

**Manchester City Council
Report for Information**

Report to: Communities and Equalities Scrutiny Committee – 14 January 2021

Subject: Manchester’s Park Development Programme 2021 - 2025

Report of: Strategic Director (Neighbourhoods)

Summary

This report provides an update on the progress and future programme of investment for parks that will accelerate delivery of the Park Strategy and support the delivery of revenue savings beyond 2021.

Recommendations

The Scrutiny Committee is recommended to consider and make comments on the content of the report.

Wards Affected: All

Environmental Impact Assessment - the impact of the issues addressed in this report on achieving the zero-carbon target for the city
Parks by their nature contribute to the mitigation of carbon across the City and the programme of investment in parks will continue, with carbon reduction being one of the key drivers for investment.

Manchester Strategy outcomes	Summary of how this report aligns to the OMS
A thriving and sustainable city: supporting a diverse and distinctive economy that creates jobs and opportunities	Parks are partnering in new and fruitful ways with organisations and communities to increase opportunities for personal development through volunteering, work experience, employment and training.
A highly skilled city: world class and home grown talent sustaining the city’s economic success	Parks offer a unique opportunity to engage in formal educational activity in the natural environment. Opportunities to build life skills such as communication and teamwork are offered through a wide range of volunteering activities.
A progressive and equitable city: making a positive contribution by unlocking the potential of our communities	Parks are at the heart of our communities, offering opportunities for community cohesion through volunteering, events and activities in a setting that is open and accessible to all.

<p>A liveable and low carbon city: a destination of choice to live, visit, work</p>	<p>Parks are an essential part of our neighbourhoods and enhance positive outcomes for residents and businesses. The delivery of a vibrant programme of events and activities is increasing the number of visitors from outside of the City.</p> <p>Whilst parks naturally contribute to the low carbon city agenda, new ways of using and activating the estate in a way that can actively contribute to lowering or offsetting carbon emissions are being explored.</p>
<p>A connected city: world class infrastructure and connectivity to drive growth</p>	<p>Parks connect our City in many different ways, physically they are expanding to offer enhanced green corridors for people and wildlife and socially by sustaining opportunities for shared experiences and common interests.</p>

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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.

- Take a Brief Walk Through Manchester’s Park Strategy 2017 – 2026
- Manchester’s Park Strategy
 - Executive Summary
 - Research and Findings
 - Ten Year Action Plan

1.0 Introduction

- 1.1 This report provides an update on the programme of investment in Parks, commonly referred to as the Parks Development Programme (PDP) and the contribution this investment will make to raising new income or reducing expenditure and therefore responding to the Council's overall budget challenge.

2.0 Background

- 2.1 In December 2017 a ten-year strategy for Manchester's Parks was launched to guide their investment, upkeep and activation. The strategy set out the vision, key themes and actions that were needed to ensure parks and green spaces continued to serve the needs of communities across the city, providing popular and attractive open spaces for play, sport and informal recreation. There was a focus on 4 key themes:
1. **Parks at the Heart of Neighbourhoods** looks at the physical role of parks in neighbourhoods across the city, as well as their size, accessibility and character.
 2. **Vibrant Parks, Vibrant Communities** considers the use and activities that take place in parks to ensure they are a focus of community life, providing opportunities for exercise and sport, and a wide variety of events that can generate additional income for the benefit of parks.
 3. **A Manchester Quality Standard** sets out a good-quality standard for managing and maintaining parks.
 4. **Productive Parks in Partnership** describes ways to deliver park services in a more collaborative and fruitful manner with communities and local organisations, not just the Council.
- 2.2 Prior to the last service redesign in 2015/16, £440k of income was being generated per annum by parks and this was being reinvested back into the service to enhance the offer. In parallel with this, approximately £1.5m of Clean City funding was directed into a variety of projects as a one-off investment to stabilise the service and move towards a more sustainable future. Four years on, this investment combined with enhanced contracting and partnering arrangements has resulted in the service generating an additional 81% of income, whilst making progress towards a consistently good quality offer across the City.
- 2.3 Building on the successful outcomes over the last 4 years, a proposal was submitted to the Capital Programme Board with the intention of reducing future revenue pressures and insulating the Parks Strategy from the impact of future savings requirements. The PDP set out a range of commercial investment opportunities to further close the gap on ongoing income and expenditure from the revenue budget. The proposal set out a Manchester City Council (MCC) capital contribution of £12.5m with the aspiration to partner and match funds through external bodies such as Sport England and the National Lottery Heritage Fund.

- 2.4 Based on the previous track record, there was confidence that the service would continue maximising opportunities from contracted arrangements, such as park cafes, by continuing to raise visitor numbers. Offering a more vibrant programme of events and activities and through the addition of new or improved attractions, such as children's play, that would increase dwell time on site and increase visitors' secondary spend. Underpinning this strategy was the ability to compete with other visitor destinations and work flexibly with partners.
- 2.5 A project team focused on identifying and analysing potential opportunities for investment in collaboration with partners and stakeholders has been established. The team are responsible for testing the feasibility of proposals to identify those opportunities that have a viable business case and will meet the principles for development, including the potential return on investment.
- 2.6 Despite the financial challenge ahead, the alignment to the strategic themes laid out within Manchester's Park Strategy will remain, the pace at which progress is made in terms of closing the gap between income and expenditure has been accelerated.

3.0 Framework for Investment

- 3.1 The investment approach for the PDP is set out across four workstreams, open to all parks across the City.
- 3.2 **Workstream 1** -This will be administered as an open fund in line with the Neighbourhood Investment Fund. £960k will be made available in 2021/22 for capital projects in parks, with £30k allocated to each ward of the City enabling elected members to champion projects that raise standards and help to close the gap between income and expenditure. It is anticipated that the Park Plans that have been created in collaboration with stakeholders will help identify potential projects. Projects could include (but are not limited to) improved play, new furniture, signs and widening participation, access and inclusivity.
- 3.3 There is a requirement for workstreams 2, 3 and 4 to provide a more substantial return on investment and for partnering arrangements to deliver the strongest outcomes with minimal risks. On this basis, the projects identified in these workstreams will be identified through the Council and its partners and be progressed on the ability to fulfil the following principles:
- Delivery of the Park Strategy – all projects will contribute to the delivery of Manchester's Park Strategy.
 - Deliverable – ability to deliver the project within the timescale and budgets set out.
 - Return on investment – a clear view of how the project will close the gap between income and expenditure.
 - Track record – to ensure projects are delivered with the lowest levels of risk there will need to be confidence that partners are able to deliver their commitments.

- Match funding – to maximise the funds invested by the Council there is an expectation that any potential partners will share in the financial commitment to the development of projects.

- 3.4 The requirements set out above become increasingly intensive from workstream 2 through to workstream 4. Appendix 1 provides an overview of the investment framework captured in a table. The fund will be administered through the Park Strategy Board, with projects agreed for progression with local members and the Executive Member responsible for the portfolio on the submission of a robust business case.
- 3.5 **Workstream 2** – This will consist of 10 or more projects with a value between £30k and £250k, they will focus on raising standards as well as closing the gap between income and expenditure, with an average return of 4p per annum for every £1 spent. Projects likely to emerge through workstream 2 will support community led use and / or management of facilities and activities that will support a break even or income generating offer i.e. cafe or sports facilities.
- 3.6 **Workstream 3** – This will see the delivery of 4 or more projects up to the value of £1m. These projects will have a strong focus on return on investment, generating on average 8p per annum for every £1 invested, with partners bringing circa 50% in match funding. Example projects include those that deliver improved infrastructure that contributes to a good visitor experience and the generation of income, including traffic management, and multifunctional spaces providing for weddings, conferencing and education.
- 3.7 **Workstream 4** – This is focused on a small number of projects that will deliver the highest return on investment. A return of at least 10p per annum for every £1 invested will be required, returning £250k on a £2.5m investment. A partner with a strong track record for successful operation and growth will be required to deliver the outcomes and will share in the risk associated with the deliverability of the project. Example projects could include family type attractions, such as tree top activities.

4.0 Pipeline

- 4.1 The investment framework was adopted in March 2020, with follow up Elected Members briefings programmed from 16 March 2020, due to Covid-19 the full programme of briefings was postponed to enable a full review of the Council's capital priorities – these dates have now being rearranged for January 2021. Progress towards developing a pipeline of projects has continued, albeit a little slower during the pandemic, with proposals shared through ward coordination, through the development of Park Plans and through the Parks Team.
- 4.2 The pipeline can most easily be described through the timescale for delivery i.e. quick wins, medium term and longer term. Below is a synopsis of projects that are already in the pipeline for delivery:

4.2.1 **Quick wins – To be delivered in 12 months:**

- City Wide Parks Development Programme (Parks in Partnership Fund - PIP) - £30k per ward for park projects that will raise standards and help close the gap between income and expenditure. Emerging projects include perimeter fencing to secure sites to unauthorised vehicle access.
- Works to facilitate the use of Wythenshawe Hall as a multifunctional space, offering an outlet for activity driven by the Friends as well as education and income generating activity.
- Rationalisation of infrastructure to support travel to parks and circulation to key visitor attractions that generate secondary income.
- Enhanced infrastructure located at play and food and beverage outlets to raise the quality of the visitor experience and increase dwell time.

4.2.2 **Medium term delivered in the next 2 to 3 years:**

- Futureproofing the infrastructure at event and activity sites to support a more vibrant programme, including better drainage and the provision of utilities that can be charged for.
- Works to support the usage of sports facilities in the City for national competition.
- Partnership investment with MCR Active to lever funds from sports national governing bodies to raise the standard of sports facilities at strategic sites to protect and enhance existing provision.
- Rationalisation of building stock to ensure that assets are being used to their maximum potential, this will include investment in buildings to bring them to a standard where they can be managed by the community or repurposed.

4.2.3 **Longer term – delivered in year 4:**

- Family attractions that will increase visitor numbers and secondary spend, whilst continuing to support an offer that is free at the point of access.

5.0 **Deliverability**

5.1 The framework for investment remains completely aligned to the Park Strategy, however it will require acceleration of the Strategy to deliver outcomes at a quicker pace.

5.2 There is a robust track record for investment in parks enabling the closure of the gap between income and expenditure. Since 2016 there has been a strong focus for investment on workstreams that delivered to the park strategy and support a more sustainable future for the service. Investment has been focused on parks that have the most opportunity in terms of increasing visitor numbers and more effective programming of the calendar of events and infrastructure and this approach has brought about a year on year increase of 20% resulting in an additional gross income of circa £700k. The principles of this approach will continue to ensure that future investment continues with a high level of output.

- 5.3 The deliverability of the programme and the associated savings is subject to several important factors, these include:
- Covid-19 Restrictions being lifted in 2021/22 and the service being able to fully return trading. This will impact on existing income streams as well as identifying those new opportunities. With the short-term future in terms of Covid-19 difficult to predict, this may include a more concentrated period of events and activities in a smaller window of opportunity and to drive more intensive usage of assets.
 - Priorities being agreed following local stakeholder engagement.
 - Planning approval being granted, where appropriate.
 - Delivery partners willing to underwrite financial risk.
- 5.4 The project team have reviewed the main challenges in the delivery of capital projects in parks over recent years and the lessons learned have been considered in mapping out the pipeline for delivery in terms of costs and timescales.

6.0 Conclusion and Next Steps

- 6.1 The Parks Development Programme will attract new partnerships and support key stakeholder groups to continue to close the gap between operating costs and income raised through enhanced trading activity. This programme of work will:
- Unlock the potential to generate additional funds, with an anticipated £427k revenue growth in a mature year.
 - Progress the delivery of a consistently good quality standard.
 - Increase the number of visitors and enable more stakeholders to play an active role.
 - Offer opportunities for our residents through the programmes commitment to generating social value.
- 6.2 Delivery of the programme of investment will continue with the following key steps:
- Brief members and stakeholders on the framework for investment – week beginning 4 January 2021.
 - Progress the development of the Parks in Partnership funding model (workstream 1) with agreed criteria, governance and administration ready for launch in March 2020.
 - Continue to gather and explore proposals for investment in workstreams 2, 3 and 4 through the development of park plans and ward coordination.
 - Progress live feasibilities for projects in the pipeline to inform business cases and checkpoint submissions.