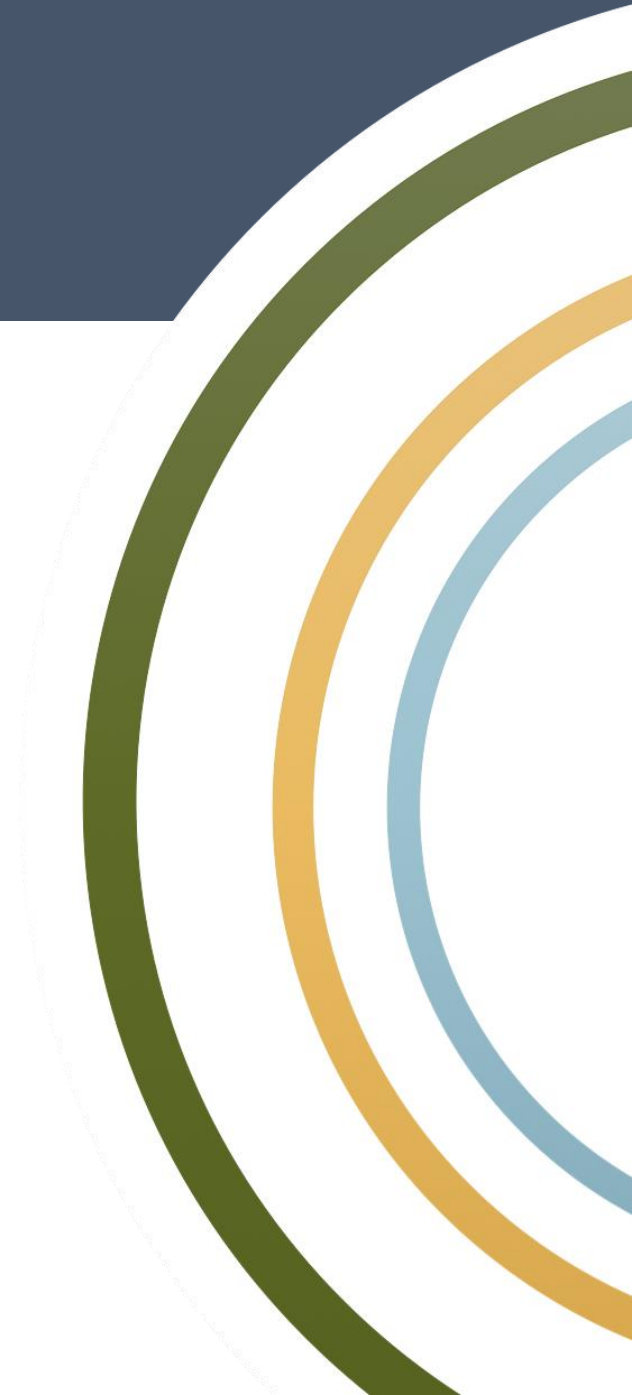


# Review of the impact of the Urban Pioneer

Environment Agency

May 2020

Final Report



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# Executive Summary

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## The Urban Pioneer

In 2016, Defra created the Urban Pioneer project in Greater Manchester to work in a local context to support and inform the development and implementation of the Government's 25 Year Environment Plan (25YEP). This was one of four three-year initiatives established across the country, to bring together research, policy development and interventions in order to deliver change that can be replicated in other localities.

Initially, the Urban Pioneer project was entirely unfunded and had no explicit objectives beyond informing the 25YEP. Early in the project's operations the Environment Agency provided funding for a small core team to ensure consistency of delivery to the end of the project (March 2020). Beyond the core team, the Urban Pioneer relied on a Delivery Group comprising officers and representatives from a range of organisations to deliver the project.

An evaluation of the performance of the Urban Pioneer against its specific objectives has been undertaken separately by ICF<sup>1</sup>

This review has been undertaken to understand the wider, indirect impacts that the Urban Pioneer had over the course of the project beyond the specific objectives. Specifically, this review has looked to understand how the structure and activities of the Urban Pioneer project can be used as a replicable model for policy testing and transformational change in the future.

*This is just the end of the beginning...*

*(Lee Rawlinson, Environment Agency)*

## The headlines

Overwhelmingly the participants in this review considered that the Urban Pioneer:

- ✓ created a safe space to think, discuss, test and implement ideas.
- ✓ demonstrated a replicable model for undertaking transformational programmes in the future.
- ✓ provided a platform linking research, policy development and delivery on the ground to accelerate policy changes across the Greater Manchester City Region and beyond.
- ✓ integrated natural capital language into the local and national political arena, helping to influence policies and political priorities across the UK.
- ✓ raised the profile of co-benefits delivered by natural capital (e.g. health and wellbeing) at a national level, facilitating enhanced collaboration and leveraging opportunities for innovative funding routes.

<sup>1</sup> [http://randd.defra.gov.uk/Document.aspx?Document=14438\\_BE0144\\_FinalReport.pdf](http://randd.defra.gov.uk/Document.aspx?Document=14438_BE0144_FinalReport.pdf)

## Key drivers of success

The success of the Urban Pioneer was driven by 4 key elements which can be replicated across programmes to support success in the future.

1. **Robust project governance**
2. **Development of a common, thematic language**
3. **Multi-stakeholder ownership and collaboration**
4. **A strong project team**

The Urban Pioneer was embedded into the Greater Manchester Combined Authority governance, enhancing its relevance in the local political arena. Its 'de-branded' approach ensured that there was a strong sense of ownership from each stakeholder involved in delivery of the project, and the work to develop a common language drove engagement and collaboration. This was all underpinned by a strong core team that used an entrepreneurial approach and a range of skillsets to maintain momentum over the course of the project.

## The indirect impacts

The indirect impact of the Urban Pioneer has been analysed against the 4 Asks:

### **Ask 1: Applying a natural capital approach to decision-making**

- The Urban Pioneer developed a natural capital framework and created a leverage effect that has influenced decisions at both the national and local levels.

### **Ask 2: Developing innovative funding opportunities**

- The Urban Pioneer was able to develop and support the case for investment into natural capital which has been taken forward locally in the form of the Greater Manchester Environment Fund.

### **Ask 3: Demonstrating integrated approaches to planning and delivery**

- The Urban Pioneer focused heavily on engagement to crowd-source solutions and ideas when planning and delivering projects.

### **Ask 4: Building our understanding of 'what works' in practice**

- The Urban Pioneer demonstrated effective ways to achieve tangible benefits by building on existing approaches and demonstrating how to embed them across a range of organisations.

## Lessons learned

The Urban Pioneer learned a number of valuable lessons that can be applied to similar projects in the future:

- 'Working with the grain' allows projects to piggyback off existing initiatives which can harness resources efficiently and promote faster, longer lasting change;
- Flexibility to respond to local drivers and issues as they arise can help maintain local support and safeguard the project's relevant and license to operate;
- The collaborative approach allowed individual organisations to free up capacity by providing access to expertise through the Delivery Group platform;
- Ensuring the core team has secure funding through the lifetime of the project helps to maintain momentum and continuity; and
- Innovative projects like the Urban Pioneer need planning time – up to a year of time is required to help shape and focus the objectives.

## The Urban Pioneer legacy

The Urban Pioneer 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 Greater Manchester City Region. This helped to **accelerate the transition**, supporting Greater Manchester in developing its understanding of the **value of environmental services** in delivering on key policy objectives. Initiatives such as the 5 Year Environment Plan, the Environment Fund and the Natural Capital Investment Plan have been informed and supported by the work of the Urban Pioneer.

The learnings taken from the Urban Pioneer experience have been **adopted at the national level**, influencing internal processes and external communication for the Environment Agency and Defra, as well as informing UK government policy and language and the structure and objectives of the new Environmental Land Management Scheme payments.

The Delivery Group for the Urban Pioneer are now working on a range of other projects nationally, helping to share and promote the learnings from the Urban Pioneer across a range of other initiatives.

Finally, the participants in this review were asked for three concluding words to describe the Urban Pioneer which are shown below. The words and themes arising from the interviews highlight that, despite challenges such the lack of funding and clear objectives, the Urban Pioneer project has created a **lasting legacy** through its ambitious and innovative approach.



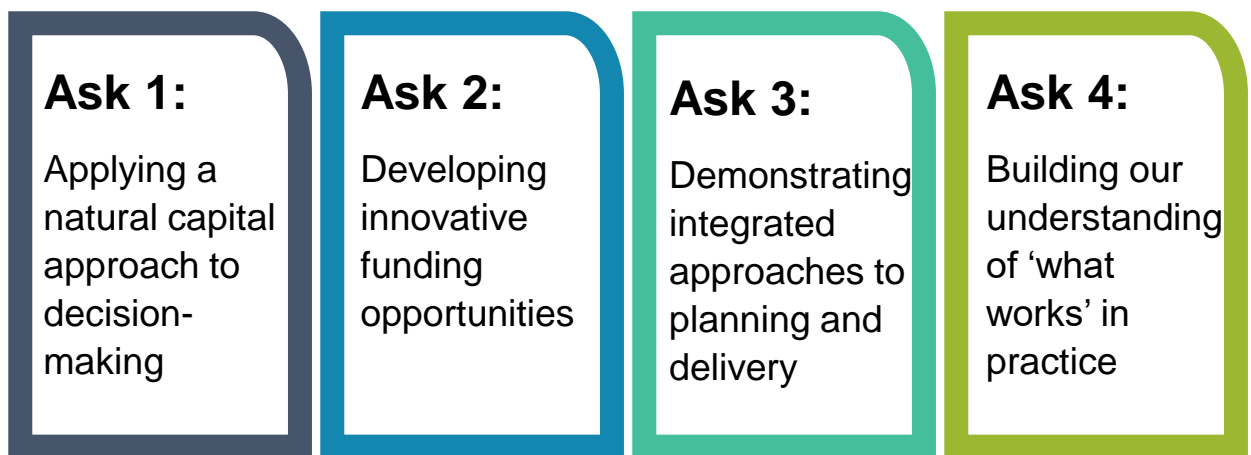
# 1. Introduction

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## Background to the Urban Pioneer

The Urban Pioneer project commenced in 2017, aimed at working in the local context of the Greater Manchester City Region to improve the natural environment and inform the development and implementation of the UK Government's 25 Year Environment Plan (25YEP).

Details on the evolution and governance of the Urban Pioneer can be found in section 3. After a lengthy planning and evolution process the project Delivery Group worked towards four key "Asks":



## Background to this review

As the project comes to a close, Green Arch Consulting has been commissioned to gather and report on the learnings and outcomes of the Urban Pioneer. This will record the impact that the project had, not only directly but also indirectly by providing insight, assistance and support to other projects, organisations and policy development both locally and nationally<sup>1</sup>.

The findings and lessons learned set out in this report are intended to inform future project design, for example those related to continued policy development and environmental intervention projects<sup>2</sup>.

The analysis is informed by feedback provided by a range of participants including those directly responsible for delivery of the Urban Pioneer (the Urban Pioneer Delivery Group) and others who have benefitted from specific deliverables or activities undertaken by the Urban Pioneer. The full list of participating organisations is found in Attachment 2.

1. This assessment does not assess the outcomes for the environment directly as this has been evaluated as part of the broader report by ICF Consulting Services (November 2018) titled 'Evaluation of the 25 Year Plan Pioneers'.
2. Details of the method used to collate the feedback and the contributors are provided in Attachment 2.

## 2. Key drivers of success

There were four key concepts that ensured the success of the Urban Pioneer:

1. Robust project governance
2. Development of a common, thematic language
3. Multi-stakeholder ownership and collaboration
4. A strong project team



### 1. Robust project governance

The Delivery Group quickly identified three core requirements in order to ensure that the Urban Pioneer was successful: **core funding; development of objectives** and **strong governance**.

The approach taken in designing the Urban Pioneer was to **embed the project into the local political arena** using tried and tested, locally accepted mechanisms. This ensured that it was relevant to local issues, reporting into the Combined Authority, and helped to minimise the risk of duplication of work already being undertaken locally in relation to natural capital.

### 2. Development of a common, thematic language

The Urban Pioneer analysed environmental services and communicated them thematically. Rather than focusing on drivers and targets for specific organisations, the **thematic approach** allowed the communication of natural capital to be applicable to a far broader audience. Additionally, the outputs themselves (for example the natural capital valuation for Greater Manchester) were **not branded by any one organisation**, creating more focus and clearer communication of a city-wide message.

The thematic approach also resulted in **convergence and harmonisation of communications** across the participating organisations – **driving a common language** and helping to direct city-wide activities in relation to natural capital.





### The Dream Team



The close collaboration between the Urban Pioneer and Greater Manchester City Region through the Natural Course project has been referred to as the 'dream team' – with the project managers working closely together to promote natural capital in Greater Manchester.

## 3. Multi-stakeholder ownership and collaboration

The Urban Pioneer provided an organisationally agnostic umbrella to work under. This **multi-stakeholder ownership of the Urban Pioneer** brand allowed work to be undertaken in a coherent way. In effect, it '**de-branded**' the natural capital efforts in the Greater Manchester City Region, allowing all interested organisations to get involved without any competition over ownership or credit or for funds.

Fundamental to the success of the Urban Pioneer was the collaboration between organisations which produced outcomes that amounted **to more than the sum of its parts**. In isolation the participating organisations would have been unlikely to have achieved the same level of impact.

A further benefit of engaging multiple stakeholders is the increased likelihood that the outcomes and solutions facilitated by the project will be taken forward and will ultimately drive the impact in the long-term. Each organisation involved has taken forward an aspect of the Urban Pioneer agenda or output and in addition, is now part of **strengthened network of stakeholders** that can provide support and share learnings.

The Urban Pioneer broke boundaries of subject, roles, remit and tiers of teams and created tools that work across political, organisational and budgetary boundaries. This approach **increased collaboration** and **forged relationships** between different organisations, existing projects and initiatives.

By providing a **unified platform for discussion and delivery**, the Urban Pioneer was invaluable in helping participating organisations identify challenges and solutions in their own activities and initiatives.



## 4. A strong project team

The success of the Urban Pioneer relied heavily on the energy and drive of the core team, the project manager and the champions. **Strong leadership, advocacy and motivation provided by key individuals** was identified by the majority of participants as being a key driver for delivery of the Urban Pioneer.

Choosing project personnel with a broad range of skills including effective communication with government departments is vital for delivering a project with this level of ambition. The team's ability to navigate difficult conversations between organisations with their own agendas maintained the momentum and increased collaboration and engagement. The **“entrepreneurial spirit”** of the individuals in the core team provided the Urban Pioneer with access to both technical expertise and **wide-ranging ‘softer’ skillsets** which drove the success of the project.

The core team worked hard to ensure that the Urban Pioneer **smoothed the natural capital journey** rather than aiming to ‘disrupt the system’. This ensured that they were able to drive positive engagement and collaboration at the local and even national level.

It is notable how many participants identified the project manager, Adam Booth, as being vital to the success of the project. Specifically, his flexibility in the approach he took and the way that he engaged with the Delivery Group and external stakeholders. This leadership at the project level was key for maintaining the energy levels and enthusiasm that participants have articulated clearly during the course of this review.

*When you've got someone who is fronting a project and is passionate and believes in it, it builds confidence.*

*(David Barlow, Manchester City Council)*

### 3. How the Urban Pioneer evolved

The Urban Pioneer Delivery Group worked hard over the course of the project to design a replicable, successful model for project implementation. The key lessons learned by the group, which can be applied in any situation, are as follows:

#### Ensure the core team is funded

The Urban Pioneer initially had no set budget which led to a risk of inconsistency in delivering the project. Over the course of the first year the Environment Agency guaranteed funding for the core team, including the Project Manager, for the full 3 years to ensure that delivery remained consistent throughout the life of the project.

#### Set the objectives

The Pioneer projects originally had no specific objectives beyond providing feedback to the 25 Year Environment Plan. The Delivery Group realised quickly that this was a barrier to progress and as a result the 4 Asks were agreed with Defra.

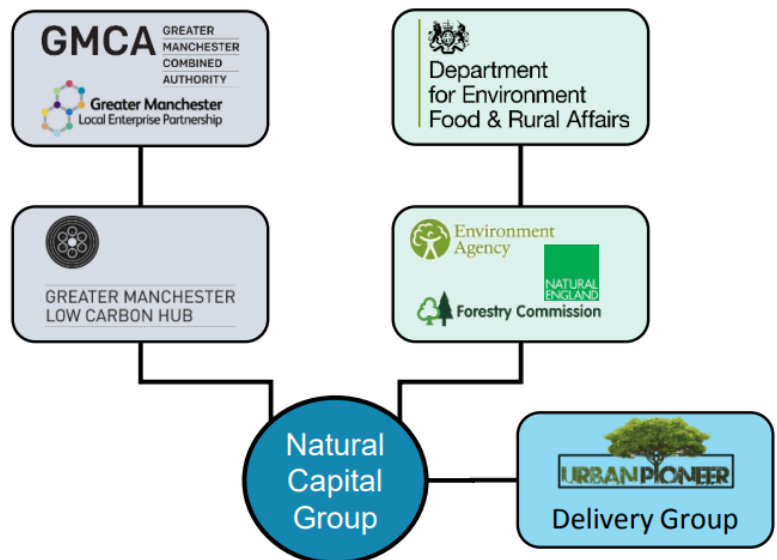
#### Agree the governance structure

Governance of the project was vital to ensuring success. The Delivery Group identified a core need for the Urban Pioneer to fit in with the existing arrangements within Greater Manchester. The reason for this was a) to avoid duplication of existing initiatives and b) to ensure that the outputs had a route to inform and feed back to local leadership. The governance structure grew organically with time and through close liaison and discussion with the Combined Authority Environment Team.

The Urban Pioneer was governed by an interdisciplinary, collaborative Delivery Group comprising officers and representatives from a range of organisations. This group was co-ordinated by the Project Manager.

The Delivery Group's primary function was to shape and take accountability for the feasibility, development, monitoring and achievement of the outcomes of the Urban Pioneer.

The Urban Pioneer reported to the Greater Manchester Combined Authority's Natural Capital Group, as shown in the image here. Further information on the governance structure is set out in Attachment 1.



Once the Delivery Group had identified the solutions to the three key challenges above, the Urban Pioneer could evolve and establish itself further. The Urban Pioneer's work evolved and was driven as follows:

### Localism drove the agenda...

- The experience of the Urban Pioneer has **highlighted the value of testing policy options locally**, supporting politicians in understanding how urban environmental management could work under different policies and in future scenarios (e.g. post-Brexit management).
- Particularly, it **demonstrated the value of flexibility** in the methods used to deliver policy commitments.
- Collaboration between the Urban Pioneer and the Greater Manchester Combined Authority, coupled with collaborative working within the Combined Authority and Mayoral office, delivered **lasting positive outcomes for the local community**.
- Led to **strong local political leadership** and put the local community ahead of national policies.
- Significant local benefits resulted from the regular updates between policy leads and **local teams giving live feedback** (e.g. highlighted where the challenges are).

*[The combination of] political will, ambition and energy provided a significant dynamic for enabling change*

*(Drew Musselbrook, Environment Agency)*

### ... and speaking with one voice drove results.

Through **creation of a common language and terminology**, the Urban Pioneer:

- Helped to identify **key terminology and language drivers** that stakeholders responded positively to - specifically health and wellbeing and flood management – the 'common language';
- **Articulated the business case** for natural capital in a way that promoted acceptance by a wide range of partners and stakeholders;
- Brought together organisations that otherwise may not have engaged with natural capital, facilitating **broader opportunities for collaboration** to deliver common aims; and
- Provided a tool, in the form of the natural capital accounts, for communication and decision-making, creating a way of **embedding co-benefit language into discussions** (e.g. air quality, health linkages and recreation).

Participants in this review identified that **discussions were more efficient and productive** within organisations and also with third-parties as stakeholders were able to articulate the value of the natural environment.

*One voice, not an eco-cacophany*

*(Workshop comment)*

## The language provided opportunities for upskilling...

This common language resulted in non-specialist advocates choosing to articulate environmental goals because they could do so in a non-technical, engaging way. It **created a toolkit for the non-environment sector** to apply when developing the business case for action.

Through the development of a common language, the Urban Pioneer created a **groundswell of skills** – focusing on upskilling a large number of people with limited natural capital knowledge across a wide range of organisations and roles. It demonstrated that, in a short space of time, those with limited experience of natural capital can see the value through the application of a common language and will actively apply that language in their own roles and activities.

This provided a **safe space to turn theory into reality** through a forum of **experiential learning**.

### Building Capacity



The Urban Pioneer funded a project to understand the natural capital benefits associated with the Warrington Flood Risk Management Scheme. The scheme's delivery team are using the outcomes of that work to influence their peers and stakeholders including speaking about the work at conferences.

## ...and resulted in high levels of engagement with the project

A key success of the Urban Pioneer was the **effective engagement** delivered during the project. The common language helped to:

- **Raise the profile of natural capital** and wider sustainability issues by providing a clear narrative of the benefits to society such as the health benefits from the access to green space;
- Integrate environmental science with economic, social and PR discussions, painting a wider picture for politicians, business and local communities;
- Engage developers with the concept of 'net gain' in a way that clearly communicated the benefits to the developer and the end user;
- Reach out to communities using the tools developed by the project in order to **demonstrate 'real world' applications**;
- Facilitate dialogue and foster interest and engagement through a range of campaigns, not just those delivered by the Urban Pioneer;
- Coordinate efforts across different organisations and **harmonise timeframes to deliver maximum impact** in the minimum amount of time;
- Assist Delivery Group organisations with their own engagement efforts, creating a feedback loop of engagement with the Urban Pioneer as benefits were seen both internally and externally with stakeholders and participating organisations; and
- Access cutting edge thinking which sparked interest, enabled experimentation and facilitated discussion.

## 4. Review of the Urban Pioneer against the 4 Asks

### Ask 1:

#### Applying a natural capital approach to decision-making

*The Urban Pioneer developed a natural capital framework and created a leverage effect that has influenced decisions at both the national and local levels.*

#### The Challenge

At the start of the Urban Pioneer the local and national decision-making landscape was characterised by a lack of understanding of the co-benefits delivered by natural capital and a lack of evidence to prove those co-benefits. This resulted in an inability to articulate the value of natural capital in supporting other policy priorities and natural capital therefore not being considered in core decisions (e.g. local authority planning and investment decisions).



*[The Urban Pioneer] demonstrated a methodology to understand natural capital at the political level and across political boundaries*

*(Jim Airton, United Utilities)*

## The Objective

One of the key objectives for the Delivery Group was, therefore, to find a replicable way to **demonstrate the value of the environment** in facilitating local and national policy and investment priorities (for example growth, health, economic benefit and returns on investment). Essentially, the challenge was for the environmental sector to 'prove its worth'.



### Accelerating decision-making



Having the Biodiversity Net Gain Task Group as part of the Urban Pioneer gave Salford City Council confidence to adopt a strong position in their Local Plan<sup>1</sup> ahead of the national 10% net gain target coming into effect. The Plan was subject to a public consultation which closed on 20th March. Formal Examination in Public is scheduled to be held in the autumn of 2020.

## The Outputs

The Urban Pioneer led to **better informed decision-making** by:

- ✓ Creating a strong evidence base, using nationally available datasets, for natural capital co-benefits, putting tangible numbers against what the environment provides, resulting in a baseline which stakeholders can understand, apply and work from.
- ✓ Demonstrating replicable methods based on nationally available datasets, and providing tools and templates, for accounting for natural capital. This included tools such as those created to support the Greater Manchester vision, as well as development of the natural capital accounts infographic as a communication tool.
- ✓ Evidencing the range of beneficiaries of ecosystem services, demonstrating linkages between organisations and departments and promoting collaboration and effective communication.
- ✓ Demonstrating the value of considering the environment as a whole, rather than focusing on one specific aspect (e.g. carbon).
- ✓ Allowing non-specialist advocates to articulate the benefits delivered by the environment.
- ✓ Providing a valuable forum with license to collaborate, experiment and even fail.

1. <https://www.salford.gov.uk/planning-building-and-regeneration/planning-policies/local-planning-policy/salfords-development-plan/salford-local-plan/publication-local-plan-chapters/23-biodiversity-and-geodiversity/>



## The Impact

### Local and Regional

#### Informed:

- ✓ Greater Manchester City Region plans: the 5 Year Environment Plan, Local Industrial Strategy, Spatial Framework and Tree and Woodland Strategy
- ✓ Greater Manchester City Region commitment to Biodiversity Net Gain before national legislation was brought in
- ✓ Correspondence from the Mayor of Greater Manchester to the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs in 2020 promoting environmental priorities, green finance and collaboration in delivering on policy objectives
- ✓ The natural capital accounts provided new and greater insight into the value of investing in environmental services to local authorities. This is reflected in, for example, the 2020/21 Rochdale Borough Council budget report
- ✓ The 2019 NP11 and Convention for the North event resulted in the Manifesto for the North, calling on the UK government to support the North in delivering long term social value, clean growth and decarbonization (the 5 Game Changers)
- ✓ Analysis of the business case for prioritising green infrastructure at development sites, undertaken by Manchester Business School and commissioned by Ministry of Housing, Communities & Local Government and Defra. This is now being used to inform green infrastructure priorities at Mayfield and for the Northern Gateway

### National

#### Inputted to:

- ✓ Defra's 25 Year Environment Plan including proving the case for legislating for Biodiversity Net Gain
- ✓ The Environment Agency's 2025 plan
- ✓ The Defra and Natural England Peatland Pilot projects
- ✓ The Treasury Public Value Framework
- ✓ The evidence base for the Environment Agency's six capitals model which is being used to help integrate natural capital thinking into wider organizational decision-making
- ✓ The Natural England biodiversity metric, influencing its design
- ✓ The evidence base for the Forestry Commission's National Forest Inventory and the services provided by Great Britain's forests
- ✓ Political communication and discussion, including a speech made in parliament by the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs



## Ask 2:

### Developing innovative funding opportunities

*The Urban Pioneer was able to develop and support the case for investment into natural capital which has been taken forward locally in the form of the Greater Manchester Environment Fund.*

#### The Challenge

Stakeholders are grappling with the need to fund environmental interventions with decreased access to public funds. This not only requires more efficient use of existing funding sources but also results in a need to leverage in private sector contributions.



#### Successful funding bids



The Urban Pioneer supported a collaborative project between Environment Agency and Manchester City Council to commission a team of Manchester Business School MBA students to identify different financial mechanisms and management approaches to maintaining newly created green spaces within developments, using the Northern Gateway development as the case study. The results helped secure approx. £45,000 worth of technical consultancy to continue exploring this as part of the £5M Ignition programme in 2020.

#### The Objective

The Urban Pioneer therefore needed to **build the business case** for taking a natural capital approach to developing innovative funding opportunities. This would support wider efforts to evidence return on investment, address challenges in procuring high quality green infrastructure, identify new funding sources and develop innovative financing opportunities.

## The Outputs

The Urban Pioneer helped to build the business case for taking a natural capital approach by:

- ✓ Demonstrating lower financial risk and increased investment opportunity if Natural Capital is included in the early stages of project design.
- ✓ Providing a blueprint for communication of the value of environmental services to business.
- ✓ Informing resourcing decisions and providing evidence for initiatives and funds.
- ✓ Illustrating the co-benefits delivered by natural capital in an urban environment, contributing to achieving targets and reducing long-term costs.

*Identification of co-benefits [delivered by natural capital]  
unlocked doors to different funding mechanisms*

*(Lee Rawlinson, Environment Agency)*

## The Impact

The outputs from the Urban Pioneer informed a range of innovative financing projects including:

- The funding and resourcing of the Oxford-Cambridge Arc, focusing on sustainable growth and social returns for the development of the corridor;
- The successful City of Trees led funding bid, obtaining £1.5million from the government's Urban Tree Challenge Fund to invest in tree planting in Greater Manchester;
- The development of the Greater Manchester Natural Capital Investment Plan, which was funded by Natural Course;
- The programme of work to deliver the Greater Manchester Environment Fund and associated Investment Readiness Fund; and
- Development of the funding application for the €5m IGNITION project in Greater Manchester.

It also helped to highlight the benefits of green flood defences in urban areas to Ministers and developers by promoting the outcomes of the Salford Flood Basin project, which created a flood storage area to protect developable land and reduce financial risk to developers.

### Ask 3:

## Demonstrating integrated approaches to planning and delivery

*The Urban Pioneer focused heavily on engagement to crowd-source solutions and ideas when planning and delivering projects*



### The Challenge

Early engagement with stakeholders identified that their objectives were often not environmental. Instead, they were focused on issues such as health, adult social care and tourism. Occasionally the focus would include flood risk, or water and air quality.

### The Objective

The Urban Pioneer Delivery Group identified a need to **engage with a broad spectrum of stakeholders** in order to inform planning and delivery of projects. Part of that included finding a way to build trust and confidence in the products and tools being used to articulate the natural capital story.

### The Outputs

The Urban Pioneer employed innovative methods for encouraging a two-way conversation with a broad range of stakeholders, including:

- ✓ Hosting joint departmental visits and meetings.
- ✓ Employing a digital engagement strategy and using data in real time to crowd source information.
- ✓ Developing engaging toolkits such as video and animation to communicate messages.
- ✓ Engaging young people through creative writing and other activities.
- ✓ Facilitating townhall talks and art projects.

## The Impact

The outputs from the Urban Pioneer encouraged significant levels of engagement with the natural environment sector and facilitated integrated approaches to planning and delivery through:

- Using artificial intelligence (AI) learning to analyse over 4,000 responses to the Manchester Green Summits, including real-time analysis during the event;
- Hosting a joint visit by Defra and the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government to consider natural capital in development planning;
- Influencing the rebranding of the Manchester Low Carbon Hub to the Green City Region Partnership;
- Influencing the alteration of the Greater Manchester 5 year plan to cover general environmental planning instead of just carbon reduction; and
- Connecting Natural England and Ordnance Survey to support delivery of the ANGST project.

*[The Urban Pioneer] drew different projects together into a co-ordinated programme, streamlining working to help keep key issues and priorities on track*

*(Krista Patrick, GMCA)*

The significant level of input from stakeholders identified natural capital as a mainstream engagement issue and led to increased political interest, resulting in a snowball effect of different departments within the Greater Manchester Combined Authority taking the co-benefit message on board. There was seamless integration with local, regional and national agendas which lead to multiple benefits rather than a single outcome

This helped to increase visibility of natural capital in the Greater Manchester City Region and further afield by creating a wider awareness and interest of what natural capital can do to support local policy drivers.

### Aligning plans



The Urban pioneer's work on ecosystem service mapping has helped to lay the foundation for a new approach to River Valleys being developed by Manchester City Council. It uses an evidence-based ecosystems approach to prioritizing opportunities for investment to regenerate the landscapes of the Irk, Medlock and Mersey Valleys.

## Ask 4:

### Building our understanding of 'what works' in practice

*The Urban Pioneer demonstrated effective ways to achieve tangible benefits by building on existing approaches and demonstrating how to embed them across a range of organisations.*

#### The Challenge

The key challenge for the Urban Pioneer was to find out what 'good' looks like while avoiding reinventing the wheel.



#### Learning lessons



The Urban Pioneer acted as a live action learning project with a direct relationship with policy writers as part of the 25 Year Environment Plan. This enabled the rapid testing of hypotheses in a real-world environment and the ability to give valuable guidance and feedback on suggested ways of working. A key example of this was the inclusion of Biodiversity Net Gain in the 25YEP and supporting the bidding process for the IGNITION project.

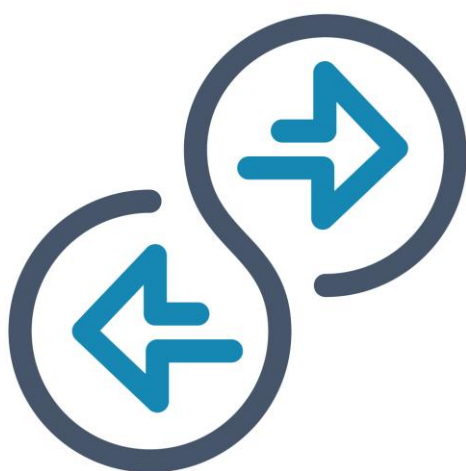
#### The Objective

Using the outputs from Asks 1, 2 and 3, the Urban Pioneer Delivery Group aimed to **develop a replicable model** for undertaking other transformational projects.

## The Outputs

The Urban Pioneer project ensured that:

- ✓ Principles were developed covering how such projects could be governed.
- ✓ Time was taken to design the project management approach and developing the management style of a long-term task and finish group.
- ✓ The project management structure and approach was designed to provide consistency and give confidence to decision-makers.
- ✓ Collaborative approaches were achieved between organisations that might usually compete for resources.
- ✓ A unified, independent decision-making platform was developed, providing a safe space for collaboration.
- ✓ Multi-stakeholder ownership of the platform means that key outputs are not lost at the end of the project.



## The Impact

The outputs from the Urban Pioneer have resulted in:

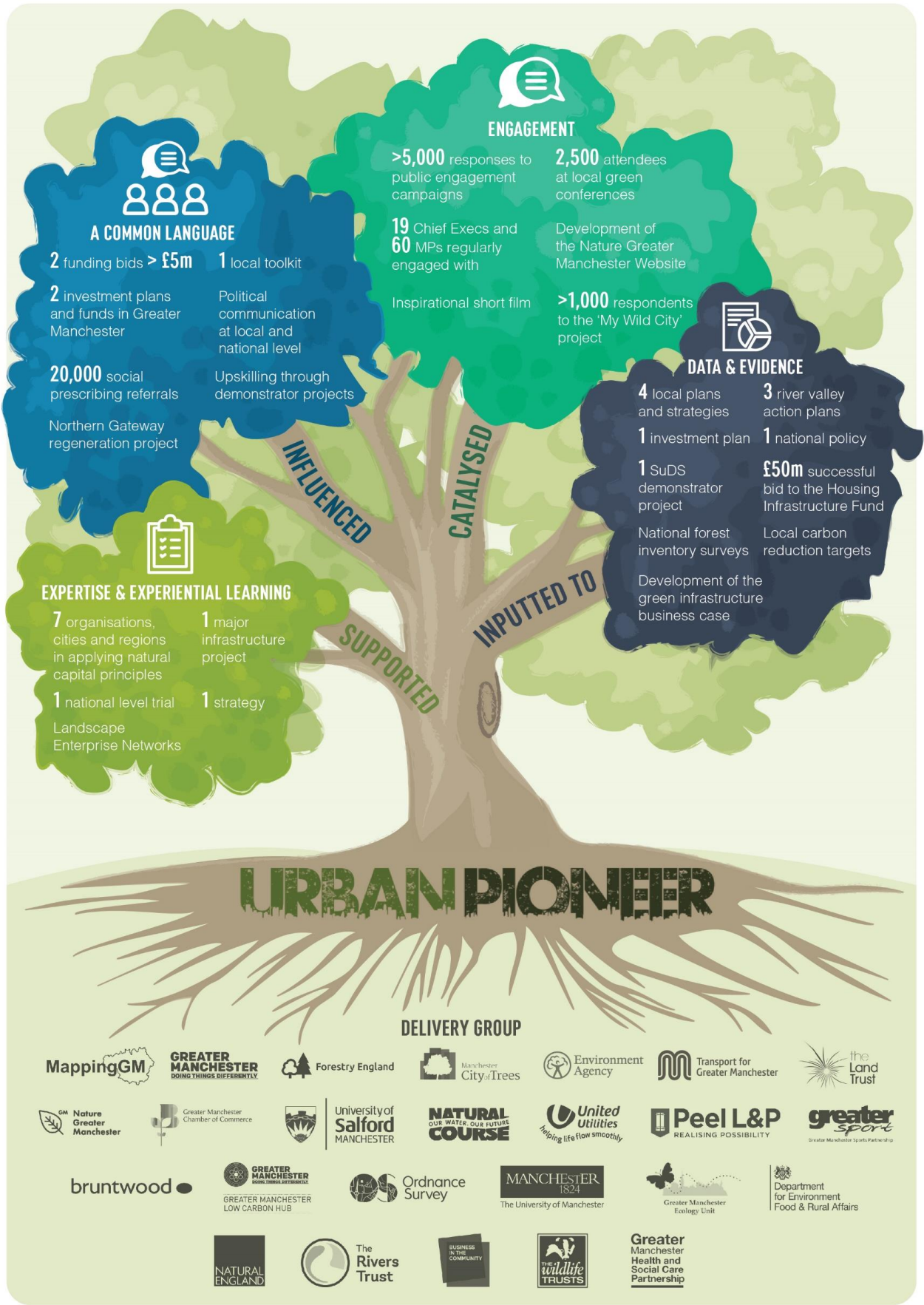
- A replicable project governance and management model that is being rolled out throughout the Environment Agency as part of the 2025 plan, including development of the Environment Agency Future Funding team.

*[The Urban Pioneer] created a safe space for people to come together from different sectors & backgrounds to talk in non-prescriptive way – delivering a fresh way of working.*

*(Clive Memmot, Greater Manchester Chamber of Commerce)*



# 5. The impact of the Urban Pioneer





The participants in this review have identified that the Urban Pioneer has had significant beneficial impact on the natural capital landscape by providing a stable platform (a “safe space”) for discussion and delivery. It helped to mainstream the use of natural capital language in the Greater Manchester City Region and wider, for example within the Environment Agency’s strategic approach to environmental management. The legacy and impacts supported by the Urban Pioneer are set out in the infographic above and further detail is provided below.

## Expertise and experiential learning

Supported:

- ✓ The development of the **United Utilities** natural capital baseline
- ✓ Ecosystem Services Opportunity Mapping across **Greater Manchester City Region**, as well as the development of the GM Tree and Woodland Strategy and Housing Infrastructure Fund bids
- ✓ **Natural Course** catchment-level decision-making
- ✓ Catchment scale natural capital accounts at **Bristol and Avon**
- ✓ Application of the principles in the **Birmingham and Liverpool city regions**
- ✓ Production of natural capital accounts for **Carlisle Garden City**
- ✓ The development of the **Greater Manchester, Merseyside and Cheshire region** natural capital baseline
- ✓ The Environmental Land Management trial project being undertaken by the **Lancashire Wildlife Trust**
- ✓ The work of the **Landscape Enterprise Networks**
- ✓ The **Environment Agency’s** management of the **OxCam** project

## Engagement

Catalysed:

- ✓ The Green Summits in Greater Manchester, with **2,400 attendees** over the 2 events
- ✓ Significant feedback and engagement from those attendees, with over **4,000 responses** to a questionnaire that was analysed by the Urban Pioneer core team using AI analysis capability and insights
- ✓ Delivery of the **natural capital group conferences**, leading to livestreaming in 2019 and **170 attendees** at the 2020 event
- ✓ Engagement across the political spectrum, with regular updates provided to **19 Chief Execs** and **60 MPs** in the Greater Manchester, Merseyside and Cheshire Region
- ✓ Over **1,000 respondents** to the Lancashire Wildlife Trust ‘My Wild City’ project
- ✓ The Greater Manchester **natural environment toolkit** - outputs include an inspirational short film showing how to bring actions in 5 year plan to life
- ✓ Development of the **Nature Greater Manchester** Website, connecting businesses and residents with nature

## Driving a common language

Influenced:

- ✓ **Political communication and discussion** including by the Mayor of Greater Manchester and the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs
- ✓ The Greater Manchester **natural environment toolkit**
- ✓ The Greater Manchester **Natural Capital Investment Plan**
- ✓ The establishment of a **Greater Manchester Environment Fund**, announced as part of the first Greater Manchester Mayor's Green Summit
- ✓ **Social prescribing** in Greater Manchester, with **20,000 referrals** by the end of 2019
- ✓ The **Northern Gateway** regeneration project
- ✓ The **IGNITION** project bid, which achieved **€5m** of funding
- ✓ The **City of Trees** funding application to the Urban Tree Challenge Fund
- ✓ **Oldham council** has displayed their natural capital accounts in the office, helping to spread the message internally
- ✓ Natural capital assessment of the **Warrington Flood Risk Management Scheme** and a broad engagement programme with colleagues as a result

## Data and evidence

Inputted to:

- ✓ The Greater Manchester **carbon reduction targets** and commitments
- ✓ The Greater Manchester **5 Year Environment Plan, Local Industrial Strategy, Spatial Framework** and **Tree and Woodland Strategy**
- ✓ The Greater Manchester City Region **Investment Readiness Fund**
- ✓ The Moorlands primary school **SuDS raingarden demonstrator** project in Sale
- ✓ The Irk, Medlock and Mersey **river valley action plans**
- ✓ The The Defra and Natural England **Peatland Pilot** projects
- ✓ The UK's **25 Year Environment Plan**
- ✓ Developing the green infrastructure case for the **National forest inventory**
- ✓ Analysis of the **business case for prioritising green infrastructure** at development sites, undertaken by Manchester Business School
- ✓ Development of the Environment Agency's **six capitals model**, integrating natural capital thinking into organisational planning.
- ✓ The successful Manchester **Housing Infrastructure Fund Bid**, raising **>£50m** to unlock land for new homes

## 6. Lessons learned

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*The experience of the Urban Pioneer has provided clear insight into what works well and what could be done better for programme design, policy development and environmental intervention projects*

### **Innovation is born from adversity...**

*The success [of the Urban Pioneer] came from “working with the grain” [and] piggybacking off existing initiatives / drivers.*

*(Keith Jones, Forestry Commission)*

The Pioneer projects were not directly funded and initially had no clear objectives. This resulted in challenges from the start around delivery of the projects but also resulted in innovative approaches being developed as the Urban Pioneer core team was forced to be creative:

1. A lack of funding beyond that required for the core team forced the Delivery Group to identify innovative solutions including locating existing resources and initiatives to ‘piggyback’ off
2. The Delivery Group collaborated in order to create new workstreams and harness additional resource. This included holding a number of brainstorming sessions in order to identify key priorities and workstreams.
3. Driven by a lack of clear objectives, the Delivery Group and core team had the flexibility to be more responsive to local issues and drivers as they arose
4. Participants identified that the collaborative approach allowed individual organisations to free up capacity by providing access to expertise through the Delivery Group platform
5. In order to underpin the activities above, the Delivery Group worked closely with the Greater Manchester Combined Authority to embed the Urban Pioneer into the local political governance structure – thereby integrating the objectives and outcomes with other existing initiatives throughout the city.

... but there are some key solutions identified by the Urban Pioneer team...

Challenge	Solution
Innovative projects are challenging to socialise with local authorities who are highly focused on delivering business-as-usual	The Urban Pioneer worked to ensure that it maintained good relationships with central government and local government. Maintaining the support of senior government officials, both national and local, was vital for maintaining momentum and overcoming barriers
Lack of clarity over funding resulted in uncertainty over deliverability over the whole term of the project	The Environment Agency ensured that the core team was funded for the duration of the project, providing stability and consistency of approach in delivering on the wider objectives
The lack of clarity in objectives resulted in challenges when engaging with stakeholders initially...	The Urban Pioneer Delivery Group chose to engage with stakeholders to understand the challenges that they were facing in their own roles, for example challenges in delivering positive health outcomes locally.
...and resulted in a need to engage with more stakeholders than originally anticipated	Having a clear online presence would have helped with this initial engagement piece.
The lack of objectives made it difficult to identify priorities, a focus and a purpose	Broad stakeholder engagement provided a 'critical mass' of concerns that, when grouped into themes, allowed priorities to be identified.
"Design by committee" meant that the outcomes were less detailed than they could have been and the outputs were less 'productive' than if the project had had fewer stakeholders and clearer objectives	The Delivery Group needed to decide whether they were aiming for broader, shallower coverage or narrower, deeper outcomes. The Urban Pioneer chose the former.
Maintaining energy and enthusiasm for delivery with no allocated budget and a small team	The skillsets and personality types for the core team is vital to get right. If the project or programme manager can think laterally and bring a broad range of wider skillsets to bear, then the project has a higher chance of success.

## .....and some important lessons learned for future projects

*Extending the project over 5 instead of 3 years with the 1st year dedicated to setting up and developing the project would have helped in delivering a clear beginning, middle and end.*

*(Adam Booth, Environment Agency)*

Challenge	Lesson
There is a risk of 'confirmation bias' in designing objectives and developing outputs, where contributors fail to understand wider challenges in associated sectors	Engaging more comprehensively with 'unrelated' sectors such as the financial sector would provide a critical eye when designing solutions
The amount of education and engagement required to actually deliver some of the findings on the ground is still unknown	Ensuring engagement with operations teams, or other projects working with operations teams, would help to identify challenges and barriers to implementation
A lack of available or harmonised data at the local and national level can delay results	The Delivery group deliberately chose to work with nationally available open data sets in order to design a method that was nationally replicable. This can result in older data being used, but was considered to be appropriate for the objectives of the project.
Natural capital accounting is still seen as 'complicated' to operations teams.	Identification of what operations teams can realistically be held accountable for in their day to day roles then helps to understand what needs to be managed at a regional or national level. Importantly, it also identifies what does not need to be held centrally
Educating stakeholders on how to use the outputs is an on-going process	Identification of how to educate stakeholders, and how to maintain momentum, would be a valuable way of ensuring the outputs from the project are taken forward
When looking at place-based design, integration with local teams is vital	Embedding the core team into local authority offices could have helped in maximizing exposure to operations teams in the local area
How can the team be certain that outcomes will continue to influence policy and activities after the project ends?	It is essential to build in an exit plan to ensure that key work is continued after the end of the project

## 7. Next steps

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*As the Urban Pioneer comes to a close, stakeholders are thinking about what's next for the legacy that's been created.*

### Testing at different scales

- The approach is being scaled up and applied to the entire Greater Manchester, Merseyside and Cheshire region within the Environment Agency
- Scaling up the approach to a region outside of an individual organisation would help to test the concept further
- It would be worth scaling it down also, by applying the approach to smaller urban area with less political autonomy

### Delivery Group organisations are maintaining momentum by:

- Embedding the ways of working and the outcomes/outputs achieved by the Urban Pioneer project into the:
  - Environment Agency's operating system
  - Defra's policies and systems;
  - Defra and Natural England's Peatland Pilot projects; and
  - Environmental Land Management Scheme payments structure and objectives.
- Working on different projects, thereby promoting and sharing the learnings from the project with other teams working on Natural Capital
- Greater Manchester will continue to promote natural capital through its 5 Year Environment Plan and through the Natural Capital Investment Plan and associated Environment Fund
- Additionally, Greater Manchester City Region is committed to continuing as a 'pioneer' in this field and continuing to be a trusted partner and test-bed for local applications of national policy discussions
- Water company planning & baselining is driving a consistent approach & collaboration in the natural capital space which is being replicated at, nationally, at catchment scale. This is further developing the principles informed by the Urban Pioneer
- A wider roll out of health outcomes through continued and expanded social prescribing.

The Urban Pioneer has shown the benefit of developing 'commercial awareness' using a language that works across sectors in order to demonstrate value. Delivery Group organisations are continuing to consider how to deliver the 25YEP and the Environment Bill through the use of Natural Capital plans, Nature Recovery Networks and Nature Recovery Strategies

*The fact that there is no sudden funding gap means that elements of the Urban Pioneer are more likely to be taken forward*

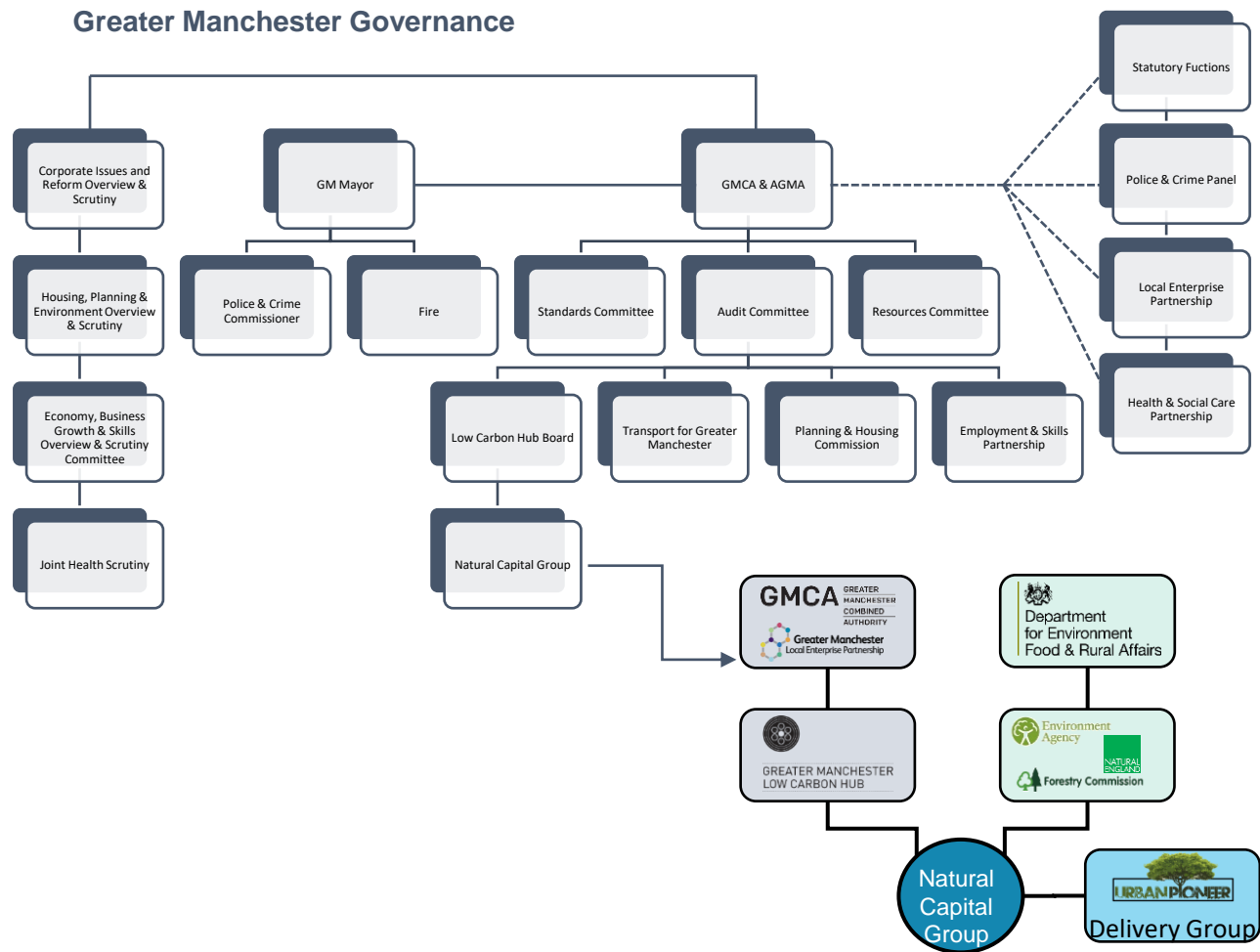
*(Max Heaver, DEFRA)*



# Attachment 1: Urban Pioneer Governance Structure

National Governance ‘DEFRA led’	Local Governance Urban Pioneer Delivery Group
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Interfaced at national level</li> <li>➤ Fed into the 25 Year Environment Plan</li> <li>➤ Created consistency between the Pioneers and linked with other initiatives</li> <li>➤ Provided a steer on tools and approaches</li> <li>➤ Interfaced with the Natural Capital Committee and Environmental Analysis Unit</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Local leadership and steer for the Pioneer</li> <li>➤ Established project priorities</li> <li>➤ Provided strategic input</li> <li>➤ Monitored progress and held partners to account</li> <li>➤ Reported up to DEFRA group and local leadership on progress</li> </ul>

## Greater Manchester Governance





## Attachment 2. Method and contributors

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The analysis is based on feedback provided by a range of participants including those directly responsible for delivery of the Urban Pioneer (the Urban Pioneer Delivery Group) and others who have benefitted from specific deliverables or activities undertaken by the Urban Pioneer. Feedback was collected via three methods: a workshop, telephone interviews and through collation of existing lessons learned documents from a range of participants.

### Workshop

A 2 hour workshop was undertaken on 26th February 2020 at Greater Manchester Chamber of Commerce, Elliot House. The workshop consisted of a number of interactive sessions which used visual tools to gather feedback from attendees on the project. Participants of the workshop were:

- Adam Booth, Urban Pioneer
- Colin Binnie, Forestry Commission
- Mark Turner, Greater Manchester Combined Authority (GMCA)
- Ruth Jones, Environment Agency (EA)
- Sarah Davies, EA

### Telephone Interviews and written contributions

Fifteen 45 minute telephone interviews were undertaken with selected stakeholders. The questionnaire is provided in Attachment 3. Additionally, those members of the Delivery Group that were unable to provide a telephone interview supported the review through written contributions to the report. The following individuals contributed either by telephone, by written review or a combination of the two:

- Andrew Holden, Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA)
- Anne Selby, Lancashire Wildlife Trust
- Chris Saville, EA
- Clive Memmot, Greater Manchester Chamber of Commerce (GMCC)
- Daryl Quantz, National Health Service (NHS)
- Dave Barlow, Manchester City Council
- David Hodcroft, GMCA
- Drew Musselbrook, EA
- Jessica Thompson, City of Trees
- Jim Airton, United Utilities
- Keith Jones, Forestry Commission
- Krista Patrick, GMCA
- Lee Rawlinson, EA
- Max Heaver, DEFRA
- Natasha Lombino, EA
- Will Horsfall, Salford City Council
- Dave Bell, Natural England

### Lessons learned documents

Lessons learned documents were provided from City of Trees, Greater Manchester Combined Authority and the University of Salford.

## Attachment 3. Questions answered by participants

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### Workshop questions

#### Workshop Questions: ASK 4 – Lessons Learned

1. From your perspective what helped Urban Pioneer make the most difference/impact?
2. What would you say is your biggest take away from the project?
3. Is there anything you would have done differently with hindsight?
4. If you had a magic wand and could change one thing about the project, what would it be?

#### Looking forward & Pledges:

1. Looking forward to the long term, what would you like to see happen with the work started by this project?
2. What will you miss most about Urban Pioneer after 31st March 2020?
3. Are you or anyone in your organisation taking forward any of the work from UP? (Specific projects currently in the works or anything planned)

## Telephone interview questions

1. Please describe your organisation and role, and your involvement with the Urban Pioneer project?
2. When you first heard of, or started working on the Urban Pioneer, what 3 words would you have used to describe it?
3. How do you think that the Urban Pioneer project has contributed to integrating natural capital considerations into local and national political decision-making approaches?
4. How do you think that the project helped to facilitate access to additional financial and other resources for other natural capital projects in the local area?
5. What additional deliverables/impact has Urban Pioneer had beyond the key objectives?
6. How has the work of Urban Pioneer impacted wider decision making:
  - a. in your organisation?
  - b. in Greater Manchester?
7. From your perspective what helped Urban Pioneer make the most difference/impact?
8. What would you say is your biggest take away from the project?
9. Are you aware of others that have been influenced by or have used any of the Urban Pioneer's products or outputs and if so in what way?
10. Is there anything you would have done differently with hindsight?
11. How has the project contributed to upskilling and knowledge sharing in relation to natural capital?
12. If you had a magic wand and could change one thing about the project, what would it be? And why?
13. Looking forward to the long term, what would you like to see happen with the work started by this project and is your organisation taking any of the activities from Urban Pioneer forwards
14. What will you miss most about Urban Pioneer after 31<sup>st</sup> March 2020?
15. Finally, what 3 words now come to mind when you think of the Urban Pioneer Project?