Urban Nature Playbook

for People, Pets and the Planet

C40 CITIES

BETTER CITIES FOR PETS

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This playbook provides guidance for cities to support the creation, improvement and increased accessibility of green spaces to benefit people, pets, and the planet. Featuring best practice and evidence-based recommendations, it is designed to inspire action in cities around the world.

As climate-related disasters such as heatwaves to floods become more frequent, proximity and access to green space is a critical factor for urban resilience and public health. This playbook will inspire the creation of pet-friendly urban green spaces that play a key role in climate and nature action helping to build more resilient cities that meet the needs of future generations.

As the number of pets rises globally, **fewer than half of people with pets surveyed in the Mars Global Pet Parent study consider their neighbourhoods to be very pet friendly.** In response, cities are increasingly prioritising spaces that accommodate pets for healthier, more connected communities. By integrating pet-friendly design into green and public spaces, cities can promote wellbeing, responsible pet ownership, and environmental sustainability.

Who we are

C40 Cities and the **Mars Better Cities for Pets™ Program** have joined forces to promote nature for all in urban environments. Together, we are working to increase access to green spaces, supporting biodiversity, climate resilience and wellbeing.

C40 Cities is a global network of nearly 100 cities committed to tackling climate breakdown through collaborative urban action championing leadership and action at the intersection of climate and nature in urban areas. Launched in 2021, C40's **Urban Nature Accelerator** supports cities to become greener and more climate resilient by integrating nature-based solutions. The accelerator focuses on enhancing urban green spaces, such as parks, urban forests and blue spaces, like ponds and lakes, while improving accessibility and connectivity to these spaces to improve physical and mental health, create green jobs, and protect communities against climate impacts. It encourages cities to set ambitious nature targets, engage vulnerable communities, and publicly report progress on two key indicators: the total cover of high-quality green and/or permeable spaces; and the accessibility and connectivity of green or blue spaces.

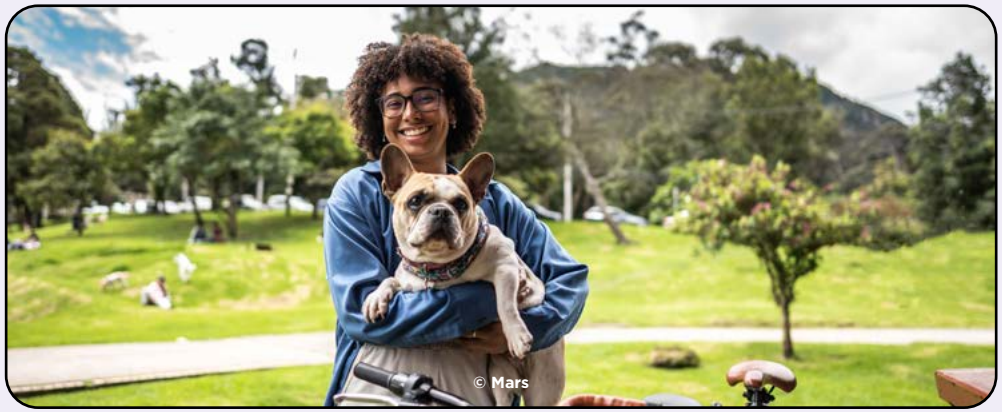
Mars, Incorporated, the world's largest pet food manufacturer, reaches half the world's pets. As a global leader in pet nutrition and health products and services, Mars is driven by the belief that pets make the world a better place – an idea that inspires its Purpose: A Better World for Pets. A world where they are happy, healthy, and welcome.This means creating a more sustainable world, an ambition reflected in the **Mars Net Zero Roadmap**, which outlines the company's ambition to reduce its greenhouse gas emissions by 50% by 2030.

Since 2017, Mars has been supporting cities to implement pet-friendly practices as part of its Better Cities for Pets™ Program. Now, in partnership with C40 Cities, we're driving a global movement for green spaces that are designed to benefit pets, people and our planet.

Our vision

By 2030, C40 and Mars aim to support 10 million people & pets to access inclusive green spaces that promote biodiversity, enhance resilience to climate risks, and improve overall wellbeing. By integrating pet-friendly design with climate-resilient urban planning, we can:

- Develop actionable strategies for cities, businesses, and communities to improve access to nature for all
- Expand access to urban green spaces to provide safe, welcoming areas for pets and people
- Support sustainable urban growth that benefits both people and pets while contributing to climate action goals.



Purpose of the playbook

This playbook offers practical guidance to support city governments, particularly signatories of the **C40 Urban Nature Accelerator**, to plan, fund, and deliver climate-resilient urban nature spaces that serve diverse urban populations and their pets.

As cities face increasing climate-related challenges, nature-based solutions are vital to build healthier, more equitable, and more resilient communities. This playbook will help cities harness the power of urban nature to achieve these goals, with a focus on inclusive, pet-friendly design.

The playbook:

- Promotes nature-based solutions for climate resilience, public health, and social equity
- Highlights the crucial role of communities, including people with pets, in activating and stewarding green spaces, and provides guidance on how to design these spaces with stakeholders in mind
- Helps city governments identify and prioritise actions for integrating nature into urban spaces
- Provides cities with proven tools, design strategies, and real-world examples to inspire implementation

The playbook draws from C40's Knowledge Hub, technical notes from the Urban Nature Accelerator, the Mars Better Cities for Pets™ Program and insights from C40 cities.

Who the playbook is for

The playbook is for:

- City decision-makers – including mayors, and leads in environment, health and planning
- Technical staff – such as urban planners, and parks and infrastructure teams
- Civil society and community partners – working to advance inclusive urban nature

It can be used:

- Strategically – to shape an urban nature strategy, resilience plan, or urban greening concept
- Practically – to guide teams in the design and delivery of green infrastructure projects
- Collaboratively – to engage and inspire stakeholders, from residents and community groups to urban planners and funders

How the playbook is structured

Our three-step approach provides cities with a clear, practical pathway to embed urban nature into everyday life, enhancing wellbeing, supporting biodiversity, and creating spaces that work for both people and pets. The steps guide cities from understanding and mapping nature's value, through to strategic planning and advocacy, and finally to implementation on the ground. They emphasise collaboration across departments, inclusive community engagement, and designing with nature at the heart of city infrastructure. Each step is supported by real-world examples, actionable guidance, and tools from the C40 Knowledge Hub and partners to help cities turn ambition into impact.

3 steps for urban nature: for people, pets and the planet

STEP 1:

Understand and map urban nature assets for people, pets, and the planet

- Map natural assets
- Identify vulnerable areas
- Quantify nature's benefits
- Engage communities, people, and their pets
- Build awareness and alignment across stakeholders

STEP 2:

Advocate and plan for nature and pet-friendly green spaces

- Embed nature and pet considerations into city strategies
- Update regulations and design codes
- Set measurable targets and goals
- Coordinate across city departments
- Partner with civil society
- Mobilise public and private investment

STEP 3:

Design and implement with nature, people and pets in mind

- Retrofit and reimagine parks and public spaces
- Design multipurpose green and blue spaces
- Create inclusive, intergenerational, and multi-species spaces
- Green and pet-friendly everyday infrastructure—streets, pavements, roofs, and walls with nature-based solutions and pet amenities
- Use permeable, cooling materials
- Activate residual and underused spaces
- Ensure safe and connected spaces for people and pets

Each step in the playbook includes:

- Core actions that cities and stakeholders advocating for urban nature can take to move from vision to impact
- City examples that showcase real-world applications of these actions
- Useful resources and tools from the C40 Knowledge Hub and partners to guide the actions

Adapting the playbook to your city

This guidance presents a broad framework—cities are encouraged to adapt actions to suit their context. Not all interventions will apply everywhere, but the principles of equity, resilience, and inclusion should guide all decisions. The actions should be adapted to suit your city's capacity, scale, and local climate and planning context.

Consider:

- Your city's available land, density, climate risks, and social priorities
- What's already working locally that can be strengthened
- Community needs, including people and pets that are most vulnerable to the impacts of the climate crisis

Introduction

Recognising nature as essential infrastructure for urban resilience, the health of people and pets, and ecosystems.

Urban nature is critical to the climate crisis

We are in the midst of a climate emergency, exacerbated by the health, water, food and economic crises, that requires bold, urgent action. Putting nature at the centre of our response to the crisis is critical. Urban nature benefits people, protects the planet, and creates healthier, more welcoming environments for pets and animals who share our cities.

Urban nature delivers wide-ranging, measurable benefits. It cools our cities, cleans our air and water, builds healthier communities, and strengthens the human-animal bond—all while helping cities adapt to a changing climate.

What are nature-based solutions?

Nature-based solutions (NbS) are actions to protect, sustainably manage, and restore natural and modified ecosystems that address societal challenges effectively and adaptively, simultaneously benefiting people and nature.*

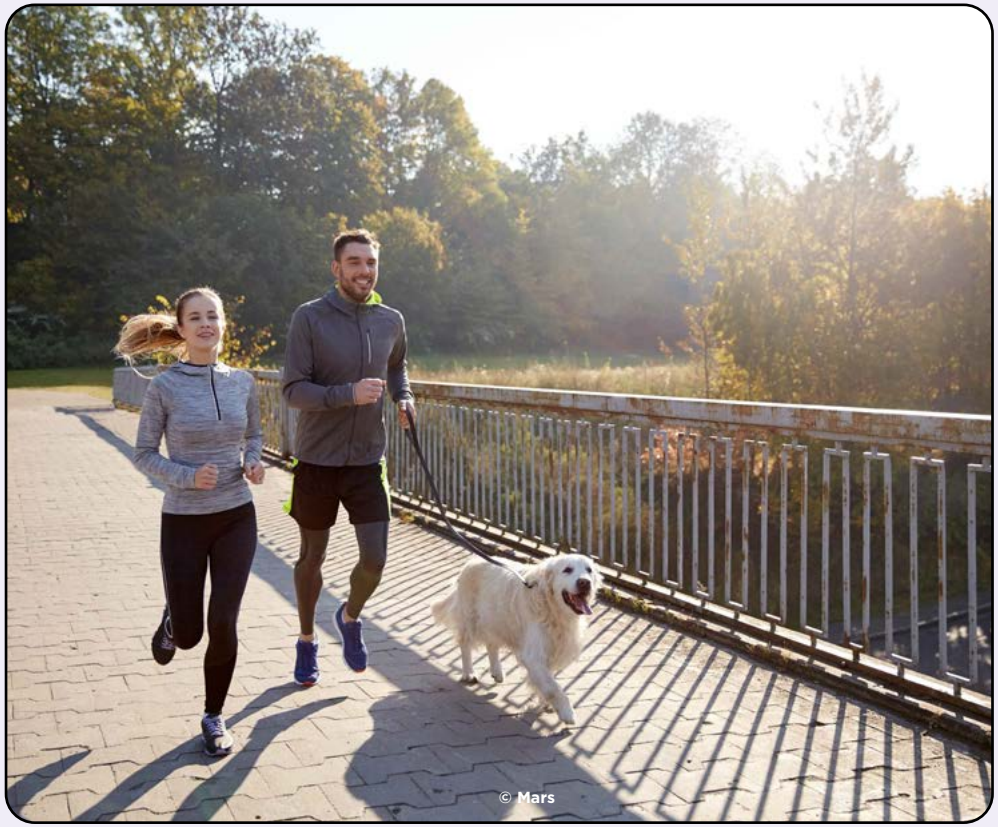
Within the umbrella definition of nature-based solutions, enhancing urban nature is one of the key actions which deliver benefits for communities and biodiversity in cities.

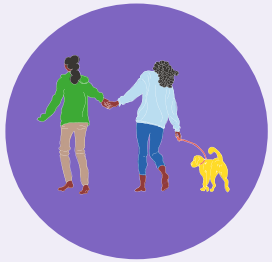
NbS are some of the most cost-effective and impactful tools cities have to deliver on climate, health, and equity goals.

*IUCN: Nature-based Solutions

How urban nature benefits everyone in cities

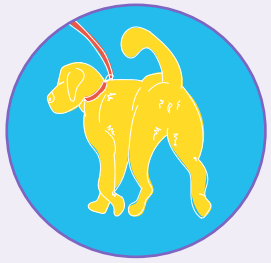
As cities around the world grapple with the twin challenges of climate change and rapid urbanisation, the need for inclusive, resilient, and nature-rich urban environments has never been more urgent. This Urban Nature playbook recognises that green and blue spaces are essential infrastructure for healthier, more equitable, and climate-resilient cities. These spaces are key for people, pets, and the planet: they cool our neighbourhoods, support biodiversity, foster community wellbeing, and provide safe, enriching environments for both humans and animals. Integrating pet-friendly design with climate-resilient urban planning underscores the interconnectedness of environmental sustainability, public health, and social equity—reminding us that thriving cities are those where all living beings can flourish. Highlighted next are the key benefits that urban nature provides for people, pets, and the planet.





PEOPLE

Green spaces improve mental health by offering calming, restorative environments that reduce anxiety and stress. They improve physical health by encouraging movement and exercise, through walking, cycling or playing sports and games. By providing shade and cooling, green spaces also help reduce the health impacts of extreme heat, especially in densely populated areas. They encourage social connection by creating shared spaces where people can meet, relax and build a sense of community. Equitable access to nature is a key part of climate justice, ensuring that everyone benefits from protection against climate risks, regardless of income, background or location, and gains in health and wellbeing.



PETS

Parks, green corridors, and accessible open spaces provide pets with safe, stimulating environments to explore, play and exercise. Designing green spaces with pets in mind, by including water stations, pet-friendly paths and shaded rest spots, supports responsible pet ownership and ensures pets' wellbeing. When communities are involved in caring for these nature spaces, it strengths local stewardship and encourages respectful, shared use of public spaces. In addition to health benefits for pets, research shows that people with pets tend be more physically active, report less loneliness and stress and have stronger social connections, making pets valuable companions in urban life.

PLANET

Vegetated and natural green and blue spaces, such as waterbodies, wetlands, green roofs and permeable surfaces, play a vital role in supporting climate resilience. They help cool cities by reducing the urban heat island effect, making urban environments safer and more comfortable during heatwaves. These spaces also absorb and store flood and rainwater which helps prevent localised and city-wide flooding. They absorb carbon, contributing to climate mitigation efforts. Green spaces also improve air quality by filtering pollutants and particulates. They also provide vital habitats that help restore and protect biodiversity in urban environments.

KEY RESOURCES (LINKS):

Introducing Spotlight On: Nature-based solutions

Why Your City Should Use Nature-Based Solutions to Manage Climate Risks

Step 1: Understand and map urban nature assets for people, pets, and the planet

Map and assess urban nature to guide greener, pet-friendly, and climate-resilient city planning.

The first step in making cities greener, more climate-resilient, and pet-friendly is understanding what nature already exists, and the role it plays in supporting urban life. Urban nature is often under-measured, undervalued and underinvested, despite delivering a vital range of benefits. Recognising this encourages cities to identify and map their existing green and blue assets, including their accessibility and suitability for people and pets, and to begin quantifying the multiple benefits these green spaces provide or could provide across climate, health, economic, and social systems.

KEY ACTIONS FOR STEP 1

Map natural assets

- Conduct spatial analysis to map trees, parks, green corridors, wetlands, river systems, rooftops, and underused public spaces. Consider canopy coverage, biodiversity hotspots, and functional green infrastructure like bioswales or permeable surfaces which reduce flooding.
- Determine where high concentrations of people and pets are living, working and playing and if any current green open spaces that include pet-focused amenities are already available.

Identify vulnerable areas

- Use vulnerability assessments to identify where hazards and urban challenges such as extreme heat, flooding, poor air quality, or nature deprivation are concentrated. Assess exposure to these against communities' capacities to cope, considering low-income and vulnerable groups.

Quantify nature's benefits

- Use natural capital accounting tools like InVEST, i-Tree, and TEEB (The Economics of Ecosystems and Biodiversity) to quantify the value of urban nature in terms of avoided health costs, reduced flood damage, carbon sequestration, and economic productivity.

Engage communities, people and their pets

- Ask residents and stakeholders to provide their input on where they think more green space and pet-friendly amenities are needed.

Build awareness and alignment

- Communicate benefits by highlighting the way nature supports urban life such as cleaner air, wellbeing, cooling, flood protection, shade, and even safer spaces for dog walking and family outings. In tandem, share the way pets benefit individuals and communities such as improving physical and mental health, social connectivity and a sense of safety.
- Acknowledge trades-offs and understand that even good solutions can have downsides. For example, permeable paving reduces flood risk, but if not adequately designed and specified could present accessibility challenges.
- Public input and awareness campaigns can build political and public support for community initiatives that benefit people, pets, and the planet alike.

WHY IT MATTERS

Recognising environmental, social and economic value

Nature-based solutions are increasingly recognised as **high-impact, low-regret investments** for cities facing climate risks. A growing body of evidence shows that NbS can deliver measurable benefits across multiple policy agendas at once—climate adaptation, public health, biodiversity, job creation, and social cohesion. By accounting for ecosystem services, cities can make more informed decisions that integrate nature into urban planning, leading to cost savings and more sustainable development.

How cities across the world are implementing Step 1

Sydney, Australia
Sydney has used interactive online technology, story maps, and community consultations to guide its thorough review of key nature strategies, such as the Greening Sydney Strategy, Urban Forest Strategy, and Street Tree Master Plan. The measurement of canopy and green cover, conducted by the city every two years, serves as a crucial tool for assessing progress on urban nature goals.

Mexico City, Mexico
Chapultepec Park is Latin America's largest urban park with 866 hectares (over twice the size of New York's Central Park) and approximately 30 million visitors annually. By combining extensive green infrastructure, community-focused programming (including regular pet adoption fairs introduced by the city government), and pet-friendly design, Chapultepec exemplifies how public spaces can simultaneously address urban resilience, biodiversity, and social wellbeing, creating a thriving hub for people and pets and the wider community.

São Paulo, Brazil
São Paulo's urban nature mapping effort integrated satellite imagery with socio-economic data to highlight where green infrastructure was lacking. The resulting afforestation strategy prioritised neighbourhoods with extreme heat exposure and limited green space access—delivering not just climate resilience, but environmental justice.

Milan, Italy
Parco Canile Rifugio di Milano provides regular workshops and events involving the public in supporting animal welfare, including adoption events and campaigns, often in collaboration with local volunteers and NGOs. Similarly, another urban green space in Milan, the Giardini della Guastalla, integrates educational signs about proper dog etiquette and strategically placed pet waste stations to keep the park clean and safe. Cultural events and exhibitions include topics related to animal welfare, fostering broader community awareness about pets. Collaborations with local animal welfare groups help promote adoption, responsible pet care, and other animal rights causes.

London, UK
London is considered one of the most pet-friendly cities in Europe, with several events (e.g. charity walks) and appropriate parks, which have designated off-lead areas. One example of pet-friendly green space is Kneller Garden, which is a key example of acknowledging and balancing trade-offs by offering safe and sustainable river access for both dogs and people. Park users are encouraged to make use of a safe and playful multi-level dog-dip downstream of a fish ladder allowing for fish and wildfowl migration and reducing bank erosion.

Freetown, Sierra Leone
Known as the #FreetownTheTreetown campaign, Freetown is pioneering a data-driven and community-led approach to urban reforestation that prioritises climate-vulnerable and low-income areas in need of regreening. Through tree tracking, verification, incentivisation to plant and monitor trees, and impact investment, the city aims to ensure that every tree planted contributes to climate resilience. To date, Freetown has planted over 1.2 million trees, restored over 1,200 hectares of urban land, and created over 5,000 green jobs.

Los Angeles, USA
Los Angeles (LA) developed a Biodiversity Index baseline measurement in 2022. This resulted in the LA Biodiversity Index Baseline Report, offering recommendations for enhancing biodiversity goals. Additionally, the city developed LA Biodiversity Guidelines, which provide valuable insights into incorporating biodiversity into urban environments both at the city and county levels. Los Angeles' Urban Nature Guidebook was published in August 2023, highlighting 20 native plant gardens, greenways, natural parks, and wildlife reserves across the city to inspire the transformation of additional sites into biodiverse habitats.

KEY RESOURCES FOR STEP 1:

Use the following resources to support mapping natural assets, assessing climate and social vulnerabilities, and valuing ecosystem services. They offer advice for quantifying benefits like flood absorption and cooling—essential for making the case for action. For example, São Paulo used such data to target tree planting in its hottest, least-green areas.

- **Nature-based solutions: How cities can use nature to manage climate risks.** This guide outlines how urban nature, such as parks, wetlands, and green roofs, can help cities address climate hazards like heatwaves and flooding, while also enhancing public health and biodiversity.
- **C40 Urban Nature Accelerator: Planned Actions.** This document details the commitments and planned actions by C40 cities to expand and enhance urban nature, aiming to reduce climate risks and improve urban resilience.
- **UNA Technical Note (2023).** A comprehensive technical guide supporting cities in implementing the Urban Nature Accelerator, offering methodologies for planning, monitoring, and scaling nature-based solutions.
- **IUCN Global Standard for Nature-based Solutions.** This C40's article presents the IUCN framework that assists cities in designing and implementing effective, equitable, and climate-resilient nature-based solutions, grounded in internationally recognised principles.
- **Natural Capital Accounting: Stanford InVEST Toolkit.** A suite of open-source models that help cities and planners assess the value of natural ecosystems in financial and planning terms to inform better decision-making.
- **A Walk in the Park Helps You and Your Pets: How to Get Pet-Friendly Green Space in Your Community.** This guide offers strategies for communities to advocate for and design green spaces that are accessible and enjoyable for both people and their pets.
- **4 Important Watchouts for Planning Pet-Friendly Places and Spaces.** A concise guide highlighting common pitfalls in designing pet-friendly areas and providing solutions to ensure safety, inclusivity, and sustainability.
- **Pet Amenities Enable Outdoor Fun Together: Here's How to Make the Most of Them.** This resource offers tips and design ideas for enhancing green spaces with amenities like shaded areas and water stations to make them more engaging for people and pets.

Step 2: Advocate and plan for nature and pet-friendly green spaces

Embed urban nature in planning, policy, budgeting, and cross-sector partnerships.

Once cities understand the value of nature and pets, the next step is to integrate them systematically into policies, plans, and budgets. This area emphasises aligning urban nature with broader climate, health, mobility, equity, and development agendas, ensuring nature is not sidelined, but central to urban transformation.

Effective planning for nature requires both top-down leadership, through city visioning, land-use policies, inclusive zoning for people and pets, and budget prioritisation, and bottom-up engagement, through inclusive community participation, local advocacy, and public partnerships. It should also consider pet-friendly design as a key approach to contribute to mental wellbeing, active lifestyles, and stronger community connections.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"Pet parents" are strategic stakeholders in urban greening efforts

Pets are integral to families. They are among the most frequent and consistent users of urban green spaces. Their daily routines - being walked, using local parks, engaging in community spaces - make them natural stewards of nature in cities. By engaging pet parents early in planning, together with pet advocacy groups, city governments can foster stronger civic partnerships, encourage responsible use of nature, and ensure that green spaces serve diverse needs across generations and species. Designing with pets in mind can:

- Increase public use and active presence in parks and green corridors
- Encourage community ownership and care of shared spaces
- Improve safety, accessibility, and inclusivity for all users
- Ensure that features and assets (such as dog waste bags and proper signage) that address the specific needs of these communities are included

Key Dog Park Features

KEY ACTIONS FOR STEP 2

Embed nature and pets in city strategies

- Incorporate nature into strategic city plans by mainstreaming urban nature into climate action plans, resilience strategies, biodiversity frameworks, and spatial masterplans. Nature-based and pet-friendly solutions should be positioned as integral to meeting carbon reduction, air quality, and public health targets.

Update regulations and design codes

- Incentivise permeable surfaces, green roofs, native landscaping, pet-safe amenities, and tree protection through updated development rules and design guidelines. Link these to equity outcomes, for example: requiring accessible, pet-friendly green space in affordable housing areas, while putting measures in place to prevent gentrification-driven displacement of low-income households.

Set measurable targets and goals

- Set up a monitoring, evaluation, and learning framework from the start to track progress and achievement on promoting urban nature, and to reassess and improve ongoing approaches. Make sure these follow the SMART method (specific, measurable, achievable, relevant, and time-bound).
- Use metrics like ecosystem extent, tree canopy, and species extinction risk to measure nature's health, and set goals to improve biodiversity and ecosystem health.
- Consider indicators that enable prioritisation of equity in access to green areas for people and pets. Use data to identify communities that are underserved by nature and at higher risk from climate impacts. Ensure public space and park designs respond to these needs by improving access to and accessibility of green and blue areas for all. Identify and address, through direct engagement with relevant groups, the specific needs of people with disabilities, older adults, underserved and marginalised communities, and their pets, among other groups.
- Consider indicators related to raising ambition and commitment, such as those aligned with C40's Urban Nature Accelerator – cities make nature goals public, develop green job programmes, involve vulnerable communities, and map climate risks.
- Include indicators that enable assessing population in terms of the amount of people with pets in the city, their location, and proximity to urban green and blue spaces.

Coordinate across departments

- Build institutional coordination by establishing cross-departmental working groups to align planning, public works, parks, transport, and housing teams around shared nature goals. Include community voices, health practitioners, and pet-focused NGOs as partners.
- Integrate nature in public space design for people and pets. When planning, include streets, squares, parks and footpaths or repurposed spaces, ensure design elements are fit for diverse users—including hydration points for people and pets, shaded walk and rest areas, waste stations, and accessible routes.

Partner with civil society

- Foster public engagement by strengthening support through storytelling, education on civic and responsible pet ownership, participatory budgeting, community events that celebrate local nature, and initiatives that build a sense of community ownership.
- Centre communities in the process by including residents, especially those who depend most on public nature and have limited access to it, in mapping and valuation efforts. Engage underserved communities, youth groups, environmental advocates, and pet advocates in the design of green spaces using approaches such as community-led science and nature research, storytelling, and mapping.

Mobilise public and private investment

- Create incentives for investment through development of tax incentives, grants, and subsidies to encourage business and private investors to fund green infrastructure projects. Highlight the long-term economic benefits of investing in urban nature for people, pets, and the planet.
- Foster public-private partnerships, including collaborations between government agencies, private companies, and non-profit organisations to pool resources and expertise. These partnerships can drive large-scale environmental projects and ensure sustainable funding.
- Promote investment opportunities that generate positive environmental and social impacts alongside financial returns. Encourage investors to support projects that enhance biodiversity, improve air and water quality, and create green jobs.
- Implement robust reporting mechanisms to track the progress and impact of investments in urban nature. Ensure transparency and accountability to build trust among investors and the public, demonstrating the tangible benefits of their contributions.

WHY IT MATTERS
Planning for nature is about shifting from reactive greening to intentional ecosystem-building. C40's research shows that cities that strategically plan for nature—and center equity—are more likely to deliver multiple, lasting benefits.

Nature-based planning is not just about land use, but about shaping healthier, more livable cities that serve all residents. This includes pets and animals, who often share our public spaces but are rarely considered in design or planning processes.


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How cities across the world are implementing Step 2

Tokyo, Japan
In Tokyo, biodiversity conservation has been improved with the revision and publication of a Tokyo Biodiversity Strategy in April 2023. This plan underscores Tokyo's commitment to the sustainable use and preservation of biodiversity. Volunteer organisations play a pivotal role in executing conservation activities in designated areas aimed at protecting and restoring valuable natural spaces. To expand and strengthen community engagement, Tokyo is undertaking collaborative efforts with local volunteer organisations making conservation activities accessible even to inexperienced participants in order to find and retain new volunteers. This initiative not only fosters conservation but allows urban residents to directly experience the benefits of these activities and the allure of nature.


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Bengaluru, India
In Cubbon Park—Bengaluru's largest green spaces—urban nature serves both ecological and community needs. The park's permeable soil and tree cover provide natural cooling and flood mitigation, while its welcoming design has turned it into a social hub, particularly for pet parents. Weekly dog gatherings, led by local residents, enhance community stewardship and public love for green space. Bengaluru has been championing improved government efforts and high community involvement in inclusive, accessible, pet-friendly and nature-positive initiatives. This includes creating a collaborative environment, developing pet-friendly parks across Bengaluru, and partnering with others to expand and improve the city's park infrastructure. Mars Petcare has actively engaged with Bengaluru's pet-loving community through initiatives at Cubbon Park—setting up Pedigree Corners to educate both new and existing pet parents on balanced nutrition, while creating fun, pet-friendly experiences. Mars has also been supporting the city's pet-loving spirit through adoption drives in partnership with local shelters and NGOs.

Milan, Italy
BAM – Biblioteca degli Alberi di Milano (Milan's Trees Library) is a modern urban park in Milan, celebrated for its innovative landscape design and rich cultural programming. It exemplifies a successful public-private partnership, with public ownership and private management funded by sponsors. The park is dog-friendly, featuring off-lead areas and hosting activities that encourage harmony between animals, humans, and nature, such as dog-friendly fitness sessions and group walks.

London, UK
Launched in 2023, London's Green Roof Fund provides grants to retrofit buildings—like schools, community centres, and businesses—with nature-based green and biodiverse roofs. Targeted at areas with limited green space and high vulnerability to heat and flooding, the fund supports urban cooling, stormwater management, and biodiversity. By turning rooftops into climate infrastructure, London is expanding its urban nature network into the built environment—bringing greenery to places where parks aren't possible.

Guadalajara, Mexico
As part of Guadalajara's broader strategy to address urban heat islands and enhance both city resilience and residents' quality of life, the city has integrated nature as a main pillar into their planning instruments. The city is striving to become Mexico's leading 'tree city' by making significant investments in urban tree planting. Despite the limited available land in the city, in 2022 and 2023 alone, Guadalajara planted more than 40,000 trees in underserved and heat-prone areas. It also introduced 20 new green corridors, enhancing public streets with additional trees, vegetation, and bike lanes. Through a strategy known as urban acupuncture, residents are being encouraged to plant trees on their own properties. The city's nature efforts are embedded in its new spatial plan, with actions prioritised based on a heat island analysis.

KEY RESOURCES FOR STEP 2 (LINKS):

These resources help cities embed urban nature into policies, plans, and budgets. They also help cities consider key components of pet-friendly policies, practices, plans, and communities overall. Find guidance on updating zoning codes, setting equity targets, and aligning nature with broader climate goals.

- ***Nature Positive: Financing the Transition in Cities.** Explores strategies for cities to secure funding for nature-positive initiatives, emphasising the importance of integrating nature into urban planning and investment decisions.
- ***Nature Positive: Guidelines for the Transition in Cities.** Provides a framework for urban policymakers to implement nature-positive actions, focusing on planning, governance, and stakeholder engagement.
- **Financing and Implementing Nature-based Solutions in Urban Areas.** Offers practical guidance for local governments in the Global South to finance and implement nature-based solutions, addressing common challenges and opportunities.
- **The Value of Incorporating Nature in Urban Infrastructure Planning.** Highlights the benefits of integrating natural elements into urban infrastructure, such as improved resilience, health outcomes, and biodiversity.
- **Inclusive Community Engagement Playbook.** A resource detailing methods for engaging diverse communities in climate action planning, ensuring inclusive and equitable participation.
- **Tools for Embedding Equity and Inclusivity in Climate Action Planning: Nature-based Solutions.** Provides tools and approaches to incorporate equity and inclusivity into nature-based climate action planning processes.
- **How to Enhance, Restore and Protect Biodiversity in Your City.** Outlines strategies for urban areas to improve biodiversity through restoration, protection, and sustainable practices.
- **BETTER CITIES FOR PETS™ Playbook for Pet-Friendly Cities.** Offers guidelines for cities to become more pet-friendly, focusing on infrastructure, policies, and community engagement.
- **Key Features of Successful Pet-Friendly Green Spaces and Dog Parks.** Details essential elements for designing effective and enjoyable dog parks that cater to both people and pets.
- **Responsible Pet Ownership Communication Toolkit.** Provides communication materials to promote responsible pet ownership within communities.
- **Pets in Public: Key Messages for People and Pets.** Shares key messages to educate people with pets on best practices for managing pets in public spaces.
- **Signage for Pet-Friendly Places Toolkit.** Offers templates and guidelines for creating signage that supports pet-friendly environments.
- **Ways to Spotlight Local Pet Ordinances and Licensing Requirements.** Suggests methods for raising awareness about local pet-related laws and licensing among residents.
- **State of Nature Metrics.** Introduces four key indicators to measure and track the state of nature, aiding in the assessment of biodiversity and ecosystem health.
- **Urban Nature Indexes.** Presents a set of indicators developed by IUCN to assess urban biodiversity and the effectiveness of nature-based solutions in cities.
- **City Biodiversity Index (or Singapore Index).** A tool developed by the Convention on Biological Diversity to help cities evaluate and monitor their biodiversity efforts.
- **IUCN Global Standard for Nature-based Solutions.** Provides a framework for designing and verifying nature-based solutions, ensuring they are effective and sustainable.
- **Urban Nature Accelerator's indicators.** An initiative by C40 Cities to support urban areas in implementing nature-based solutions and enhancing green infrastructure.

Step 3: Design and implement with nature, people and pets in mind

Transform open spaces and everyday urban surfaces with climate resilient, nature-based and pet-friendly solutions.

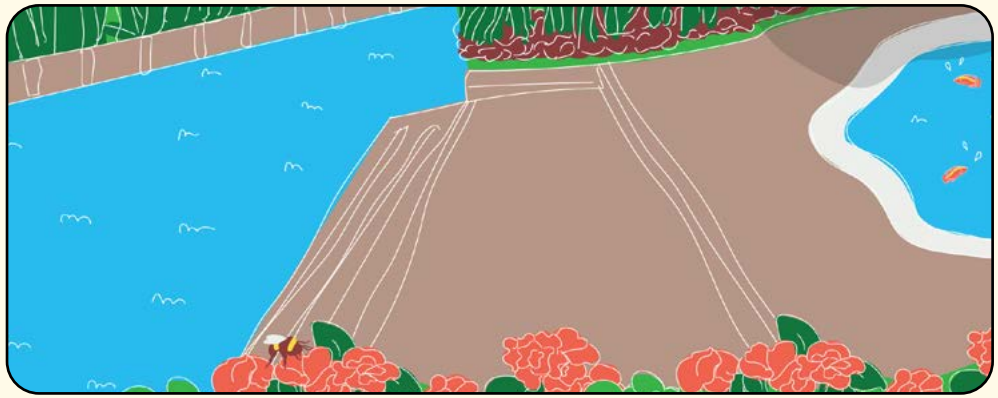
Designing with nature isn't just about parks and trees, it's about rethinking how nature can improve how cities function. This step focuses on putting nature into action, across both public open spaces and the everyday surfaces of the built environment. It's about creating places that provide cooling, absorb stormwater, support biodiversity, and invite people and their pets to gather, play, and rest in urban nature environments.

Designing and implementing urban nature must go beyond aesthetics. It must address local climate challenges, deliver public-health improvements, promote inclusion, and reduce inequalities. This means embedding nature-based solutions and pet-friendly amenities into infrastructure, mobility systems, housing developments, vacant land reuse, and city-wide green networks.

Cities can apply a range of spatial design strategies to integrate nature across their urban fabric. Adding even simple pet amenities to pocket parks, sidewalks and streets promotes public health and increased community connectivity. These interventions below should always be adapted to climate needs, community priorities, and biodiversity goals.

A. OPEN SPACES

Open spaces include parks, open squares, riversides, and other public outdoor areas designed for recreation, rest, and gathering. When planned with nature at the core, they can deliver maximum benefits—cooling entire neighbourhoods, absorbing floodwaters, and supporting biodiversity, and wellbeing of people and pets.



B. URBAN FABRIC

Urban fabric refers to the everyday built environment—streets, rooftops, walls, sidewalks, car parking areas and in-between spaces. Greening this fabric unlocks vast, underused potential for nature in dense cities, transforming grey infrastructure into living systems that cool, regenerate and provide opportunities to connect.

A. Design nature-rich open spaces

Retrofit and reimagine existing parks and public spaces

- Integrate tree canopy, bioswales, native planting, and green infrastructure that deliver climate benefits: cooling, air filtration, and flood mitigation.
- Ensure all new and retrofitted parks provide pet and people-friendly features: water stations, shaded seating, separate dog zones, and non-toxic vegetation.
- Enhance the design of parks, squares, and waterfronts to support cooling, biodiversity, recreation, and safe access.
- Use eco-friendly/recyclable materials when possible to build infrastructure and special additions like dog agility equipment.
- Install waste stations dispensing free waste bags for people with pets to pick up after dogs and trash receptacles to support disposal for safe, clean and well-kept urban spaces. Consider providing compostable bags for pet waste disposal.

Design multipurpose green and blue spaces

- Use natural buffers like wetlands, reeds, and floodable meadows to manage stormwater while creating inviting recreational areas.
- Integrate features in parks and large green areas, based on previous community engagement, to support diverse users such as a community garden, fitness equipment, kiosks and dog friendly areas.
- Ensure safety and accessibility with gently sloped entrances and provide pet-safe water access areas to reduce the risk of erosion and improve biodiversity protection.
- Design amenities and topographical features with nature, people and pets in mind such as shaded areas, hydration points, waste facilities, water basins/filtrations, and pet-safe vegetation.

Create inclusive, intergenerational, and multi-species spaces

- Add features that support diverse users such as benches with back support for older people, ramps for wheelchairs and strollers, and designated quiet zones for sensory sensitivity.
- Design features to separate sensitive ecological zones from high-use or pet-active areas using soft landscaping or natural fencing.
- Update regulations and zoning codes: Incentivise permeable surfaces, green roofs, native landscaping, and tree protection through updated development rules and design guidelines. Link these to equity outcomes—for example, requiring accessible green space in affordable housing areas.
- Improve walkability and access to ensure spaces are usable and safe for residents with children, mobility aids, and guide dogs.

Pets and biodiversity: Designing with balance

As cities become more inclusive and pet-friendly, thoughtful design can play a key role in supporting both pets and ecological health, ensuring that green spaces meet the needs of pets and people while protecting biodiversity, minimising wildlife disturbance, and enhancing overall environmental resilience:

- Zoning and signage: Clearly separate sensitive habitat zones from pet-active areas through soft fencing or planting buffers.
- Lead policies: Designated off-lead and on-lead zones to protect wildlife and meet pets' needs.
- Education and stewardship: Use signage and community programming to promote responsible pet ownership alongside protecting nature.

By designing with intention, cities can make urban nature accessible and welcoming, while protecting the ecosystems that make these spaces thrive.

B. Green urban fabric

Include green and pet-friendly everyday infrastructure such as streets, sidewalks, roofs, and walls with nature-based solutions and pet amenities

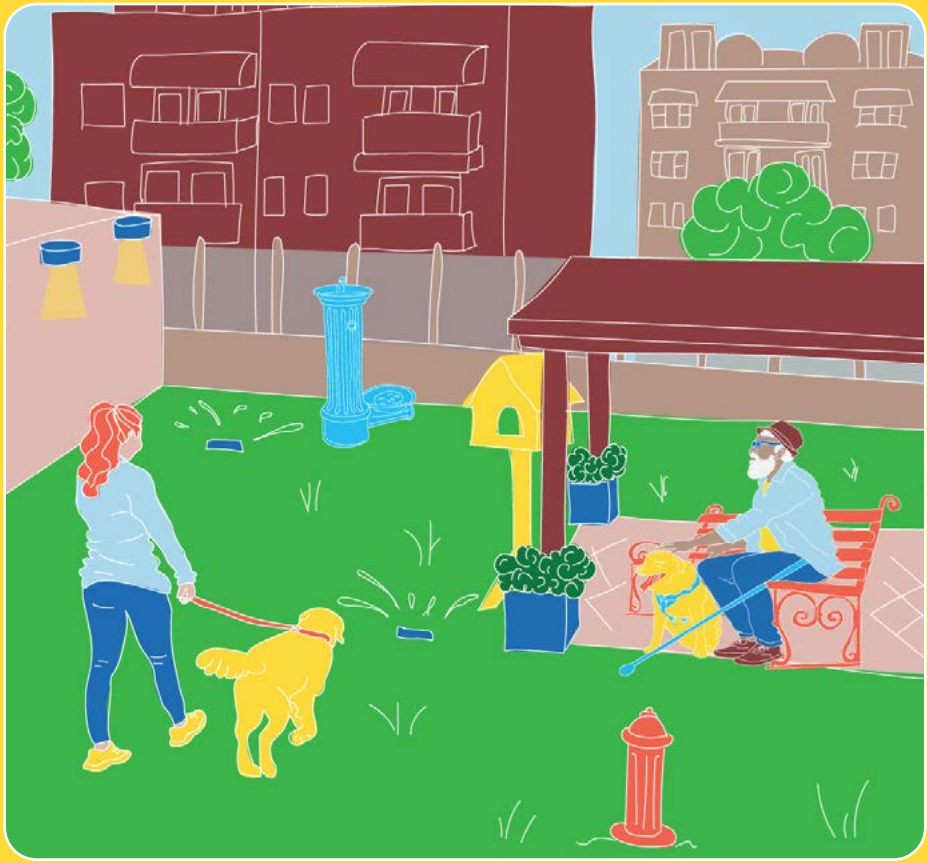
- Plant linear green corridors along pavements and medians as part of a broader urban planning project, using tree species selected for shade, drought resilience, and biodiversity.
- Encourage or mandate green roofs and vertical gardens on both public and private new developments, positioning them as essential elements of everyday urban infrastructure that support climate resilience and biodiversity.
- Connected green pavements, rooftops, medians, and building facades to reduce heat and pollution, and improve biodiversity flows.
- Ensure greenery in pet-friendly spaces isn't poisonous to pets. Identify a database relevant for your country for a list of plants, flowers and trees that are considered safe for pets.

Use permeable and cooling materials

- Replace impermeable surfaces with permeable pavers, gravel paths, and cooling pavements, especially in flood-prone or high-heat zones. Choose pet-friendly materials that stay cooler, are safe and comfortable for walking.
- Educate maintenance staff on the upkeep of permeable systems to ensure long-term effectiveness, especially in areas frequented by pets, where wear and waste management can impact performance.

Activate residual and underused spaces

- Explore opportunities to make pet-friendly areas in underused public spaces. This might include activating leftover spaces under flyovers, on rooftops, between buildings, or around parking garages and car parks as pocket parks, pollinator gardens, community spaces or off-lead dog zones.
- Use lightweight, modular, and recycled materials where ground loading or space is constrained.



Ensure connectivity and safety for people and pets

- Design green routes with consistent tree cover and safe crossings so residents and their pets can walk comfortably and securely.
- Use natural buffers (shrubs, low fencing) to separate high-traffic roads from greenways.

Use pet-safe native or adaptive plant species to reduce water needs and support local wildlife.

Apply climate justice perspective: prioritise green investments in heat-vulnerable, low-income neighbourhoods.

Build for future flexibility: design modular elements that can be adapted for different use over time.

Partner with communities and pet advocacy groups to co-design and co-maintain spaces.

WHY IT MATTERS

Why embedding nature in cities matters more than ever

Urban design decisions shape cities for decades. By embedding nature into the built environment, cities gain powerful tools to tackle extreme heat, stormwater overflow, air pollution, and rising mental health issues, while also creating welcome and safe spaces for people and their pets.

Nature-based solutions are often more cost-effective, multifunctional, inclusive and conducive to public health than traditional infrastructure and are especially valuable in cities where space is scarce and climate risks are rising. It enhances physical and mental wellbeing, social cohesion, and equitable access to green space.

This area is where many cities can visibly demonstrate their commitment to nature, climate, people and pets—turning grey infrastructure into a green and inclusive opportunity.

How cities across the world are implementing Step 3

Paris, France
Through its 'Reinventing Paris' competition, the city has retrofitted rooftops and courtyards into biodiversity gardens and urban farms. These spaces reduce the urban heat island effect, increase food access, and double as safe, green areas for pets and residents. Public-private partnerships have been crucial in scaling these retrofits across the city's historic building stock. Paris boasts 80 green streets, emphasising the integration of nature into urban infrastructure, exemplified by the transformation of 130 courtyards into oases by 2023 to promote greenery and community wellbeing.

Chennai, India
Looking ahead, the Greater Chennai Corporation is actively developing 57 sponge parks, investing INR 76.7 million (over US$ 900,000) to mitigate flooding in low-lying areas. These parks serve as water reservoirs during heavy rainfall to reduce flooding risks, recharge groundwater levels, and enhance urban permeability. At the same time, the Chennai Metropolitan Development Authority (CMDA) is building a climate park in Kilambakkam, spanning nearly 17 acres. With its recreational facilities, cultural highlights, and an emphasis on urban ecology, the park is expected to reduce the city's emissions and align with its broader sustainability goals.

Toronto, Canada
To address environmental inequities, the city launched the Growing Green Streets pilot, specifically targeting marginalised populations through capital projects for green infrastructure.
The city also established a new work and learn programme called GreenforceTO, which recruits and trains individuals from equity-deserving communities in green infrastructure maintenance. Furthermore, teaming up with Toronto Nature Stewards, the city successfully trained 800 volunteers for invasive plant removal, contributing to biodiversity preservation.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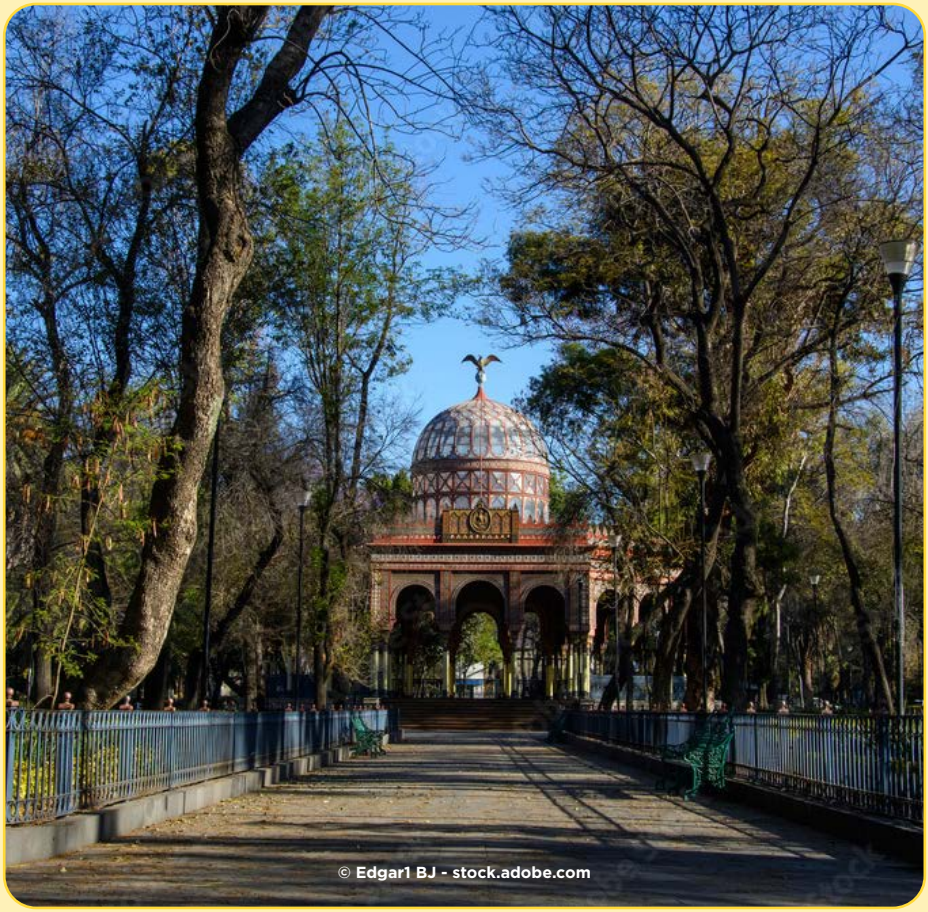
Mexico City, Mexico
Kiosko Morisco, located in the densely populated neighborhood of Santa María la Ribera, highlights the transformative potential of pet-friendly public spaces in urban communities. Once an underutilised historic site, it has evolved into a vibrant meeting point thanks to strategic adaptations including designated dog-friendly areas, responsible pet ownership initiatives, and community-driven pet events. This transformation has not only revitalised the park but also strengthened neighbourhood cohesion, demonstrating the positive social impact of incorporating pet-friendly design into local urban planning.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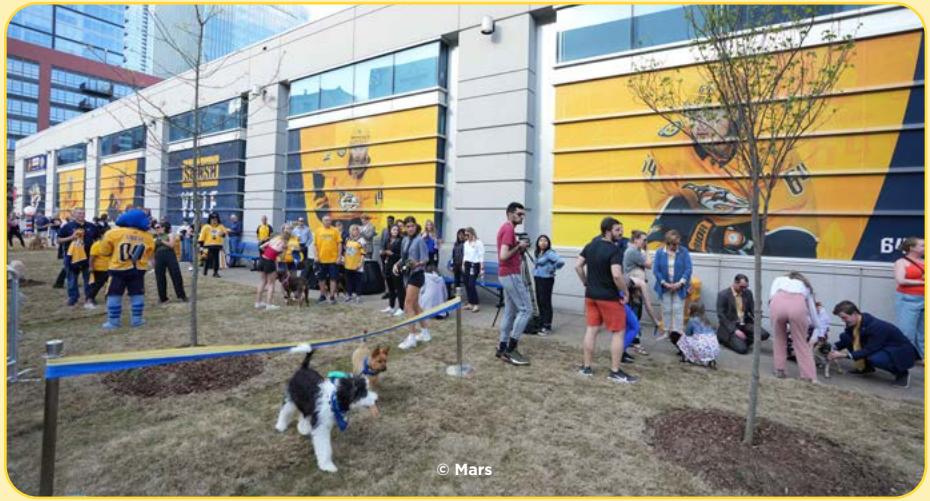
Barcelona, Spain
The city has created four biodiversity sanctuaries and has progressed on its aim to remove chemical herbicides from the management of green public spaces. The city has also strategically deployed 'Mans al Verd' or 'Hands on Green', a programme aimed at promoting a collaborative management model of the city's green infrastructure. The city is set to further improve its ecological management of green areas, emphasising the protection and conservation of fauna.

Bangkok, Thailand
In Bangkok, Watcharapirom Park demonstrates how even constrained, overlooked spaces, like areas beneath highway flyovers, can be transformed into multifunctional green spaces. Using recycled materials and sustainable landscaping, the park integrates shaded rest zones, pet play areas, and natural cooling features to address both social and climate resilience in a dense urban setting. The upcycled benches and paving blocks, made from pet packaging collected through the Mars Petcare Thailand SWAP campaign, support recycling, reuse and environmental care. This green space offers a welcoming area where people and their pets can enjoy outdoor activities together, helping to build a strong and connected pet community.

Copenhagen, Denmark
As part of its 'Cloudburst Management Plan', Copenhagen is working on transforming its public spaces to climate-proof blue-green areas with over 350 projects across the city, prioritising flood-prone areas. By using the ability of trees, shrubs and soil to retain water naturally, these redesigned public spaces—including parks, playgrounds, and roundabouts—help in the retention or redirection of floodwaters.

Nashville, Tennessee, USA
In downtown Nashville, a previously underutilised plot of land near Bridgestone Arena (music and sports venue) was converted into Pups N Play, a public dog park developed through a partnership between the Nashville Predators, Mars, and the City of Nashville. With an estimated 5,000 dogs living in the area and limited access to green space, the project addressed a critical need for pet-friendly infrastructure in the city's urban core. The park features hydration and waste stations, safety elements, and community seating, supporting daily use by residents and their pets. It contributes to broader city objectives around walkability, public health, and inclusive urban design.



KEY RESOURCES FOR STEP 3 (LINKS):

Explore these tools for practical design strategies and implementation guidance. They cover street greening, park retrofits, green roofs, and more - as seen in in the London's Green Roots programme. Use them to design interventions that deliver climate benefits and support community use.

- **How to Expand Your City's Tree Canopy.** Use this guide to plan and implement strategies that grow urban tree canopies, helping your city reduce heat, improve air quality, and boost wellbeing.
- **Design Guidance for Green and Thriving Public Spaces.** Follow practical steps to create inclusive, resilient, and welcoming public spaces that support climate goals and community wellbeing.
- **Urban rewilding: The value and co-benefits of nature in urban spaces.** Discover how reintroducing nature into cities through rewilding can enhance biodiversity, climate resilience, and mental health.
- **Flooding: How to Increase Your City's Permeability.** Learn how to reduce flood risks and manage stormwater by increasing urban permeability through nature-based design.
- **Nature based solutions: Using rainwater as a resource to create resilient and liveable cities (C40 Knowledge Hub).** Explore how rainwater can be harnessed through green infrastructure to create more resilient, liveable cities.
- **Inclusive Greenspace.** Use this guidance to design greenspaces that are accessible, sensory-rich, and welcoming for people of all ages and abilities.

Top considerations for pet-friendly green space design

SPATIAL INTERVENTION	PURPOSE	EXAMPLE
SHARED PET-PEOPLE ZONES	Ensure comfort and safety by planning for expected use by both people and pets.	Include compact on-lead zones for quick use and off-lead areas of at least 0.5 acre for safe, active play.
DISTANCE FROM HAZARDOUS OR HIGH-DISTRACTION AREAS	Ensure safety by minimising exposure to vehicles, noise, and unpredictable activity.	Use 1.2 metres+ (4 foot+) fencing or barriers near roads, playgrounds, or construction zones to prevent escapes and reduce stress for pets and people.
USE NATURAL, PAW-FRIENDLY SURFACES WITH GOOD DRAINAGE	Ensure pet safety, comfort, and environmental performance across varying use levels.	Select grass, sand, or wood chips; in high-use or non-landscaped areas, opt for permeable, heat-safe materials with proper drainage.
DESIGN ACCESSIBLE, INCLUSIVE PET-FRIENDLY AREAS	Support usability for people of all abilities while ensuring comfort and ease of use.	Include wide, even pathways, low-height hydration stations, universal seating, and multilingual signage.
USE NON-TOXIC, PET-SAFE PLANTS IN LANDSCAPING	Prevent accidental poisoning from common greenery in pet-friendly areas.	Select plants from pet-safe lists (e.g., **ASPCA database**) and post signage reminding "pet parents" to avoid plant chewing.
INTEGRATE HYDRATION AND WASTE STATIONS INTO ALL PET-FRIENDLY SPACES	Promote health, hygiene, and responsible pet ownership in shared public areas.	Install plumbed or refillable water stations alongside well-marked waste bag dispensers and trash bins—placed in visible, high-use areas and regularly maintained.
INSTALL CLEAR SIGNAGE WITH PET RULES AND ETIQUETTE	Encourage responsible behaviour and ensure clean, safe, and enjoyable spaces for all users.	Use friendly, easy-to-read signs—possibly in a playful tone or 'dog's voice'—to communicate do's and don'ts.
ENSURE LIGHTING OR SET CLEAR USE HOURS	Support safe use of pet-friendly spaces during early or late hours.	Install lighting where possible, otherwise, define access times (e.g., dawn to dusk).
DESIGN SHELTERS USING NATURAL, PET-SAFE MATERIALS	Offer shade and shelter from sun and weather for pets and people.	Use tree cover, pergolas, or green canopies with pet-safe climbing plants.
PLAN FOR ONGOING MAINTENANCE AND USER FEEDBACK	Ensure spaces remain safe, clean, and functional over time.	Implement standard operating procedures and signage with a QR code or contact info for reporting issues.
DESIGNATE SPECIAL-USE ZONES WITHIN PET-FRIENDLY SPACES	Support diverse pet needs and promote safe, positive interactions.	Create separate areas for large/small dogs, energetic vs. calm pets, or users needing accessibility accommodations.
REPURPOSE UNDERUTILISED URBAN SPACES FOR PET-FRIENDLY USE	Increase access to green areas in dense neighbourhoods by making overlooked spaces functional and inclusive.	Convert rooftops, underpasses, or parking corners into pocket parks with lighting, pet zones, and core amenities.

Conclusion and next steps for cities

We invite all cities to join the Urban Nature Accelerator and Better Cities for Pets™ Program and help shape the future of urban nature.

This playbook is just the beginning. Cities ready to scale urban nature are encouraged to:

- Use this playbook to inform planning, delivery, and community engagement
- Align with the **Urban Nature Accelerator** goals to drive measurable action
- Contribute case studies, lessons, and innovations to help cities globally
- Reach out to the Better Cities for Pets™ Program (**BetterCitiesForPets@effem.com**) and C40 team (**nature@c40.org**) for technical exchange, peer learning, and support

Together, we can build a shared movement for people, pets and the planet, through greener, more inclusive, and more resilient cities.

Acknowledgements

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We gratefully acknowledge:

- City leaders, technical teams, and community partners across the C40 network who are pioneering urban nature actions and generously sharing their experiences
- C40 Knowledge Hub for providing foundational research, technical resources, and guidance throughout this playbook
- Mars Better Cities for Pets™ Program for supporting efforts to create nature-rich cities that are healthier for people, pets, and the planet
- Contributors to the C40 Urban Nature Accelerator Technical Notes, whose insights helped shape the playbook's action framework
- Arup as a key partner and technical contributor to the content on integrating nature into urban areas and implementing nature-based solutions for climate resilience in the built environment.
- The many cities featured in case studies, whose innovative examples inspire urban transformation globally

This playbook is a collective effort—and we invite all cities to continue contributing their experiences to strengthen and expand the urban nature movement.

Together, we can build greener, more resilient, and more inclusive cities for generations to come.


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