

Manchester City Council Report for Resolution

Report to: Environment and Climate Change Scrutiny Committee - 13
October 2022
Executive - 19 October 2022

Subject: Draft Manchester Biodiversity Strategy

Report of: Director of Planning, Building Control and Licensing

Summary

To provide Members with an overview of the draft Manchester Biodiversity Strategy prior to reporting the matter to the Executive.

Recommendations

1. The Environment and Climate Change Scrutiny Committee is recommended to note the report and endorse its progress to Executive.
 2. The Executive is recommended to approve and endorse the Manchester Biodiversity Strategy.
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Wards Affected: All

Environmental Impact Assessment - the impact of the issues addressed in this report on achieving the zero-carbon target for the city

Ecosystems, such as Manchester's woodlands, helps to capture and store carbon, as do effectively managed meadows, while rivers and canals provide a cooling effect during times of heat stress. Access to nature encourages walking and cycling and improves health and well being, reducing reliance on cars with a consequent reduction in carbon emissions.

Equality, Diversity and Inclusion - the impact of the issues addressed in this report in meeting our Public Sector Equality Duty and broader equality commitments

Actions set out in the Manchester Biodiversity Strategy 2022-30 relate to the need for addressing environmental inequalities across Manchester. This includes areas such as increased community engagement with diverse audiences, improving local biodiversity and improved access to nature which are referenced in the Action Plan.

Manchester Strategy outcomes	Summary of how this report aligns to the OMS/Contribution to the Strategy
A thriving and sustainable city: supporting a diverse and distinctive economy that creates jobs and opportunities	Thriving biodiversity increases the attractiveness of Manchester as a place in which to work and invest. Jobs are created in the environmental sector through the need to plant and manage the local green and blue infrastructure resource. Specialist jobs are also created such as Forest Schools leaders, ecologists and wildlife related engagement officer roles.
A highly skilled city: world class and home grown talent sustaining the city's economic success	Manchester competes on a world stage to attract skilled people. A high quality, attractive natural environment makes an important contribution to this.
A progressive and equitable city: making a positive contribution by unlocking the potential of our communities	A more biodiverse environment should be accessible to all communities within Manchester, offering the potential to gain health benefits through improved access to nature for relaxation and exercise and learning new skills through volunteering opportunities.
A liveable and low carbon city: a destination of choice to live, visit, work	The city's natural environment, its woodlands, rivers and meadows play a valuable role in storing carbon and creating a liveable city.
A connected city: world class infrastructure and connectivity to drive growth	Improved connectivity between wildlife friendly sites increases and improves species abundance and movement, while at the same time improving local public access to nature, reducing the need to travel.

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

- Equal Opportunities Policy
- Risk Management
- Legal Considerations

Financial Consequences – Revenue

None

Financial Consequences – Capital

None

Contact Officers:

Name: Julie Roscoe
Position: Director of Planning, Building Control and Licensing
Telephone: 0161 234 4552
E-mail: julie.roscoe@manchester.gov.uk

Name: Duncan McCorquodale
Position: Planning and Infrastructure Manager
Telephone: 0161 234 4594
E-mail: duncan.mccorquodale@manchester.gov.uk

Name: Katrina Holt
Position: Principal Planning Policy Officer
Telephone: 0161 234 4570
E-mail: katrina.holt@manchester.gov.uk

Name: Dave Barlow
Position: Senior Policy Officer
Telephone: 0161 234 4507
E-mail: dave.barlow@manchester.gov.uk

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.

- Draft Manchester Biodiversity Strategy – 2022-2030
- Manchester’s Great Outdoors: A Green and Blue Infrastructure Strategy for Manchester: July 2015
- Manchester’s Great Outdoors: A Green and Blue Implementation Plan Refresh – March 2022
- Our Manchester Strategy - Forward to 2025
- Manchester City Council Climate Change Action Plan 2020-25

1.0 Introduction

- 1.1 The new Manchester Biodiversity Strategy focuses on the need to conserve, protect and enhance biodiversity in the City for current and future generations. This is set within the strategic context of delivering economic growth, new jobs and new homes that are essential to a prosperous, modern city.
- 1.2 It is the third Biodiversity Strategy and Action Plan to be developed in the City, a refresh of new ideas, practical action and policy changes. It provides a comprehensive, multi- agency 10-year Action Plan of activity and commitments which will support positive citywide biodiversity impact. As well as the Council, Partners involved directly in strategy development include Natural England, The Environment Agency, The Wildlife Trust for Greater Manchester, Greater Manchester Ecology Unit, the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds, City of Trees, Canal and River Trust, The Conservation Volunteers, Manchester Metropolitan University, Manchester Museum and the University of Manchester
- 1.3 In 2017 a new approach to strategy development was established, with the Council looking at a more collaborative “Our Manchester” way of delivering an inclusive, innovative Biodiversity Strategy for the City, with much more active partner involvement – a strategy made for the City by the City.
- 1.4 In 2017/18 The Wildlife Trust for Greater Manchester worked over many months, linking in with potential funders the Esmee Fairburn Foundation and with the Council to shape a funding bid that would satisfy both the Council’s ambition but also that of the Wildlife Trust and Esmee Fairburn Foundation. This would extend the impact of the project further by including creative, effective stakeholder engagement and practical action as well as strategy development and delivery.
- 1.5 This approach and bid was supported by the Council and its internal Green Infrastructure Board. A bid was submitted to the Esmee Fairburn Foundation by the Wildlife Trust for nearly £250,000, with overall project costs being £320,000, including £20,000 support from MCC. After lots more time and effort by the Wildlife Trust and MCC officers over the following months, The My Wild City Project bid was successfully approved in September 2018. The My Wild City project began in earnest in late 2018, with the appointment of two new officers to work directly on the project for four years.
- 1.6 The new Biodiversity Strategy is a legacy of all the hard work that has gone into developing and delivering the My Wild City four-year programme from the outset. It has led to the My Wild City project shaping and developing a comprehensive and challenging Strategy that will benefit biodiversity in the City for many years to come.
- 1.7 This document outlines how the City of Manchester is going to progress biodiversity conservation locally. It recognises that we are a significantly urban area, with a range of complex challenges, and that the City will still need to grow economically as well as environmentally. This does not mean that we are

devoid of nature, or that our industrial past is preventing biodiversity from thriving – quite the opposite. The City’s nature recovery network is all encompassing, from our extensive parks, river valleys and canals, to our gardens, greenspaces, ponds, allotments and verges.

- 1.8 Attached in Appendix 1 is the final draft version of the Manchester Biodiversity Strategy. Two extensive reports on citizen engagement which underpins the Action Plan are provided in Appendices 2 and 3. Appendix 4 provides biodiversity and community focussed case studies.

2.0 Background

- 2.1 In Manchester as with other urban cities, economic growth, new jobs and new homes are essential to a prosperous, modern city. Biodiversity will have a strong role to play in the growth of our city; it is even more important that we understand how both to protect and enhance biodiversity, finding creative ways to develop new partnerships. to integrate biodiversity across other key themes, including Climate resilience, health, education, transport and education.
- 2.2 Manchester has a diverse, dynamic, ever-changing landscape. It is dissected by a network of river valleys which act as wildlife corridors, and has some of the oldest formal parkland in the country. Topographically the landscape changes from the flat floodplains of the Mersey belt to the higher ground and acid grasslands of north Manchester. There are old and valuable woodlands, rivers, canals, meadows, plus gardens and greenspaces that act as vital wildlife stepping stones. Moreover, there is a wide and varied flora and fauna in the City, including the Black Redstart (a small bird rarer than a golden eagle) living and breeding in the City Centre; Barn Owls nesting in Manchester for the first time in over 75 years; and Otters have been sighted in Manchester rivers – a good sign of improving water quality.
- 2.3 These species and habitats make up a rich and valuable diversity, an important nature network that we will aim to protect and manage so they can be enjoyed by all, both now, and in the future.

3.0 Biodiversity – background concepts

- 3.1 The word Biodiversity comes from the phrase ‘biological diversity’. In its simplest term biodiversity means the whole variety of life on Earth. It includes all plants and animals, their habitats and the factors that link them to each other and their surroundings. It is not restricted to rare or threatened species and habitats but includes the whole of the natural world from the commonplace to the critically endangered.
- 3.2 We all have a part to play in safeguarding our biodiversity. Action needs to be taken, at a local, national and global level, in order to make a difference. In our city, this responsibility falls to all of us – the Council, partner organisations and importantly its citizens.

3.3 In October 2021 Manchester was the first major City in England to sign the Edinburgh Declaration – a global pledge registering our concern about Biodiversity loss and signalling our commitment to tackling the twin challenges of biodiversity and climate crises.

3.4 The benefits of biodiversity include:

- Plants, animals and habitats enrich our everyday lives. They produce the necessary ingredients for all life to exist.
- The United Nations Human Rights Council has declared that having a clean, healthy, and sustainable environment is a human right.
- Delivering biodiversity benefits adds to improved climate resilience.
- Learning about and enjoying the wildlife of Manchester can make an important contribution to our quality of life, health and spiritual well being.
- Without conserving biodiversity, we will pass to our successors a planet that is markedly poorer than the one we were privileged to inherit. Therefore we have a duty and a role of play to ensure that the earth and its environment are protected for generations to come.
- Conserving biodiversity locally creates new employment from park wardens and engagement officers to ecologists, land managers and habitat surveyors.
- Increased biodiversity, encouraging nature and wildlife friendly activity can improve environmental quality, raise environmental awareness and lead to positive behaviour change.

Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG)

3.5 As a key output of the new Environment Act, biodiversity net gain (BNG) will provide a legal requirement that any impact on biodiversity resulting from new development, where it cannot be avoided, will have to demonstrate a 10% biodiversity net gain – a legal commitment to improve biodiversity on development initiatives. BNG needs to be deliverable and measurable in Manchester, so that the City always benefits positively from any effects on biodiversity. This will require consideration of on-site and off-site improvements, or a combination of both, when considering development for new housing or employment opportunities.

Nature Recovery Networks (NRN)

3.6 The NRN is another priority of the Environment Act, and is a major commitment in the government's 25 Year Environment Plan and part of the forthcoming national Nature Strategy. The NRN will be a national network of wildlife-rich places. Government's aim is to expand, improve and connect these places across our towns, cities and countryside. The new Manchester Biodiversity Strategy will provide a City-focussed response to this, and link in with the Greater Manchester Local Nature Recovery Network.

4.0 Biodiversity Strategy Development

- 4.1 The Biodiversity Strategy is the third iteration in a process that goes back to 2005. The key stages of development are set out below.
- 2005-2009 First Manchester Biodiversity Strategy Approved
 - 2012-2016 Refreshed Biodiversity Action Plan
 - 2018/19 My Wild City Project Established by the Wildlife Trust for Greater Manchester to produce a new independent Biodiversity strategy, supported by the Council and other partners.
 - 2020 Extensive public consultation was undertaken pre – covid in late 2019/20 with over 2000 people taking part in the Survey about the importance of nature in Manchester. A further survey was undertaken during the first lockdown in Spring 2020.
 - 2021 Manchester became the first major City in England to sign the Edinburgh Declaration, an International commitment that registers our concerns about global biodiversity loss.
 - 2022 New Manchester Biodiversity Strategy developed.
- 4.2 A crucial partnership which My Wild City has helped to establish and co-ordinate is the new Manchester Biodiversity Action Group. This partnership, including representation from the City Council, local universities, environmental NGOs and public sector partners contributed to the development of the new Biodiversity Strategy and Action Plan for Manchester. This partnership is now regularly meeting to explore opportunities to work collaboratively to deliver against the new biodiversity action plan.
- 4.3 The new approach to engagement and collaboration has helped identify new opportunities and partnerships in the City, and has provided a significant mandate to shape the new Biodiversity Strategy and Action Plan. The City Council are an active partner in the Strategy's development and implementation.
- 4.4 The Wildlife Trust are championing the City's biodiversity agenda, co-ordinating and leading new biodiversity policy formation with a broad range of stakeholders. The robust engagement and knowledge sharing approach has received National recognition and was Highly Commended in 2021 by the Chartered Institute of Ecology and Environmental Management (CIEEM) as part of their 'Best Practice – Knowledge Sharing Award'.
- 4.5 A suite of new species and habitat action plans will be developed supporting the ambition set out in the new Environment Act to deliver Biodiversity Net Gain and establish Local Nature Recovery networks.
- 4.6 The Strategy will assist our understanding of how BNG can be achieved. It will look to provide guidance and action as to where priority interventions are needed to address environmental inequalities and deliver effective

Biodiversity enhancement in the City. BNG will be embedded within the context of a City which has clear economic ambition and opportunities, which in turn have the potential to positively enhance biodiversity in the City over the years to come.

5.0 Biodiversity Strategy Overview

Aims and Objectives

- 5.1 Manchester's priorities for biodiversity will reach beyond Sites of Special Scientific Interest, Sites of Biological Importance, and Local Nature Reserves and include common habitats and species as well as those that are rare. The Strategy will help address environmental inequalities, and deliver meaningful, practical biodiversity focussed benefits citywide. The Strategy aims to:-

Conserve, protect and enhance biodiversity in the City for current and future generations

- 5.2 Clearly defined objectives with supporting actions have been established which will allow everyone to find a way to contribute:

Objective 1 - Managing and understanding biodiversity

Key priorities:

- Greater Manchester Nature Recovery Network Strategy, contextualised for the urban character of Manchester, guides the focus of habitat management work.
- All priority wildlife sites to be in active management by 2030.
- Key species action plans will be developed which will guide management work across the recovery network as well as indicator species recording to measure change.

Objective 2 - Involving people

Key priorities:

- Creatively involving more people in the city to encourage action to help the nature recovery network in Manchester.
- Manchester Biodiversity Action Group (MBAG) acting and supporting communities.
- Increase knowledge and skills amongst land managers and practitioners in the city to protect, enhance and restore biodiversity.

Objective 3 – Planning, policy and partnerships

Key priorities:

- Biodiversity embedded and mainstreamed into refreshed City Council policies to help protect and enhance nature.

- Cross thematic links established with partners delivering against challenges including climate change, health and wellbeing and air quality to ensure new effective collaboration in the City.
- Realise funding opportunities for recovery of nature, particularly through the planning and development process.

6.0 The Council's Role

- 6.1 The council is committed to support the new biodiversity strategy. The recognition of biodiversity in all work undertaken by the Council is a key component of the Natural Environment and Rural Communities Act 2006. Section 40 of the NERC Act places a duty to conserve biodiversity on public authorities in England. It requires Local Authorities to have regard to the purposes of conserving biodiversity in a manner that is consistent with the exercise of their normal functions such as policy and decision-making. 'Conserving biodiversity' may include enhancing, restoring or protecting a population or a habitat. Having a plan or strategy for Biodiversity contributes to realising NERC act objectives.
- 6.2 A suite of exciting new species and habitat action plans will be developed supporting the ambition set out in Government's new Environment Act to deliver Biodiversity Net Gain and establish Local Nature Recovery Networks. The Strategy will also help shape Biodiversity related policies in the City's new Local Plan.
- 6.3 This will be supported by the Council declaring two official new Local Nature Reserves at executive over the coming months, at Broadhurst Clough in Moston and at Kenworthy Woods in Northenden.
- 6.4 This is a key strategy for the City, which will play an important role in developing our future plans and policies. We recognise that there are significant cross overs, linkages and opportunities, to embed and integrate biodiversity into wider City priorities and challenges, to inform our strategic thinking and decision making.
- 6.5 Key thematic links for biodiversity will include influencing post-Covid recovery, improving the health and wellbeing of our communities, supporting Climate resilience, improved place making, better sustainable transport connectivity, reducing flood risk and improving air quality.
- 6.6 The strategy will help to provide a platform for guidance on the conservation of biodiversity and the safeguarding of species. It will help identify the potential ecological impacts of development and highlight possible mitigation opportunities.
- 6.7 Along with other detailed key commissions around trees, woodlands and our river valleys, the Biodiversity Strategy will help establish priorities for investment and provide important evidence to shape biodiversity-related policy within the Local Plan which is currently in development. It will also act as a

catalyst for investment, creating new jobs and skills and providing numerous volunteer opportunities across the City.

- 6.8 An example of this can be found in the Resilient River Valley Valleys Initiative, a £1.2 million, government funded 2 year programme delivered by three environmental charities – The Groundwork Trust, City of Trees and Mersey Rivers Trust, to positively enhance the City's natural environment while at the same time providing effective training and developing transferable skills.

7.0 Recommendations

- 7.1 The Environment and Climate Change Scrutiny Committee is recommended to note the report and endorse its progress to Executive.
- 7.2 The Executive is recommended to approve and endorse the Manchester Biodiversity Strategy.