

Green Spaces Fund

Interim Evaluation Report

March 2024

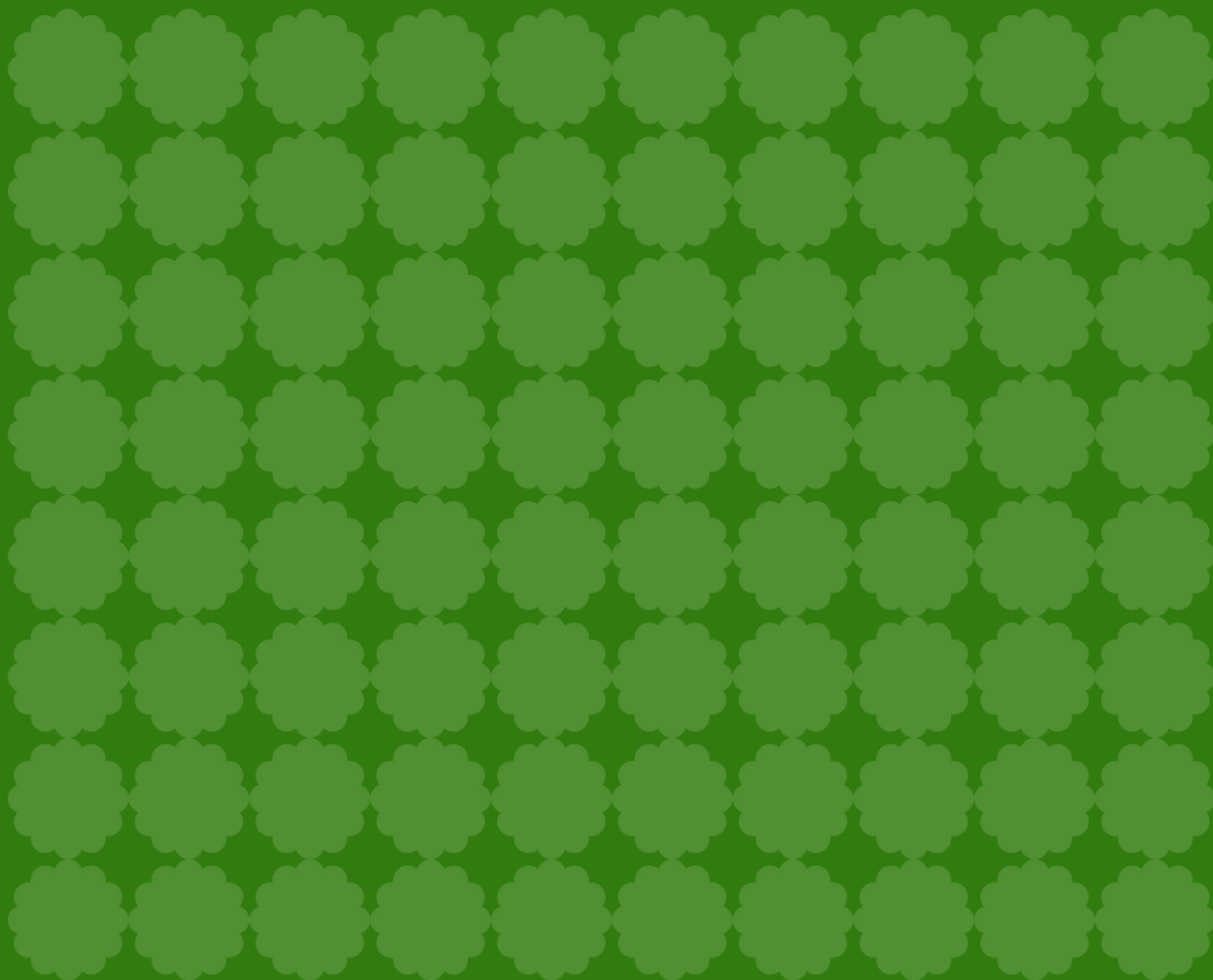


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Introduction

What is this report?

This is an overview of the outputs and delivery of the Greater Manchester Green Spaces Fund as of March 2024, at the end of the conclusion of Round 1 of projects supported by the Fund. The Green Spaces Fund was launched in summer 2022 following a commitment in the Mayor’s manifesto to:

“Create a new 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.”

The Greater Manchester Combined Authority has invested £2.6m into the Fund, which includes funding for the delivery of projects, management and administration of the Fund by the Greater Manchester Environment Fund and support for communities provided by a team of Green Spaces Fund Advisors. 4 rounds of the Fund have been run over the past 2 years, with successful applicants in each round at various stages in the delivery of their projects. The future of the Fund beyond the 4 rounds funded to date will be subject to future decisions.

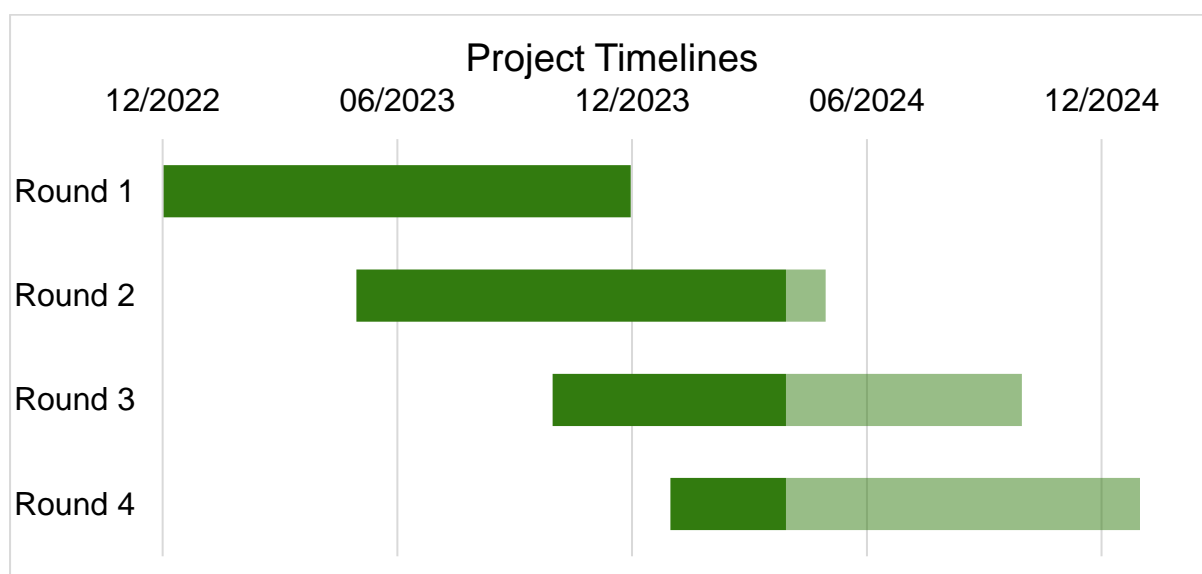


Figure 1. Project timelines for all 4 Rounds of the Green Spaces Fund

How is this report compiled?

This report has been informed by the end of project details submitted by the successful applicants of Round 1 of the Fund (most of whom have completed their projects) and project proposals from the successful applicants from Rounds 1 to 4 (who are still delivering their projects). It is also informed by an assessment of the management of the Fund and of the impact of the Green Spaces Fund Advisors.

Who has compiled this report?

The Greater Manchester Combined Authority and the Greater Manchester Environment Fund, in collaboration with the partner organisations hosting Green Spaces Fund Advisors.

How will this report be used?

This report is designed to provide information about delivery of the Green Spaces Fund to date and an indication of what will be delivered over the next 12 months. It will be used to inform any continuation of the Fund in the future (subject to decisions to be made) and can also inform the delivery of similar funds elsewhere.



Ardwick Stepping Stones. Copyright: Daniell Musaheb.

Overview of the Green Spaces Fund

Types of projects supported

The Green Spaces Fund was established to support community-led projects that increase the amount and quality of accessible, nature-rich green space across Greater Manchester, particularly in the areas where people need it most.

Community groups across Greater Manchester have been able to apply to the Fund to create or enhance green space in their area. The type of projects supported vary and include new pocket parks, improving unloved or neglected spaces and creating community food growing areas. Projects also vary in scale – two sizes of grants have been available depending on the size of the project proposed, with small grants from £2,000 up to £15,000 and large grants from £15,000 to £40,000.

Funding and support provided

The total amount of funding from the GMCA directly awarded to 86 projects is £1.9 million. This has been split across 4 rounds, with £400,000 for Round 1, £800,000 for Round 2, £400,000 for Round 3 and £300,000 for Round 4. Additional funding of £700,000 was deployed to provide direct support to community groups to develop their applications and deliver their projects, as well as enabling management of the Fund.

The Greater Manchester Environment Fund

The Greater Manchester Environment Fund was created in partnership with The Wildlife Trust for Lancashire, Manchester and North Merseyside, and the Greater Manchester Combined Authority to bring together communities and funding bodies keen to channel their resources into addressing environmental problems. It manages and administers the Fund, as it also does for the Recycle for Greater Manchester Community Fund.



Greater Manchester
Environment Fund

The Green Spaces Fund Advisors

A partnership of 5 organisations, led by Groundwork Greater Manchester, was created to support and enhance the delivery of the Fund, with each represented by a Green Spaces Fund Advisor. The Advisors work in partnership and empower community groups to take positive and meaningful action for nature, ensuring activity reflects the needs of the wider community and is inclusive. They directly engage and support community groups where the Fund is needed the most, from project conception through to application and project delivery guidance and support.



Aims of the Fund

The Fund was established with 3 main aims to deliver its vision. Applicants to the fund have needed to address and demonstrate how they meet these to be awarded funding.

Aim 1 – Benefitting communities with a lack of quality greenspace

- Reach communities where there is poor access to quality green spaces.
- Tackle inequalities including health and wellbeing.
- Enable people to have contact with nature.

Aim 2 – Tackling our climate and biodiversity emergency

- Improve Greater Manchester’s green and blue spaces.
- Tackle climate and biodiversity emergencies.
- Have a priority fit with Greater Manchester’s priorities for nature recovery and wider environmental ambitions.

Aim 3 – Encourage and Empower communities to take positive action for nature

- Opportunities for training & skills through volunteering.
- Empower community groups to take actions in their local area.

What have projects delivered to date?

Round 1 Projects

Round 1 of the Green Spaces Fund ran for a 12-month period from December 2022 to December 2023. 70 applications were submitted, with a total ask of nearly £1.2 million, almost 3 times the amount (£400,000) allocated for the round.

Of the 70 applications, 21 projects were successful and subsequently funded. Of these, 16 have completed with the remaining 5 granted short extensions to allow for completion by summer 2024.

Although not a pre-requisite for award, these 16 projects groups secured additional donations and grants for the continued development and growth of their projects, with over £260,000 of match funding secured.

During the application window, the Green Spaces Fund Advisors engaged 285 groups, supported 31 with their applications and ran 12 ‘Meet the Funder’ sessions, demonstrating a clear demand for support from community groups wanting to apply.

Delivery by completed Round 1 projects

What the 16 completed Round 1 projects have delivered compared to what they proposed in their applications is set out below:

Green space created:	
Proposed	2,490m ²
Delivered	3,237m ²

Green space improved:	
Proposed	76,251m ²
Delivered	238,774m ²

Tress planted:	
Proposed	859
Delivered	2,218

People trained or volunteer:	
Proposed	3,970
Delivered	4,755

It is possible to monetise some of these benefits. The 16 completed projects in Round 1 have also provided wider benefits to their communities. For example, the trees planted provide £27,500 worth of carbon sequestration and £122,500 worth of air quality benefits. The local communities will also gain other wider benefits such as recreation, amenity, and physical and mental health but these are more difficult to explicitly monetise for the Green Spaces Fund interventions.

Delivery by Round 2-4 projects

As community groups funded in Rounds 2-4 (and those 5 projects from Round 1 granted short extensions) complete their projects, the assessment above will be repeated to set out what those projects have delivered in the communities in which they are located.

How have projects delivered against the aims of the Fund?

Overview

As well as understanding what has been delivered by projects supported by the Fund, how these have been supported in achieving the aims of the fund is also an important assessment.

Aim 1: Benefitting communities with a lack of quality greenspace

Overview

In achieving this aim, the Fund seeks to:

- Tackle inequalities including health and wellbeing.
- Reach communities where there is poor access to quality green spaces.

In addition, a spread of projects across Greater Manchester's Local Authorities has been sought, including through the work of the Green Spaces Fund Advisors.

Its impact in these areas can be looked at by assessing the location of each project against the following:

- The [Index of Multiple Deprivation](#), which is a measure of relative deprivation and inequalities at a small local area level based on economic, social and environmental factors. Areas are ranked from 1 to 10, with areas in 1 being in the 10% most deprived, 2 in the 10-20% most deprived, and so on.
- The [Accessible Natural Green Space Standard](#), which is a measure of the current level of access to green space in an area, and green cover in the local area.
- The spread of projects across the 10 Local Authorities within Greater Manchester.

Tackling inequalities

Across the 4 rounds, the successful projects are located in communities in the top 60% of deprived areas nationally (IMD 1-6). Nearly half (49%) of the projects benefit those in the top 10% most deprived areas (IMD 1) and 86% benefit those in the top 30% (IMD 1-3).

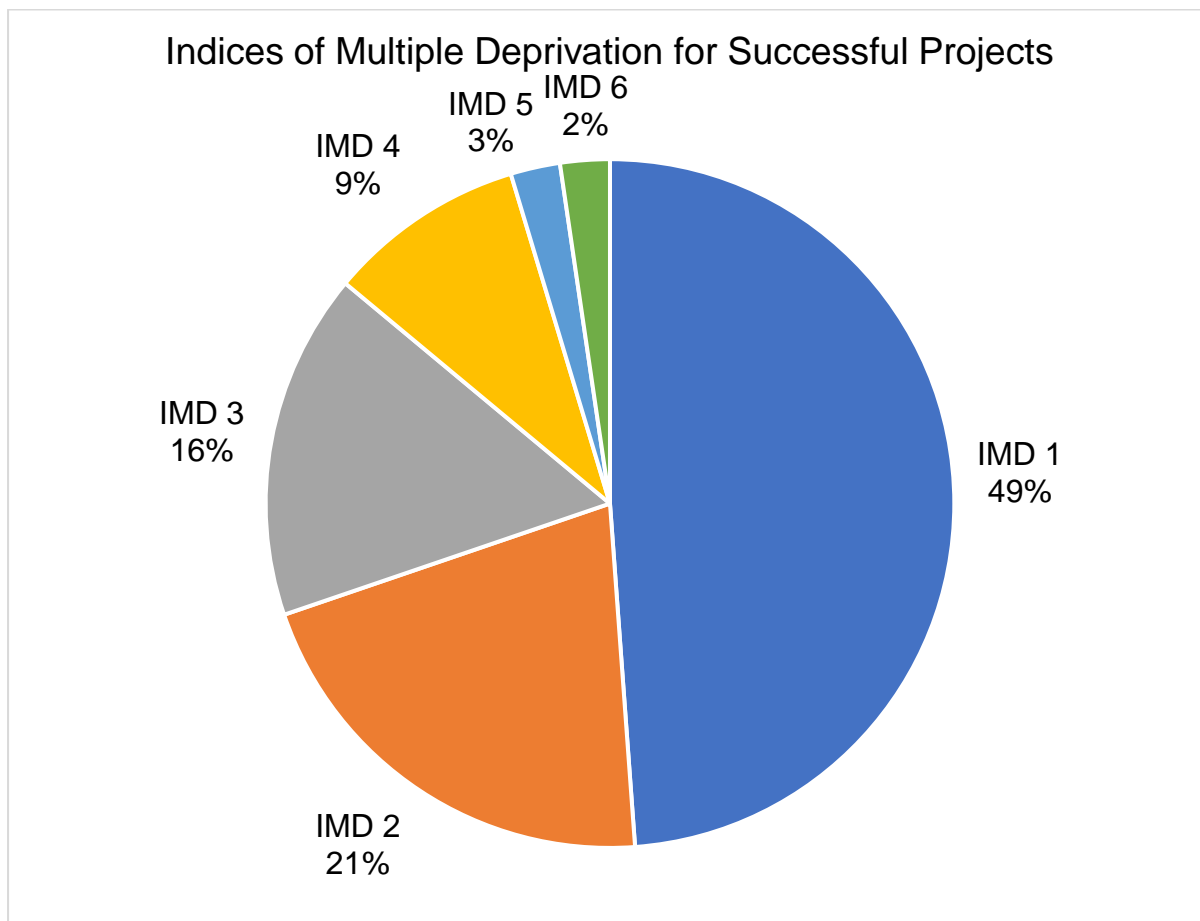


Figure 2. Indices of Multiple Deprivation for successful projects across all 4 rounds of the Green Spaces Fund

Access to quality green space

The lower the Accessible Natural Green Space Standard score, the closer the project is to an existing natural green space. Nearly half (49)% of projects benefit those areas with the least access to existing green space (score of 4 and 5).

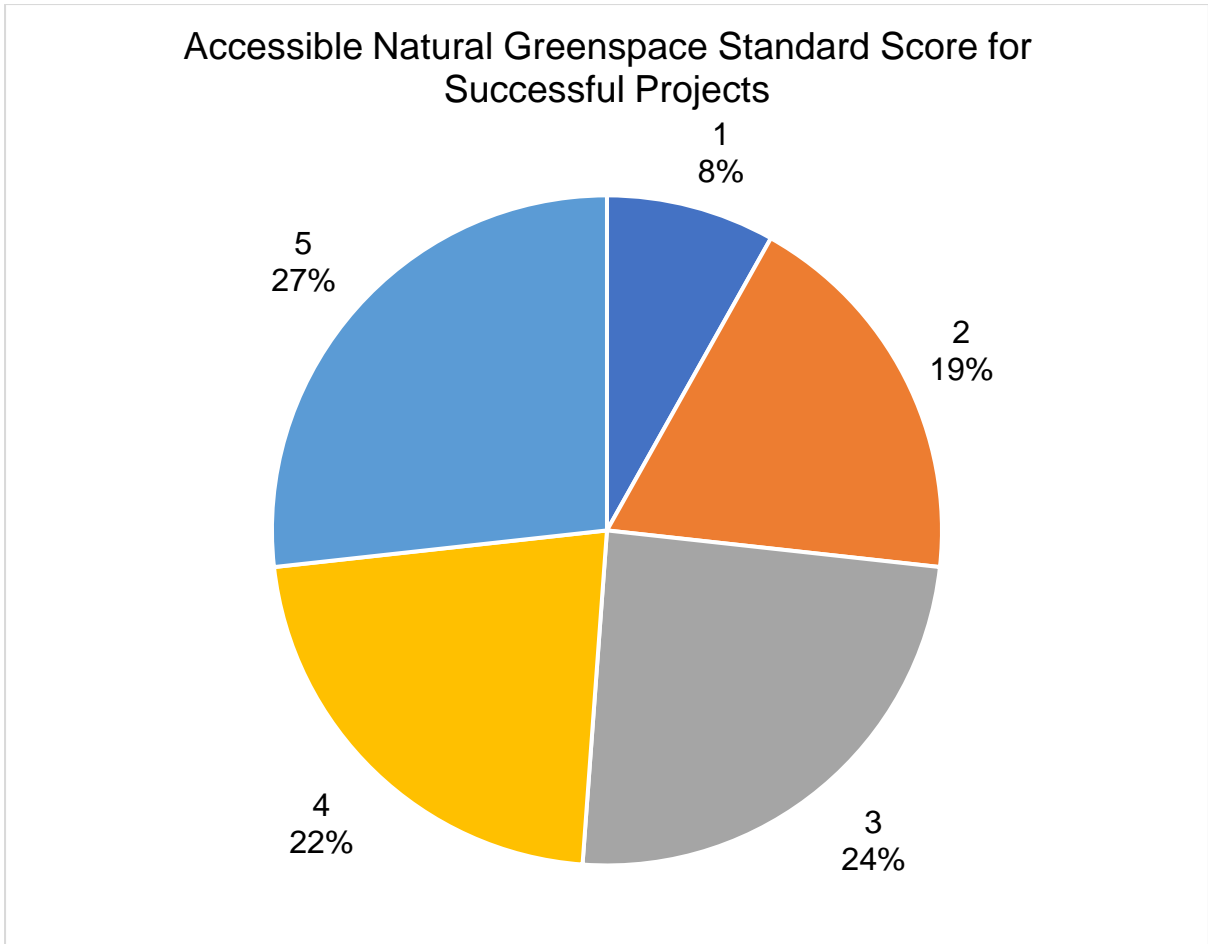


Figure 3. Accessible Natural Greenspace Standard score for successful projects across all 4 rounds of the Green Spaces Fund

Spread of projects across Greater Manchester

Of the 86 successful projects, an average of 2.75 have been awarded per 100,000 people across Greater Manchester, with the spread relatively equal across the 10 Local Authorities. This is set out below along with the total number of applications (257 in total) per Local Authority.

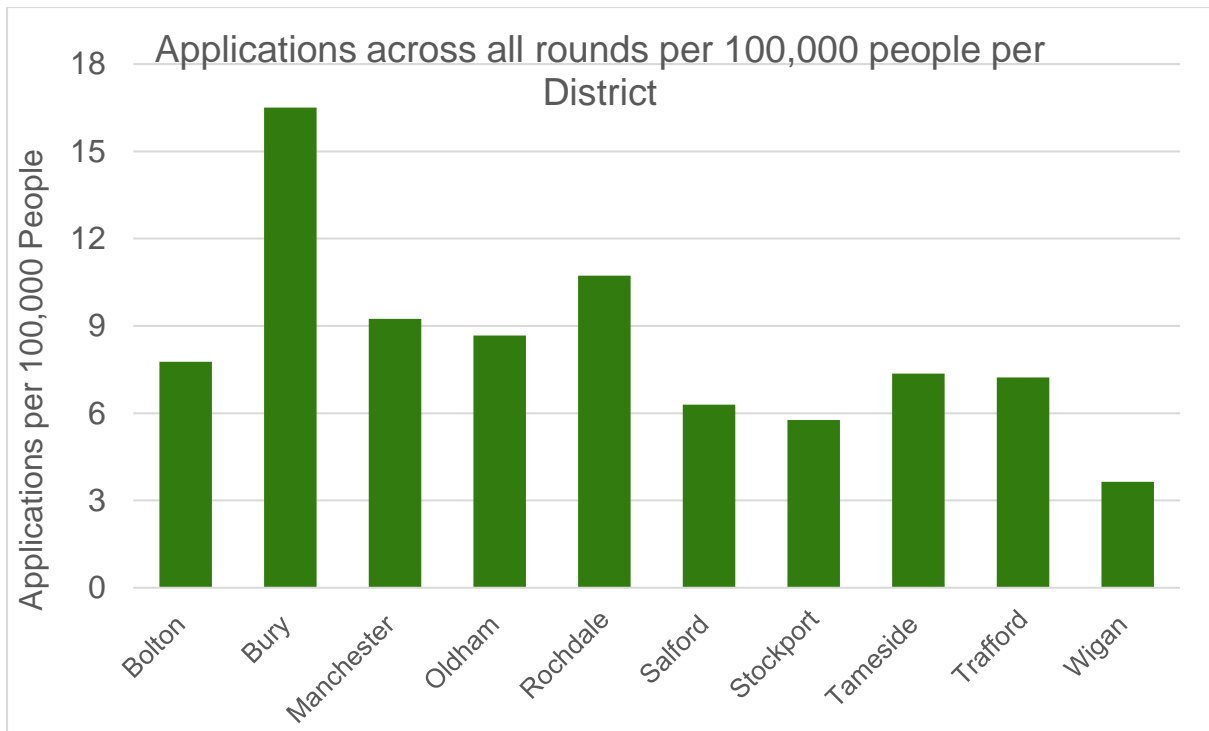


Figure 4. Applications to the Green Spaces Fund across the Districts of Greater Manchester, per 100,000 people

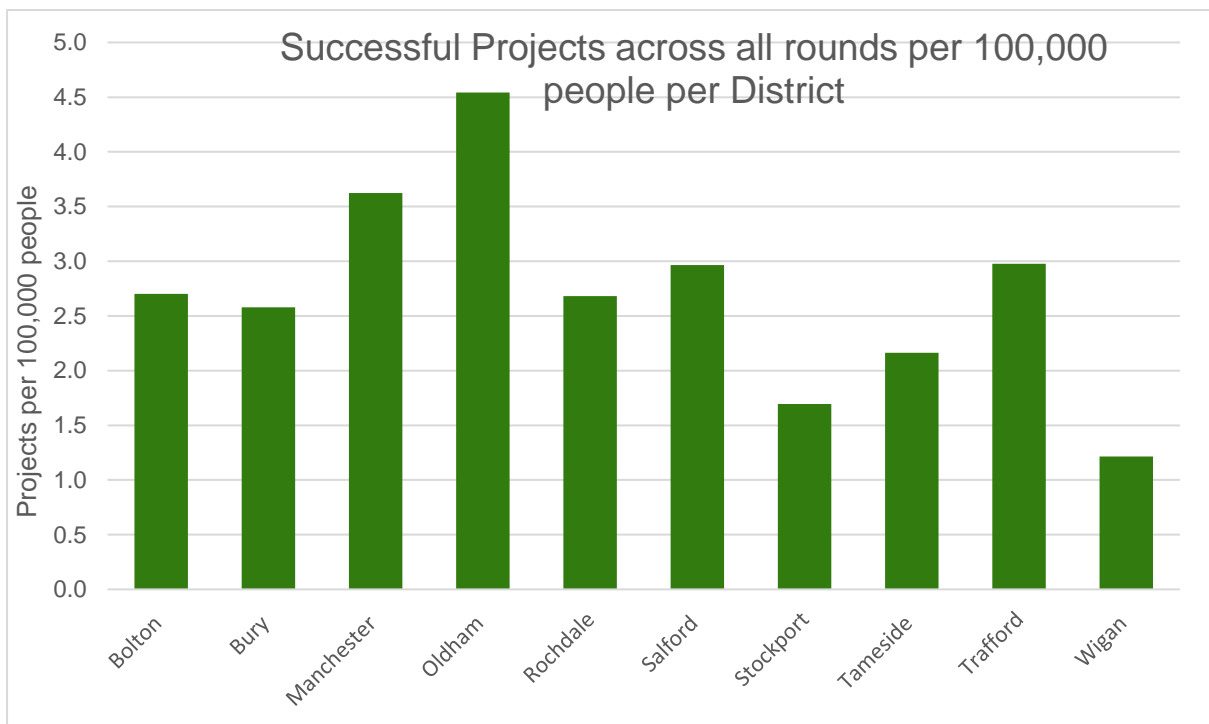


Figure 5. Successful projects in the Green Spaces Fund across the Districts of Greater Manchester, per 100,000 people

Aim 2: Tackling our climate and biodiversity emergency

Overview

In achieving this aim, the Fund seeks to:

- Improve Greater Manchester’s green and blue spaces.
- Tackle the climate and biodiversity emergencies.
- Have a priority fit with priorities for nature recovery and wider environmental ambitions.

Improving green and blue spaces and tackling the climate and biodiversity emergencies

The improvement of green and blue spaces and how the projects contribute to the climate and biodiversity emergencies can be assessed through the impact the projects have had on local green spaces and the greening of those that has taken place. This is set out for the 16 projects delivered to date and the ongoing 70 projects in the table below.

Category	Delivered to date (R1)	Proposed (R2-4)
Green space created (m ²)	3,237	81,608
Green space improved (m ²)	238,774	336,569
Trees planted	2,218	6,690
Plants planted	282,709	78,851
New features	311	2,058

Groups worked with their local community to identify and focus on areas which needed the development and maintenance of green space, for it to be enjoyed and accessed with ease. Project types ranged from the creation of wildflower meadows and mini orchards to connecting green spaces between the city centre and neighbouring urban communities. For many projects, the funding provided the opportunity to invest some much-needed time and finance into a neglected area which had been forgotten but held much promise for growth and engagement.

Priorities for nature recovery and wider environmental ambitions

As a Greater Manchester Local Nature Recovery Strategy is developed by early 2025, an assessment will be made in future of the fit of the projects between the ambitions and priorities set out in that strategy.

Aim 3 – Encourage and empower communities to take positive action for nature

Overview

In achieving this aim, the Fund seeks to:

- Support opportunities for training and skills through volunteering.
- Empower community groups to take actions in their local area.

Training and skills

The provision of training and skills can be assessed through the reach the projects and their activities have had in their local communities. This is set out for the 16 projects delivered to date and the ongoing 70 projects in the table below.

Category	Delivered to date (R1)	Proposed (R2-4)
Engagement sessions	1,427	3,106
People engaged	91,048	265,323
People volunteering	1,707	3,383
People trained	3,048	3,323

Empowering communities

The focus of the Green Spaces Fund Advisors has been to work with community groups to engage locally and develop project proposals. This is covered in a subsequent section below.

Across the 4 rounds, nearly £800,000 has been pledged by winning groups in terms of match funding, demonstrating their ability to bring in other sources of funding.

How has the Fund been delivered?

Application process

The Green Spaces Fund accepts applications from registered charities, community benefit societies, schools and resident association organisations based in Greater Manchester. Awareness of the Fund has been raised through the work of the Green Spaces Fund Advisors who have been building relationships with groups through networking events and site visits. This has led to their support from project conception to creation of the project plan and during project delivery post award of the funding. Awareness has also been raised through promotional work done by the Greater Manchester Environment Fund.

Each application window is open for around 6 weeks and involves the submission of a project proposal, with accompanying information that includes landowner permission for the project activity on site for the 12-month delivery period and for three years post-delivery, planning permission (if relevant) and a budget and activity plan.

Lessons learned:

- The introduction of a dedicated online application portal from Round 3 helped to streamline the submission of applications and bid outcomes.
- Some applicants reported the process as being too academic. If the fund continues in the future, learning will be gathered to evaluate if the application form needs to be re-designed to better appeal to target groups and to overcome barriers they may face.
- A diversity monitoring form will also be introduced to measure who is interacting with the fund to help to inform its reach.
- Some groups reported issues obtaining the correct permission from landowners. The advisors were able to assist in making the necessary connections to get the relevant permissions where possible.

Assessment process

The Fund operates a layered and robust assessment process to ensure the awarded projects are in locations of need and where there is a lack of access to green space. A series of eligibility and due diligence checks are carried out to ensure that the projects submitted meet the criteria of the Fund.

Eligible applications received then go through three assessing stages.

- Project locations are recorded in relation to their Index of Multiple Deprivation and Accessible Natural Green Space Standard.
- The application forms are read and scored by a panel of expert assessors from the public, private and charitable sectors.
- The Green Space Advisors score the submissions on how community driven the project is.

The scores are combined to create an overall score which is submitted to the decision panel for selection. Once selected, a paper of the proposed winners is then presented to the Greater Manchester Environment Fund board for sign off to progress to the grant award.

Lessons learned:

- The assessment process is resource intensive and has relied on volunteers from private, public and charitable sector organisations to come together to be part of the panel of expert assessors.
- Should the fund continue in the future, learning from the assessment process will be gathered to evaluate if the process can be further streamlined whilst balancing this with taking a robust approach.

Project Award

The winning applicants are issued with an agreement letter and contract which lays out the payment schedule of their grant and associated reporting process. They have two weeks to review, sign and return the agreement.

Additional due diligence checks on banking information is carried out before initial payments are issued. The payment plan consists of:

- 50% of the grant issued on receipt of signed agreement.
- 40% of the grant issued 6 months into the project once a claim report and project update has been submitted.
- 10% of the grant is issued in arrears on completion of the project and the final claim form and project update has been submitted.

Lessons learned:

- Many target groups are newly formed and may not be fully established and constituted, meaning they nominate and rely on an accountable body to manage their grant.
- Similarly, some groups may not have managed project budgets before and may not have reserves to manage the cashflow associated with the payment.

Project delivery

Winning groups have 12 months, from the point of receiving the first payment, to deliver their projects. The Advisors are on hand to assist with any problems arising. Projects go through peaks and troughs of activity which is mainly impacted by the seasons, e.g. tree planting season takes place between November and March.

Lessons learned

- Over the course of delivery, delays do occur from various issues such as poor weather. In some cases, an extension to the project delivery has been approved for groups to complete their proposed works.
- Groups require significant amounts of support from the Green Spaces Fund Advisors to deliver their projects, from selecting the right plants or trees, to sourcing them from suppliers, to delivering the works, ongoing maintenance and promoting and supporting volunteering.

Projects also run workshops and volunteer sessions to engage with their local community and deliver training which contributes to the legacy of the Fund. Reallocation of Funds from project areas to other eligible items can happen during the project and groups are requested to issue any changes in writing for approval.

Reporting

Awardees are asked to report on their project twice over the course of the 12-months. Five months into delivery, a halfway reporting claim form is issued to groups to complete and return. The claim form covers the following areas:

- What has been achieved in this claim period?
- Tell us about your outcomes – i.e., The difference the project has made for participants and the local community.
- How does this compare with the agreed proposed programme of work?

Eleven months into the project delivery groups are issued with a final reporting form which covers the same topics and also asks:

- What was the biggest challenge in delivering this project?

At both the halfway and final reporting stages, groups also provide updates against the proposed activities and budget plan, as submitted on the point of application.

These forms record progress and challenges as well as capturing project impact and can help to inform on any considered changes for the Fund delivery and inform reporting.

Lessons learned

- The reporting process has proven to be difficult for some groups and work is underway to streamline this as best as possible while ensuring information is gathered to demonstrate the impact of the fund and ensure

How have community groups been supported?

The role of the Green Spaces Fund Advisors

The Green Spaces Fund Advisors have been building relationships with community groups across Greater Manchester. Each District has a dedicated Green Spaces Fund Advisor that has identified areas for engagement, and they have supported groups who are interested in the Fund about how a project can be delivered. This role encompasses:

- Community outreach work to promote the Fund and generate project ideas, particularly targeting areas where the Fund would have the greatest impact.
- Supporting applicants to apply, carrying out regular check-ins and meetings, and helping groups with their application.
- Supporting successful groups in project delivery, helping them sustainably deliver their projects particularly with volunteer days and in choosing and sourcing capital items.
- Supporting groups beyond the end of their project, advising, and helping them access new funding, sourcing volunteers and running their group/wider network.

Impact of the Green Spaces Fund Advisors

In addition to their work and contribution to Round 1 as mentioned earlier, they have increased their reach and project support as the Fund has progressed.

When working with groups, the Green Spaces Fund Advisor team use a categorising method to identify those who may need the most assistance. Reasons for this can include levels of experience with funding applications, computer literacy and knowledge of project planning.

- Bronze – these are the groups that need the least amount of assistance.

- Silver – these groups have some previous experience, but still require dedicated support.
- Gold – these groups require the most amount of support and help throughout the application and delivery process.

The Green Spaces Fund Advisors target working with gold level groups as they most meet the criteria of the Fund, being grassroots groups in areas where the Fund can have the greatest impact. Without support, many of these groups would not be in a position to apply nor sustainably deliver their projects.

Across all 4 rounds 44 grass roots gold level groups have submitted an application thanks to the support and guidance of the Green Spaces Fund Advisors.

As of January 2024, the Green Spaces Fund Advisors have connected and had contact with over 1,200 groups, indicating the demand for the Fund. This represents a cumulative engagement effort over the course of the Fund and includes any group they have had a connection with, regardless of their application status.

Information around engagement with groups, those supported to application and ‘Meet the Funder’ sessions for each of the 4 rounds is set out below.

Round 1	
Engaged	285
Supported to apply	31
Sessions	12

Round 2	
Engaged	213
Supported to apply	67
Sessions	14

Round 3	
Engaged	104
Supported to apply	57
Sessions	7

Round 4	
Engaged	188
Supported to apply	44
Sessions	8

As the Green Spaces Fund Advisor team was set up and became established, it has worked with an increasing number of groups. From Round 2 onwards, over 85% of applicants were supported by a Green Spaces Fund Advisor.

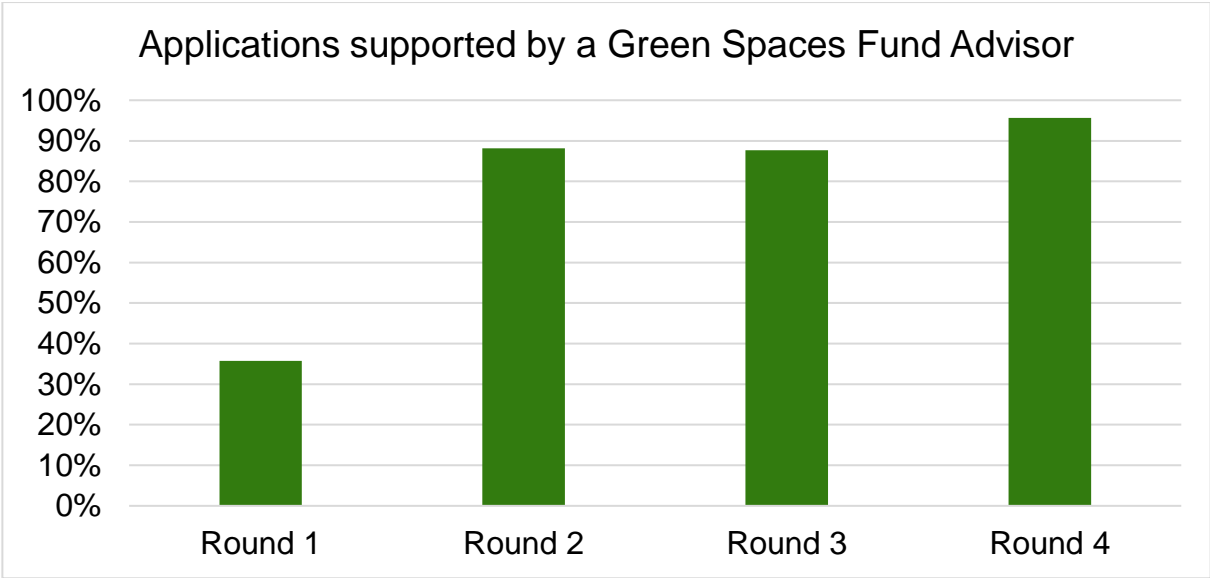


Figure 6. Percentage of applications across all four rounds supported by a Green Spaces Fund Advisor

More widely, the partnership of the 5 organisations has had a broader impact. The partnership is unique in that it brings a range of environmental organisations together and has strengthened their partnership working and collaboration. The model also enables expertise to be drawn in for the projects from each organisation, for example, the Royal Horticultural Society has provided horticulture training days for groups from Bolton and Manchester is leading the way in terms of applications to their Nature Parks Grants for Schools.

Lessons learned

- There is a strong appetite amongst local community groups, particularly target groups for the fund, to be supported to engage their wider communities to develop and deliver the type of projects supported by the Fund.
- Working with community groups in this way takes time in order to be sustainable and empowering and supporting them to build capacity does not happen overnight.
- Some of the areas of greatest need remain unreached and further work is needed to work with groups in these communities.
- There is significant interest from local businesses in supporting the Fund and projects, with the potential to tap into them for funding in the future.
- Further work is required to understand the different barriers different communities and individuals may face in accessing support and in applying to the Fund.
- The legacy of the projects funded and the community groups themselves is important, given some groups are concerned about the long-term sustainability of their project and the ongoing support they will need to maintain what they have delivered through the Fund.

Next steps

Delivery is ongoing for the extended Round 1 and Round 2, 3 and 4 projects. These groups are continuing to receive support from the Greater Manchester Environment Fund and Green Spaces Fund Advisors to help them deliver their projects and report on the impact they have had in their local communities, including:

- Providing support in delivering their projects.
- Bringing in other Green Spaces Fund Advisors and colleagues within their organisations, for example Sow the City supporting with food growing, Royal Horticulture Society supporting with horticulture, and City of Trees supporting with tree planting.
- Creating and supporting a network of successful groups, including at a celebration event at Manchester Museum on 14th March and hosting online drop-in webinars.
- Sharing resources and supporting groups to access other funding.

A further report, following the format of this report, will be published once additional data is available from Round 2, 3 and 4 projects.

Case study: Deane and Derby Cricket Club Community Garden

Awarded £15,000 in Round 2

A disused patch of land behind the Deane and Derby Cricket Club in Bolton has been given a new lease of life after being transformed into a vibrant and accessible community garden.

With the guidance and support of Green Spaces Fund Advisors, the funding has allowed the club to create an inclusive garden that benefits the local community, providing growing space and biodiverse wildlife areas, as well as workshops, regular events and green volunteering opportunities.

The project aims to engage individuals who may not have previously had much experience in outdoor activities and encourages people from all backgrounds to actively participate in gardening, conservation, and outdoor education. Recent events have included a tree and hedge planting day where members of the community were encouraged to muck in and learn about plant maintenance.

One attendee at a recent gardening session said,

“I had an amazing time today planting with members of the community including young children who did a marvellous job!”. Another said the event was “very therapeutic – I felt connected with nature and got a few gardening tips.”

It’s fantastic to see the garden fulfilling its aim of becoming a place where people can come together to learn, grow, and connect with one another and themselves.

"We are very well supported and without help of Emma [their Green Space Fund Advisor], we could not manage to apply for the funding. Without your help we could not carry out the project after getting the funding. We appreciate and thank you for your support throughout our Community Garden project."



Enterprise Rent-A-Car staff on site at Deane and Derby Cricket club for a corporate volunteer day. Copyright: Candice Turner.

Ismail Kala, the club Secretary, has certainly noticed a change in the community.

"New people are visiting to use the club facilities and coming to see how the garden is progressing. So far, we've introduced over 150 trees, hedges and plants to the garden with the help of volunteers; it's great to see people coming together to help."

The garden also hosts weekly community payback sessions, where people on probation help out on site by litter picking, painting and performing general maintenance tasks. In the future, they're hoping to offer social prescribing sessions and create a café connected to the garden.

As well as becoming a space for encouraging community spirit, it's hoped that the garden will attract lots of vital wildlife to the area. Ismail said there's been a "noticeable increase in the number of birds and insects" visiting the space which is great to hear.

The group has even played host to a team from Enterprise Rent-A-Car for a corporate volunteer day. Colleagues from Enterprise visited Deane and Derby Cricket Club to lend a helping hand in the garden. They proved a very helpful bunch throughout the day; installing raised beds, painting picnic benches and laying paving slabs to create a new path through the area.

Throughout the project's delivery phase, Green Spaces Fund Advisors remain involved with the development of the garden, actively supporting with project implementation, greenspace management and wildlife conservation. They have also been working with the group on upskilling, empowering them to take on more responsibilities in the management of the garden.

The Deane and Derby Cricket Club Community Garden Project is a wonderful example of the positive outcomes that can result from collaborative, inclusive, and environmentally conscious projects. Helping people come together to improve their local environment as well as the wellbeing of their local communities is a key objective of the Green Spaces Fund, so it's brilliant to see this community garden project going from strength to strength.

Testimonials

Several groups have captured responses from people who have engaged with and been involved in their projects. The positive impact of this fund is undeniable and it's so encouraging to hear from those who have benefitted first hand from the Fund.

Green Recovery Project

Awarded £29,500 from Round 1



Copyright: Petrus Community

"I like the community spirit and team work. I feel like I belong. I have been welcomed with open arms, we are all comrades. It is fun and informal, and it's encouraging me to try new things I'd never think of doing. The allotment is great."

LEAP Community Wellbeing Garden

Awarded £34,794 in Round 1



Copyright: LEAP (St Peters Partnerships)

“This was great. I have learned lots about trees and how to prune and manage them. I don't like trying to learn from YouTube, and it was good to have someone knowledgeable teach us how to do it in person so we can ask questions (which I did a lot!) We've also been able to cut down ours and be more confident doing that. I now know all about diseases and how to cut it out”.

Tropic of South Manchester

Awarded £27,000 in Round 1



Copyright Blossom - health through activity

“We are so grateful for Green Spaces funding. It is already making a huge difference!”

Together Kitchen Garden

Awarded £7,475 in Round 1



Copyright: The Together Centre

“The 84 Children attending weekly who are nonverbal, visually impaired, wheelchairs users and/or with learning disabilities, now have their new skills and abilities to grow their own fruits and vegetables. The produce they have harvested is now provided to our local Together Families twice weekly who attend our onsite Pantry, supporting those experiencing financial difficulties during these unprecedented times – An empowering allrounder!”