

## **GREATER MANCHESTER GREEN CITY REGION PARTNERSHIP**

Date: **24 July 2020**

Subject: **URBAN PIONEER IMPACT REVIEW**

Report of: **Lee Rawlinson, Regional Director, Environment Agency**

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### **PURPOSE OF REPORT**

The paper provides a review of the outcomes from the 3 year Urban Pioneer Project and next steps.

### **RECOMMENDATIONS:**

The Partnership is requested to:

- Note the progress and impact of the GM Urban Pioneer
- Note the Urban Pioneer Evaluation Report (Annex).
- Consider next steps for the legacy assets and recommendations of the work
- Raise awareness of the summary report and key programme highlights with GMCA Executive

### **CONTACT OFFICERS:**

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## 1.0 BACKGROUND

- 1.1. In 2016 Defra created the Urban Pioneer (UP) in Greater Manchester (GM) to support the development and implementation of Governments 25 Year Environment Plan (25YEP) as one of four pioneers each set in a different geography. These were part of an 'action learning' approach to developing its 25 Year Environment Plan, designed to develop and identify research, policy development and interventions to create positive environmental change which could be replicated in other localities.
- 1.2. UP was an unfunded project led by the Environment Agency (EA) which provided a small core team to ensure consistency of delivery and to support the UP Delivery Group which was made up of project partners.
- 1.3. In Jan 2018 The UP published its strategic plan document detailing what the UP would do. This was co-branded between the Environment Agency and GMCA as its major partner.

## 2.0 KEY OUTCOMES

- 2.1. The UP acted as a catalyst to the natural capital sector, collaborating with and building on, existing initiatives to unify the language, direction and effort in the GM City Region. This helped to accelerate the transition, supporting GM in developing its understanding of the value of the natural environment in developing and delivering key policy objectives.
- 2.2. **Natural Capital Accounts:** The development of [natural capital accounts](#) for GM, which at the time of publication contained a number of world firsts, supported this and has been used by GM and its many partners to further understanding and engagement around the natural environment. As well as national Defra teams in developing tools and policy and others such as the OxCam Growth Arc and the Northern Powerhouse.
  - These accounts and the methodologies applied were used to support the [Salford Housing Infrastructure bid](#), identifying the uplift in benefit flows as part of the scheme's green and blue infrastructure design.
  - They were also rapidly deployed in an incident scenario during the [Saddleworth moor fires](#). It was used to measure the biodiversity loss, carbon impacts and tourism impacts of the fires and was welcomed by the Local Resilience Forum and nationally recognised as a first for such an application, changing how we measure the impacts of such events.
- 2.3. **Local Policy Insights:** Initiatives such as GM's [5 Year Environment Plan](#), the GM Environment Fund and the [GM Natural Capital Investment Plan](#) have all been informed and supported by the work of the UP.
  - The [Investment Readiness Fund](#) (IRF) development guidance was produced by the UP to support natural capital projects.
  - The UP played a critical role in the [GM Green Summits](#) supporting the natural environment agenda and by engaging with the general public and sector specialists. Analysing and synthesizing the data gained using the latest Artificial Intelligence techniques to inform the development of the 5 Year Environment Plan and the summit itself in real time. This novel approach has now been adopted with the Environment Agency as a best practice approach.
- 2.4. **National Policy Insights:** In addition to work to embed it in GMSF, and the practice of local development control teams, [Biodiversity Net Gain](#) (BNG) as core policy of the 25YEP is present due to the innovative work of the UP through its partners and the influence of GM through its local commitment and adoption of a BNG policy, prior to the 25YEP publication. Significant work developing how BNG can be implemented in practice has, and continues to be developed by the UP partners.

- The 25YEP's place focus was shaped and informed by the UP, and the confidence it gave in the importance of place-led, integrated approaches.
- The Environment Agency's future funding team was highly influenced by the example of the UP, with its Engagement Plan and Priorities shaped by the work of the UP, now leading to projects around DEFRA Environment Funds and Investor engagement
- UP outputs have been used in a range of cross departmental meetings, including with Treasury, to justify and progress work on more integrated decision-making, taking account of natural capital assets and impacts
- UP has been a keynote topic included in Mayor's, Leaders and expert presentations across the UK, positioning and promoting GM as a thought leader on the natural environment agenda at over 20 national Planning, Environment and Innovation conferences.

### **3.0 NEXT STEPS**

- 3.1 The GM NCG members are all considering how their respective organisations and the sectors they represent can adopt and embed the lessons and learnings from the UP. Partners valued the collaborative platform it provided to work on innovative activity on the socioeconomic aspects of the environment agenda which is not replicated in any other forum, and this needs to find a new home.
- 3.2 The IGNITION project will continue the UP's work to develop innovative financing solutions for investment in Greater Manchester's natural environment.
- 3.3 Work on the GM Environment fund and Investment Readiness Fund is continuing.
- 3.4 A number of partners led by Natural England will continue to further develop the tools and process required to embed BNG across the city region.
- 3.5 GM NCG with its ambitious work plan via its Task and Finish groups will continue a number of elements of the UP's work.
- 3.6 The Environment Agency and Defra remain committed to supporting the natural environment agenda in GM and its 5 Year Environment Plan, supporting a range of projects and programmes which will adopt the lessons from the UP.

### **4.0 RECOMMENDATIONS:**

- 4.1 The Partnership is requested to:
  - Note the progress and impact of the GM Urban Pioneer
  - Note the Urban Pioneer Evaluation Report (Annex).
  - Consider next steps for the legacy assets and recommendations of the work
  - Raise awareness of the summary report of key programme highlights with GMCA Executive