

INVESTMENT PLAN

DEN HELDER

*Building a Child-Friendly City from the Inside Out.
Towards the Netherlands' Most Attractive Coastal
City for Families*

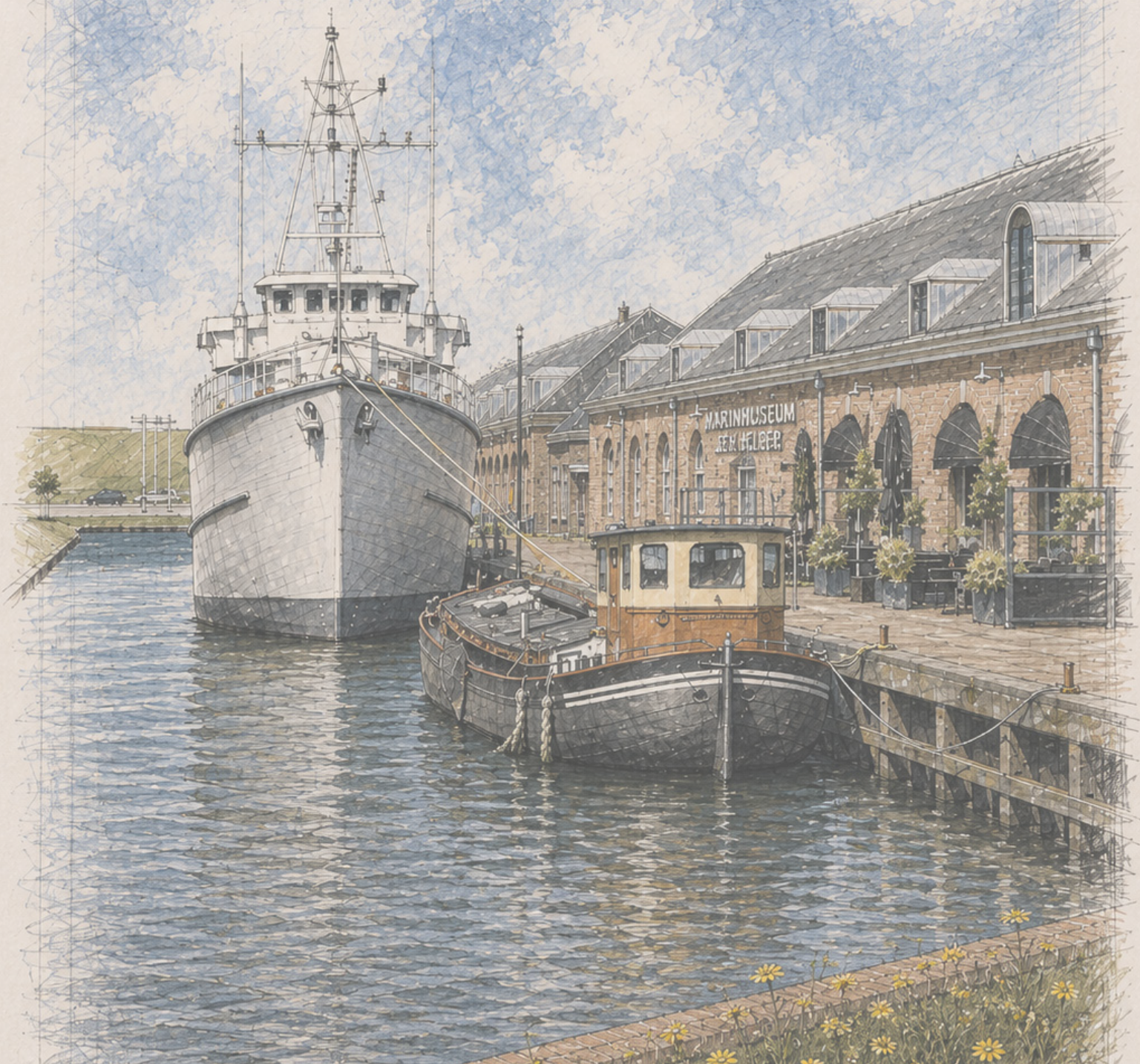


TABLE OF CONTENTS

Vision	3
The Investment Plan at a Glance	4
1. Why Child-Friendliness Matters for Den Helder	7
1.1 Responding to Den Helder's Strategic Ambitions	
1.2 The Starting Point: A City with Strong Assets, but Unequal Childhoods	
1.3 The Policy Response: A Child-Friendly Growth Strategy	
1.4 Towards UNICEF Recognition as a Child Friendly City .	
2. From Ambition to Investment	13
2.1 Background to the Proposal:	
2.2 Building the Plan from the Inside Out	
2.3 The Integrated Approach	
3. The Investment Proposal	18
3.1 Why Den Helder, Why Now?	
3.2 Investment Project 1	
3.3 Investment Project 2	
3.4 Investment Project 3	
3.5 Investment Project 4	
4. Governance, Funding and Delivery Roadmap	29
4.1 Governance and Delivery	
4.2 Child-Friendliness within the Alliantie Kansrijke Buurten	
4.3 Child-Friendly Programme Team	
4.4 Funding and Subsidy Strategy	
4.5 Investment Summary	
4.6 Delivery Roadmap 2026–2035	
5. Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning	37
5.1 Monitoring and Evaluation Approach	
5.2 A Child-Friendly Monitoring Framework	
5.3 Core Indicators	
5.4 The Annual State of the Child Report	
5.5 Learning, Adaptation and External Evaluation	
6. Conclusion	42

VISION

Den Helder wants to become a city where children feel free, safe and seen.

Urban geographer Willem Boterman has described urban families as the “canaries” of the city: a sensitive indicator of urban liveability. When families with children choose to stay, it suggests that everyday life is safe, accessible and supportive. Streets are usable, public spaces are welcoming, schools and services are within reach, and parents feel confident in the environment in which their children grow up.

Den Helder wants to build on that principle. A city where children can move independently, where parents feel confident in their neighbourhood, and where opportunities to play, learn, meet and develop are close to home. A city where the sea, dunes, harbour and open landscape are not simply part of the view, but part of everyday childhood. This Investment Plan sets out how Den Helder will build that future: from the inside out, together with children, families, neighbourhoods and local partners. A city where children feel free, safe and seen.

***Because a city that works well for children,
works better for everyone.***



The Investment Plan at a Glance

A city where children feel free, safe and seen. Because a city that works well for children works better for everyone.

Den Helder aims to become the Netherlands' most attractive coastal city for families: a city where children can grow up with freedom, confidence and opportunity, and where the sea, dunes, harbour and open landscape form part of everyday childhood.

This Investment Plan sets out a long-term strategy to make child-friendliness a visible and reliable quality of everyday life across the city. It combines spatial improvements, social investment, participation and long-term cooperation in one integrated approach.

Child-friendliness is not treated as a separate social programme. It is a strategic response to Den Helder's wider ambitions and to the ***Kansrijke Buurten*** (Opportunity neighbourhoods) programme: stronger neighbourhoods, equal opportunities, healthier and greener public space, family retention and attraction, an attractive housing environment

Item	Description
Timeframe	2026–2035
Core challenge	Not every child in Den Helder grows up with the same access to safe streets, welcoming public spaces, nearby activities or supportive networks. Differences between neighbourhoods, fragmented initiatives and car-dominated environments limit children's freedom, safety and development opportunities.
Strategic objective	To transform Den Helder into a child-friendly coastal city where all children can grow up safely, freely and with equal opportunities.
Total investment	€ 10.000.000
Target groups	Children, young people, parents, schools, neighbourhoods, community organisations and public and private partners.
Guiding framework	UNICEF Child Friendly Cities Initiative
Long-term ambition	To work towards official recognition as a UNICEF Child Friendly City.

The Three Investment Lines

Fix What's Broken

Strengthen the foundations of everyday life by improving safety, maintenance, mobility, lighting, public space and neighbourhood responsiveness.

Magnify What Works

Connect, strengthen and scale the schools, organisations, networks and local initiatives that already make a positive difference for children and families.

Fill in the Gaps

Create the missing opportunities and places that children and young people need to learn, play, meet, explore and grow close to home.

The Four Investment Projects

Investment Project	Purpose	Budget
1. Reliable Everyday Living Environment	Safe walking and cycling routes, greener and better public space, climate-adaptive play, traffic calming, lighting, maintenance and neighbourhood feedback systems.	€4,500,000
2. Connected Strengths	A Child Friendly Network, knowledge sharing, learning communities, innovation grants and scaling successful initiatives.	€1,200,000
3. Equal Development Opportunities	Child Friendly Hubs, teenager spaces, maritime discovery routes, sports, culture, creativity and nature-based learning.	€2,800,000
4. Child Participation & Storytelling	Children's City Council, storytelling, feedback loops, participation structures and the annual State of the Child Report.	€1,500,000
Total		€10,000,000

Expected Impact by 2030

By 2030, Den Helder aims to achieve:

- safe and recognisable walking and cycling routes to all primary schools;
- 25 improved, greener and climate-adaptive public spaces, designed with children and families;
- a 30% increase in perceived safety in targeted neighbourhoods;
- four Child Friendly Hubs and ten attractive teenager spaces;
- five maritime, nature and adventure routes;
- 50 organisations participating in the Child Friendly Network Den Helder;
- 2,500 children and young people, together with parents and caregivers, actively involved in participation processes;
- an annual State of the Child Report, combining quantitative data, qualitative lived experience, neighbourhood signals and public accountability.

1.

Why Child-Friendliness matters for Den Helder



1.1 Responding to Den Helder's Strategic Ambitions

Child-friendliness as a strategy for long-term urban attractiveness

Den Helder is working towards a future in which the city is attractive to live in, to raise a family in and to build a long-term future. The city's strategic ambitions for housing, neighbourhood development, liveability, equal opportunities and economic resilience all raise the same underlying question:

How can Den Helder become a city where people choose not only to arrive, but also to stay?

Child-friendliness offers a practical and unifying answer to that question.

It has strategic value: families are more likely to choose a city where children can grow up safely, develop their talents and feel connected to their neighbourhood. In this way, a child-friendly environment contributes not only to children's wellbeing, but also to resident retention, a balanced population structure and the city's long-term economic attractiveness.

A city that works well for children is a city with safe streets, good schools, inviting and green public spaces, accessible facilities, strong neighbourhood networks and affordable, comfortable and sustainable homes. These are also the conditions that help retain and attract families, support healthy communities, strengthen neighbourhood identity and improve Den Helder's long-term residential attractiveness.

The ambition to become a child-friendly city therefore supports several existing municipal goals at once. It contributes to:

- retaining and attracting families;
- strengthening neighbourhood quality and liveability;
- creating equal opportunities for children and young people;
- improving public space, mobility and perceived safety;
- building healthy, inclusive and socially connected neighbourhoods;
- strengthening Den Helder's distinctive identity as a coastal city where nature, space and community are part of everyday life.

Child-friendliness is not an additional social programme. It is an integrated urban development, housing and growth strategy, and a practical lens for the Kansrijke Buurten programme.

The city's Strategic Agenda and Housing Vision provide an important basis for this approach. A family-friendly city requires more than housing alone. It requires a living environment in which homes, streets, schools, green space, sports, culture, care, mobility and community facilities work together around the daily needs of children and families.

This Investment Plan translates that ambition into concrete action. It connects Den Helder's existing strengths with targeted investments in public space, social infrastructure, participation and long-term cooperation.

1.2 . The starting point

A City with Strong Assets, but Unequal Childhoods

Den Helder has many strengths.

Children grow up in a city with an exceptional natural and maritime setting: the sea, dunes, forests, harbour and open landscape are never far away. The city has schools, sports clubs, cultural institutions, neighbourhood organisations and committed professionals who provide structure, support and opportunities for children and families.

With approximately 56,700 inhabitants and more than 13,000 children and young people under the age of 25, Den Helder has a substantial young generation whose everyday environment will shape the city's future.

Yet the city's strengths do not reach every child in the same way. Conversations with children, parents and professionals show clear differences between neighbourhoods. Not every child grows up with equal access to safe streets, welcoming public spaces, nearby activities or supportive networks.

For children and families, these differences are not abstract. They shape everyday life: whether a route to school feels safe, whether public space invites play or avoidance, whether sports and cultural activities are within reach, and whether parents feel confident allowing their children to move independently.

Children point to very concrete issues in their everyday environment:

- litter and poorly maintained public spaces;
- unsafe traffic situations and difficult crossings;
- dark or hidden places that feel uncomfortable;
- a lack of attractive meeting places for teenagers;
- unequal access to sports, culture, play and after-school activities.

These daily experiences affect more than physical activity and traffic safety. They influence children's confidence, wellbeing, social interaction, sense of belonging and opportunity to develop independently.

Den Helder already has many valuable initiatives, active organisations and promising local networks. However, these efforts are often fragmented, project-based or insufficiently connected. A lack of transparency, overview, coherence and alignment means that strong initiatives do not always reach the children and families who need them most. Working through clear area-based plans can help connect these efforts, scale what works and create long-term impact.

This creates **three interconnected challenges**:

1. The everyday living environment is not equally reliable everywhere

In some neighbourhoods, children experience streets, squares and public spaces as unsafe, unattractive or poorly maintained. This limits independent movement, outdoor play and social interaction.

2. Existing strengths are not sufficiently connected or scaled

Schools, sports clubs, cultural partners, community organisations and neighbourhood initiatives already contribute to children's development. However, their efforts are not yet part of one coherent child-friendly city strategy.

3. Development opportunities are not equally accessible to all children

Access to play, sports, culture, nature, informal learning and social support differs between neighbourhoods and families. Children's opportunities are still shaped too strongly by where they grow up.

The challenge for Den Helder is therefore not to start from zero.

The challenge is to fix what is broken, magnify what already works, and fill in the gaps between places, people and opportunities.

1.3 The Policy Response

A Child-Friendly Growth Strategy

Families with children are a sensitive indicator of urban liveability. When families choose to stay in a city, it suggests that daily life is sufficiently safe, accessible and supportive: streets are usable, public spaces are welcoming, schools and services are within reach, and parents have confidence in the environment in which their children grow up.

Children are not only indicators of urban quality. They are active contributors to neighbourhood life. They use streets, squares, parks and informal public spaces in direct and social ways. Their presence brings movement, encounter and vitality into the city. When children can play outside, walk or cycle safely, meet neighbours and explore their surroundings, public space becomes more than infrastructure. It becomes a shared social environment in which trust, belonging and community life can grow.

For Den Helder, child-friendliness is therefore not a separate theme. It is a strategic lens and compass for urban development. Children and young people are not only a target group; they are a benchmark for urban quality. A city that works well for children and families also works better for older residents, young people, people with limited mobility, newcomers and vulnerable groups. Investing in child-friendly neighbourhoods means investing in safety, health, social resilience, community trust and the everyday quality of life of the city as a whole.

The ambition is to develop Den Helder into the Netherlands' most attractive coastal city for families: a city where children grow up with freedom, confidence and opportunity, and where the sea, dunes, harbour and open landscape form a meaningful part of everyday childhood.

In the desired situation, Den Helder is a city where:

- children can move independently and safely between home, school, play, sports and community spaces;
- parents feel confidence in their neighbourhood and trust the quality of the public environment;
- opportunities for learning, play, sports, culture, care and personal development are accessible and nearby;
- children and young people are actively involved in shaping the places that matter to them;
- organisations work from one shared direction and reinforce one another's efforts;
- Den Helder's maritime identity is visible, tangible and part of everyday childhood.

In this future, child-friendliness is not a temporary project. It becomes a compass for Den Helder's development: visible in safe walking and cycling routes to school, green and inviting public spaces, accessible activities, strong neighbourhood networks and meaningful participation by children and families.

1.4 Towards UNICEF Recognition as a Child Friendly City

UNICEF Child Friendly City

The UNICEF Child Friendly Cities Initiative provides an international framework for translating children's rights into local policy, public space, participation, governance and everyday practice. For Den Helder, this recognition is not an end in itself. It provides a clear framework, a shared language and a measurable route towards long-term change.

In the Dutch context, Den Helder can also learn from nearby municipalities that are exploring or working with child-friendly city approaches.

This Investment Plan forms the basis for that trajectory. It connects spatial, social and organisational investments to a common commitment: ensuring that children's rights, needs and experiences are reflected in how the city plans, invests, designs, manages and evaluates its neighbourhoods.

Den Helder will work towards a city in which:

- children influence decisions that affect their lives;
- children's rights are embedded in local policy;
- safe, clean and inclusive public spaces are prioritised;
- equal opportunities are central to investment decisions;
- child participation is structural rather than occasional;
- budgets are assessed in relation to children's needs;
- progress is measured, reported and communicated;
- children's voices are heard independently and taken seriously.

By aligning this Investment Plan with the UNICEF Child Friendly Cities Initiative, Den Helder creates a route from children's rights to local investment, from participation to action, and from individual projects to a lasting child-friendly city.

2.

From Ambition to Investment



2.1 Background to the Proposal

From Daring Cities to a Child-Friendly Den Helder

This Investment Plan has been developed in the context of Den Helder's wider ambition to create stronger, healthier and more inclusive neighbourhoods. It builds on the city's participation in Daring Cities and on the growing recognition that child-friendliness can offer a practical and unifying response to several urban challenges at once.



Den Helder is a city with strong assets: space, nature, a maritime identity, committed local organisations and close-knit neighbourhoods. At the same time, children and families do not experience these strengths equally in every part of the city. Differences in public-space quality, safety, access to activities and neighbourhood support shape daily life and affect children's freedom to move, play, meet and develop independently.

The Daring Cities process has helped Den Helder to look at these challenges through a broader lens. Rather than treating safety, mobility, public space, participation, health and equal opportunities as separate themes, this Investment Plan brings them together around one central question:

How can Den Helder become a city where every child has the freedom, safety and opportunity to thrive?

The answer is not one isolated intervention. It requires a long-term, integrated approach that connects spatial investment, social support, local partnerships and meaningful participation by children and families.

This Investment Plan translates that approach into an investment agenda for the period 2026–2035: a programme with concrete urban tasks, measurable ambitions and area-based investments.

2.2 Building the Plan from the Inside Out

From lived experience to a shared city compass

A child-friendly city is not designed from behind a desk. It grows from the everyday routes, experiences, concerns and ideas of children, parents, schools, neighbourhood organisations and local communities.

The preparation of this Investment Plan has therefore been informed by conversations with children, parents and professionals about the places they use every day. These conversations reveal how children experience their neighbourhoods: which routes feel unsafe, where they enjoy spending time, which places they avoid, what is missing, and what would make their daily environment more welcoming.

This perspective is essential.

Children and young people are experts in their own everyday lives. They understand the difference between a route that looks safe on a map and one that actually feels safe after school; between a public square that is technically accessible and one that feels inviting; between an activity that exists and an opportunity that is genuinely within reach.

The Investment Plan therefore adopts a participatory approach in which children, families and local partners are not only consulted, but actively involved in shaping priorities, interventions and evaluation.

This means that:

- children and young people help identify barriers and opportunities in their neighbourhoods;
- parents and caregivers contribute their everyday knowledge of safety, accessibility and family life;
- schools, childcare providers and youth organisations help connect interventions to children's daily routines;
- neighbourhood organisations and local partners contribute local knowledge, networks and implementation capacity;
- feedback is communicated clearly, so participants understand what has been heard, what action has been taken and what will happen next.

By translating lived experiences into concrete spatial and social interventions, Den Helder can create neighbourhoods that respond to real needs, build trust and strengthen local ownership.

2.3 The Integrated Approach

Fix What's Broken – Magnify What Works – Fill in the Gaps

Den Helder adopts a three-part investment approach to becoming a child-friendly city from the inside out. The approach is practical, recognisable and action-oriented. It starts with the everyday experiences of children and families: what feels unsafe, what already works, and what is still missing.

The three investment lines form one integrated approach, but each line has a clear function:

I. Fix What's Broken restores the basic conditions of everyday life;

II. Magnify What Works connects and scales existing strengths;

III. Fill in the Gaps creates the missing opportunities and places children and young people need.

Together, the three investment lines create a clear route from urgent improvements to long-term transformation.

I. Fix What's Broken

Strengthening the Foundations of Everyday Life

The first priority is to address the basic conditions that determine whether children and families feel safe, welcome and confident in their neighbourhood. A child-friendly city starts with reliable streets, clean public spaces, safe routes and places that are cared for.

This investment line focuses on:

- safe routes to school;
- clean and well-maintained public spaces;
- better lighting in places that feel dark, hidden or unsafe;
- safer crossings and traffic-calmed streets;
- reducing nuisance and improving the sense of safety;
- clear neighbourhood feedback systems, linked where possible to existing municipal reporting tools such as Fixi, allowing residents and children to report problems, follow progress and see what action has been taken.

Goal

To create a living environment that is predictable, safe, clean and welcoming: a city where children can move more freely and parents feel confident allowing them to do so.

II. Magnify What Works

Turning Local Strengths into a City-Wide Movement

The challenge is to connect these strengths, make successful initiatives more visible and scale up what has proven to work.

This investment line focuses on:

- scaling successful local projects;
- connecting organisations around shared child-friendly goals;
- sharing knowledge, methods and lessons learned;
- showcasing good practices across neighbourhoods;
- strengthening neighbourhood networks and partnerships;
- building a common language around child-friendly urban development.

Goal

To turn isolated successes into a coordinated city-wide movement, so that strong initiatives do not remain dependent on individual projects, people or neighbourhoods, but become part of Den Helder's long-term way of working.

III. Fill in the Gaps

Creating Missing Opportunities Close to Home

Even where the basic environment improves and existing initiatives are strengthened, children and young people still experience gaps in their everyday lives. Teenagers may lack places to meet. Some neighbourhoods may have limited access to sports, culture or creative activities. Children may not always have meaningful contact with the maritime, natural and cultural identity of their own city.

This investment line focuses on:

- attractive and safe meeting places for teenagers;
- sports, play and creative hubs;
- child-friendly neighbourhood centres;
- adventure routes through the city, dunes, harbour and green spaces;
- maritime and nature-based education;
- accessible cultural activities for children and young people;
- new links between schools, public space, community organisations and local identity.

Goal

To ensure that every child in Den Helder has access to meaningful opportunities close to home. Not only to be safe, but to grow, explore, participate and feel connected to the city.

3.

The Investment Proposal



3.1 Why Den Helder, Why Now?

A Family City by the Sea

Den Helder is not competing with other cities on size or density. It competes on quality of life. The city offers something that is becoming increasingly rare: space, affordable and comfortable homes, nature in close proximity, neighbourhoods with strong social ties and the freedom for children to grow up with the sea, dunes, harbour and open landscape as part of everyday life.

For families, the decision to stay in or move to a city is shaped by more than housing alone. Families need confidence in the daily environment around their home. They look for safe neighbourhoods, good schools, accessible public space, opportunities for sports and culture, green and healthy surroundings, social connection and room for children to develop independently.

Den Helder already possesses many of these qualities:

- spacious neighbourhoods and family-oriented housing;
- the beach, dunes, forests, sea and open landscape;
- a strong maritime identity and heritage;
- schools, sports clubs, cultural institutions and local organisations;
- active neighbourhood networks and committed professionals;
- opportunities for outdoor life, adventure and discovery.

The challenge is not to create these qualities from scratch. The challenge is to connect them, strengthen them and make them accessible to every child and family, regardless of the neighbourhood in which they grow up.

Child-friendliness is therefore also a residential and economic strategy. A city where children thrive is a city where families choose to stay, where young professionals can imagine a future, where neighbourhoods become more resilient and where the city's identity becomes more attractive and visible.

The central proposition of this Investment Plan is simple: Den Helder will become a family city by the sea: a city where children grow up with freedom, families find space, and the qualities of nature, neighbourhood and maritime life become part of everyday childhood.

Growing Up by the Sea

Den Helder's maritime identity is not only part of its history. It is a living asset for the future. Children in Den Helder can grow up with the sea, the harbour, dunes, forests, ships, tides and coastal landscape close at hand. This creates unique opportunities for outdoor play, nature education, movement, creativity, discovery and a stronger connection to place.

The Investment Plan uses these qualities intentionally. The sea and landscape are not treated simply as a backdrop to the city, but as part of the child-friendly environment itself: places to learn, explore, meet, belong and build confidence. This makes Den Helder's approach distinctive. It combines the practical foundations of a child-friendly city: safe routes, good public spaces, accessible activities and strong local networks with a childhood rooted in nature, adventure and maritime identity.

3.2 Investment Project 1

Reliable Everyday Living Environment Strengthening the Foundations of Everyday Life

Purpose

This investment improves the physical and social foundations of everyday life in Den Helder's priority neighbourhoods.

A child-friendly city starts with streets, routes and public spaces that children and families can rely on: clean, safe, well-maintained, accessible and welcoming. When the everyday environment feels predictable and cared for, children can move more independently, parents feel more confident, and neighbourhood life becomes stronger.

Investment Components

The project focuses on visible improvements in the daily environment of children and families, including:

- safe school streets and school environments, with attention to both walking and cycling;
- safe and attractive walking and cycling routes;
- play streets and low-traffic neighbourhood streets;
- pocket parks, green play routes and small-scale public spaces;
- climate-adaptive playgrounds, shaded play areas and greener streets that contribute to comfort and sustainability;
- traffic-calming measures and safer crossings;
- better lighting, maintenance and management of public space;
- neighbourhood feedback systems that identify and address local issues quickly.

Family-Friendly Neighbourhoods

The project will be delivered through a family-friendly neighbourhood approach. In priority areas, investments in housing environments, public space, mobility, schools, green space and local facilities will be better connected around the daily needs of children and families.

This approach includes:

- green courtyards and shared gardens;
- safe inner streets and play streets;
- attractive routes between homes, schools and local facilities;
- natural play spaces and climate-adaptive streets;
- places where neighbours can meet and children can play independently;
- closer coordination between housing corporations, schools, neighbourhood organisations and municipal departments.

Participation

Children and parents will participate in the design of all interventions. Their daily routes, concerns and ideas will help determine where improvements are needed most and how these improvements should take shape.

Objectives

- improve actual and perceived safety in priority neighbourhoods;
- increase children's independent mobility by foot and bicycle;
- improve the quality, maintenance and accessibility of public space;
- strengthen neighbourhood identity and pride;
- create visible and tangible improvements that build trust among residents.

Targets 2030

- 100% of primary schools connected to safe and recognisable school routes;
- 25 public spaces improved or redesigned with children and families;
- 30% increase in perceived safety among children and parents in targeted neighbourhoods;
- 90% of neighbourhood signals addressed, followed up and communicated back to residents.

Budget

€4,500,000

3.3 Investment Project 2

Connected Strengths

Turning Local Strengths into a City-Wide Movement

Purpose

Den Helder does not start from zero. Across the city, schools, sports clubs, cultural institutions, neighbourhood organisations, professionals and residents are already improving the lives of children and families.

However, many initiatives remain locally dependent, temporary or insufficiently visible. Valuable knowledge is not always shared, successful approaches are not always scaled, and organisations do not always work from one shared child-friendly direction. This project strengthens, connects and scales what already works.

Investment Components

The project includes:

- establishment of the Child Friendly Network Den Helder;
- structured knowledge sharing between schools, neighbourhoods, organisations and professionals, supported where possible by the concept of **Mijn Den Helder (My Den Helder)**: a programme name, gateway and digital place where children and young people can see what is possible for them, express what they feel is missing and contribute ideas about their city;
- neighbourhood learning communities;
- annual Child Friendly Awards to recognise and showcase good practices;
- small-scale innovation grants for local partners and residents;
- support for scaling successful initiatives across multiple neighbourhoods;
- an annual Child Friendly Conference to share results, lessons and new opportunities.

Objectives

- build long-term partnerships around child-friendly urban development;
- increase the visibility and impact of existing good practices;
- strengthen cooperation between social, spatial, educational, cultural and community partners;
- scale proven initiatives so they benefit more children and families;
- create a shared language and direction for child-friendliness in Den Helder.

Targets 2030

- 50 participating organisations in the Child Friendly Network Den Helder;
- 15 successful initiatives scaled to other neighbourhoods or target groups;
- 5 active neighbourhood learning networks;
- an annual Child Friendly Conference established as a recurring city-wide event.

Budget

€1,200,000

3.4 Investment Project 3

Equal Development Opportunities Creating Meaningful Opportunities Close to Home

Purpose

Every child in Den Helder should have access to places to learn, play, meet, explore and grow.

Yet opportunities are not equally distributed across the city. Some children have fewer nearby facilities, fewer safe places to spend time and less access to sports, culture, creativity, nature and informal learning. Teenagers in particular often lack places where they can meet others freely, safely and with a sense of ownership.

This project fills the gaps in Den Helder's social and spatial infrastructure for children and young people.

The 10-Minute Principle

The project is guided by the 10-Minute Principle: every child should be able to reach essential everyday opportunities within ten minutes by walking or cycling. The underlying idea is proximity as a principle for urban development: daily opportunities should not only exist somewhere in the city, but be reachable, visible and usable close to home.

This includes access to:

- school;
- a safe place to play;
- green space;
- sports facilities;
- cultural and creative activities;
- friends and informal meeting places;
- support, care and neighbourhood facilities.

The principle provides a practical framework for identifying gaps and prioritising investment in neighbourhoods where opportunities are currently too far away, inaccessible or insufficiently connected.

Child Friendly Hubs

The project supports the development of child-friendly neighbourhood hubs: accessible places where children, young people and families can find activities, support and connection close to home.

These hubs may combine:

- homework support and informal learning;
- sports and movement activities;
- arts, culture and creative programmes;
- well-being and family support;
- participation activities and youth-led initiatives;
- links with schools, community partners and neighbourhood organisations.

Teenager Spaces

Teenagers need their own places in the city: spaces where they feel welcome, respected and free to meet others.

The project invests in attractive and safe spaces for young people, such as:

- outdoor sports areas;
- music studios;
- makerspaces;
- creative workshops;
- informal meeting places;
- youth-led activity spaces.

Maritime Discovery Routes

Den Helder's harbour, sea, dunes, water and open landscape can become part of everyday childhood and learning.

The project develops maritime, nature and adventure routes, including:

- harbour experiences;
- dune adventures;
- water-related activities;
- nature education;
- cycling and walking routes;
- links between schools, neighbourhoods, cultural partners and the landscape.

Objectives

- increase equal access to development opportunities for all children;
- improve access to play, sports, culture, learning and meeting places;
- strengthen children's connection to Den Helder's maritime and natural identity;
- create attractive and meaningful places for teenagers and young people;
- support children's social, physical, creative and emotional development close to home.

Targets 2030

- 4 Child Friendly Hubs established in priority neighbourhoods;
- 10 attractive and safe teenager spaces developed;
- 5 maritime, nature and adventure routes realised;
- 80% of children in targeted neighbourhoods have access to a child-friendly facility within ten minutes by walking or cycling.

Budget

€2,800,000

3.5 Investment Project 4

Child Participation & Storytelling Building the City from the Inside Out

Purpose

Participation is not a separate tool in this Investment Plan. It is a way of working.

Den Helder wants to build a child-friendly city with children, young people and parents, not only for them. Children and young people are experts in their own daily environment. They know which routes feel unsafe, where they enjoy spending time, where they avoid going, what is missing in their neighbourhood and what would make the city feel more welcoming.

Parents and caregivers bring another essential layer of knowledge. They understand the daily routines of family life: the school run, play after school, safety concerns, informal care networks, financial barriers, social contact, stress points and the places where children can or cannot move independently. Their experience helps the city understand not only what children need, but also what families need in order to feel confident, supported and connected to their neighbourhood.

This project creates permanent structures for child and parent participation, storytelling and feedback. It supports all other investment projects and ensures that Den Helder remains connected to the lived experience of children and families throughout implementation.

The aim is not only to collect opinions, but to understand meaning: what children and parents value, what makes them feel safe or unsafe, where they experience belonging, what gives them pride, and what kind of future they imagine for their neighbourhood.

From stories to meaning anchors

Den Helder will use storytelling as a method to move beyond general data and standard participation. Existing monitors can show what happens in a neighbourhood, such as safety scores, participation levels, access to facilities or public-space quality. Storytelling helps explain why these issues matter in daily life.

Through conversations, walking interviews, children's maps, parent stories, photographs and neighbourhood observations, the city will collect the language, experiences and emotions of children, young people and parents themselves.

These stories will be analysed to identify recurring themes and values. These can become local "meaning anchors": shared words or ideas that express what a place means to children and families. Examples may include safety, freedom, belonging, adventure, calm, pride, trust, visibility, friendship or home.

The meaning anchors are not predetermined policy themes. They emerge from the stories of children, young people and parents themselves. Together, they form a child- and family-centred meaning map of the neighbourhood: not a map of buildings and streets, but a map of what matters.

Translating meaning into design principles

The participation process will not end with listening. The meaning anchors will be translated into practical design principles and choices for policy, public space, programming and cooperation.

For example:

- > if children and parents describe “safety” as a key meaning anchor, the design question becomes: how can routes, lighting, crossings and public spaces help children move independently and help parents feel confident?
- > if “belonging” emerges as important, the design question becomes: how can public spaces, hubs and activities strengthen local identity and social connection?
- > if “freedom” is central, the design question becomes: how can children and young people gain more space to play, explore, meet and take initiative?
- > if “home” is important, the design question becomes: how can neighbourhoods feel more welcoming, recognisable and cared for?

In this way, stories become more than communication material. They become a practical foundation for urban design, social programming, neighbourhood investment and public accountability.

Children’s City Council

A Children’s City Council will give children and young people a formal voice in the development of Den Helder as a child-friendly city.

Children and young people will advise on:

- public space;
- mobility and safe routes;
- neighbourhood development;
- municipal policy;
- events, activities and city identity;
- priorities within the Investment Plan;
- the annual State of the Child Report.

The Children’s City Council will not replace broader participation. It will function as a visible and recurring structure through which children and young people can help shape the city over time.

Parent and Family Panels

Alongside children’s participation, Den Helder will establish Parent and Family Panels in priority neighbourhoods.

These panels will help the city understand how families experience everyday life in their neighbourhoods. They will provide insight into safety, accessibility, informal support, barriers to participation, the use of facilities, and the conditions that help children grow up with freedom and confidence.

The Parent and Family Panels will contribute to:

- identifying neighbourhood priorities;
- testing proposed interventions;
- improving communication with families;
- understanding barriers to participation, sports, culture and support;
- strengthening trust between families, partners and the municipality;
- evaluating whether investments are making everyday life better.

This ensures that the Investment Plan is grounded not only in children's experiences, but also in the realities of family life.

Storytelling Lab

The Storytelling Lab collects and shares the lived experiences of children, young people and parents. It acts as a living archive of childhood and family life in Den Helder: a place where stories, images, maps and observations make visible how children and families experience the city and how investments change everyday life.

The lab collects:

- children's stories;
- parent and caregiver stories;
- photographs;
- podcasts;
- videos;
- walking interviews;
- neighbourhood experiences;
- children's maps and observations;
- family routines and everyday journeys;
- local meaning anchors and neighbourhood narratives.

The stories will be used for:

- policy making;
- project development;
- public-space design;
- communication;
- monitoring and evaluation;
- participation;
- public accountability;
- strengthening local identity and shared ownership.

The Storytelling Lab will help Den Helder build a shared language for child-friendly neighbourhood development. It will show not only what needs to improve, but also what children and families value, protect and want to strengthen.

Feedback Loops

Participation only builds trust when children, young people and parents understand what happens with their input.

Every participation process will therefore include clear feedback loops. Participants will receive answers to three questions:

- ***What did you tell us?***
- ***What did the city do with your ideas?***
- ***What happens next?***

This ensures that participation is not symbolic, but meaningful, transparent and connected to action.

Feedback will be communicated in accessible ways, including child-friendly summaries, neighbourhood updates, visual maps, school presentations, parent meetings and digital communication. The aim is to make participation visible and trustworthy: people should be able to see how their stories and ideas influence decisions.

Objectives

- strengthen the role of children, young people and parents in shaping the city;
- understand what neighbourhoods mean to children and families, not only how they perform in data;
- translate lived experience into meaning anchors, design principles and concrete interventions;
- improve the quality and relevance of policy, public-space design and social programming;
- increase trust between residents, children, families, organisations and the municipality;
- build ownership and pride among children, young people and parents;
- create a permanent learning system for child-friendly urban development;
- connect storytelling, monitoring and accountability through the annual State of the Child Report.

Targets 2030

- 2,500 children , young people and their parents or caregivers involved in participation processes
- a Children's City Council established as a recurring participation structure;
- Parent and Family Panels active in priority neighbourhoods;
- a Storytelling Lab established and connected to the Child Friendly Office;
- meaning maps developed for priority neighbourhoods;
- design principles developed from children's and parents' lived experiences;
- an annual State of the Child Report published;
- permanent participation and feedback structures embedded in municipal and neighbourhood practice.

Budget

€1,500,000

4.

Governance, Funding and Delivery Roadmap



4.1 Governance and Delivery

Building on the Alliantie Kansrijke Buurten (Opportunity Neighbourhoods Alliance)

The delivery of this Investment Plan is anchored in Den Helder's existing neighbourhood approach and in the Alliantie Kansrijke Buurten. Child-friendliness will be developed as a focused programme line within this broader partnership, connecting the city's social, spatial and community-based ambitions around the everyday lives of children and families.

The Municipality of Den Helder remains responsible for policy alignment, public accountability, budget decisions and the implementation of municipal investments. The Alliantie Kansrijke Buurten provides the wider partnership platform through which neighbourhood priorities, local knowledge and shared action are brought together.

To support implementation, a small Child-Friendly Programme Team will coordinate the child-friendly programme line. This team will work within existing municipal and partnership structures and will connect the four Investment Projects with participation, monitoring, storytelling, funding development and the trajectory towards UNICEF Child Friendly City recognition.

This governance model keeps the approach practical and close to implementation. It strengthens the existing Kansrijke Buurten structure, while ensuring that children, young people, parents and families become more visible in policy, design, investment and neighbourhood development.

4.2 Child-Friendliness within the Alliantie Kansrijke Buurten (Opportunity Neighbourhoods Alliance)

A programme line for children, families and neighbourhoods

Within the Alliantie Kansrijke Buurten, child-friendliness becomes a shared programme line focused on one central ambition: making Den Helder's neighbourhoods places where children feel free, safe and seen.

This programme line brings together partners who shape the daily environment of children and families, including schools, childcare organisations, youth work, welfare partners, housing corporations, sports clubs, cultural institutions, healthcare organisations, police, neighbourhood representatives and local initiatives.

The child-friendly programme line will focus on:

- connecting existing initiatives for children, young people and families;
- strengthening cooperation between social, spatial, educational and community partners;
- identifying priority routes, public spaces, facilities and opportunity gaps;
- developing child-friendly design principles for neighbourhood improvement;
- linking physical investment with social programming and participation;

- involving children, young people and parents in neighbourhood development;
- supporting the trajectory towards UNICEF Child Friendly City recognition;
- connecting Den Helder to national and European knowledge exchange and funding opportunities.

For specific themes, temporary working groups or project tables can be organised. These may focus on safe school routes, teenager spaces, Child Friendly Hubs, participation, storytelling, public-space improvements or subsidy applications. These groups remain linked to concrete actions and are embedded in the wider Kansrijke Buurten approach.

Through this structure, child-friendliness becomes a strengthening layer within neighbourhood development: a way to make children's rights, family life, everyday safety and equal opportunities visible in the choices the city makes.

4.3 Child-Friendly Programme Team

Coordination from plan to practice

The Child-Friendly Programme Team provides the coordination capacity needed to turn the Investment Plan into a coherent programme. The team connects municipal departments, neighbourhood partners, children, young people and parents, and helps translate shared ambitions into visible action.

The Programme Team will coordinate:

- implementation of the four Investment Projects;
- cooperation with partners within the Alliantie Kansrijke Buurten;
- participation with children, young people and parents;
- storytelling, meaning-mapping and communication;
- monitoring and the annual State of the Child Report;
- subsidy development and match-funding opportunities;
- the UNICEF Child Friendly Cities trajectory;
- European knowledge exchange through programmes such as URBACT, EUI, CERV and the New European Bauhaus.

The programme requires several core functions. These can be organised through existing roles, combined responsibilities, temporary capacity or external support:

- **Programme Coordination** — planning, internal alignment, progress monitoring and delivery support;
- **Participation and Co-design** — involvement of children, young people, parents and neighbourhood partners;
- **Storytelling and Communication** — collecting stories, sharing results and building public visibility;
- **Monitoring and Data** — developing baselines, tracking progress and preparing the State of the Child Report;
- **Funding and Partnership Development** — identifying subsidy opportunities, preparing applications and connecting partners.

The Programme Team works as a connector and accelerator. It supports existing

departments and partners, helps maintain focus and ensures that the child-friendly ambition remains visible throughout implementation.

4.4 Funding and Subsidy Strategy

Combining local commitment with external funding

The Investment Plan covers the period 2026–2035 and will require a combination of funding sources. The programme brings together physical improvements, social investment, participation, coordination, monitoring and learning. Different parts of the programme will therefore require different forms of funding.

The financial strategy combines:

- municipal investment;
- regional and provincial funding;
- national programmes;
- European subsidy opportunities;
- partner contributions where relevant;
- project-based match funding;
- knowledge and exchange programmes.

Potential funding directions include:

<i>Investment theme</i>	<i>Possible funding direction</i>
Safe walking and cycling routes for children	EFRO, EUI
Improvement of public spaces	EFRO
Youth hangouts and teenager spaces	ESF+, EFRO
Child Friendly Hubs	ESF+
Participation and Children's City Council	CERV
UNICEF Child Friendly City trajectory	CERV
Knowledge exchange and city-to-city learning	URBACT, EUI
Innovative neighbourhood development	EUI
Equal opportunities for children and young people	ESF+
Meaningful neighbourhood transformation and participatory design	New European Bauhaus

These funding directions will be explored further during the next phase. Eligibility, timing, partnership requirements, co-financing rates and administrative conditions differ per programme.

This Investment Plan provides the strategic basis for future funding applications. It sets out the narrative, objectives, target groups, investment lines, governance model and monitoring framework needed to position Den Helder strongly for local, national and European funding opportunities.

A funding calendar will be developed to connect each Investment Project to relevant subsidy windows, required partners, preparation time and match-funding needs.

4.5 Investment Summary

The Investment Plan covers the period 2026–2035. The final financial structure will distinguish between one-off investment costs, recurring programme costs and long-term coordination capacity.

<i>Investment Project</i>	<i>Indicative Budget</i>	<i>Primary Purpose</i>	<i>Possible Funding Directions and Funding Mix</i>
1. Reliable Everyday Living Environment	€4,500,000	Safe routes, improved public spaces, climate-adaptive play, traffic calming, lighting, maintenance and neighbourhood responsiveness.	EFRO, EUI and New European Bauhaus / Horizon Europe may support public-space improvements, mobility measures and innovative neighbourhood transformation. Municipal and provincial investment can provide direct funding and co-financing.
2. Connected Strengths	€1,200,000	Networks, knowledge sharing, learning communities, innovation grants, events and scaling successful local initiatives.	URBACT, EUI and CERV may support knowledge exchange, city-to-city learning, civic participation and community-based cooperation. Municipal and partner contributions can support coordination, innovation grants and match funding.
3. Equal Development Opportunities	€2,800,000	Child Friendly Hubs, teenager spaces, maritime discovery routes, sports, culture, creativity and nature-based learning close to home.	ESF+, EFRO and EUI may support equal opportunities, social inclusion, youth development, physical facilities and innovative local pilots. Municipal, regional and partner funding can support hubs, spaces and programme delivery.

Investment Project	Indicative Budget	Primary Purpose	Possible Funding Directions and Funding Mix
4. Child Participation & Storytelling	€1,500,000	Children's City Council, Parent and Family Panels, storytelling, meaning maps, feedback loops, monitoring and the annual State of the Child Report.	CERV, URBACT, EUI and New European Bauhaus / Horizon Europe may support youth participation, democratic engagement, learning, exchange and participatory design. Municipal and partner contributions can support participation, storytelling and monitoring.
Total proposed programme value	€10,000,000	Long-term child-friendly city programme combining spatial, social and organisational investment.	Combination of municipal investment, regional/provincial funding, national programmes, European subsidies, partner contributions and project-based match funding.

The budget will be developed further during the next phase, based on priority neighbourhoods, the scope of the first pilot projects, required municipal co-financing, partner contributions, relevant subsidy deadlines, staffing needs and long-term management and maintenance costs.

The programme can be developed in stages. This allows Den Helder to begin with visible improvements and priority neighbourhoods, while preparing larger funding applications for the following years.

4.6 Delivery Roadmap 2026–2035

The Investment Plan will be delivered in three connected implementation periods. These periods provide a practical sequence: organise the foundations, deliver visible improvements and embed child-friendliness into the city's long-term way of working.

2026–2027: Establishing the Foundations

The first period focuses on setting up the programme line, building the evidence base and preparing the first visible interventions.

Key actions include:

- position child-friendliness as a programme line within the Alliantie Kansrijke Buurten;
- organise the Child-Friendly Programme Team within existing structures;
- develop a baseline assessment of child-friendliness across neighbourhoods;
- identify priority neighbourhoods, routes, public spaces and opportunity gaps;
- begin structured participation with children, young people and parents;
- develop the storytelling and meaning-mapping approach;
- launch first pilot projects for safe routes, public-space improvements and teenager spaces;
- develop the monitoring framework and first State of the Child baseline;
- prepare the UNICEF recognition trajectory;
- develop a funding calendar.

2028–2030: Delivering Visible Change

The second period focuses on implementation, scaling and public visibility.

Key actions include:

- roll out safe school routes and public-space improvements;
- deliver the first Child Friendly Hubs and teenager spaces;
- strengthen learning communities within the Kansrijke Buurten approach;
- launch maritime, nature and adventure routes;
- expand participation structures, including the Children's City Council and Parent and Family Panels;
- publish annual State of the Child Reports;
- use stories, meaning maps and data to adjust investments;
- prepare and submit subsidy applications for larger implementation projects;
- review progress against the 2030 targets.

2031–2035: Embedding and Expanding the Approach

The final period focuses on long-term embedding, expansion and sustainability.

Key actions include:

- integrate child-friendly principles into policy, urban design, housing and neighbourhood investment;

- expand successful interventions to additional neighbourhoods;
- secure long-term funding and partnership agreements;
- strengthen national and international exchange;
- continue progress towards official UNICEF Child Friendly City recognition;
- evaluate overall impact;
- define the next generation of child-friendly city priorities.

By 2035, Den Helder aims for child-friendliness to be embedded not only in individual projects, but in the city's normal way of planning, investing, designing, managing and working with residents.

The delivery model supports that ambition by combining municipal accountability, the partnership structure of the Alliantie Kansrijke Buurten, active involvement of children and families, and focused programme coordination.

5.

Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning



5.1 Monitoring and Evaluation Approach

Learning from data, stories and everyday experience

This Investment Plan is designed as a long-term learning programme. Den Helder will monitor not only whether activities have been delivered, but whether children, young people, parents and families experience a meaningful improvement in their everyday lives.

The monitoring and evaluation approach combines quantitative data with qualitative evidence. It measures visible outputs, such as improved public spaces, safe routes and new facilities, alongside lived experience: whether children feel safer, whether parents feel more confident, whether public spaces are more welcoming, and whether opportunities are more equally accessible across neighbourhoods.

This approach recognises that child-friendliness is not only about infrastructure. It is about trust, freedom, belonging, participation and the ability of children to move, play, meet and develop independently.

Monitoring will therefore combine:

- baseline data on neighbourhood quality, public space, safety, access to facilities and participation;
- project delivery data, including budgets, outputs, reach and implementation progress;
- child, youth and parent satisfaction surveys;
- neighbourhood dashboards and feedback systems;
- walking interviews, children's maps, photographs, stories and other qualitative evidence;
- annual reviews within the Alliantie Kansrijke Buurten (Opportunity Neighbourhoods Alliance);
- external evaluation at key milestones;
- the annual State of the Child Report.

Progress will be reviewed regularly and used to improve delivery. Monitoring is therefore not only a reporting requirement; it is a practical tool for learning, adjustment and accountability.

5.2 A Child-Friendly Monitoring Framework

Four questions to guide progress

The monitoring framework follows four connected questions:

1. Are we improving the everyday living environment?

This includes safe routes, public-space quality, maintenance, lighting, accessibility, traffic safety and the perceived safety of children and parents.

2. Are opportunities becoming more equally accessible?

This includes access to sports, culture, learning, nature, meeting places, neighbourhood facilities and support close to home.

3. Are children and families genuinely influencing the city?

This includes participation reach, diversity of participation, feedback loops, visible changes resulting from children's input and the level of trust in municipal processes.

4. Are we building a sustainable city-wide movement?

This includes the growth of partnerships, shared learning, scaling successful initiatives, long-term funding and the embedding of child-friendly principles in municipal policy and practice.

The framework will be refined during the first implementation period, including the definition of baselines for each priority neighbourhood and target group.

The 2030 targets are indicative working targets. They will be tested and refined after the 2026 baseline, so that the final indicators are realistic, evidence-based and aligned with available capacity and funding.

5.3 Core Indicators

Theme	Indicator	Baseline	Target 2030	Source / Method
Participation	Children and young people involved in participation processes	To be established in 2026	2,500	Participation records, schools, youth organisations and programme monitoring
Participation	Parents and caregivers involved in participation processes	To be established in 2026	2,500	Participation records, neighbourhood programmes and parent/caregiver feedback
Public Space	Public spaces improved or redesigned with children and families Mobility	-	25	Project records and spatial monitoring
Mobility	Primary schools connected to safe and recognisable walking and cycling school routes	To be established in 2026	100%	Mobility and public-space assessment
Safety	Perceived safety among children and parents in targeted neighbourhoods	To be established in 2026	+30%	Child and parent surveys, walking interviews and neighbourhood data

Theme	Indicator	Baseline	Target 2030	Source / Method
Neighbourhood Responsiveness	Neighbourhood signals addressed and communicated back to residents	To be established in 2026	90%	Neighbourhood feedback system and response tracking
Equal Opportunities	Child Friendly Hubs established in priority neighbourhoods	-	4	Programme records
Equal Opportunities	Attractive and safe teenager spaces developed	-	10	Programme records and user feedback
Access	Children in targeted neighbourhoods with a child-friendly facility within ten minutes by walking or cycling	To be established in 2026	80%	Spatial accessibility analysis
Identity and Outdoor Learning	Maritime, nature and adventure routes realised	-	5	Project records and school/community use data
Partnerships	Organisations participating in the Child Friendly Network Den Helder	To be established in 2026	50	Alliance membership and attendance records
Learning and Scaling	Successful initiatives scaled to new neighbourhoods or target groups	-	15	Programme evaluation
Neighbourhood Networks	Active neighbourhood learning networks	-	5	Child-Friendly Programme Team monitoring
Public Accountability	State of the Child Report published	-	Annual publication	Child-Friendly Programme Team

5.4 The Annual State of the Child Report

The State of the Child Report will be the annual public accountability instrument for the Investment Plan.

It will bring together:

- key data and performance indicators;
- children's, young people's and parents' lived experiences;
- neighbourhood stories and observations;
- examples of completed projects and visible improvements;
- feedback on what has changed as a result of participation;
- remaining gaps, risks and priorities for the following year.

The report will not only ask whether the city has delivered its planned actions. It will ask a more important question:

Is Den Helder becoming a better city in which to grow up?

The report will be prepared by the Child-Friendly Programme Team and discussed with the municipality, the Kansrijke Buurten Alliantie (Opportunity Neighbourhoods Alliance), local partners, children, young people and parents. It will provide a transparent basis for decisions about future investments, programme adjustments and funding priorities.

5.5 Learning, Adaptation and External Evaluation

Keeping the programme responsive over time

The Child-Friendly Programme Team will coordinate quarterly implementation reviews and annual learning sessions within the Kansrijke Buurten (Opportunity Neighbourhoods) approach.

These reviews will examine:

- progress against targets;
- experiences from children, young people, parents and neighbourhood partners;
- delays, barriers and emerging risks;
- opportunities to scale successful interventions;
- required adjustments to programme design, funding or partnership arrangements.

At key milestones, including 2030 and 2035, Den Helder will commission an external evaluation to assess the overall impact of the Investment Plan.

The evaluation will consider:

- changes in children's perceived safety, freedom and wellbeing;
- changes in neighbourhood quality and access to opportunity;

- the effectiveness of participation structures;
- the role of parents and families in shaping neighbourhood development;
- the strength and sustainability of the partnership model within the Kansrijke Buurten (Opportunity Neighbourhoods) approach;
- the extent to which child-friendly principles have become embedded in local policy, design and investment decisions;
- progress towards official UNICEF Child Friendly City recognition.

This learning approach ensures that the Investment Plan remains responsive to the realities of children, young people and families. It allows Den Helder to celebrate what works, correct what does not, and continue building the city from the inside out.

6.

Conclusion



A City Where Children Feel Free, Safe and Seen

Den Helder has all the ingredients to become the Netherlands' most child-friendly coastal city.

It has space, nature, a strong maritime identity, affordable family housing, active neighbourhoods and committed local organisations. Children can grow up close to the sea, dunes, harbour, forests and open landscape, in a city where adventure, movement and discovery can be part of everyday life.

At the same time, these strengths do not yet reach every child in the same way. Differences in neighbourhood quality, safety, access to activities and public-space conditions mean that not every child experiences the same freedom, confidence or opportunity to grow.

This Investment Plan provides a practical route towards change. Its strength lies in the three-part approach, the move from a youth programme to an urban development strategy that gives child-friendliness real weight for administrators, partners and investors.

By fixing what is broken, Den Helder will improve the everyday foundations of childhood: safe routes, clean and welcoming public spaces, better lighting, stronger maintenance and neighbourhoods where children can move independently.

By magnifying what works, the city will connect the schools, organisations, initiatives and local networks that already make a difference for children and families.

By filling in the gaps, Den Helder will create the places, routes and opportunities that are still missing: teenager spaces, Child Friendly Hubs, creative and sporting opportunities, maritime discovery routes and accessible support close to home.

The plan does not treat child-friendliness as an additional social programme. It positions child-friendliness as a long-term urban, social, residential and economic strategy: one that strengthens neighbourhoods, supports family retention and attraction, improves liveability, creates equal opportunities and makes Den Helder more attractive for current and future generations.

Den Helder does not need to compete with other cities on size or density. Its strength lies in a different kind of urban quality: the combination of space, water, landscape, heritage and community.

It can offer something that few Dutch cities can bring together in the same way:

- a city surrounded on three sides by water, where the sea, harbour and horizon are part of everyday life;
- a city where children can grow up close to dunes, beaches, forests, open landscape and maritime heritage;
- a city where families can find affordable and comfortable homes, space, safety and community;
- a city where neighbourhoods are small enough to feel personal, but connected to landscapes and institutions of national importance;

- a city shaped together with the people who live there.

By investing in children, Den Helder invests in the future of its neighbourhoods, its communities and its economy. It strengthens the conditions that help families stay, children thrive and the city grow from within.

Den Helder: a city where children feel free, safe and seen. Because a city that works well for children works better for everyone.

