, where the casual network of light rings meets a previously existing series of lighting columns. Here Bauchplan opted for a spatially defined “lighting break” to separate the field of columns from the first rings, clearly differentiating between the lighting effects and spatial quality of both solutions – ring and column. Munich-based lighting designers Lumen³ supported Bauchplan during the early stages of the project to help resolve a number of fundamental questions. How large should the ring be to maximise the light space in relation to the size of the luminaire? What...
It was necessary to strengthen the structures along the open pedestrian zone in relation to the private commercial spaces of the shopping centre, as well as creating an alternative offer by breaking up the linear design of the main transport axis.

kinds of distances between the luminaires are feasible? Which types of facades are suitable for mounting and hanging? Where is additional support required? The lighting technology was also outlined in advance to help achieve excellent visual comfort and differentiated levels of brightness. According to Balsauf, the default lighting concept for the ideas workshop was initially somewhat disappointing. The specification of a non-zonal solution left facade lighting as the only design option. As the representative sides of the Bahnhofstrasse show little discernible quality, Bauchplan did not want to additionally showcase these with light. The landscape architects defined the specification to create their own lighting system that could respond more freely to the space available. In retrospect, the intensive work on the illumination was a clear competitive advantage for Bauchplan, who certainly scored additional points with light. The landscape architects defied the idea that the new plan has been internalised by the local population and has thereby helped contribute to the formation of a new identity. The definition of a different name was an integral part of the design process for Bauchplan, explains Balsauf. The “design through words” approach helped when it came to clarifying their own ideas, as well as during the discussions with other participants involved in the planning. The success of this philosophy is reflected in the self-perception with which the new plan has been internalised by the town. “Bauchplan designs for Böblingen” was the way Christine Kraayvanger, the mayor responsible for the construction, summed up the design approach – an approach that has gone beyond the traditional confines of merely adding different places and equipment to instead create a completely new identity.

**NEUE MEILE, BÖBLINGEN, GERMANY**

Client: Stadt Böblingen (local authority)

Landscape architect: Bauchplan, Munich, Vienna

Lighting design: Lumen³, Munich

Luminaire manufacturer: Bergmeister Leuchten, Tegernau, Germany
