

Manchester City Council Report for Resolution

Report to: Communities and Equalities Scrutiny Committee - 4 January 2017
Executive - 11 January 2017

Subject: Manchester Parks Strategy 2017 - 2026

Report of: Deputy Chief Executive (Growth & Neighbourhoods), Director of
Neighbourhoods, Strategic Lead (Parks, Leisure and Events)

Summary

This report provides a summary of the new ten year Manchester Parks Strategy, and following extensive consultation sets out the vision and actions to make it happen. It also gives the context for the Strategy's development since the update to the Neighbourhoods Scrutiny Committee on 23 February 2016.

Recommendations

The Executive is recommended to:

1. To consider and note the findings from the Consultation on the Manchester Parks Strategy, noting the significance of parks in delivering other strategic priorities across the City and the weight of support from residents and stakeholders about the importance of parks.
2. To consider and approve the adoption of the proposed vision, strategic priorities and actions to deliver the Strategy over the next 10 years.
3. Delegate authority to the Strategic Lead (Parks, Leisure and Events) in consultation with the Executive Member for Culture and Leisure to complete the production of the Strategy document for communication with residents, visitors, partners and businesses.

Wards affected: All

Manchester Strategy outcomes	Summary of the contribution to the strategy
A thriving and sustainable city: supporting a diverse and distinctive economy that creates jobs and opportunities	The approach proposed within the Parks Strategy will enable existing jobs to be protected where possible and will support the training and progressions into employment for young people. A more focused approach to introduce new service provision within parks i.e. café's and visitor attractions will support an increase in jobs.

A highly skilled city: world class and home grown talent sustaining	Access to appropriate services will support residents to achieve and contribute to the city.
A progressive and equitable city: making a positive contribution by unlocking the potential of our communities	Parks provide a service where the majority of communities are well represented. The Strategy build on this strength and seek to provide something for all. Additionally, increasing the standards in our parks will provide the opportunity for Manchester residents to raise their individual and collective aspirations.
A liveable and low carbon city: a destination of choice to live, visit, work	Manchester has one of the highest levels of tree cover of any large city at 20% of the area against a UK average of 8.2%. Increasing this tree cover through participation in City of Trees will serve to mitigate CO2 emissions and contribute towards flood mitigation measures. Additionally, future buildings renovations will use new technology in their design to mitigate CO2 emissions for example composting toilets, rainwater harvesting, solar, recycled building materials etc.
A connected city: world class infrastructure and connectivity to drive growth	This strategy recognises the importance a balanced parks offer plays within a well connected city and the neighbourhoods within it. It seeks to create neighbourhoods where residents will choose to live and their needs and aspirations are met.

Full details are in the body of the report, along with any implications for:

- Equal Opportunities Policy – Where appropriate Equality Impact Assessments will be undertaken.
- Risk Management – A risk management approach will be taken for all the proposals outlined in this report.
- Legal Considerations – There are no additional legal consideration arising from this report.

Financial Consequences – Revenue

There are no specific financial consequences arising from this report. However, it should be noted that the approach proposed will enable the service to close the gap between income and expenditure during the lifespan of the Strategy.

Financial Consequences – Capital

There are no specific capital finance consequences arising from the report, but it should be noted that separately the service will be seeking to bring forward investment cases to improve the infrastructure within Parks and assist in sustaining the service over the long term.

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Background documents (available for public inspection):

The following documents disclose important facts on which the report is based and have been relied upon in preparing the report. Copies of the background documents are available up to 4 years after the date of the meeting. If you would like a copy please contact one of the contact officers above.

- Manchester Park Strategy 2017 - 2026
- State of UK Public Parks 2016 - Heritage Lottery Fund
- Rethinking Parks – 2014 - 16 NESTA
- Our Manchester: The Manchester Strategy
- Manchester's Great Outdoors: A Green and Blue Infrastructure for Manchester (2015)
- The Local Development Framework (Core Strategy 2012)
- A Healthier Manchester (2015)

Introduction

- 1.1 ***“As a student here, I loved to escape the city & relax in Wythenshawe Park & Marie Louise Gardens. As a mum, I tired my sons with football in Fog Lane, and long walks by the Mersey. As a couple we ran round Fog Lane, Didsbury & Fletcher Moss. When my husband was dying of cancer, we used Fog Lane as a shortcut, and loved to sit & watch the flowers grow. Now I gain peace of mind from walking in all my local parks, remembering happier times.”***

(Resident’s quote from the consultation on the vision and strategy for Manchester Parks).

- 1.2 The last update on progress and proposed direction for the Manchester Parks Strategy was presented in February 2016 to the Neighbourhoods Scrutiny Committee. The report included the context, scope, strategic themes and accompanying actions which formed the basis for consultation.
- 1.3 The Manchester Parks Strategy is the result of this consultation. It provides the vision for Manchester’s Parks and a summary of the work required to achieve the vision through four areas of focus referred to as ‘Strategic Themes’.
- 1.4 The Strategy provides the backdrop against which individual Park Plans will be developed. These Park Plans will be produced together with local residents, groups and stakeholders. They will consider the individual character and potential of a given park as well as any existing plans already in place, investment to date and resources required to implement the plan.
- 1.5 The final public facing Strategy document will be completed for January 2017 and it will be designed to be able to ‘dip in and out of’ easily, presenting the key messages in a summary document focusing on the Vision and Strategic Themes. The Research and Findings and Ten Year Action Plan will be developed as additional documents that will accompany the Strategy. The design will reflect the strength of the branding created for Heaton Park and the Strategy will be provided in a digital and paper form. There will be a ‘priorities at a glance’ produced on a single page to extend the reach across a range of audiences including park users and non-users to assist with communicating the key messages.

2.0 Consultation: ‘Plant a Seed for Manchester’s Parks’

- 2.1 Following directly on from the *Our Manchester* consultation in 2015, the Parks Strategy consultation similarly encouraged everyone to ‘join in the conversation’ about the future for parks in the City. It used a variety of channels to build on the personal approach successfully recognised in *Our Manchester*. The consultation was delivered through a strong communications campaign using the strap-line of ‘Planting a Seed for Manchester’s Parks’. This was visually nostalgic with a ‘nod’ to the long history of parks in the City but directly referenced the uses of parks today.

- 2.2 The consultation ran from 7 March to the 31 May 2016 and included:
- A social media campaign.
 - The City Council's e-news channels direct to residents.
 - Contact with key stakeholders.
 - On-line questionnaires.
 - Hard copy questionnaires.
 - Face-to-face workshops.
 - Written submissions.
 - Press and radio activity.
- 2.3 The articulate and passionate responses showed that local people, partners and stakeholders care deeply about the City's Parks and information was drawn from:
- **2,042 responses** to the online consultation.
 - **91 face-to-face conversations** with 'Age Friendly' representatives, Councillors, Council Officers, Friends of Parks and Community groups, the Education and Health sectors, Housing Associations and Key Stakeholders.
 - **74,000 Twitter** followers and **180,000 Facebook hits**.
 - **Open letters, emails and free text** social media responses.
 - **Open feedback sessions** where residents and stakeholders commented on a working draft..
- 2.4 The results from over **106,000 pieces of new data** captured from the questionnaires and a detailed analysis of all other 'open' responses showed that:
- **94% of respondents use a park in Manchester** more than once a month, compared to 57% across the UK (*State of UK Parks 2016*, Heritage Lottery Fund report).
 - The **average length of stay** in a Manchester Park **is between 1 - 2 hours**.
 - **Over 343,000 hours are spent in Manchester Parks annually by those people surveyed.**
 - **86% of respondents agreed with the four strategic themes.**
- 2.5 Analysis of all face to face conversations contributed to the development of the final Vision and Strategy. The quantity and high quality of feedback helped to see and develop the Strategy from a residents' point of view and served to demonstrate *Our Manchester* in action. The Parks Strategy marks an important and fundamental change in the way Manchester works with residents, communities and partners. Manchester cannot secure the future of our Parks in isolation.
- 2.6 In addition to the data listed above, residents listed the following seven aspects they cared most about:
- 2.6.1 **A true working partnership** – residents want a trusting and collaborative relationship with Manchester City Council. This trust needs to be evidenced by providing resources for residents to play their part. A share of the actions will

be delivered by empowering our residents, communities, partners and stakeholders working together with the Council.

- 2.6.2 **Communication and promotion** – great things are happening in Manchester Parks but they are not always publicised effectively, or the outcomes celebrated after they happen.
- 2.6.3 **Building respect for our parks** - through education and learning across all ages and stages; parks as places of learning for all.
- 2.6.4 **Cleanliness and safety**- not just about access and usability for residents, it is about being proud of our Parks and able to use them safely.
- 2.6.5 **Health and wellbeing** – residents see many opportunities for parks to play a key role in what they call a ‘natural health service’, with mental health as important as physical health.
- 2.6.6 **Climate change, biodiversity and ecology** – parks as places for nature to thrive as well as people.
- 2.6.7 **Investment** - the consultation identified many strengths of the current Parks Service. It also highlighted the successes where targeted investment has been made through Heritage Lottery Fund, Historic England, *Clean City, Section 106* and other sources and partners.

3.0 Parks and Green Spaces are Critical to Achieving the City’s Priorities

- 3.1 The Council has been able to spend around £3m on the Parks Service and Grounds Maintenance Teams (combined) despite the significant cuts in budget from Central Government over recent years. This has been complemented by the strong support from 50 active Friends Groups, volunteers and other partners contributing the equivalent of an additional 51 FTE worth of activity across our parks.
- 3.2 Whilst some comparable Authorities invest a higher percentage revenue than Manchester does currently, this is likely to change over the next three years as those Authorities will be looking to parks and associated areas to make further budget reductions.
- 3.3 Our Parks are critical to achieving a number of the City’s priorities and this is evident when considering the vision outlined in The Manchester Strategy, *Our Manchester*.

Our Manchester theme	Parks have a role to play
A thriving and sustainable city	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Parks and green spaces provide opportunities for flood alleviation and water management across the City. 2. Parks provide opportunities for small local businesses to develop and are key spaces for culture and art.
A highly skilled city	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 3. Parks have links with many schools across Manchester and have a huge role to play in the education and development of children and young people. 4. Parks provide opportunities for those looking to get into work, with partnerships with local Colleges offering catering, customer services, horticulture and animal husbandry qualifications. 5. Parks currently host Community Payback's biggest project in Greater Manchester where offenders carry out 12,500 hours of maintenance across Heaton Park annually, a figure similarly matched at Wythenshawe.
A progressive and equitable city	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 6. As free-entry spaces where people can relax and exercise and that are open to all, parks are well placed to tackle health inequalities. Parks already provide opportunities for sport and play, but the consultation also emphasised that parks have a key role to play in promoting good mental health and well being. 7. Parks serve as focal points for communities, creating identity and shared experiences that promote social cohesion.
A liveable and low carbon city	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 8. Our Manchester states that "The city also needs to provide good quality public spaces to relax, exercise and step away from the busy city." Parks contribute to a high quality of life by providing every day space for social activity. 9. Parks have an obvious role in helping to reduce the harmful effects of climate change and improving air quality.
A connected city	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 10. 31% of consultation respondents said they use parks as a cut through on their way to somewhere else. Attractive parks and green spaces provide safe places for walking and cycling away from traffic and pollution, providing a healthier way to travel around the City.

3.4 Parks also have a role to play in achieving the aims of other key council strategies, including:

3.4.1 **The Local Development Framework (Core Strategy 2012).** Manchester's plan for the regeneration and development of the city makes direct reference to parks and green spaces. Its core vision looks to create 'a city where residents and visitors regularly enjoy a network of quality open spaces, parks and river valleys, enriched with biodiversity, which provide recreational routes and opportunities for sport across the city'. As our population continues to grow, the demand on land will only increase. Parks must be of a high standard to cater for this demand.

- 3.4.2 **Manchester's Great Outdoors: A Green and Blue Infrastructure Strategy for Manchester (2015)** has a wider remit than the Parks Strategy. It goes into more detail about the city's green spaces and waterways and sets out a vision for improving the quality of these spaces. 58% of Manchester's land is made up of parks, woodlands, river valleys, fields, verges, canals and rivers, allotments and private gardens.
- 3.4.3 **Manchester: A Certain Future (2013)** describes the city's collective action on climate change with the aim of significantly reducing the city's CO₂ emissions by 2020. Parks have a clear role in helping to combat the effects of climate change, providing natural flood defences, carbon absorption and potential spaces for food production.
- 3.4.4 **A Healthier Manchester (2015)**. This document describes the city's ambition to improve the health of people living in Manchester and prevent ill health. As free open spaces for exercise and relaxation, parks have a natural role in meeting this ambition and tackling health inequality. **Public Health England (2016)** states "The provision of high quality, local and accessible green space helps to address a number of agendas at local authority level including health, crime and safety."

4.0 National Developments

4.1 State of UK Public Parks 2016

Since the last update to members in February 2016, the **Heritage Lottery Fund** has updated its 2014 report, **State of UK Public Parks**. Of particular significance in the September 2016 report is the role that local authorities have to play in championing parks. There has also been a continuing upwards trend in the usage of parks across the UK as well as a reported strain on resources to support service delivery in parks across the UK. In addition communities are doing more for their parks and Local Authorities' commitment to parks make a difference Key findings and more detail can be found online at:- www.hlf.org.uk/state-uk-public-parks

4.2 Future of Public Parks National Inquiry

In July 2016, the Communities and Local Government Committee launched an inquiry to examine the impact of reduced local authority budgets on parks and green spaces. Manchester City Council has submitted evidence for this inquiry as part of a wider *Core Cities Parks and Green Space Group* joint response. There are four key messages in the joint response: Parks are valued by all those who use them; Parks deliver a wide range of benefits to society and these benefits can be better understood and acknowledged; Local authorities have done an excellent job of offsetting significant budget reductions by working inventively and collaboratively with voluntary groups and contractors to find new solutions; The Core Cities Parks and Green Space Group acknowledges the competing demands of local government, but suggests that the Select Committee should investigate the current funding status of parks.

5.0 The Manchester Vision and Strategic Themes

5.1 The Vision for Manchester's Parks:

Shaped by consultation, this ambitious vision is shared and has been tested by residents, stakeholders and Parks Service staff. It consists of a high level summary and eight aspects of equal significance: We tested our vision and how we could achieve it with people who live, visit and work in and out of the city. **86%** of respondents agreed with the four 'Strategic Themes' to make the Vision a reality:

“Together, we want our parks and green spaces to be the heart, lungs and soul of Manchester by providing the conditions for our city, environment and people to flourish”

5.1.1 The vision will be realised with our Parks being:-

Fully accessible, welcoming and visually appealing with some truly world-class destinations, great heritage, horticultural and tourist attractions.
Good for physical and mental health: a Natural Health Service where people can relax and feel safe as well as a space for sport and culture, with the relevant infrastructure in place for this to happen.
High quality assets where people meet and community flourishes , providing high visitor satisfaction and promoting Manchester as a place to live, work and visit.
Loved by local people and organisations, visitors, users and people who work in them, making a positive difference to people's lives and a source of pride for everyone.
Net contributors to the City: reducing the effects of pollution; producing food and plants; providing learning, skills, training and job opportunities.
Supportive of the diverse range of wildlife by conserving natural habitats, improving air quality; mitigating climate change and flooding; allowing people to engage with and learn about nature.
Valued and understood through education, communication and effective partnerships where local people and organisations are involved, creating spaces where people can relax and feel safe.
Well managed in partnership with internal council departments and external partners working together to ensure sustainable operation – both financially (by closing the gap between income and expenditure) and environmentally.

5.2 Strategic Themes and Service Actions:

The work required to achieve the vision is broken down into four Strategic Themes with each area listing a number of high level actions, again refined by consultation. These are actions which Manchester City Council will deliver over the next ten years, working together with partners and communities.

5.2.1 Strategic Theme 1: Parks at the Heart of Neighbourhoods - this is about: what there is and where it is, ensuring every community is provided for.

Parks and green spaces are a key part of Manchester's geography and history; a continuing symbol of its innovative provision for local residents. The

best spaces provide for local natural habitats whilst also being in tune with the needs of the neighbourhood.

10 Year Service Actions – Parks at the Heart of Neighbourhoods	
Manchester City Council, together with local communities and partners, will:	
1	Review and define planning standards for quality and accessibility for parks across the city. Identify the relationship between parks and the key areas of housing growth within the city and ensure targeted investment in adjacent parks is the beneficiary from any development and planning gain.
2	Promote better links between separate green spaces, for example by welcoming opportunities to develop pocket parks, green corridors and urban green spaces.
3	Bring together all information about parks and facilities in the city so that their use can be maximised.
4	Review the facilities in parks to ensure that they are used and able to be used. And, where appropriate, able to generate income for their upkeep.
5	Co-ordinate and create management plans for individual parks, taking into account existing plans and information.
6	Look to develop pilot projects that increase the functionality and biodiversity of parks to improve resilience to climate change.

5.2.2 Strategic Theme 2: Vibrant Parks, Vibrant Communities - this is about: what will happen in our parks.

Parks provide the space and opportunities for things to happen; some planned, some unplanned as a key part of everyday life. The best parks are inclusive places, allowing people to relax and play; meet and build community. They give opportunities for creativity, learning and achievement to take place and are spaces for people to get fit and feel healthy

10 Year Service Actions – Vibrant Parks, Vibrant Communities -	
Manchester City Council, together with local communities and partners, will:	
1	Continue the conversations with park users and non-users to develop, coordinate and clearly communicate the citywide programme of park events and activities. Prepare an events strategy for parks and open spaces that considers how income can be increased where appropriate.
2	Develop inclusive facilities and activity programmes across selected parks for all age groups and under represented groups such as people with an impairment.
3	Review policies and bylaws relating to parks to ensure that they are relevant and foster an <i>Our Manchester</i> approach.
4	Improve access to information about Manchester's parks.
5	Continue the conversations with park users and non-users to develop and implement a park user survey and engagement programme to understand satisfaction level with parks' programme and use.

5.2.3 Strategic Theme 3: A Manchester Quality Standard - this is about: looking after our parks.

Parks need constant care and attention in order to continue to be vibrant spaces at the heart of neighbourhoods. Parks and their facilities must be of high quality to reap the maximum benefit from their use. Management of parks will develop financially and environmentally sustainable solutions that respect nature, park users and the residents that live nearby.

10 Year Service Actions – A Manchester Quality Standard	
Manchester City Council, together with local communities and partners, will:	
1	Continue the conversations with park users and non-users to develop an agreed quality standard for parks and green spaces that is appropriate for different types of parks.
2	Identify and implement both capital and revenue investment priorities to support the implementation of the ten year strategy.
3	Communicate the Parks management and delivery structure and standards ensuring the highest possible levels of transparency and accountability.
4	Agree and test alternative techniques in landscape management and create opportunities for training and employment for local people.
5	Test new ways to capture and understand park usage.
6	Track progress towards service goals and priorities and report annually on progress.
7	Provide leadership and reporting arrangements for parks – both internal and external partners.
8	Establish an ‘Age Friendly’ standard for parks.
9	Update and expand the use of digital and information technology in parks.

5.2.4 Strategic Theme 4: Productive Parks and Green Spaces in Partnership - this is about: the resources needed to make the vision a reality.

Thriving, vibrant and sustainable parks are based on productive relationships with stakeholders, partners, residents and visitors; the *Our Manchester* approach. This will ensure that Manchester’s Parks continue to be enjoyed and cared for by generations to come. The management of parks will be about creating realistic plans with stakeholders, testing new approaches to looking after parks, making the best use of local contacts, skills and knowledge. Joint decisions will secure long term viability and sustainability to benefit local communities and the environment.

10 Year Service Actions – Productive Parks and Green Spaces in Partnership	
Manchester City Council, together with local communities and partners, will:	
1	Identify sustainable income generating opportunities and business models for a range of suitable parks.
2	Bring forward investment cases for sites with the greatest possible income opportunities.
3	Identify and secure resources from partners to improve the infrastructure and continue the progress created by <i>Clean City</i> investment.
4	Strengthen partnerships with Friends groups, community groups and stakeholders.
5	Establish a programme of engagement and partnership with Education providers, the Private Sector and local communities.

6	Establish a programme of training and development for staff and stakeholders.
7	Develop and implement a volunteer strategy.

6.0 Strategy Implementation

6.1 Infrastructure and Resource for Parks

6.1.1 The strategy will be delivered by:

- 6.1.1.1 Re-aligning and deploying existing council resources to deliver the action plans and priorities created using the *Our Manchester* approach with park users.
- 6.1.1.2 Working closely with existing and new residents, stakeholders and businesses. Local people's passion for parks has been reflected in both the response to the parks consultation and the consultation on the council's budget proposals and this translated in offers of help and resources. Comparatively small investments can make a big difference and residents themselves highlighted how much of a difference a small sum of money can make to their local park, with *Clean City* grants commonly cited as having made a positive difference.
- 6.1.1.3 Developing a new Volunteer Strategy for Parks with Friends groups, volunteers, residents, stakeholders and connect with the voluntary sector across the city and city region. This will build on the stakeholder groups and individuals currently working in our parks, those offering support through consultation as well as reaching out to those not yet known to the service.
- 6.1.1.4 Bringing forward the business case for additional resources and investment through the Park Investment Programme. This will continue the progress made to re-set standards by the *Clean City* investment and to activate those sites with greatest potential for income opportunities. This will enable Parks to continue to make the journey towards closing the fiscal gap on its revenue budget.
- 6.1.1.5 Strengthening the parks team to develop new ideas, improve quality and trial new approaches to management and operational activities.
- 6.1.1.6 Exploring the potential for income generating ideas for parks suggested by 75% of consultation respondents. Business cases will be developed to invest in and support the publicly supported income opportunities for sites with the greatest possible return.
- 6.1.1.7 Exploring greater opportunities for sponsorship, support for fundraising and a focus on income generation in appropriate locations.

7.0 Risks

- 7.1 There is an active risk log which is reported through the Park Strategy Board and subsidiary groups.

8.0 Next Steps:

Report to Executive	11 January 2017
Production of the final public facing Strategy document - Hard copies and e-copies available to residents at key public buildings and distributed to councillors, Friends groups and other stakeholders.	By 31 January 2017
Distribution of summary version.	By 31 January 2017
Public Launch of Strategy.	February 2017
Parks feature in MCC e-newsletter.	Early Spring 2017