

## Manchester City Council Report for Information

**Report to:** Environment and Climate Change Scrutiny Committee  
– 9 March 2023

**Subject:** Manchester Green and Blue Strategy and Implementation Plan,  
including annual update and a report on the Tree Action Plan

**Report of:** Director of Planning, Building Control and Licensing

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### Summary

The work on improving our green and blue spaces is an essential component of delivering the vision for Our Manchester. It also contributes to delivering Manchester's Climate Change Action Plan by helping to create a more climate resilient city. This report provides the annual update on the delivery of the Green and Blue Implementation Plan together with information on the delivery of the Tree Action Plan. It looks back at the progress made during 2022/23 and sets out the key priorities for 2023/24. The report also provides information on the Environment Agency with regards to their role concerning pollution and flood risk and information on the Our Rivers Our City Strategy. An update on Victoria North will be brought to Scrutiny later this year.

### Recommendations

The Committee is recommended to:-

1. Consider and comment on the progress that has been made during 2022/23 by both the Council and external stakeholders in achieving the actions in the G&BI Implementation Plan and the Tree Action plan
  2. Consider and comment on the work of the Our Rivers Our Strategy, the role of the Environment Agency in dealing with river pollution and flood risk.
  3. Consider and comment on the priorities for the G&BI and Tree Action Plans set out for the coming year, in the Appendix to this report.
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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

Manchester's green infrastructure helps to capture and store carbon. Attractive green routes encourage walking and cycling, reducing reliance on cars with a consequent reduction in carbon emissions. Local green space, both public and private can be used to increase the amount of sustainable, locally grown food.

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

The improvement of our green and blue spaces allows for greater environmental equity for all Manchester's residents. Delivery of the strategy down to neighbourhood level seeks to increase the equitable distribution of the benefits that green and blue infrastructure can bring.

<b>Manchester Strategy outcomes</b>	<b>Summary of how this report aligns to the OMS/Contribution to the Strategy</b>
A thriving and sustainable city: supporting a diverse and distinctive economy that creates jobs and opportunities	A high quality environment, including trees and open spaces, 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.
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 natural environment makes an important contribution to this.
A progressive and equitable city: making a positive contribution by unlocking the potential of our communities	An attractive tree filled natural environment should be accessible to all communities within Manchester, offering the potential to gain health benefits through improved air quality and opportunities 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 tree stock plays a valuable role in storing carbon and creating a liveable city. High quality multi-functional open spaces also improve the quality of life.
A connected city: world class infrastructure and connectivity to drive growth	Appropriate tree planting along transport routes can help mitigate poor air quality. Appropriately located and designed green infrastructure can also increase the permeability of the city reducing surface water flooding along transport routes.

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

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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.

1. Manchester Green and Blue Infrastructure Strategy: report to Neighbourhoods Scrutiny Committee and Executive, July 2015, Manchester City Council
2. Manchester's Great Outdoors: A Green and Blue Infrastructure Strategy for Manchester: July 2015
3. Manchester's Great Outdoors: A Green and Blue Infrastructure Stakeholder Implementation Plan: July 2015
4. Green and Getting Greener. A three-year review of progress through Manchester's Great Outdoors: A Green and Blue Infrastructure Strategy for Manchester 2015-18
5. Our Manchester Strategy - Forward to 2025
6. Manchester G&BI Stakeholder Implementation Plan and Tree Action Plan – Report on Progress: to Neighbourhoods and Environment Scrutiny Committee January 2021

7. Manchester G&BI Stakeholder Implementation Plan and Tree Action Plan – Report on Progress: to Neighbourhoods and Environment Scrutiny Committee March 2022
8. Manchester City Council Climate Change Action Plan 2020-25 – Report to NESC and February 2021
9. Our Rivers Our City <https://growgreenproject.eu/rivers-city-strategy-revitalising-manchesters-river-valleys-urban-waters/>

## 1.0 Introduction

- 1.1 This report provides the annual review on Manchester's Great Outdoors – A Green & Blue Infrastructure Strategy for Manchester. The strategy forms part of a framework of strategies, policy and action plans for Manchester which support the city's strategic objectives related to environment, climate change, sustainable development and access to green space. Fig 1. below shows how the Strategy is delivered through its accompanying Implementation Plan and supporting Tree Action Plan, both of which play a key role in delivering the Our Manchester vision for a world class city with a high quality environment. Delivery of the Strategy is also supported through actions and investment under the Park Strategy and Biodiversity Strategy (endorsed by Executive in October 2022) and Our Rivers Our City. The G&BI Strategy also contributes to the delivery of Manchester's Climate Change Action Plan, specifically in relation to climate resilience and adaptation, as well as informing the evidence and strategic context for the city's local development framework, including the refresh of the Local Plan



*Fig1: This shows the relationship of the Green & Blue Infrastructure Strategy to other Council strategies and action plans as described in paragraph 1.1*

- 1.2 The report highlights the key progress that has been made in delivering the G&BI Strategy, both by the Council and with our partners. More detailed progress is set out in Appendix 1 of this report. It also highlights the actions undertaken part of Our Rivers Our City and the involvement of one of our key partners, the Environment Agency, in terms of their role in flood management.

## 2.0 Background

- 2.1 Manchester's Great Outdoors – A Green & Blue Infrastructure Strategy for Manchester, together with its Implementation Plan were prepared and are jointly owned by the Council and Manchester G&BI stakeholder group on behalf of the wider city. Together, they have been recognised as a benchmark

of excellence, winning the 2018 CIEEM Award for best practice in Knowledge Sharing. The full documents can be found using the links provided in the background documents section.

- 2.2 The Strategy is based on a long-term vision that was updated as part of a refresh of the document in 2021. The updated vision is that:

*By 2025 climate resilient, well maintained green and blue spaces will be an integral part of all neighbourhoods. The city's communities will be living healthy, fulfilled lives, enjoying access to parks and greenspaces and safe green routes for walking, cycling and exercise throughout the city. Green and blue infrastructure will be supporting Manchester's growth.*

- 2.3 The delivery of the vision is centred on four objectives:

1. Improving the quality and function of Green and Blue Infrastructure to maximise the benefits it delivers,
2. Using appropriate Green and Blue Infrastructure as a key component of new developments to help create successful neighbourhoods and support the city's growth,
3. Improving connectivity and accessibility to Green and Blue Infrastructure within the city and beyond,
4. Improving and promoting a wider understanding and awareness of the benefits that Green and Blue Infrastructure provides to residents, the economy and the local environment.

### **Governance - the G&BI Board**

- 2.4 The Implementation Plan continues to be delivered by the Council and its partners. The Executive member for Environment who covers all green issues, including climate change, leads on this agenda. Progress against the Council actions is steered within the council by the G&BI Board, chaired by the Director of Planning, Building Control and Licensing and attended by relevant Heads of Service. This provides an opportunity to focus on the strategy objectives and add value to the way G&BI is delivered across the city. It enables issues that arise to be discussed across services rather than in isolation. Ward members are often best placed to know their local community groups and understand their communities' needs and opportunities and together with council officers they are involved with many of the actions needed to deliver the G&BI Strategy.

### **Working in Partnership - the G&BI stakeholder Group**

- 2.5 Many of the actions within the G&BI Strategy and Implementation Plan are achieved through collaboration with Manchester's partners. A stakeholder group known as the Manchester G&BI Group meets at regular intervals. This group is made up of a range of experienced practitioners and stakeholder organisations, including officers from the Council, Corridor Manchester, Manchester Climate Change Agency, Greater Manchester Combined Authority and Registered Housing Providers, statutory bodies such as the

Environment Agency and Natural England, environmental charities like Groundwork, City of Trees, the National Trust, Wildlife Trust and RSPB, and academics from Manchester's Universities. It provides both a forum for sharing best practice and a catalyst for encouraging new partnerships for delivering action in line with the objectives of the G&BI Strategy.

- 2.6 The Group has met physically three times this year, as well as attending an organised tour of Mayfield. The group has expanded, including environmental organisations Sow the City, the Orchard Project and RHS Bridgewater and commitments have been made by partners to the GI Strategy, new Biodiversity Strategy and our Rivers Our City Strategy.

### **Knowledge Sharing – MCC GI Group**

- 2.7 A new council officer group with a focus on GI and adaptation has been established jointly by Environment, Policy and Resources and Planning Strategy, with officer representatives from across council services. This will provide a useful forum for exchanging ideas, developing collaborative projects and networking.
- 2.8 New climate related roles for key departments, including Planning, Housing, Highways and Education, have also been established. These roles, along with Neighbourhood Climate Change officers, will provide important links and bridges between departmental priorities enabling better mainstreaming of the GI agenda.

### **3.0 Challenges, Opportunities and Key Issues**

- 3.1 This section outlines the challenges, opportunities and key issues that have impacted the delivery of the G&BI Strategy over this last year. It also responds to the specific questions raised by members (Recommendation 2).

### **Places for Everyone and our Local Plan**

- 3.2 Places for Everyone (PfE), the joint plan of nine of the Greater Manchester Districts, (excluding Stockport) is currently going through an Examination in Public. This details the quantum of residential and commercial development that will be expected and sets out strategic level policies including those relating to the environment, such as green infrastructure and biodiversity. Once adopted this will provide a planning policy framework for the city region. Work has also begun on a new Local Plan for Manchester, that will provide greater detail and Manchester specific policy approaches. A report on this was brought to Environment & Climate Change Scrutiny on the 9<sup>th</sup> February this year. Much of the research work completed as part of our G&BI Strategy, such as Our Rivers Our City, Biodiversity Strategy and Tree Capacity work, will provide evidence for the environmental policies within our Local Plan. Similarly, the planning policy framework created by PfE and Manchester's Local Plan will ensure that we can protect and enhance our G&BI assets, in the context of achieving the housing and employment that our city needs.

## Our Rivers Our City

- 3.3 This initiative was funded through the EU GrowGreen project and launched on 7<sup>th</sup> December 2021. The aim of the Strategy is to re-energise some of the city's most important natural spaces, making them 21st-century assets, drivers for growth, and places where people and nature can thrive. As well as an overarching strategy for the city, individual long-term action plans have been co-developed for the Irk, Medlock and Mersey Valleys. To find out more, all documents can be found via the link here: <https://growgreenproject.eu/rivers-city-strategy-revitalising-manchesters-river-valleys-urban-waters/>. The success of the Strategy depends not only on the council but also on a range of external stakeholders. It has already led to progress outlined in more detail in paragraphs 4.12 and 4.25. Lead officers have been identified to take forward those actions that the Council has responsibility for and to continue to liaise with our partners where an external stakeholder has the primary responsibility.

## Climate Change – Flooding

- 3.4 Extreme weather events have continued to provide significant challenges. In January 2022, Manchester recorded its highest river level on the Mersey in South Manchester. The response to flooding events requires a multi-agency approach, dealing with flooding at a strategic level and on a more detailed site by site level. At a strategic level, the **Environment Agency** is responsible for managing the risk of flooding from main rivers, reservoirs, estuaries and the sea in England and Wales.
- 3.5 In Manchester, "main river" designation applies to the Irk, Mersey, Medlock, Irwell and a small part of the Bollin near Manchester Airport, as well as some of their key tributaries e.g. Moston Brook. Other smaller rivers and streams are referred to as "ordinary watercourses", for which lead local flood authorities (LLFAs) such as Manchester City Council, are responsible for managing the risk.
- 3.6 The Environment Agency are the first point of call for environmental issues, flooding, or pollution incidents including:-
- flooding from main river or the sea
  - main rivers blocked by a vehicle or fallen tree causing risk of flooding
  - pollution to water or land
  - collapsed or badly damaged river banks
  - damage or danger to the natural environment
  - people taking water illegally from rivers, streams, canals or underground sources such as wells
  - incidents at Environment Agency-regulated waste sites
  - dead fish or fish gasping for air
  - poaching or illegal fishing
  - unusual changes in river
- 3.7 Nationally, the government has commenced a review of the case for implementing Schedule 3 to the Flood and Water Management Act 2010



concerning Sustainable Drainage Systems (SuDS). This will support the objectives of alleviating pressures on the sewer network and reducing flood risk, as well as improving water quality, amenity, biodiversity, and rainwater harvesting. If implemented, this Schedule would introduce standards for new sustainable drainage systems as well as making connection to public sewers conditional of approval that the drainage system meets the national standards. The outcome of the review is expected shortly.

- 3.8 At a more local level, MCC Highways are developing their own SuDS standard details. The standards include two high-level construction detail drawings accompanied by a maintenance guide for each SuDS design. The two designs are for a rain garden and a SuDS enabled street tree. At present the details have been drafted and the report has been signed off prior to publication on the council website.

### **Climate Change – Extreme Heat**

- 3.9 Last summer, Manchester suffered from a continuous period of excessive heat. The city's highest daily temperature reading of 37.2°C was recorded in August. This had a negative impact on some of our newly established tree planting due to heat stress. They were checked regularly, and the arboricultural team had two contractors and an in-house team watering all the new trees planted by the Council, across the city on a rolling cycle, at least twice a week from May until September. Tree officers are confident many will bounce back but 68 trees are being replaced in the Winter 2022/23 planting season. Further watering regimes will be in place for the coming Summer
- 3.10 At a strategic level, the Government are considering changes to the National Planning Policy Framework, (see Report to Environment & Climate Change 9 Feb 2023). This would encourage further provision of nature-based solutions within new development, to improve resilience to extreme weather events by, for example, contributing towards cooling and shading to counter overheating. This will be given further consideration as our new Local Plan is prepared.

### **Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG)**

- 3.11 The Environment Act 2021 introduced a new legal requirement that all new development will need to provide a 10% improvement in biodiversity. This is expected to be in force in November of this year. Regulations are still awaited that will define the size and type of development to which this will apply.
- 3.12 We want BNG to be deliverable and measurable in Manchester, so that the city always benefits positively from any effects on biodiversity. We will look at both on-site and off-site improvements, or a combination of both, when considering development for new housing or employment opportunities. A study is currently being commissioned to consider how BNG should be delivered within Manchester. This will also provide evidence to underpin Local Plan policy.

3.13 The new Biodiversity Strategy (endorsed by Executive in October 2022) will assist our understanding of how BNG can be achieved. This will help identify where priority interventions are needed to address both biodiversity enhancement and environmental inequalities.

#### **4.0 G&BI Implementation Plan – highlights by objective**

##### **4.1 Objective 1: Improving the quality and functionality of G&BI across the city to maximise the benefits it delivers**

###### **Key headlines:**

- **Parks**
- **Green Spaces Fund**
- **In our Nature**
- **My Wild City**
- **Biodiversity Strategy**
- **Resilient River Valleys (OROC)**

###### **Parks**

4.2 Circa £4.6M has been invested across the existing Parks estate, with over 107 capital projects identified and delivered in collaboration with Manchester residents. The Council's partnerships with organisations such as British Cycling have generated additional investment to the value of £0.5M. This has resulted in projects which have widened access and participation, enabled more residents and visitors to get involved and supported the delivery of good quality parks and green spaces for residents in every ward of the City.

4.3 The foundations for the investment to continue at pace have been set with strategic support given to the further development of an additional £4M of investment in the pipeline for delivery that is anticipated to generate £2M in match funding from partners.

4.4 The opening of Mayfield Park in September 2022, (see paragraph 4.14) demonstrated the City's ambition and commitment to the delivery of world class parks and green spaces for Manchester's residents and visitors.

4.5 Over the last year there has also been a clear focus to ensure that Manchester's Parks are vibrant places which reflect their local communities and offer an opportunity to connect with nature, as a result 1,812 events and activities have been delivered, an increase of 16% on the previous year. Participation rates have almost doubled, with an estimated 600k people engaging in an activity in the last year. Of note are the partnerships that have developed with organisations such as Really Wild Forest Schools to provide activity in Parks for over 800 young people. Through the My Wild City Project new action plans for twelve priority wildlife sites have also been developed to help support Parks staff and Friends of Groups to have a better understanding of how to manage their sites for biodiversity.

## **Parks Climate Change Action Plan**

- 4.6 The Council's Zero Carbon ambition continues to influence the focus of the Parks Service and the development of a Parks Climate Change Action Plan is underway. The plan reflects the five workstreams of the Council and coordinates activity to complement the Council's plan, identify further opportunities through the Parks Estate, how the Service operates, and the relationships and interactions with volunteers and visitors.

## **Green Spaces Fund**

- 4.7 The launch of the £2.6m Greater Manchester Green Spaces Fund offers small and large grants to communities for projects that improve or create local green spaces in areas of greatest need. Five of the twenty-one schemes approved across GM (Greater Manchester), were in Manchester. This has amounted to nearly £100K being awarded to support neighbourhood greening in Beswick, Ardwick, Levenshulme and Wythenshawe. The next round of funding closed on 23<sup>rd</sup> January 2023.

## **In Our Nature**

- 4.8 The In Our Nature project has been awarded £2.5m from The National Lottery Community Fund. This three year project will help Manchester residents deliver over 50 community led projects to reduce carbon emissions and introduce urban greening and nature-based solutions. In Our Nature brings together a delivery partnership made up of Manchester Climate Change Agency, Hubbub, Groundwork Greater Manchester, Amity CIC, The Tyndall Centre for Climate Change Research, who will work alongside the City Council. The project team has begun working alongside a far-reaching network of experts, individuals, and grassroots organisations to connect with communities and groups looking to collaborate on projects in 2023.

## **Biodiversity Strategy**

- 4.9 The new Manchester Biodiversity Strategy was well received at Scrutiny Committee on 13 October 2022 with the Strategy endorsed at the City's executive on 19 October 2022. It provides a ten year, comprehensive, multi-agency Action Plan of activity and commitments to support positive citywide biodiversity impact. The Manchester Biodiversity Action Group, including sixteen, actively engaged stakeholder organisations, continue to meet bi-monthly to help co-ordinate delivery of the action plan including collaborating on new investment to deliver benefits for G&BI and residents in Manchester.
- 4.10 As a response to the new Strategy, Manchester declared Kenworthy Woods in Northenden as a new Local Nature Reserve (LNR) in December 2022. A further LNR at Broadhurst Clough, Moston, is being brought to Executive, this spring.

## **My Wild City**

- 4.11 The Wildlife Trust has continued to deliver a range of events and workshops with the public to improve awareness, connection, knowledge, and action taken for nature and the environment in Manchester. Ranging from high profile collaborative events like Manchester Science Festival with the Museum of Science and Industry which saw over 22,000 people engaging in activities, through to species identification walks with residents and Friends of Groups at sites such as Bank Bridge Meadow and Blackley Forest. 35 practical conservation sessions have been delivered at nine wildlife sites, mainly in north Manchester, involving over 35 volunteers from Manchester.

## **Resilient River Valleys**

- 4.12 The Resilient River Valleys project is a strong response to the ambition set out in the **Our Rivers Our City Strategy**. It has been funded by the Government's Green Recovery Challenge Fund and is a partnership project between three environmental charities – Groundwork Greater Manchester, City of Trees and the Mersey Rivers Trust. The project focuses on delivering nature-based solutions for climate mitigation and adaptation, such as leaky dams and tiny forests, in Manchester's river valleys and urban green spaces. The Project has helped create thirty-eight new roles providing training and capacity building for citizens, with twenty-two of these roles being for unemployed young people. Over 200 training courses have been provided, and 5700 people have been engaged in activities and events in areas in Wythenshawe, Burnage, Moston and Collyhurst.
- 4.13 **Objective 2: Using appropriate green and blue infrastructure as a key component of new developments to help create successful neighbourhoods and support the city's growth.** This needs to happen at both the detailed, masterplan and strategic framework level

### **Key headlines:**

- **Mayfield Park**
- **Castleford Viaduct**
- **Glade of Light**
- **Jackson Brickworks**
- **Poland Street**
- **New Arena**

### **Mayfield Park**

- 4.14 Opened on 22nd September 2022, Mayfield is the first new park to be created within Manchester's City Centre in over 100 years. A successful £23 Million project, it was delivered on budget, and on time, despite being delivered during the pandemic. Manchester now has a new four acre park with a restored section of river a two minute walk from Manchester's main train station. Mayfield incorporates sponge city thinking and has landscape, quality, and function at its heart.

### **Castlefield Viaduct**

- 4.15 A twelve month pilot was opened officially in early 2022, by the National Trust (NT), to explore opportunities to use the grade II listed Castlefield viaduct to create a new multi-functional elevated open space in the City Centre. The aim of the National Trust is to bring the viaduct back into use and transform it into a freely accessible green space. Visitor sessions booked up instantly online and as of end of December NT had engaged 15,915 people since May. The pilot will run into Summer 2023.

### **Glade of Light**

- 4.16 The Glade of Light is a memorial commemorating the victims of the 22 May 2017 terrorist attack at Manchester Arena. A living memorial, the Glade of Light is a tranquil garden space for remembrance and reflection. It features a central white marble 'halo', and plants which grow naturally in the UK countryside. 43 new trees have been planted and around the anniversary, every year, the white flowers of a hawthorn tree planted at its centre will bloom. The memorial was officially opened on 10<sup>th</sup> May 2022.

### **Former Jackson's Brickworks**

- 4.17 A scheme at the former Jackson's Brickworks, Newton Heath, received a minded to approve decision at a meeting of the Planning Committee in October 2022. The proposal for 378 dwellings together with commercial floorspace and a new secondary school, has included significant remediation works due to land contamination. The development includes the planting of 373 trees together with a deep landscaped buffer to an adjoining canal towpath as well as native hedging with native herbaceous planting to water retention swales and rainwater gardens. Public realm will be brought forward through a 1.36ha park together with several smaller pocket parks/play areas. Water run-off and flood mitigation will be dealt with through the provision of swales, rainwater gardens and attenuation basins which also provide habitats as part of biodiversity enhancements.

### **The Coop Live Arena, Etihad Campus**

- 4.18 The new events arena located adjacent to the Etihad Stadium will be completed later this year. Green infrastructure enhancements include a green, living wall, improvements to the public realm around the building with trees, planting and wildflowers to the canal side to improve biodiversity, by creating new habitats and attracting wildlife.

### **Poland Street, Ancoats**

- 4.19 The Mobility Hub is an innovative project helping to deliver the public realm strategy within Ancoats. The hub will provide space for resident and visitor parking in a manner that allows more space for public realm and planting, within the Poland Street area. As part of the project trees will be planted from six different species and positioned to define different spaces so pedestrians

and cyclists can use the area safely whilst creating places for sitting and relaxing. The southern elevation of the Mobility Hub will consist of pre-grown 'green' panels of climbing plants providing a mix of species to increase biodiversity. Construction is due to commence in summer 2023.

#### 4.20 **Objective 3: Improving connectivity and accessibility to Green and Blue Infrastructure within the city and beyond.**

##### **Key headlines:**

- **Active Travel Strategy**
- **Bee network**
- **Canals – access corridors**

##### **Active Travel Strategy**

4.21 Manchester Active Travel Strategy was approved by Executive in February this year. This includes a draft Network Plan designed to connect as many Manchester residents as possible to key destinations, including parks and green spaces. This will form the basis of future funding bids for active travel schemes. Ambition 2 of the Strategy aims to double the number of people who live within a 10-minute walk or cycle from local green spaces. There is a qualitative aspect to this in which we will be aiming to provide the best 'level of service' for walking, wheeling and cycling. Ambition 3 seeks to reflect the diversity of Manchester and address transport inequalities. This will in part be achieved by an audit of all access barriers to our off-road foot and cycle paths and by removing all barriers which prevent access for those using wheelchairs, non-standard cycles and other mobility aids.

##### **Bee Network travel Routes**

4.22 Almost £30million is committed to Bee Network travel route improvements in Manchester. This network improves accessibility, via active modes of travel to facilities across Manchester including our open spaces. Projects include:

- Chorlton Cycleway - 5km route south from the city centre to Chorlton. Work has almost been completed on this scheme.
- Northern Quarter Cycleway - This scheme is separated into four areas with Area 1 (Ducie Street/Dale Street) and Area 3 (Thomas Street) principally complete. The design of Area 2 (Stephenson Square) is still being finalised as are the detailed plans for Area 4 (Withy Grove/Shudehill).
- Northern and Eastern Gateway Connectivity - Phase 1a of this project in relation to Redhill Street has been completed with Phase 1b at Old Mill Street and Pollard Street at the tendering stage with construction work due to commence early 2023. Work on Phase 2 is also progressing.
- Radial Routes – All the radials are being considered holistically as part of ongoing strategic thinking and the update to the Manchester Local Implementation Plan in 2023. A design for active travel improvements for Oldham Road (out from the centre to Queen's Road) is being reviewed as

part of the radials work to ensure it aligns with the changes to radials over the next few years.

- GM Cycle Hire – A new cycle hire scheme, with the first phase including roll out on Oxford Road in Manchester. The initial phase of the project was rolled out in 2022.

### **Canals – Access Corridors**

4.23 The Canal and River Trust have delivered substantial ecological improvements along the Rochdale Canal in the City Centre, again achieving Green Flag Status. The Trust have worked with volunteer groups along both the Ashton and the Rochdale Canal, commissioning a full ecological evaluation along the Rochdale from the City Centre to Miles Platting.

4.24 **Objective 4: Improving and promoting a wider understanding and awareness of the benefits that Green and Blue Infrastructure provides to residents, the economy and the local environment.**

#### **Key headlines:**

- **Our Rivers Our City (OROC) Strategy**
- **Open Space Study**
- **GrowGreen**
- **Britain in Bloom Awards**
- **Protecting Playgrounds**

### **Our Rivers Our City**

4.25 The new strategy for revitalising Manchester’s river valleys, launched in 2021 is already yielding results. It was a catalyst for Groundwork’s successful £1.2million bid for the Resilient River Valleys project (see earlier) and the Love Your River Irk project delivered by Groundwork and Mersey Rivers Trust. The Strategy was a shortlisted finalist in the 2022 Landscape Institute Awards. It was also recognised within the Natural England studies focused on Fallowfield Brook in the Highfield Local Nature Reserve, and the River Medlock. The Environment Agency have commissioned £50K worth of investigation work looking at possibilities for weir removal along the River Irk in Manchester and provided further funding for Mersey Rivers Trust to undertake feasibility studies to naturalise and daylight sections of Baguley Brook. OROC has also provided a baseline assessment of a potential Urban Green Factor based on a ward level analysis across the city, as featured in the report to Environment & Climate Change Scrutiny in February 2023. This will inform the development of policy to improve green infrastructure across the city.

### **Open Space Study**

4.26 An audit to understand the distribution of different types of open space across the city has been completed. This will provide evidence to support the preparation of the Local Plan and in development management decisions. The study shows that most parts of the city have reasonable access to open space

although not to all types of open space. The study will help investment decisions broaden the functionality of existing open spaces, increase their accessibility and quality and improve the equitable distribution of all types of open space provision across the city.

### **Grow Green**

- 4.27 The GrowGreen project came to an end, culminating in a final event in Brest, France in November 2022. The five year, EU Horizon 2020 project has been a resounding success, with Manchester orchestrating and leading the entire 11.2 million Euro Project across six EU Countries and Wuhan in China. All partner Cities presented updates at the final event around their demonstrator projects and the development of GI/Nature Based Solution Strategies in their Cities. In Manchester, GrowGreen supported the refresh of the City's latest G&BI Action Plan, funded the Our River Our City study and delivered the £1.2million award winning Sponge Park in West Gorton. Key Learning and outputs demonstrating the successful results of the project will be shared across a range of platforms over the coming months.

### **Britain in Bloom Awards**

- 4.28 Manchester has continued to see a consistently high standard of Britain in Bloom entries across the city. 95% of entrants scored a Level 4 (Silver gilt: Thriving) or higher despite the challenges facing our volunteers including the ongoing impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic, the cost of living crisis and extreme weather.
- 4.29 Manchester has one of the highest number of communities engaged with In Bloom across the entire North West. Several new entries have needed little or no encouragement to consider more sustainable, biodiversity considerate approaches to gardening in our changing climate. A greater focus has also been given to reducing waste, recycling and improving our urban and green spaces for wildlife. Whilst celebrating all Bloom groups, a stand out entry has been the Manchester Urban Diggers who scored a 5 (Gold: Outstanding) in their first year in the scheme and received the MCC sponsored Pride of Manchester award.
- 4.30 Looking forward to 2023 we aim to continue to grow by demonstrating that North West in Bloom is a richly diverse and inclusive scheme that can be enjoyed by all and striving to overtime any barriers to this.

### **Protecting Playgrounds**

- 4.31 Children are particularly vulnerable to the effects of air pollution which impacts neurodevelopment and cognitive ability, can trigger asthma and childhood cancer and can lead to chronic diseases such as cardiovascular disease later in life.
- 4.32 The Protecting Playgrounds project, funded by the Council and Transport for Greater Manchester, has tested a range of tree species on a number of



primary school sites in Manchester with a different mix, density, height and leaf shape in order to find the most effective nature-based solutions that may be able to help reduce the risk. The report's findings were presented to MCC managers and officers in October 2022 by lead researcher Professor Barbara Maher from Lancaster University. The evidence shows that selective planting of certain 'tredges' (trees maintained as hedges) between roads and playgrounds can significantly reduce traffic-derived air pollution. Environmental Health have produced a checklist to facilitate further tregde planting in appropriate locations. This can inform neighbourhood planning including ward based climate change action plans, subject to further funding being identified.

## **5.0 Tree Action Plan – Highlights and Update**

- 5.1 During 2022/23 a total of 7861 trees were planted, by the council and their partners, including five orchards and 6249 hedge trees. Working with City of Trees, the Council identified over 300 new locations for mature standard trees and again secured significant funding from Forestry Commission's Urban Tree Challenge Fund, with all new planting to be delivered by March 2023. Manchester has added 165 of the trees planted to the commemorative national Queen's Green Canopy project.
- 5.2 The Orchard Project received funding from We Love Manchester, which enabled them to run five orchard care workshops. Volunteers conducted tree health assessments, weeded, and re-mulched the tree bases and took part in a pruning workshop. Orchard Care Events took place at Delamere Park, Parkway Playing Fields, Fallowfield Loop, Platt Lane in Platt Fields Park, and at Kenworthy Woods in December and January. An additional orchard planting took place at the British Muslim Heritage Centre in Whalley Range.

### **Tree Action MCR**

- 5.3 Tree Action MCR is now in its final phase. In total, during phase 1 and 2, 2288 standard trees have been planted as part of the programme across all of the city, with 59 planted in cemeteries, 287 in parks, and 1942 on street scene. In addition to the standard tree plant, planting projects included;
- 8 restocked tree avenues, 3 new avenues created across parks and cemeteries,
  - 14 specimen beacon trees in cemeteries and parks to mark the impact of Covid.
  - 8 new community orchards
  - 7903 hedges planted to create native hedgerow.
- 5.4 A second Urban Tree Challenge match funding grant application has been successful to allow a winter plant in 2022. Phase 3 of Tree Action MCR will therefore add 337 trees to the city scape, along with a programme of 60 trees to be planted within the Northwards estate and replacement planting for dead or damaged trees. A consistent watering regime is also taking place which will continue to ensure that each tree has a full three years of care.

5.5 The focus of tree planting has now shifted. In 2022 Manchester delivered the most comprehensive assessment of the City's tree and woodland resource ever undertaken. City Roots provides an informative look back at the evolution of our treescape over the last 100 years, whilst citywide Capacity Mapping provides a ward based analysis identifying opportunities for improving and enhancing the City's tree scape for generations to come. Work is now needed to use this evidence to engage communities in planting in those areas which have fewer trees. City of Trees have secured funding through Defra's Woodland Accelerator programme and have recruited four new posts to work across GM for two years on helping the Districts to deliver meaningful treescape improvements. This will link into the ward based capacity maps provided.

## **6.0 Future Priorities**

6.1 Work will continue in delivering the four objectives of the Green and Blue Infrastructure Strategy. Projects will continue to include work undertaken by the council, in collaboration with its many stakeholders and projects that are delivered directly and independently by those stakeholders. The focus over the next year will include:

- Tree Action Plan Refresh – a new action plan will build on extensive research, looking at new challenges and opportunities across the City's treescape. This had been delayed to enable the incorporation of key ambitions set out in the newly completed ward based opportunity mapping. Work will also involve liaising with the Tree Council to ensure that the refreshed Action Plan reflects the newly approved Tree and Woodland Strategy Guidance delivered in January 2023.
- Biodiversity Net Gain - A detailed process analysis of biodiversity net gain options in the City is being commissioned to help maximise opportunities that may arise through development.
- Biodiversity Strategy – Work will begin with Natural England to understand and improve the mix of habitats across the City, and with partners to begin to develop meaningful activity around priority Species Action Plans and the designation of further Local Nature Reserves.
- Our Rivers Our City – Work with partners, such as the Environment agency and United Utilities will continue to realise the Strategy and Action Plan.
- Planning and Development – We will continue to engage with developers and other partners to deliver green and blue infrastructure improvements within major projects including Victoria North and HS2.
- The preparation of a draft Local Plan with strong environmental policies around green and blue infrastructure, biodiversity and open space making full use of the up-to-date evidence produced through the G&BI Strategy.

## **7.0 Recommendations**

7.1 Recommendations appear at the front of the report.