

**GREATER MANCHESTER PLANNING & HOUSING COMMISSION**

Date: 17 January 2017

Subject: Key Environment Programmes: Urban Pioneer and Natural Course Update

Report of: Mark Turner, Natural Course GM Team Leader, GMCA

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**PURPOSE OF REPORT**

To update the Commission on the progress being made on the delivery of the DEFRA Urban Pioneer and Natural Course EU Life Integrated Project and to highlight the opportunities that exist to support future economic growth alongside the protection and enhancement of Greater Manchester's natural environment .

**RECOMMENDATION**

That the Commission:

- notes the progress being made in delivering the Urban Pioneer and Natural Course; and
- discusses how the principles and objectives of these initiatives should be considered and reflected in the wider work programme of the Commission such as the GM Spatial Framework.

**CONTACT OFFICERS:**

Mark Turner, Natural Course GM Team Leader, GMCA  
[mark.turner@neweconomymanchester.com](mailto:mark.turner@neweconomymanchester.com)

Adam Booth, Urban Pioneer Manager, Environment Agency  
[adam.booth@environment-agency.gov.uk](mailto:adam.booth@environment-agency.gov.uk)

## **1.0 Purpose**

To update the Commission on the progress being made on the delivery of the DEFRA Urban Pioneer and Natural Course EU Life Integrated Project and to highlight the opportunities that exist to support future economic growth alongside the protection and enhancement of Greater Manchester's natural environment.

## **2.0 Background**

- 2.1 The city region is developing ambitious targets to deliver new homes and new jobs over the next twenty years, to house and sustain a growing population. A more prosperous Greater Manchester, with an increased quality of life for its citizens, is only possible through sustainable development and a thriving ecological network of well-managed, well-loved natural space and green infrastructure. This is a key objective of the draft Greater Manchester Spatial Strategy (GMSF), currently being consulted upon.
- 2.2 Meanwhile, Greater Manchester contains a broad range of valuable habitat types including lowland wetlands, river valleys and canals and areas of woodland, which together make up a significant resource or ecological network.
- 2.3 A paper<sup>1</sup> prepared by GMEU in October 2016, as background to the GMSF process, outlined a series of interventions that could help to develop a more coherent ecological network across Greater Manchester. The paper highlights the importance of water to the geography and economy of Greater Manchester and identifies the crucial role of rivers and waterways in flood risk mitigation.
- 2.4 There is also a growing body of literature concerning the application of a Natural Capital approach as a method of evaluating the wider economic and social benefits from our natural environment.
- 2.5 Two initiatives that are currently being delivered in Greater Manchester that will support delivery and engagement of a Natural Capital approach are Urban Pioneer and Natural Course. The following report provides further detail on these, how they are being delivered and what they mean for the future growth ambitions of Greater Manchester.
- 2.6 The initiatives are supported by the GM Natural Capital Group which held a GMSF consultation event on 30th November which was attended by more than 50 key stakeholders. Based upon this, response has been submitted as part of the GMSF consultation.

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<sup>1</sup> Background Paper - The Natural Environment- Priority Green and Blue Infrastructure  
October 2016, GMEU

### **3.0 Urban Pioneer**

#### *Background*

- 3.1 The Government has committed to improving the environment within a generation. The forthcoming Defra 25 Year Environment Plan (25 YEP) seeks to halt and reverse the decline in Natural Capital, build resilience and support sustainable economic growth and human well-being.

#### *Aims and Objectives*

- 3.2 In August 2016, the Defra Secretary of State announced four Pioneer Projects as key initiatives in the development and delivery of the 25 YEP that will identify good practice and innovative solutions to current environmental challenges using a Natural Capital approach.
- 3.3 The Pioneers are located in four different settings so that they can test the best analytical tools, data and governance approaches across a range of situations and Greater Manchester has been identified as the Urban Pioneer (led by the Environment Agency).
- 3.4 The Pioneers will support communities and decision-makers as they work to improve the environment within their areas, focusing on different local challenges and situations. The Pioneers will work with and build on existing successful local initiatives and learn lessons from as many sources as possible over the next few years.
- 3.5 The main aims of the Urban Pioneer, as set out by Government, are to:
- Test new tools and methods as part of applying a Natural Capital approach in practice;
  - Demonstrate a joined-up, integrated approach to delivery;
  - Pioneer and 'scale-up' the use of new funding opportunities; and
  - Grow our understanding of 'what works', sharing lessons and best practice.
- 3.6 Within the Urban Pioneer this approach will be used to seek improvements in the natural environment to bring about positive changes to the lives of Greater Manchester's citizens. Principally through improvements in;
- Health and Wellbeing
  - Supporting growth and prosperity
  - Empowering and educating citizens to understand and value their natural environment
  - Exploration of innovative ways to fund environmental interventions.

## *Delivery and Timescales*

- 3.7 The Urban Pioneer will bring together key stakeholders to improve the natural environment across Greater Manchester by supporting ongoing projects to work in a more integrated way and assisting in the achievement of going beyond the targets set in current plans and policies.
- 3.8 Due to the collaborative way of working there are both national and local governance arrangements in place for the project.
- Locally an Urban Pioneer Deliver Group has been created from the Local Nature Partnership (Greater Manchester Natural Capital Group) and will act as the project's steering group. Nationally there is the Pioneer Steering Group co-ordinating the asks of Government across the Pioneers and ensures consistency where appropriate.
  - Reporting will be on an ongoing basis and the development of an evaluation framework is currently taking place.
  - There have been a number of workshops and engagement events held within Greater Manchester and wider to support the development of the Urban Pioneer. The Natural Capital Committee<sup>2</sup> held a round table event on 23rd November 2016 in Manchester
  - Planned events include GM's Natural Capital Group Annual Conference on 1<sup>st</sup> February 2017, which will host a number of relevant workshops, and a future event targeted at Health and Wellbeing. Key speakers confirmed include Emma Howard Boyd Chair of the Environment Agency and Dr William Bird, CEO of Intelligent Health. An invitation has also been sent from the Mayor of Salford for Defra Ministerial representation.
- 3.9 Defra are looking to provide early support to the Pioneers through a central evidence project looking to develop high level Natural Capital accounts for Greater Manchester this financial year.
- 3.10 The lifespan of the Urban Pioneer is until 2020, however it is required to produce learnings on an ongoing basis. The first year will seek to develop the baseline assessment of the natural environment identifying opportunities and exploring how it can add value and support existing national and local policies and frameworks.

## **4.0 Natural Course**

### *Background*

- 4.1 Natural Course is an EU LIFE Integrated Project aimed at integrated water management through accelerating delivery towards the objectives of the EU

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<sup>2</sup> The Natural Capital Committee provides advice to the government on the sustainable use of natural capital with a primary focus on helping the government develop its 25 year environment plan.

Water Framework Directive (WFD) and improved flood risk management. The project spans the North West England River Basin District, with an early focus on the River Irwell catchment. Natural Course is delivered by a partnership comprising the Environment Agency, United Utilities, the Greater Manchester Combined Authority (with Salford City Council acting as lead authority), the Rivers Trust and Natural England.

#### *Aims and Objectives*

- 4.2 Natural Course began in October 2015 and will run for 10 years with budgets and work programmes split into four equal phases of 2.5 years.
- 4.3 Because of the scale, complexity and in some cases the high cost of WFD delivery, Natural Course focuses on integration; both between the project partners and more widely among organisations and sectors that can contribute to integrated water management. Natural Course promotes an integrated catchment approach, working through the established network of Catchment Partnerships and employs a Natural Capital approach to tackling the challenges presented by the WFD and increased flood risk management where possible.

#### *Delivery and Timescales*

- 4.4 The focus of the current phase of Natural Course is the development of an integrated water management framework through a series of “Preparatory Actions” including:
  - A desk top collection and analysis of existing data, or evidence, from the River Irwell catchment and development of a programme of works, or measures to address the challenges presented by the WFD (to be completed February 2017).
  - Collation and sharing of ecological and environmental information about the River Irwell catchment working with volunteers to conduct surveys aimed at filling gaps in knowledge about the ecology of the catchment (on-going to March 2018).
  - Modelling the River Irwell catchment to understand the potential value and impact of Natural Flood Risk Management (NFRM) interventions to contribute to reduced flood risk across the catchment (to be completed February 2017).
  - Understanding and mapping the opportunities to restore and re-naturalise “heavily-modified” waterbodies so as to provide maximum ecosystem service benefits across the River Irwell catchment.
  - Identifying and understanding the synergies between water management challenges and sources of investment from different sectors and opportunities to align investment to enhance and accelerate delivery of multiple water management benefits for the River Irwell catchment (to be completed June 2017).

## **5.0 Recommendation**

That the Commission:

- notes the progress being made in delivering the Urban Pioneer and Natural Course; and
- discusses how the principles and objectives of these initiatives should be considered and reflected in the wider work programme of the Commission such as the GM Spatial Framework.