

Greater Manchester Combined Authority

Date: 22nd March 2024

Subject: Progress in tackling the Biodiversity Emergency In Greater Manchester

Report of: Councillor Tom Ross, Portfolio Lead for Green City Region and Sue Johnson, Portfolio Lead Chief Executive for Green City Region

Purpose of Report

To provide an update on initiatives in place to tackle the Biodiversity Emergency in Greater Manchester, particularly the activities being carried out by the GMCA in:

- Providing an evidence base on the current state of nature in Greater Manchester.
- Developing a Greater Manchester Local Nature Recovery Strategy to set out priorities for nature's recovery.
- Providing funding to community groups, through the Green Spaces Fund, to improve their local natural environment.
- Developing an action plan, as part of its compliance with the Biodiversity Duty, to set out the action the GMCA will take for biodiversity.

Recommendations:

The GMCA is requested to:

Note the contents in the attached report, in particular:

1. The publication of a State of Nature Report.
2. Progress in developing the Greater Manchester Local Nature Recovery Strategy.
3. The delivery of the Green Spaces Fund.
4. Compliance with the Biodiversity Duty.

Contact Officers

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Equalities Impact, Carbon and Sustainability Assessment:

Impacts Questionnaire		
Impact Indicator	Result	Justification/Mitigation
Equality and Inclusion		
Health	G	GM's natural environment provides £56m in physical health benefits each year, which would increase with further enhancement to the natural environment GM's natural environment provides £364m in mental health benefits each year, which would increase with further enhancement to the natural environment GM's natural environment provides £372m in mental health benefits each year, which would increase with further enhancement to the natural environment
Resilience and Adaptation	G	GM's natural environment provides £11m in flood risk reduction and urban cooling benefits each year, which would increase with further enhancement to the natural environment Taking action under the recommendations in this report would increase the quality of green and blue infrastructure in Greater Manchester.
Housing		
Economy	G	Greater Manchester's natural assets provide over £1bn of benefits each year to Greater Manchester, which would increase with further enhancement to the natural environment Further enhancement in the natural environment is likely to result job opportunities within an increasingly important sector in the longer term Greater knowledge and integration into decision making of the economic benefits of GM's natural assets will result in more sustainable use of these assets in the future There are likely to be resulting opportunities in delivering on these commitments and implementing the actions under the underpinning Greater Manchester Natural Capital Investment Plan.
Mobility and Connectivity		
Carbon, Nature and Environment	G	GM's natural environment provides £38m in air quality benefits each year, which would increase with further enhancement to the natural environment
Consumption and Production		
Contribution to achieving the GM Carbon Neutral 2038 target		The delivery of nature based solutions play a key role in achieving the Greater Manchester Carbon Neutral 2038 target including planning more trees and restoring our lowland and upland peatland stores. GM's trees store 1.5m tonnes of carbon. Chat Moss, one of GM's most important peatland resources, stores over 5m tonnes of carbon.
Further Assessment(s):	Carbon Assessment	
	Positive impacts overall, whether long or short term.	 Mix of positive and negative impacts. Trade-offs to consider.
	Mostly negative, with at least one positive aspect. Trade-offs to consider.	 Negative impacts overall.

Risk Management

N/A

Legal Considerations

The Environment Act 2021 has amended section 40 of the Natural Environment and Rural Communities Act 2006 to amend the biodiversity duty as follows:

A public authority which has any functions exercisable in relation to England must from time to time consider what action the authority can properly take, consistently with the proper exercise of its functions, to further the general biodiversity objective.

The "general biodiversity objective" is the conservation and enhancement of biodiversity in England through the exercise of functions in relation to England.

After that consideration the authority must (unless it concludes there is no new action it can properly take)—

(a) determine such policies and specific objectives as it considers appropriate for taking action to further the general biodiversity objective, and

(b) take such action as it considers appropriate, in the light of those policies and objectives, to further that objective.

The requirements of (a) above may be satisfied (to any extent) by revising any existing policies and specific objectives for taking action to further the general biodiversity objective.

In complying with the duty, a public authority must in particular have regard to any relevant local nature recovery strategy and any relevant species conservation strategy or protected site strategy prepared by Natural England.

In addition, the Environment Act 2021 requires 'responsible authorities' to prepare and publish local nature recovery strategies. The responsible authority for the area of the GMCA is the Mayor. Regulations made provision in relation to the procedure to be followed in the preparation and publication of these strategies.

Financial Consequences – Revenue

None - £2.6m has already been allocated by the Greater Manchester Combined Authority for the delivery of the Green Spaces Fund. A further £250,000 has been provided by Defra to the GMCA to develop the Greater Manchester Local Nature Recovery Strategy.

Financial Consequences – Capital

None

Number of attachments to the report: 2

Comments/recommendations from Overview & Scrutiny Committee

Background Papers

[GMCA Paper March 2022 – Biodiversity Emergency](#)

[GMCA Paper March 2023 – Greater Manchester Local Nature Recovery Strategy](#)

[GMCA Paper March 2022 – The Greater Manchester Green Spaces Fund](#)

Tracking/ Process

Does this report relate to a major strategic decision, as set out in the GMCA Constitution

No

Exemption from call in

Are there any aspects in this report which means it should be considered to be exempt from call in by the relevant Scrutiny Committee on the grounds of urgency?

No

Bee Network Committee

N/A

Overview and Scrutiny Committee

N/A

1. The Biodiversity Emergency

1.1 Greater Manchester Combined Authority declared a biodiversity emergency in March 2022. This reflected the need for more urgent and ambitious action to tackle the decline in the diversity and abundance of key species and habitats across the city-region.

1.2 There have been efforts across Greater Manchester, both within the private, public and third sectors, to try to halt this decline. The Greater Manchester Combined Authority is playing its part in these, including in:

- Providing an evidence base on the current state of nature in Greater Manchester.
- Developing a Greater Manchester Local Nature Recovery Strategy to set out priorities for nature's recovery.
- Providing funding to community groups, through the Green Spaces Fund, to improve their local natural environment.
- Developing an action plan, as part of its compliance with the Biodiversity Duty, to set out the action the organisation will take for biodiversity and to contribute to the achievement of national goals and targets on biodiversity.

1.3 These are each covered in further detail below.

2. The State of Nature in Greater Manchester

2.1 To better understand the scale of the biodiversity emergency locally, a report on the State of Nature in Greater Manchester has been produced by the Greater Manchester Combined Authority and key partners, and is attached at Annex A.

2.2 This report brings together available local evidence and highlights the urgent challenges faced by nature across the city-region.

2.3 It covers trends in wildlife populations, the extent and condition of our most important spaces for nature, the use of land, pressures on nature, wider benefits we receive from nature and people's access to nature and engagement with it.

2.4 The report is being used to communicate the need for everyone to work together to halt and reverse the decline in biodiversity.

3. The Greater Manchester Local Nature Recovery Strategy

- 4.1 A [Local Nature Recovery Strategy](#) (LNRS) for Greater Manchester is in development, which will set out how and where everyone can work together to help nature recover across the city-region. A total of 48 individual strategies will cover all of England, collectively forming a National Nature Recovery Network.
- 4.2 The strategy for Greater Manchester will set out priorities and targets for nature recovery, measures to help deliver them and maps of where action should be taken. These priorities, maps and targets will support the planning system and help direct funding (public, philanthropic or private) for nature recovery.
- 4.3 Since commencing development of the strategy last summer, significant engagement has taken place, including the launch of a public survey. This engagement will continue with a public consultation later this year before the publication of the final strategy in 2025.

4. The Green Spaces Fund

- 5.1 The Green Spaces Fund was established in 2022 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.
- 5.2 This followed a manifesto commitment from the Mayor in 2021 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.”
- 5.3 The Greater Manchester Combined Authority is investing £2.6m in community-led projects to enable and empower them to do this. 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.
- 5.4 Four rounds of the Fund have been run over the past 2 years, with successful applicants in each round now at various stages in the delivery of their projects, with most Round 1 groups having concluded their projects.
- 5.5 A report on the impact of the Fund has been produced, based on the projects that have concluded and the proposals from the projects that are still ongoing. This is set out at Annex B and includes:

- The 16 projects completed so far (of 86 in total) delivering over 3,000m² of new green space, improving a further 240,000m², planting over 2,000 trees and engaging nearly 5,000 people in volunteering or training.
- The remaining 70 projects still in progress will deliver a further 80,000m² of new green space, enhance a further 340,000m², plant a further 6,500 trees and engage another 3,500 people in volunteering or training.
- All 86 projects bringing in an estimated £800,000 of funding from other sources.
- Nearly half of all projects benefitting those areas ranked in the top 10% most deprived in the country, with 86% in the top 30%.
- Nearly half of all projects benefitting those areas with least access to existing quality green space.
- Green Space Fund Advisors supporting communities in applying to the fund and delivering their projects, with over 85% of applicants of applications from Round 2 onwards supported by an Advisor to apply to the Fund.

5.6 The future of the fund, beyond the four rounds funded to date, will be subject to future decisions.

6. The Biodiversity Duty

6.1 Since the declaration of a Biodiversity Emergency, the Environment Act 2021 has introduced the Biodiversity Duty on public bodies, including all Local Authorities.

6.2 Under the Biodiversity Duty, public authorities must:

- From time to time, consider what action it can properly take, consistently with the proper exercise of its functions, to further the 'general biodiversity objective'.
- Determine (unless it concludes there is no new action it can properly take) such policies and specific objectives as is considered appropriate to based on its consideration to further the 'general biodiversity objective'.

6.3 Take such action as it considers appropriate, in the light of those policies and objectives, to further that objective. The Greater Manchester Combined Authority has considered what it can do on its part to conserve and enhance biodiversity and is now agreeing policies and specific objectives to form part of an action plan, to sit under the GMCA Sustainability Strategy.

5. Recommendations

7.1 The GMCA is requested to note the contents in the attached report, in particular:

1. The publication of a State of Nature Report.
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