

**Manchester City Council  
Report for Information**

**Report to:** Environment, Climate Change and Neighbourhoods Scrutiny Committee – 7 March 2024

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

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

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**Summary**

This report provides the annual update on the delivery of the Green and Blue Implementation Plan together with information on the Biodiversity Action plan and new draft Tree and Woodland Action Plan. 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 and biodiverse city. The report looks back on the progress made during 2023/24 and sets out the key priorities for 2024/25.

**Recommendations**

The Committee is recommended to:

1. Consider and comment on the progress that has been made during 2023/24 by both the Council and external stakeholders in progressing the G&BI Strategy, the Biodiversity Strategy Plan and the Tree and Woodland Action Plan (TAWAP).
  2. Consider and comment on the priorities for the G&BI and Tree and Woodland Action Plans set out for the coming year, in Appendices one and two to this report.
  3. Note the results from the public consultation on the draft Manchester TAWAP, in appendix three, and endorse the updated Manchester TAWAP 2024-2034, which is going to Executive for final endorsement on 15<sup>th</sup> March 2024.
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**Wards Affected: All**

<b>Environmental Impact Assessment</b> - 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.
<b>Equality, Diversity and Inclusion</b> - the impact of the issues	The improvement of our green and blue spaces allows for greater environmental equity for all

addressed in this report in meeting our Public Sector Equality Duty and broader equality commitments	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.
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<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

## **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: 07507 065558  
E-mail: duncan.mccorquodale@manchester.gov.uk

Name: Katrina Holt  
Position: Principal Planning Policy Officer  
Telephone: 07966 382023  
E-mail: katrina.holt@manchester.gov.uk

Name: Dave Barlow  
Position: Senior Policy Officer  
Telephone: 07798 698667  
E-mail: dave.barlow@manchester.gov.uk

Name: Melanie Tann  
Position: Policy Officer  
Telephone: 07914 228269  
E-mail: melanie.tann@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.

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 Environment and Climate Change Scrutiny Committee March 2022
7. Manchester City Council Climate Change Action Plan 2020-25 – Report to NESC and February 2021
8. Manchester G&BI Stakeholder Implementation Plan and Tree Action Plan – Report on Progress: to Environment and Climate Change Scrutiny Committee March 2023
9. Refreshed Tree and Woodland Action Plan 2024 – 2034, Report to Environment and Climate Change Scrutiny Committee, 9 November 2023

## 1.0 Introduction

- 1.1 This report provides the annual review on Manchester's Great Outdoors – A Green & Blue (G&BI) Infrastructure Strategy for Manchester. It brings forward the draft Tree and Woodland Action Plan for endorsement, following consultation with the public, as outlined in this report. It also highlights key areas of progress on Manchester's Biodiversity Strategy.
- 1.2 Members will be aware, the G&BI 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. Bringing these strategies together under the wider context of delivering key growth objectives essential for the city, new homes and new jobs is key to addressing and achieving development in a sustainable manner. Fig 1. below shows how the Strategy is delivered through its accompanying Implementation Plan and supporting Tree and Woodland 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, Biodiversity Strategy 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.*

- 1.3 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 in relation to the new Biodiversity Strategy, and updates on the consultation responses shaping the new Tree and Woodland Action Plan.

## **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, brought to Scrutiny in 2022. The 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 met physically four times in 2023, with focused discussion around Natural England's Urban Habitats data, the effectiveness of vertical green walls, the Pollinator Parks Pilot and also the launch of a new National Education Nature Park by the RHS.

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

- 2.7 The new City Council officer group with a focus on GI and adaptation has met three times this year, with focused discussion around Zero Carbon, Biodiversity Net Gain and the new Tree and Woodland Action Plan.

### **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.

### **Places for Everyone**

- 3.2 Places for Everyone (PfE), the joint plan of nine of the Greater Manchester Districts, (excluding Stockport) has now been through Examination in Public and the Inspector's report has been published recommending certain modifications. Following further consultation on these modifications the plan has been recommended for adoption and is going to Executive on the 15<sup>th</sup> March and Full Council on the 20<sup>th</sup> March for adoption by the City Council.
- 3.3 PfE 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 high-level planning policy framework for the city region.

### **Local Plan**

- 3.4 From past reports members will be aware work has also begun on a new Local Plan for Manchester, that will provide greater detail and Manchester specific policy approaches. 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 the Local Plan. It is anticipated that policies within the Local Plan will cover Green and Blue Infrastructure, River Valleys, Trees, Biodiversity and

Biodiversity Net Gain and the Urban Green Factor, the latter two explained in a little more detail in the following paragraphs. Policies will also be included that relate more to the regulatory environmental issues of water and air quality, land contamination and flood risk. The planning policy framework created by both 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 growth that our city and future residents need.

### **Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG) and Urban Green Factor**

- 3.5 The Environment Act 2021 introduced Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG) as a requirement for Local Planning Authorities. This came into force in February 2024 for major developments and will be applied to smaller sites from April 2024. Virtually all developments will be expected to provide a 10% uplift in biodiversity provision, on site if possible or alternatively off site as near as possible to the development site.
- 3.6 In readiness for BNG becoming mandatory a new study has recently been completed to inform potential policy approaches for both BNG and the Urban Green Factor (UGF) in the emerging Local Plan. The study's main purposes were:
1. To identify the amount of biodiversity units that are likely to be required to provide 10% Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG), due to the level of development taking place in Manchester over the period 2023/24-2038/9.
  2. To scope out potential sites for BNG within Manchester to allow biodiversity units to be provided as near to the development sites as possible.
  3. To consider the application of an Urban Green Factor policy on developments proposed within Manchester.
- 3.7 The purpose of an Urban Green Factor (UGF) is to enable green infrastructure to be embedded within new developments to increase both biodiversity and resilience to climate change. This approach is particularly appropriate within Manchester given that a significant proportion of development sites are on brownfield land and have little or no biodiversity value. A Manchester Urban Green Factor approach is being considered for inclusion within the Local Plan to ensure developers are delivering more green infrastructure. It would be complementary to BNG, placing greater emphasis on urban habitats such as raingardens, green roofs and living walls, which are widely seen by stakeholders as being important for urban place-making and climate resilience.

### **Climate Change – Flooding**

- 3.8 The Sustainable Drainage Systems (SuDS) design guide was produced and uploaded to the MCC website in summer 2023. The guide includes technical information regarding the expected design of SuDS within Manchester and includes technical detail drawings to illustrate the SuDS designs accepted by Highways. Following the creation of the SuDS design guide, Highways



continues to share knowledge and lessons learnt with other MCC colleagues regarding SuDS design and maintenance considerations. To date, several SuDS workshops have been presented by the Highways Environmental Sustainability Lead to MCC colleagues. New SuDS are being installed across the city as part of private development and Highways major projects. It is envisaged that site visits will be set up in the spring/summer to allow MCC colleagues to visit these SuDS features. This will provide an opportunity for staff to get a better understanding of how SuDS can work in urban environments and to understand the lessons learnt.

#### **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:**

- **River Valleys**
- **Parks**
- **Parks Climate Change Action Plan**
- **GM Green Spaces Fund**
- **In our Nature**
- **Biodiversity Strategy (See Paragraphs 6.1 – 6.12)**

###### **River Valleys**

- 4.2 Supporting the Our Rivers Our City strategy, there has been much activity in the river valleys this year. As part of the Bringing the River Irk to life project (BRIL) feasibility studies have been undertaken at Collyhurst and Harpurhey weirs and a programme of volunteer activity has been delivered by Mersey Rivers Trust and Groundwork Trust around Harpurhey Ponds, Lower Crumpsall Recreation Ground and Hendham Vale through an engagement campaign called Love Your River Irk. The Medlock featured prominently in the 2023 Manchester International Festival opening ceremony at Mayfield in June as part of the “Each Tiny Drop” event: <https://factoryinternational.org/whats-on/risham-syed-each-tiny-drop/> Around the Mersey, a sub-group of the catchment partnership called South Manchester Urban Brooks has been formed, including EA, Mersey Rivers Trust United Utilities and Natural England to bring projects forward.

###### **Parks**

- 4.3 Data has been gathered from 6 sites detailing footfall, dwell time and the geography of where visitors are travelling from, evidencing circa 7.2M visits per year from these sites alone. The data is enabling the progress of the service to be measured and is providing critical information in planning resources, demonstrating the viability of investment and the procurement of income generating contracts and arrangements.
- 4.4 Over the past 12 months 28 new park plans have been created with an additional 22 plans in progress, this will bring the total number of parks with

plans to 123 across the city. The park plans have played a crucial role in guiding improvement and investment in partnership with the Friends of Parks and other key stakeholders.

- 4.5 On 1st April 2023 the Parks Climate Change Action Plan was launched. An update on delivery of the Parks CCAP was presented at the Environment, Climate Change and Neighbourhoods Scrutiny Committee on 8<sup>th</sup> February 2024.
- 4.6 Differential mowing regimes were implemented in Birchfields, Chorlton and Platt Fields Park during 2023. This approach is being further developed with feasibility works underway to identify additional locations, with consideration being given to resident and visitor engagement. Parks are also looking into the viability of potential sections of parks and green spaces for the use of biodiversity net gain units.
- 4.7 A total of £4.1M has been invested across the Parks estate through PDP, Section 106 and partnership funding that have been identified and delivered in collaboration with residents and stakeholders over the last two years. 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 and visitors to the city.

#### **Parks Climate Change Action Plan**

- 4.8 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.

#### **Greater Manchester Green Spaces Fund**

- 4.9 The £2.6m Greater Manchester Green Spaces Fund (2022/24) offered grants to communities for projects that improve or create local green spaces in areas of greatest need. Sow the City are a small social enterprise that is commissioned by the Council to run the 'Growing Manchester' programme and latterly have been asked by GMCA to deliver Green Spaces Fund support to communities in Manchester. Their role in the Fund is to support communities in developing and delivering strong bids. Manchester groups were extremely proactive, with over 100 ideas submitted and 22 out of the 86 approved projects across the whole of Greater Manchester receiving funding of up to £40,000 for each project. In total over the four rounds of funding, this has equated to over £1 million pounds worth of investment into Manchester projects, improving the environment in parks, community gardens, alleyways, ponds, urban greening, and school playgrounds within our communities of greatest need (a core aim of the fund).

- 4.10 Together with Sow the City, Neighbourhood Teams have supported several community led projects empowering local residents to create the green spaces that they want and that will improve their environment and their lives. Examples include Levenshulme's Green Hub project which is a co-created community growing and wildlife space, led by local Community Interest Company Station South, which aims to inspire residents and welcome them into an accessible hub of climate friendly activity. Neighbourhood Teams have supported this by bringing individuals together through facilitated climate change discussions; providing Neighbourhood Investment Funding (NIF) to kickstart groups, activities and ideas and by providing links and facilitating relationships with partners, other MCC departments and to social value opportunities, to ensure these projects are deliverable.

### **In Our Nature**

- 4.11 The In Our Nature programme is now half-way through the three-year programme to help residents in Manchester 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 Community Interest Company, and The Tyndall Centre for Climate Change Research, who will work alongside the Council.

The Project has begun work with communities in the following wards, which will continue into 2024:

- Longsight
- Cheetham Hill
- Whalley Range
- Chorlton Park
- Crumpsall
- Charlestown

- 4.12 **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:**

- **Land To the Rear Of 354 Wilbraham Road**
- **Castleford Viaduct**
- **Mayfield Park**
- **Land at Bennett Street**
- **New Co-op Live Arena**
- **Land to West of Rodney Street**
- **Victoria North**

### **Land to the Rear of 354 Wilbraham Road**

- 4.13 The scheme proposes the development of 65 new dwellings. The site would be accessed via an improved access from Wilbraham Road. The scheme also proposes that additional land included in the site edged red be enhanced to deliver grassland habitat. The applicant has revised the landscaping scheme to achieve an 11.86% Biodiversity Net Gain on the site. The increase in BNG has been achieved by uplifting the targeted condition of tree planting on the site from 'Moderate' to 'Good' through the planting of 87 trees. This exceeds the BNG targets which at the time of granting planning permission were not statutory.

### **Castlefield Viaduct**

- 4.14 A two year pilot was opened officially in summer 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. The pilot phase has had a hugely successful community and public programme with many city-based partners, and as of end of December 2023, there have been over 90,000 visitors – 98% of whom want the Viaduct to be permanent and to go somewhere. The Trust are now developing the vision and proposal for an extended 1km sky park opening up connections between Manchester, Trafford and Salford. NT are working collaboratively with the community to shape future plans and secure funding for the next stage.

### **Mayfield Park**

- 4.15 Mayfield Park has been a great success in its first year, and has received high profile national recognition, winning four prestigious landscape awards for its quality and innovation. (See paragraph 4.35)

### **Land at Bennett Street, Ardwick**

- 4.16 This is a cleared brownfield site that is subject to contamination which has very little existing green infrastructure currently at the site. There are, however, opportunities to create improved areas of green infrastructure as part of the development proposals in the form of well sized amenity spaces and landscaping. The approved development involves the creation of areas of green infrastructure to include green space in association with the route of the culvert and pedestrian walkways, as well as private usable amenity spaces to the proposed dwellinghouses. A significant level of tree planting (187 trees) will be in the front gardens of the proposed houses, the landscaped setting of the proposed apartment blocks and within the linear public open space/green infrastructure (2,882sqm) including a Local Area for Play above the route of the Corn Brook culvert. The landscaping scheme includes the provision of mixed species native hedge planting to the curtilage of the proposed apartments blocks, with a wildflower meadow mix, together with the tree planting to the linear public open space to either side of the

proposed east west pedestrian route. It is also proposed to plant shrubs in the front garden areas of the proposed dwellinghouses.

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

- 4.17 Located adjacent to the Etihad Stadium, this new events arena will open in April 2024. 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.

### **Land to West of Rodney Street**

- 4.18 The proposal is the first project by the City Council's 'This City' housing company which seeks to develop high quality, low carbon housing for all Mancunians as part of boosting the City's housing supply which includes providing affordable housing. Located on a brownfield site in Ancoats, the new areas of public realm, green spaces and linkages all contribute to place making. Over 132 trees will be planted at the site and along street frontages. This will improve biodiversity and create wildlife habitats. Surface water risk will be managed through green and blue infrastructure such as rain gardens which will attenuate the water at source.

### **Victoria North**

- 4.19 The first phase of the wider Victoria North scheme was minded to approve by the Planning and Highways Committee subject to a legal agreement. The public realm and landscaping works and the introduction of green and brown roofs, would achieve a net gain in biodiversity of 26.86%. The green roofs at mid level would be planted with a native wildflower mix which would be attractive to invertebrates and provide foraging opportunities for birds and bats. Larger areas of green roofs would be planted with herbaceous perennial and shrub planting. Attractive to invertebrates. The brown roofs on the towers would self-vegetate by wind blow or bird dispersal creating a natural habitat. This would also provide a place for foraging and nesting birds including Black Redstart. This should be assessed in conjunction with the works expected to take place at Red Bank. Both proposals would transform the former industrial area with green and blue infrastructure creating habitats, tree coverage and planting.
- 4.20 **Objective 3: Improving connectivity and accessibility to Green and Blue Infrastructure within the city and beyond.**

#### **Key headlines**

- **Manchester Active Travel Strategy and Implementation Plan (MATSSIP)**
- **Bee Network**
- **Canals – Access corridors**
- **Medlock Valley Nature Partnership**
- **MATSSIP**

- 4.21 The Manchester Active Travel Strategy and Implementation Plan (MATSIP) was approved by Executive in February 2023. 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, using a route which meets a good level of service for walking and cycling, as defined on pp6-7 of the Strategy. Ambition 3 seeks to reflect the diversity of Manchester and address transport inequalities.

### **Bee Network Travel Routes**

- 4.22 Over £48 million is committed to Bee Network travel route improvements in Manchester, across completed schemes and those still in progress. 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 and will finish in early 2024.
  - Northern Quarter Cycleway - This scheme is separated into four areas, three of which are complete. Detailed plans for Area 4 (Withy Grove/Shudehill) are still in development.
  - Northern and Eastern Gateway Connectivity - Phase 1 of this project in relation to Redhill Street, Old Mill Street and Pollard Street is complete. Work on Phase 2 including a bridge over the Ashton Canal and junction improvements at the Rochdale Road and Oldham Road ends of Thompson Street will commence construction in 2024.
  - Radial Routes – Additionally to the £48m active travel programme, a £79m programme of bus, active travel and public realm improvements is being worked on as part of the City Regional Sustainable Transport Settlement (CRSTS), with the aim of delivering comprehensive upgrades on Rochdale Road, Oldham Road, Ashton New Road, Stockport Road and a section of Wilmslow Road by 2027.
  - GM Cycle Hire – The scheme is now fully implemented and operational with over 60,000 registered users and one million kilometres travelled achieved in late 2023.
  - Yellow Brick Road - this section of the Fallowfield Loop in Gorton and Openshaw will see a £1.5m surfacing, lighting and widening scheme delivered in 2024.
  - Fallowfield Loop - surfacing, lighting and access/egress work has been delivered in 2023.
  - Major works to Whitworth Street West and the southern end of Deansgate to improve cycling and walking will commence in early 2024, ahead of further development of designs for Deansgate as part of CRSTS.
  - Works to substantially complete the Levenshulme and Burnage Active Neighbourhood scheme will take place in 2024, beginning in February.

### **Canals – Access Corridors**

- 4.23 The Council began works to improve signage, surfacing and access/egress on Rochdale Canal, in partnership with the Canal and River Trust, in December 2023.

## **Medlock Valley Nature Partnership**

4.24 In 2023 a consortium of environmental partners including the Councils of Manchester, Tameside and Oldham, worked on developing a five year Nature Recovery partnership project for the Medlock Valley, stretching from the City Centre to the foothills of the Peak district. A £1.2 million bid to Government's Species Survival Fund was submitted, and work is continuing to develop an outline bid for Government's Environmental Land Management (ELM) Landscape Recovery Round 3 which is scheduled to launch in September 2024. One of the potential outputs is to establish a ten mile accessible route, the Medlock Valley Way (from the City to Saddleworth), linking and improving many greenspaces along the way.

4.25 **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**

- **Neighborhoods- Nature Focused Community Activity**
- **The Natural Course Project**
- **Biodiversity Net Gain and Urban Green Factor Study (see paragraphs 3.5 – 3.7)**
- **Manchester Festival of Nature**
- **Awards and Recognition – Britain in Bloom, CIEEM, Mayfield**

4.26 **Neighbourhoods – Nature Focused Community Activity**

Neighbourhood Teams have supported the delivery of an additional 32 local projects and initiatives focused on Nature & Biodiversity across the city. Projects include alley way and street greening, public space and communal garden creation/improvements, tree and hedge planting and grow your own (fruit, vegetables, herbs) initiatives. As a result, more than 220 local people have been engaged on the topic which has enabled meaningful conversations around climate change, over £26,000 of NIF has been committed to this theme and biodiversity and access to nature has been increased through planting of trees and hedgerows as well as herbs and other edible plants.

4.27 During 2023/4 there has been ongoing activity to engage residents close to the sites in co-designing improvements and practical action, such as planting events, habitat workshops and celebrations. There will be training and skill sharing sessions to increase understanding of biodiversity and climate change as well as sessions to co-create management plans for the sites. Surveys, questionnaires, and stories will be used to monitor progress and record impact.

### **The Natural Course Project**

4.28 With the eight year EU funded project coming to an end, new funding bids around the Medlock have been submitted and support continues to be provided to both catchment partnerships, the Irwell and Upper Mersey. Natural

Course is an EU LIFE Integrated Project aimed at accelerating the delivery of the EU Water Framework Directive (WFD) objectives across the North West England River Basin District, with an early focus on Greater Manchester and the River Irwell catchment. Natural Course is delivered by a partnership comprising of the Environment Agency, United Utilities, the Greater Manchester Combined Authority, the Rivers Trust and Natural England. A celebration event for the project was delivered on February 28<sup>th</sup>. Key outputs have included:

- A Detailed portfolio of projects designed to improve the condition of the River Irk (Bringing the River Irk to Life, BRIL)
- Innovative green infrastructure projects to reduce diffuse pollution pressures on Moston Brook
- Resource to enable identification of priority locations for green infrastructure investments to address diffuse pollution pressures associated with road runoff
- A Sustainable Urban Drainage (SuDS) design guide for highways engineers and other local authority staff
- A natural capital user guide which includes detailed ecosystem opportunity mapping and natural capital accounts for the Irwell catchment

### **Manchester Festival of Nature (MFoN)**

4.29 2023 was the fifth year the festival had taken place, and again was a resounding success. Organised by the Lancashire Wildlife Trust and the Manchester Nature Consortium (a partnership of over 20 organisations including the City Council) over 4000 people attended the full day of nature related activities at Heaton Park in June. Twenty-four publicly accessible activities were provided by partner organisations, including scavenger hunts, arts and crafts activities, storytelling, painting of plant pots, high-tech microscope gazing and an appearance by live bats (safely cared for by South Lancashire Bat Group). Solar DJ provided music and compering, with Blackley brass band launching a Pollinator Parade around the gardens. Young people from the MFoN Youth Panel and Wildlife Trust Youth Council undertook surveys and collected pledges from visitors for a better environment. The event, which takes place annually at Heaton Park, had a high social media profile, with many organisations promoting it, leading to a combined profile of over 34,000 impressions across X, Facebook and Instagram. Funding was secured through Parklife, Toyota and Little Green Feet. It is hoped the festival will return to Heaton Park in its regular slot, at the end of June 2024.

### **Awards and Recognition**

#### **Britain in Bloom Awards**

4.30 In the 2023 North West In Bloom (NWIB) and It's Your Neighbourhood scheme, Manchester continued to see a consistently high standard of entries. There has been a growing focus on sustainability, biodiversity and community focused entries, including a number of new groups such as Ardwick Climate Action working to improve green spaces to increase active travel and



Birchfields Forest Garden, an established permaculture and biodiversity garden, both found in areas with few groups, historically.

- 4.31 The City had a total of 110 entries, 71% of which scored a level 4 (Silver Gilt) or above and received a number of special awards including the RHS Communities Trophy, presented to the Council for supporting our volunteers; Best Neighbourhood, awarded to Mirfield Rd Community Garden in Blackley and Manchester won Best Large City in the North West. Additionally, eight of the Manchester groups received the prestigious 5 Year Award for scoring a level 5 (Gold) over five consecutive years.
- 4.32 The City Council donated in the region of 39,000 bedding plants and over 100,000 bulbs to over 81 of the city's active groups, a number growing each year through increased communication with groups to discuss how best the council can support them. The City Council continues to encourage groups to opt for sustainable alternatives to seasonal bedding plants through donating wildflower seed, perennial plants and hedge whips and where bedding and bulbs are used, these are varieties listed as RHS Plants for Pollinators wherever possible. The aims for the future are to continue to engage with newly formed groups and those not previously entering into NWIB with a particular focus on areas with fewer groups and the city centre. The aim is also to retain Best Large City in future years, which may be achieved by collaborating with Neighbourhood teams to ensure a joined-up approach to working across council departments. The City Council aims to increase communication and information sharing between groups through the trialling of a NWIB forum for each city region and through a shareable GIS browser to display data spatially.
- 4.33 April 2024 will see the first ever RHS urban show held at The Depot: Mayfield. The City Council is currently working with the RHS to potentially exhibit at the show whilst advising on local suppliers and businesses to consider and aim to offer discounted entry to all of the city's NWIB volunteers if possible. This is an exciting opportunity to have a say in the running of the event and celebrate its ethos on small scale and urban gardening in our city.

### **Chartered Institute for Ecology and Environmental Management Awards (CIEEM) 2023**

- 4.34 Manchester received significant recognition at this year's national CIEEM Awards. CIEEM is the leading professional body representing and supporting ecology and environmental management in the UK, Ireland and abroad. The council was a Highly Commended Finalist in the prestigious Climate and Nature Action 2030 category, which recognises targeted work to combat Climate Change. The Mayfield Park Partnership won the Innovation Category for its landscape led approach integrating a swathe of exciting nature-based solutions as part of the City Centre's first park in 100 years. Former MMU and UoM Student and MCC Placement Chris Moss was a highly commended finalist in the Promising Professional category. More info on all the finalists and winners can be [found here](#), but it is good to see the City

featuring so prominently in such a highly-regarded cohort of short listed finalists.

## **Mayfield Park**

- 4.35 Mayfield Park has already become a benchmark of excellence and has won widespread National accolades for its design and innovation. As well as the above CIEEM Award, in 2023 Mayfield was a finalist in five categories and won both the Excellence in Landscape Design and Excellence in Place Regeneration professional categories at the Landscape Institute Awards. Mayfield has also won a Design Council “Pineapple” award for Future Place.

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

- 5.1 During 2023/24 much work has been undertaken engaging with key stakeholders and developing the draft Tree and Woodland Action Plan.
- 5.2 A public consultation took place between 10th November 2023 - 7th January 2024. 549 completed responses were submitted, with a further 183 incomplete responses. This is compared to 140 completed responses to the same survey undertaken in 2017. Key findings include:

- 94% of respondents think it's extremely important to have trees as part of the urban environment.
- 90% of respondents would like to see more trees in Manchester.
- Respondents value the presence of trees in parks and gardens the most (98%).
- Respondents value local trees mostly due to their importance for wildlife.

A detailed accessible analysis is provided in Appendix 3. The responses received from the public consultation demonstrated support for the actions identified within the Action Plan. There were no actions that received significant amounts of negative feedback. Keen emphasis from the consultation was placed around protecting what we have in terms of the treescape. This would be supported by the suggested refresh of the Principles of Tree Management guidance. The consultation also resoundingly supported the need for more trees in the City, which is reflected in the delivery of the Growing Manchester's Trees capacity study, with tree planting opportunities suggested for all Wards.

- 5.3 Numerous helpful suggestions and comments were also put forward, including:
- "Ensure trees are considered in all planning applications".
  - "Preserve and protect existing trees which have taken years to become established".
  - "School outreach, planting events, existing tree celebrations, education for all should be supported".
  - "Work with local organisations that have expertise and shared goals".

- 5.4 From an Our Manchester perspective, the Manchester Tree and Woodland Action Plan consultation provided an opportunity for local individuals and communities to get involved. The consultation asked respondents to state if they would be interested in volunteering opportunities in tree related activity across the city. 69% of respondents said they would, with a further 19% already actively involved through friends groups and community initiatives; All those who have provided contact details will be signposted to appropriate volunteering opportunities, through organisations such as City of Trees, the Wildlife Trust, The Orchard Project and The Conservation Volunteers.
- 5.5 In total, so far in the 2023/24 planting season 7063 trees were planted on known schemes by the council and their partners, including 10 orchards and 3634 hedge trees. Working with continued, active support from key organisations including City of Trees, the Council identified over 390 new locations, along roadsides, verges and in parks, for large mature standard trees and again secured significant additional funding, with all new planting to be delivered by March 2024.
- 5.6 City of Trees provided a bespoke workshop for MCC teams to take advantage of support around developing tree planting options in the city. Working directly with the Parks team, six parks have been surveyed and assessed, with plans in place for the 24/25 planting season.
- 5.7 The Education team have been working with City of Trees and are currently consulting with six educational establishments across the city with a view to developing tree planting projects. These include:
- Divine Mercey Primary Rusholme
  - Martenscroft Nursery Hulme
  - St Catherines Primary East Didsbury
  - St Annes Primary Crumpsall
  - Brighter Beginnings Nursery, Fallowfield
  - Little Hamzas Nursery Moss Side
- 5.8 The Orchard Project has been instrumental in delivering training, capacity building and planting activity in the City, including planting 10 espalier (specially pruned) trees with a group from a twinned city, Chemnitz in Germany in collaboration with Longsight Art Space. The Orchard Project also planted 10 fruit trees, helping a scout group in Ardwick (Hanworth Close M13 9UU) and running a series of highly successful planting activities and a Wassailing Event in January 2024 at Crowcroft Park in Levenshulme.

## **6.0 Biodiversity Strategy**

- 6.1 Set out in partnership with the Wildlife Trust and a range of other organisations, the 10 year Manchester Biodiversity Strategy Action Plan sets out 44 headline Actions across 3 key objectives. Manchester has delivered significant projects that support the ambition set out in the new strategy. These include:

## 6.2 **Objective 1: Managing for Biodiversity**

### **Key headlines**

- **Biodiversity in Parks**
- **Pollinator Parks Pilot**
- **MCC Biodiversity and Grounds Maintenance**

### **Biodiversity in Parks**

- 6.3 Habitat improvement works have been undertaken at Highfield Local Nature Reserve (LNR) and pond restoration work at Chorlton Ees LNR, with wildflower landscapes created in Fog Lane Park (see below).

### **Pollinator Parks Pilot**

- 6.4 Funded through the Park Development Programme, this one year pilot project aims to increase the benefits of wildflower habitat across the City. It is establishing potential crop species that are harvestable and saleable and providing much needed biodiversity connector spaces for pollinators. Working with local community groups and schools, the trial has established a one hectare area of species rich meadow in Fog Lane Park, with the opportunity to manage and crop over subsequent years. The pilot will look to establish the commercial viability of crop sowing and harvest in an urban context, with the potential to expand to other parts of the City.

### **MCC Biodiversity and Grounds Maintenance**

- 6.5 A new small Biodiversity team within the grounds maintenance and arboriculture section provides greater flexibility over the way Manchester's hedges, meadow sites and green spaces are managed, promoting biodiversity through bespoke maintenance regimes such as "cut and collect", altered mowing frequency and leaving sites uncut for shelter over winter. Currently a team of four, this team works alongside the Grounds Maintenance and Arbor teams. This new complementary approach reflects the change of emphasis in relation to active management of Council land for Biodiversity. This has led to 630 large mature standard trees being planted by the team and volunteers, along with approximately 2500 hedge trees, two orchards and the creation of over 14000 M2 of wildflower landscapes.

## 6.6 **Objective 2: Involving People with Biodiversity**

### **Key headlines**

- **The Conservation Volunteers Willow Tit Project**
- **Lancashire Wildlife Trust - Biodiversity in Manchester Focus Work**

### **The Conservation Volunteers – Willow Tit project**

- 6.7 Willow Tits are an identified priority species of the new Biodiversity Strategy. Funded through Natural England, local environmental charity The Conservation Volunteers (TCV) have been working on identifying and transforming land within the Mersey Valley to improve habitat for Willow Tit.

TCV bring people together to create, improve and care for green spaces. From local parks and community gardens to Local Nature Reserves and Sites of Special Scientific Interest; from school grounds and hospital grounds to waterways, wetlands and woodlands: they connect people to the green spaces that form a vital part of any healthy, community. Willow Tit and habitat surveys have been completed with volunteers covering all council owned sites along the Mersey (Ivy Green through to Fletcher Moss). Habitat works for Willow Tits have been completed at Chorlton Ees Local Nature Reserve and are planned for Ivy Green, Hardy Farm, Barlow Eye and Kenworthy Woods LNR before the end of March 2024. Local people have been engaged in education about Willow Tits through Barlow Moor Community Association

### **Lancashire Wildlife Trust - Biodiversity in Manchester Focus Work**

- 6.8 A Natural Environment Investment Readiness Fund (NEIRF2) project has been delivered across a number of GM districts including Manchester, which included work to consider options for BNG offsite supply sites in district ownership. This culminated in a detailed analysis of Ashenhurst Common in Higher Blackley. This work helped to inform the wider BNG commission referred to earlier in paragraph 3.6. The Trust have been undertaking a neighbourhood project in Deansgate ward to explore opportunities to connect residents with nature. Work has included two city centre bat walks, a partnership event with the Canal and Rivers Trust, and an ecological survey and analysis at Bridgewater Basin. Further work in 2024 will include bird and bat box building workshops in partnership with the Manchester Museum of Science and Industry, National Trust and community groups. The Trust have also been working with Natural England and the council to undertake a study to help guide prioritisation of nature recovery work along the Mersey Valley. A series of sites are subject to walkover surveys, species baseline mapping, soil analysis and other work to identify priority areas for targeted restoration, enhancement or maintenance to improve this corridor for biodiversity. Key sites subject to the study include Chorlton Ees, Barlow Eye, Hardy Farm and Kenworthy Lane. Work will continue into late spring/early summer of 2024. This Funding equates to approximately £20,000 invested in Manchester.
- 6.9 **Objective 3: Planning, Policy and Partnerships for Biodiversity**
- 6.10 As well as delivering the Biodiversity Net Gain and Urban Green Factor study, the Council published its Growing Manchester's Trees study which will inform local neighbourhood decision making as regards new tree planting aspirations in the city and contribute to climate resilience.
- 6.11 MCC officers contributed to 5 focused workshops to support the development of a new GM Local Nature Recovery Strategy.
- 6.12 Work will continue in using our growing evidence base to inform the development of Local Plan policies that will protect and enhance Biodiversity in the City, including utilising the Biodiversity Net Gain and Urban Green factor Study (see paragraphs 3.5 – 3.7)

## **7.0 Future Priorities**

7.1 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:

- 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.
- A Review of the G&BI Implementation Plan will take place, including evidence gathering and public consultation in order to the steer development of a new 10 year implementation plan from 2025.
- The new Tree and Woodland Action Plan will be approved, with priority projects including refreshing the principles of tree management taken forward.
- Work will continue with partners to help deliver the City's Biodiversity Strategy; understand and improve the mix of habitats across the City; 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.
- New work around localised GI mapping will be undertaken by Sow the City using Moss Side as a focus.

## **8.0 Recommendations**

8.1 Recommendations appear at the front of the report.

## **9.0 Appendices**

Appendix 1 – GBI Action Plan Update 2023/24

Appendix 2 - Tree & Woodland Action Plan Consultation Results

Appendix 3 - Tree & Woodland Action Plan Action Plan 2023/24