



**Project Name:**

# Move Quickly, Live Slowly - A vision for Astana

**Project Country:** Kazakhstan

**Project City:** Astana

**Project Category:** Future Projects, Masterplanning/  
Urban Landscape

**Project Area:** 2500HA

**June 2025**



# 1. Context

## 1.1 Astana - the new Capital

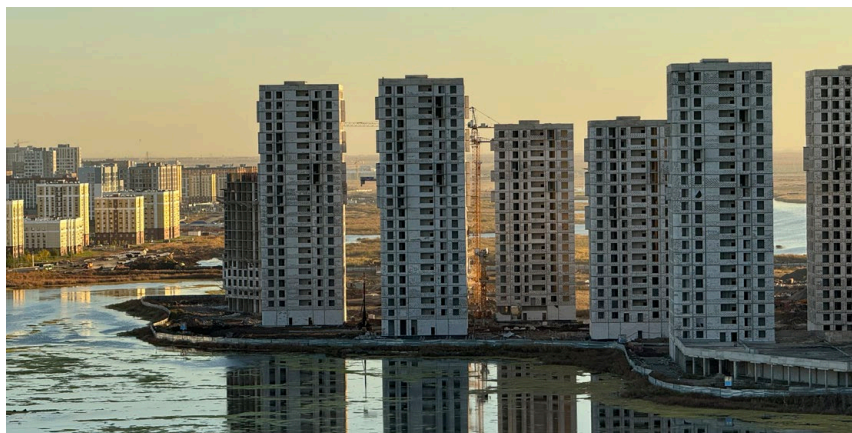
Originally shaped by Soviet planning codes and Kisho Kurokawa's pre-2000 masterplan, Astana was built for cars, not people.

We aim to retrofit the city into a hub of wellbeing, responding to its extreme climate with a visionary placemaking strategy. By drawing on global best practices, we're creating people-first streets and all-season public spaces through integrated blue, green, and white infrastructure.

With a growing population, thriving tech sector, and expanding universities, Astana is poised to become a modern, healthy capital at the heart of the reimaged Silk Road—if it continues to meet the evolving needs of its people.

Astana—meaning “capital” in Kazakh—was long focused on projecting an image of grandeur through wide boulevards and landmark architecture. Today, however, there's growing political and public momentum to make the city greener, more walkable, and liveable.

→ Astana today





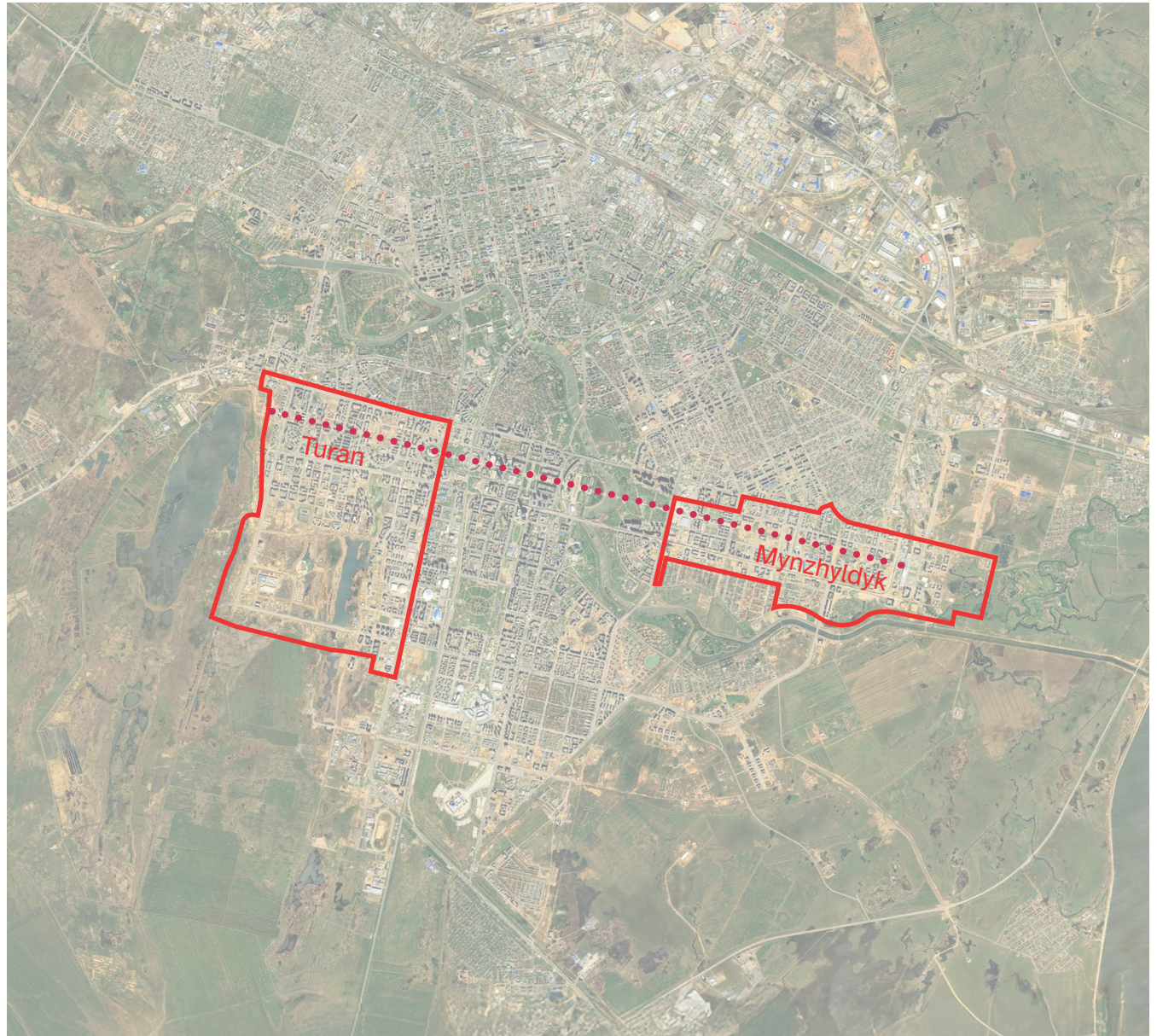
# 2. Sites

## 2.1 Accommodating rapid growth

Kazakhstan is a vast and strikingly diverse country—mountains, deserts, steppes, forests, lakes, and salt flats span its 2.7 million square kilometres. Rich in natural resources, it holds nearly 100 of the 118 elements on the periodic table, yet remains sparsely populated with just six people per square kilometre.

Shaped by Turkic, Mongol, Russian, and Chinese influences, Kazakhstan is a Muslim-majority nation with a rapidly growing population, now experiencing a second baby boom. Astana, its capital, has grown from 600,000 to 1.4 million people in just a decade.

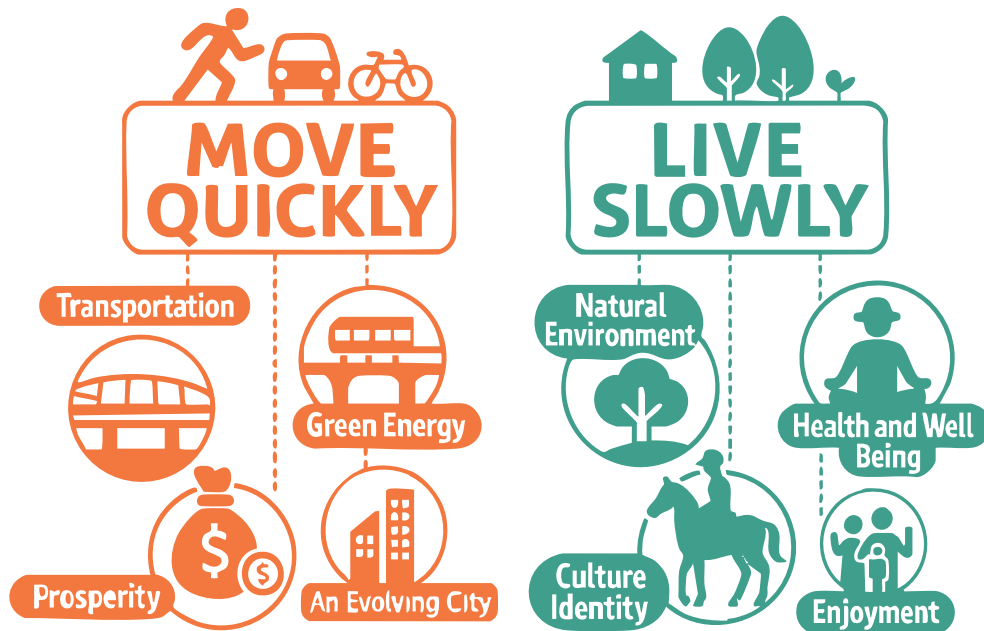
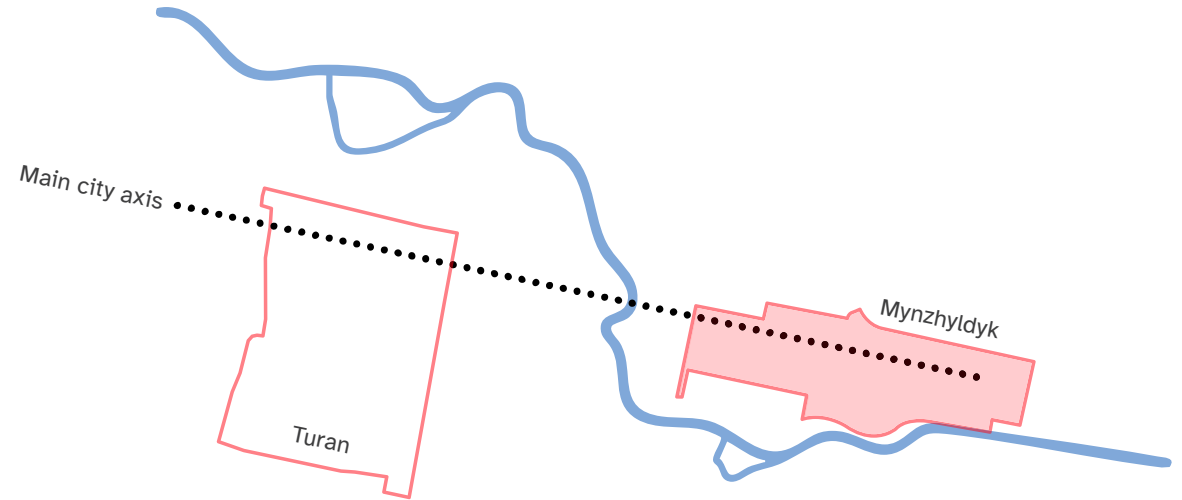
We were asked to develop concept masterplanning strategies for two sites located at opposite ends of the central city axis, each within a distinct context and addressing a defined set of challenges. We believe that the lessons learned and solutions developed for these sites have the potential to be applied more broadly across Astana, supporting the city in addressing its ambitious growth agenda.



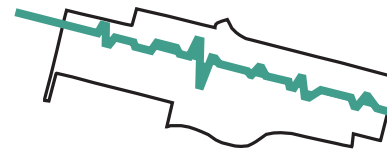
# 3. Mynzhyldyk Alley

## 3.1 New Chapter in Kazakhstan's Millennium history

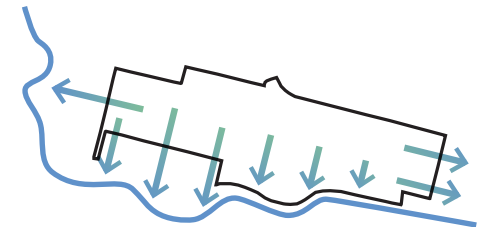
Our concept balances fast-paced city movement with spaces to pause, relax, and live slowly. With a booming young population and harsh winters, our multifunctional green spaces within the central park are designed for maximum year-round use. Adjustments to circulation and vehicle access create ground-level spill-out areas, enhancing activation throughout the year.



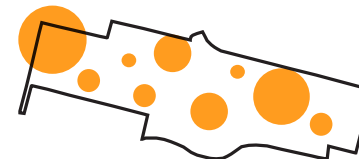
1. Impulses for the Alley



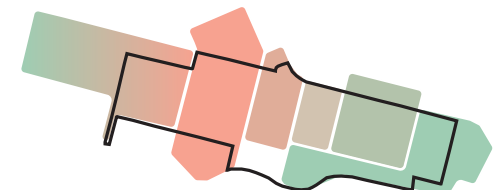
2. Connection to the River



3. System of Active Centres



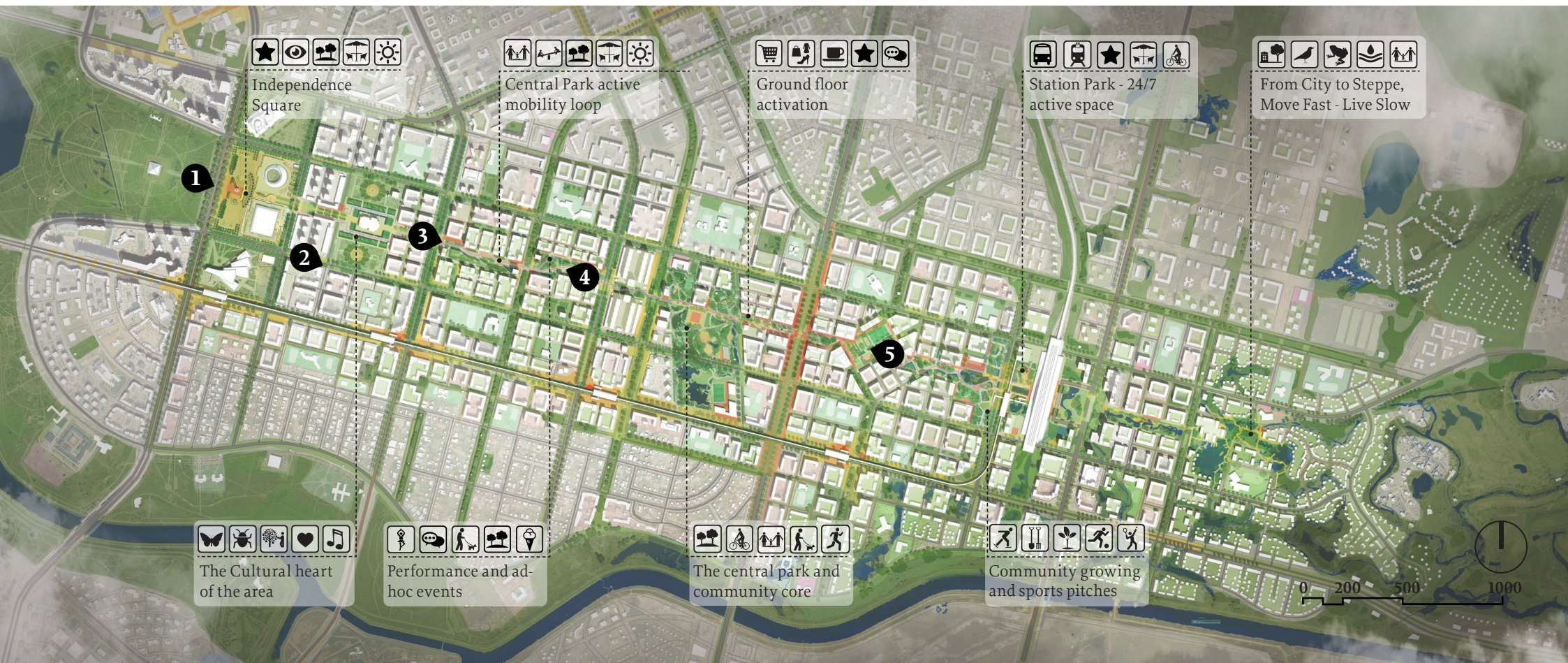
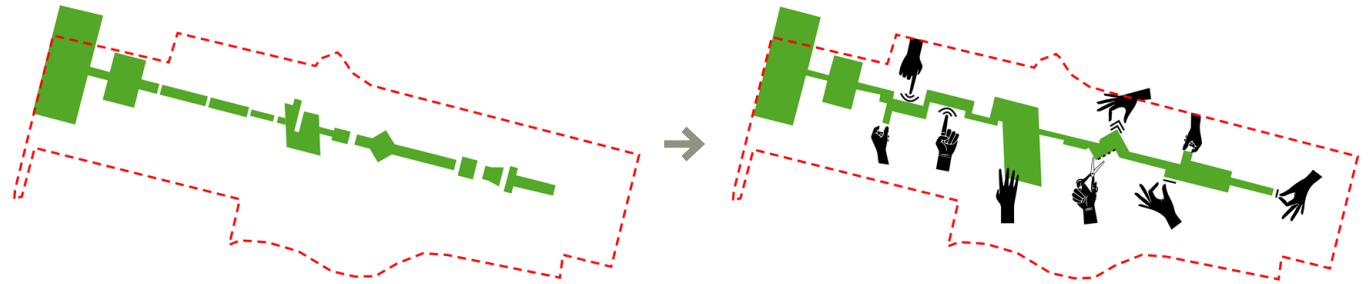
4. Transect to Nature





## 3.2 From fragmented to green, connected and diverse city

The current masterplan features a long, uniform central park flanked by roads. We propose reshaping it—narrowing and widening key areas—to add variety and support diverse activities.





### 3.3 Bringing human scale to the Independence square

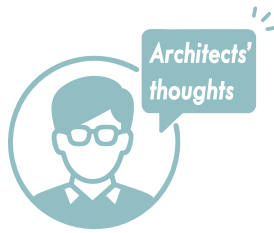
Transforming a sacred space in the capital is a major responsibility. Our design adds a human touch while preserving the site's grandeur. A key goal was to create year-round, user-friendly spaces that respond to Astana's harsh climate, using landscape features to provide shelter and adapt to heat, cold, rain, snow, and ice.

View 1



↑ before

→ after



Architects'  
thoughts

Green roofs with  
meadow planting  
to enhance  
biodiversity.

Flexible space that can accommodate  
variety of programmes and scenarios  
across the year and enhance sense of  
belonging.

Wind shields on  
the edges of the  
square.

Trees around the perimeter of  
the square to help to calm down  
the prevailing wind and block the  
noise/pollution from the roads.

Landforms provide shelter  
from wind and noise, plus  
support guided experience.





### 3.4 Converting Roads to Streets

Astana's extreme climate has led to heavy car use. We're rethinking this by prioritising people and public transport with a fast, reliable transit system and more people-friendly streets.

Green infrastructure will help manage floods, offer summer shade, reduce pollution, and support wildlife—creating a better balance between city and nature.

View 2



↑ before

→ after





### 3.5 Community Linear Park at the Heart

Inspired by Kazakhstan's diverse landscapes, the central park flows with varied typologies that bring nature close while supporting comfortable urban living. Landmark buildings aid wayfinding and give identity to each area. Playgrounds sit within sculpted landforms, and a sheltered walkway offers weather protection and social space.

View 3



↑ before

→ after



Architects'  
thoughts

Flexible lawns, enclosed by tree-covered landforms and tree blocks, help buffer wind and enhance comfort.

Meandering cycling route along the Central Alley and a dedicated running track to make active travel safe and enjoyable.

Mix of active frontages with commercial activities and residential ground floors along the linear park

Detached blocks help to break symmetry, improve visual navigation by introducing landmarks

White and blue infrastructure to deal with flash floods and snow







View 4



### 3.6 Diverse, unique and thought-provoking

The park's form gently pinches and widens along its length, creating a sense of guided drama and a scenographic experience. These deliberate spatial bottlenecks introduce moments of surprise and delight, framing views and enhancing visual diversity while adding character to the journey.

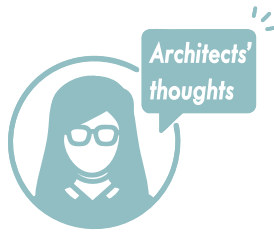
The linear park accommodates a rich mix of uses—community gathering, sport, play, and nature—offering space for everyone and fostering inclusive, shared experiences.

#### View 5



↑ before

→ after



#### Architects' thoughts

Landmark buildings anchoring key vistas helping with intuitive navigation and way-finding.

Expressive massing highlights key moments of interest along the route, creating a cohesive and engaging experience.

Playful geometry and varied massing introduce visual diversity.

Water features and rain gardens manage flash floods and snow-melt while enriching the park's ecology and atmosphere.

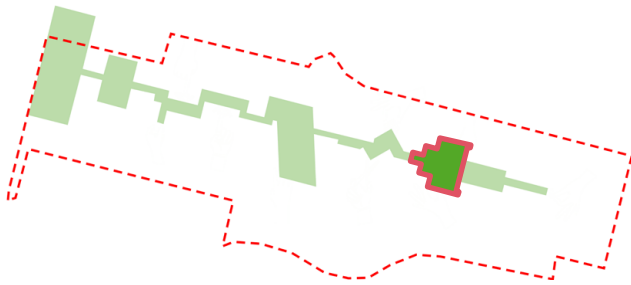
A rich variety of trees enhances biodiversity and helps create a patchwork of distinctive landscape character areas throughout the park





### 3.7 Station Park

One of the first phases in delivering this ambitious transformation is Station Park — a 16-hectare urban park adjacent to the recently completed central railway station. The site will also accommodate the terminal stop of the new Sky Rail system and a major bus interchange. The design aims to seamlessly integrate this diversity of transport and urban functions, celebrating the city's arrival experience while offering a welcoming place of belonging for local residents. Station Park will bring together sport, play, community uses, culture, commerce, and nature in a unified landscape. At its heart lies a pond that traces the historic route of the Ishim Riverbed, once flowing through this very site — grounding the park in its layered past.





### 3.8 Celebrating arrival experience

As simple as it may seem, removing parked cars along the edges of the central park and activating the ground floors of adjacent residential buildings is already a major win. With cars gone, the park immediately feels more generous—unlocking space for a wide range of activities. It now comfortably accommodates a designated cycling lane, suitable for both recreational rides and everyday commuting, alongside areas for play, gathering, and relaxation.

View 6



↑ before

→ after





### 3.9 Creating spaces for all

Station Park offers everything from large civic spaces for events to quiet pocket parks and nature hideaways—inviting people to unwind, reconnect with nature, and escape the city's noise.

**View 8**

**View 7**



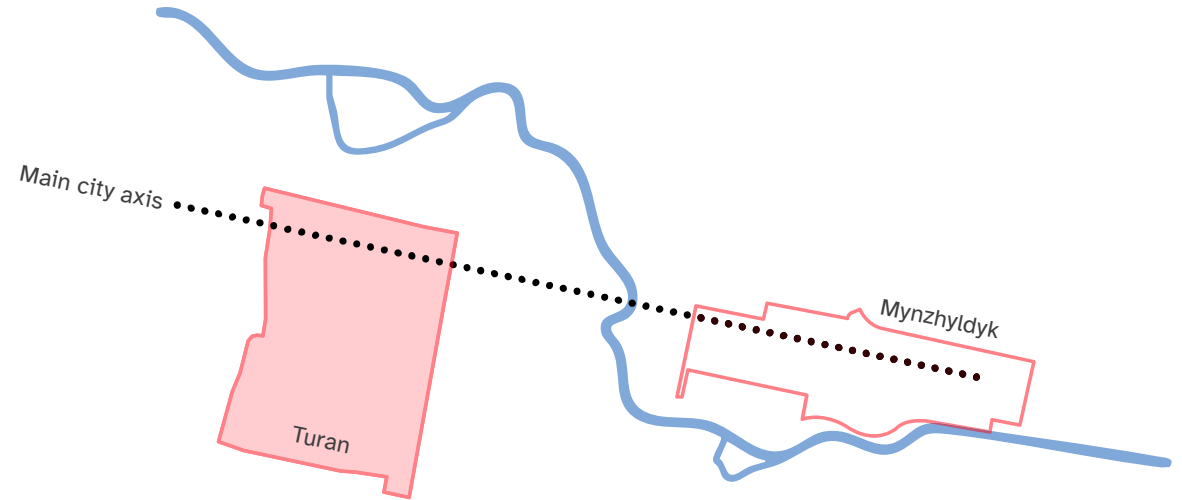


# 4. Turan

## 4.1 Bringing nature back

Our second site sparks a vital debate around urban expansion and the loss of natural habitats. Our ambition was to strike a balance between the city's growth plans and the urgent need to restore nature—avoiding long-term ecological and climate-related impacts.

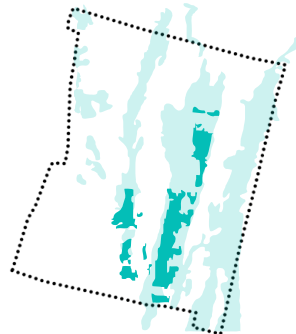
A once-disappearing system of local lakes finds new life through a carefully balanced, landscape-led masterplan that re-establishes a resilient relationship between people and nature.



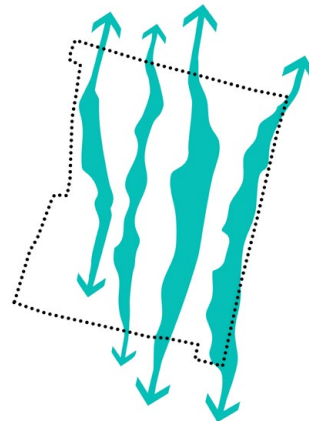
**Historic lakes pattern**



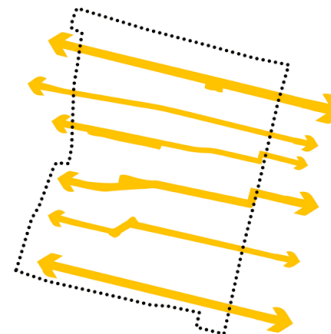
**Lost lakes to fast-paced development**



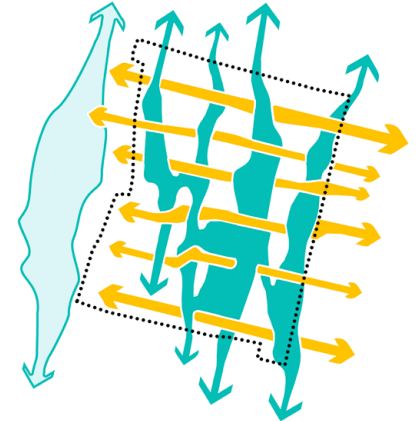
**Re-introducing nature corridors**



**Stitching site back to the rest of the city**



**Urban "Fabric" - People and Nature Balance**





## 4.2 Changing Astana's Policy

The city authorities of Astana are open and committed to changes that bring residents closer to healthier and more prosperous lives. Updating policies and revising the city-wide Masterplan are among the first essential steps—clear signals of political

will to support meaningful transformation. This includes reordering priorities to allocate more space to nature and public realm, helping to shift the balance toward a healthier, more sustainable, and resilient future for Astana.

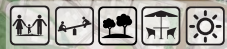


↑ Old city plan - fragmented patchwork of isolated pockets of green



↑ Proposed changes - continuous network of generous nature corridors





New pedestrian street/linear Park



Canals, rain-gardens and linear parks



Network of board-walks along the water banks



New commercial centre



Removing cars from the edge of the park



Using water as a natural connectivity barrier



Water treatment facilities integrated into the park

## 4.3 Ambitious transformation

Inspired by the historic patterns of lakes and rivers once present on the site, the masterplan reintroduces water into the urban fabric. These restored lakes, rivers, and canals will connect with existing water bodies to form a cohesive green and blue infrastructure network—vital for the city's long-term health and resilience.



## 4.4 Transforming Waterfront

Striking the right balance between habitat creation and commercial activation along the waterfront is key. Removing cars from this edge is the first step. The design carefully blurs the boundary between active spaces and quiet nature walks, minimising disruption to local species and allowing wildlife to thrive. It also offers an everyday opportunity for ecological education, bringing people closer to nature.

View 9



↑ before

→ after



Architects'  
thoughts

Attractive and  
convenient pedestrian  
routes around the lake

Lake transformed into a  
landmark visitor attraction,  
celebrating ecology and unique  
nature qualities and site's history

Active frontage  
with scenic views  
across the lake

Enhanced planting improves  
biodiversity and water quality  
within floodable space for  
seasonal water level fluctuations

Key views overlooking  
the lake from apartments  
and podium



## 4.5 Bringing water back

Our vision aims to restore the water systems, natural habitats, and green, blue, and white infrastructure that have been neglected during a decade of rapid urban growth. A new canal along Ayteke Bi Street traces the path of a former lake once lost to development. This is not a greenwashing gesture, but a strategic move to de-risk the city's future and create a lasting legacy for Astana.

View 10



↑ before

→ after





## 4.6 Motorways to Streets

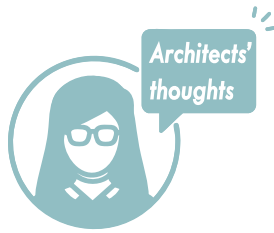
Astana's exceptionally wide streets currently prioritise private car use, leading to long commutes and daily congestion. Our plan shifts the focus to efficient, comfortable public transport—introducing trams, dedicated bus lanes, cycle routes, and safe pedestrian infrastructure. These generous corridors also offer the chance to create linear parks that reduce noise and pollution, form a connected green and blue network, and strategically manage rainfall and flash floods.

### View 11



↑ before

→ after



Architects'  
thoughts

Mature trees planting  
to minimize noise and  
pollution impact

Linear parks on both  
sides of the street

Enhanced crossing  
infrastructure, safe and  
accessible for pedestrians

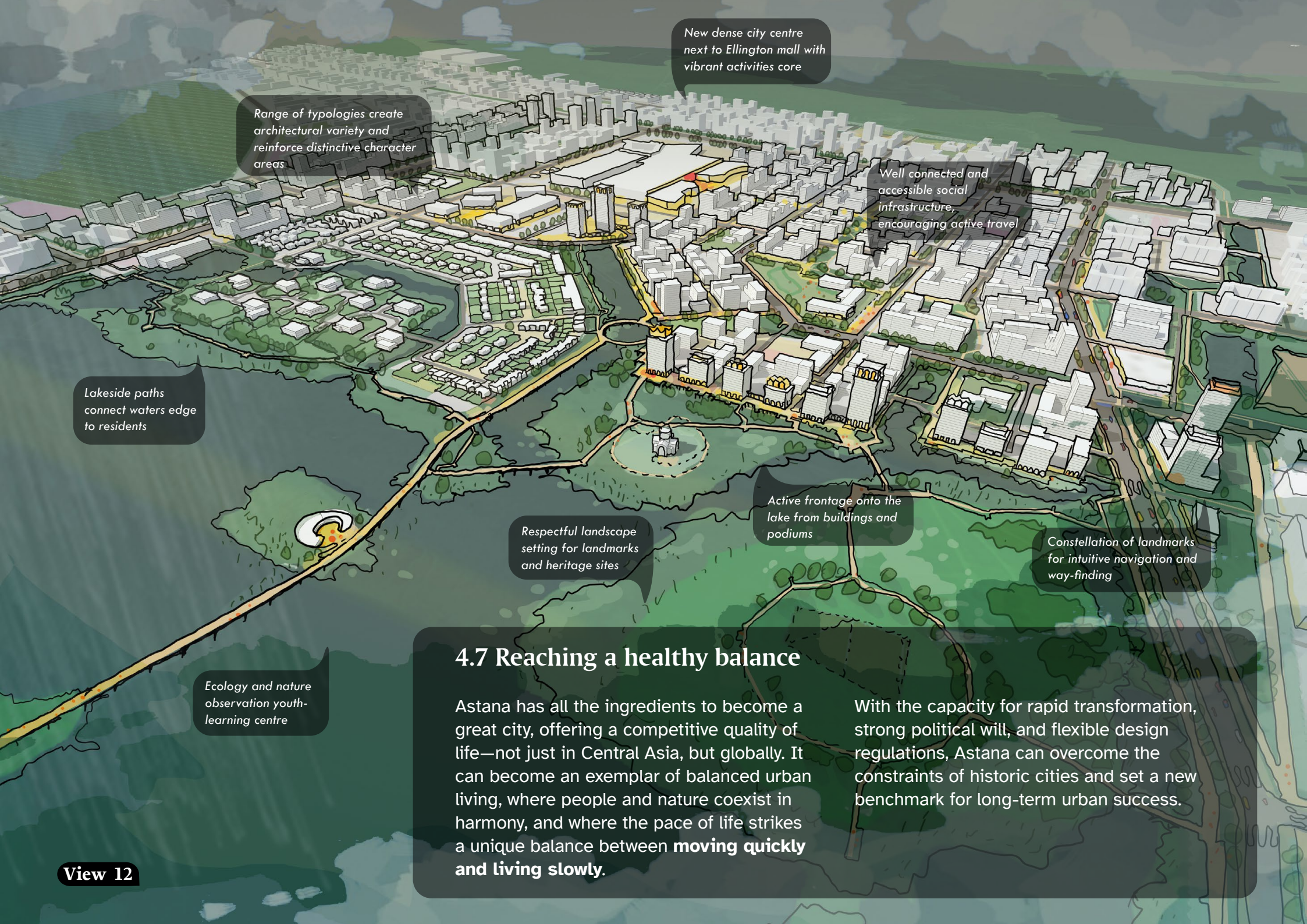
Rain Gardens  
along the street to  
minimise flood risk

Vehicles share  
priority with public  
transport

New tramline improves  
accessibility, prioritizing safe,  
rapid and comfortable public  
transport







New dense city centre  
next to Ellington mall with  
vibrant activities core

Range of typologies create  
architectural variety and  
reinforce distinctive character  
areas

Well connected and  
accessible social  
infrastructure,  
encouraging active travel

Lakeside paths  
connect waters edge  
to residents

Respectful landscape  
setting for landmarks  
and heritage sites

Active frontage onto the  
lake from buildings and  
podiums

Constellation of landmarks  
for intuitive navigation and  
way-finding

Ecology and nature  
observation youth-  
learning centre

## 4.7 Reaching a healthy balance

Astana has all the ingredients to become a great city, offering a competitive quality of life—not just in Central Asia, but globally. It can become an exemplar of balanced urban living, where people and nature coexist in harmony, and where the pace of life strikes a unique balance between **moving quickly and living slowly**.

With the capacity for rapid transformation, strong political will, and flexible design regulations, Astana can overcome the constraints of historic cities and set a new benchmark for long-term urban success.