



GM GREEN CITY REGION PARTNERSHIP

Date: 18th March 2022

Subject: Greater Manchester Green Spaces Fund

Report of: Councillor Emmott, Portfolio Lead for Green City Region and Pam Smith, Portfolio Lead Chief Executive for Green City Region

Purpose of Report:

This report sets out draft proposals for the delivery of the Mayor's Green Spaces Fund, a key commitment to improving green spaces, and access to them, across the city-region. The Green Spaces Fund will be announced at the GM New Era event on 14th March.

Recommendations:

The Partnership is requested to note and comment upon:

1. The need for investment in the city-region's green spaces.
2. The proposed aims of the Fund.
3. The types of projects it is proposed the Fund will support.
4. The proposed support for enabling community participation and action.
5. The budget allocated to the Fund.
6. The proposed timeline for delivery of the Fund over the next 2 years.
7. The arrangements for administration and delivery of the Fund.

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1. Introduction/Background

- 1.1 The Mayor's manifesto set out the commitment to establish a Green Spaces Fund "to give small grants to communities to clean up and improve pocket parks and local green spaces or create new ones where they are needed."
- 1.2 Greater Manchester's 5 Year Environment Plan sets out the ambition for a clean, carbon neutral, climate resilient city-region with a thriving natural environment and circular, zero-waste economy.
- 1.3 For our natural environment, the plan describes the need to prioritise action that protects, maintains and enhances our key natural assets (Greater Manchester's air, land, water and biodiversity) and the multiple benefits they provide. It also sets out the importance of both engaging and connecting people with their natural environment and the need to bring in other sources of funding to deliver these actions. The importance of access to quality green space across Greater Manchester is a key part of this plan.
- 1.4 Subsequently, the report of the [Greater Manchester Independent Inequalities Commission](#) has highlighted the importance of green space to communities across Greater Manchester and how much they matter to people.

2. The need for investment in green spaces

- 2.1 Greater Manchester's green spaces are vital to those living and working in the city-region. Their importance has become only more apparent over the past 2 years as people discovered and appreciated parks and green spaces during the Covid-19 pandemic.
- 2.2 They are particularly important to our mental and physical health, providing us with places to walk, exercise, meet friends, relax or simply connect with nature. Greater Manchester's green spaces provide us with nearly £700m per year in recreation, physical and mental health benefits.
- 2.3 The natural environment also helps reduce the risks of the impacts of climate change – reducing flood risk and keeping urban areas cooler – as well as locking up carbon,

improving air quality and providing space for wildlife. This amounts to over another £300m of benefits every year, meaning Greater Manchester's natural environment provides residents and businesses with £1bn of benefits annually.

2.4 However, access to these benefits is not equal. Not everyone in Greater Manchester has equal access to quality green space, either at their home or in their local area. Natural England has recently published a Green Infrastructure Mapping tool¹ that allows interrogation of data relating to this at a local level, including for Greater Manchester.

2.5 Sufficient funding is not readily available to tackle these issues and local authority budgets for park and green space creation and management have been impacted by a decade of budget cuts.

2.6 It is within this context that proposals for the Mayor's Green Spaces Fund have been developed.

3 Aims of the Mayor's Green Spaces Fund

3.1 Tackling these issues and bringing more and better-quality green spaces to those who need it most will be at the heart of the Mayor's Green Spaces Fund.

3.2 The proposed aims of the Mayor's Green Spaces Fund are as follows:

- To improve Greater Manchester's green and blue spaces to benefit people and nature and to tackle the climate and biodiversity emergencies.
- To tackle inequalities and target these improvements in communities where they are most needed – where people suffer from poorer access to quality green space.
- To support and empower these communities and organisations with the capacity to take action, bringing communities together to improve their local natural environment.

3.3 These aims will be reflected in the criteria for applications to the Mayor's Green Spaces Fund, alongside an assessment of how the projects will be successfully delivered and how they will leave a legacy beyond the project itself.

¹ <https://designatedsites.naturalengland.org.uk/GreenInfrastructure/MappingAnalysis.aspx>

4 Types of projects the Mayor's Green Spaces Fund will support

4.1 The Fund will support projects that take place within Greater Manchester and make the city-region greener, whilst tackling inequalities in access to green spaces.

4.2 Projects should improve accessible spaces through physical improvements to make them better places for nature and people. These projects could take place in parks, community gardens, streets, schools, housing estates, canals/streams/rivers and existing nature reserves.

4.3 Examples of the type of projects it could support include but are not limited to:

- Improving existing or creating new accessible green space for people and/or wildlife.
- Permanently greening streets
- Creating new permanent parklets or pocket parks
- Community gardening/food growing
- Turning paved over areas to green areas
- Cleaning up and restoring streams, rivers, canals and ponds

4.4 The following organisations would be supported through the Fund. They will need to be formally constituted organisations that have a bank account to which funding can be paid:

- Registered charities.
- Community groups.
- Social enterprises and community interest companies.
- Register housing providers, tenant associations and tenant management organisations.
- Schools and academy trusts.
- Local authorities on behalf of or that have partnered with any of the above.

4.5 To cater to the needs of different communities and groups, it is proposed that two tranches of projects be funded:

- Projects of £10,000k.

- Projects between £10,000 and £40,000.

4.6 Applications would be accepted on a rolling basis, rather than in distinct rounds, to provide flexibility to groups applying, with all projects to conclude by March 2024.

5 Empowering and enabling communities

5.1 Those communities with the greatest need to create new or enhance existing green space may be less able to develop proposals and projects. With that in mind, a key aspect of the Fund is to work with these communities and empower them to take action and maximise the opportunities for the fund.

5.2 Their activities would include:

- Supporting the development of projects that are realistic, achievable and deliverable and result in strong applications.
- Ensuring projects are developed that are reflective of the needs of the community and inclusive to different groups.
- Supporting groups to develop their skills and confidence in delivering projects.
- Measuring the impact of their projects consistently.
- Identify common training and development needs and develop ongoing skills.
- Facilitate the network of groups through sharing best practice and mentoring.

5.3 They would also work to raise double the amount of funding from the Green Spaces Fund from other sources to secure a legacy for their projects.

6 Budget and project funding

6.1 Funding of £2.6m from the GMCA's budget has been allocated across 2022/23 and 2023/24 for delivery of the Fund. This will support the delivery of projects on the ground, as well as the "community enablers" and administration of the fund (see below).

6.2 As set out above, a key priority for the "community enablers" will be to support projects and groups to bring in further funding to provide a legacy to the projects and increase the amount of funding brought into green space projects.

7 Timeline

7.1 A proposed/indicative timeline for the first tranche of funding and projects is set out below.

| Activity | Timeframe |
|---|-----------------------------|
| Communications to encourage potential applicants to develop proposals | March |
| Fund documentation in place | April |
| Launch first call for projects | May |
| First projects awarded funding | July |
| Delivery of first projects | From July onwards |
| Future application assessments | Autumn 2022; Spring 2023 |
| Completion of projects | March 2024 |

8 Delivering and administering the fund

8.1 The challenge of securing varied and sustained investment into the natural environment is common to all cities across the UK and is recognised in the government's Green Finance Strategy (2019). Given pressures on public spending, broadening the range of investment into projects that enhance the natural environment – encompassing increasing amounts of philanthropic, impact first, responsible and mainstream investments – is crucial to overcoming this challenge. These opportunities and challenges are set out in greater detail in the Greater Manchester Natural Capital Investment Plan².

² [Greater Manchester Natural Capital Investment Plan - GM Green City](#)

8.2 As such, a key action in the 5 Year Environment Plan was to support the development of a Greater Manchester Environment Fund (GMEF). The aim of doing this was to establish the right structures and enabling environment to mobilise existing and new sources of funding at scale into projects on the ground. In turn, this would allow the blending of public and private sector funding to close the gap between corporate organisations and institutions, that either wish or are required to address their negative environmental impact, and smaller, grassroots organisations, that aim to deliver environmental projects on the ground.

8.3 Since making this commitment in the 5 Year Environment Plan, significant progress has been made. Through a competitive tendering process, The Wildlife Trust for Lancashire, Greater Manchester and North Merseyside (Lancashire Wildlife Trust) were appointed in May 2020 to set up and run the fund on Greater Manchester's behalf. They have since established the GMEF as an independent charitable company limited by guarantee.

8.4 The GMEF has been successful in securing £2.1m of funding to start delivering projects on the ground to benefit Greater Manchester's environment. This comprises funding secured, ringfenced and allocated to projects, as below:

- £1.8m of funding from the government's Green Recovery Challenge Fund which will restore over 500ha of habitats across the city-region (including woodland, peatland and public parks/green spaces) and create new jobs and traineeships.
- £220,000 of funding from SUEZ for the Recycle 4 Greater Manchester Community Fund, which will support community-led projects that will prevent, reuse, or recycle household waste, and also reduce contamination, promote sustainable use of waste and resources, and generate wider social benefits.
- £100,000 of capacity funding from the Environment Agency to support development of investment models for carbon and habitat enhancements.

8.5 This funding is providing the foundation to establish the GMEF and the capacity to develop and fund more projects. It has also set up the legal and governance structures necessary to receive and disburse funding.

8.6 Given that, it is proposed that the Mayor's Green Spaces Fund be administered and delivered as a distinct and separate fund under the umbrella of the GMEF. A cap of 12% in terms of a management fee for the fund is proposed.

9.0 Opportunities/Risks

9.1 The key opportunities include:

- The creation and improvement of green spaces in areas of the city-region where they can have the most impact for people, nature and the environment.
- Engaging people in the natural environment, improving health and wellbeing.

9.2 The key risks include:

- The capacity and capability of communities, especially those most in need of increased/improved accessible green space, to develop and deliver projects.
- The demand for funding outstripping the amount available.

10.0 Financial Implications

10.1 As set out above, funding of £2.6m from the GMCA's budgets has been allocated across 2022/23 and 2023/24 for delivery of the Mayor's Green Spaces Fund.

11.0 Recommendations:

The Partnership is requested to note and comment on:

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