

The Future of Greater Manchester

etc.venues, 11 Portland Street, Manchester

7th January 2019

Full speech transcript

Over the last 20 years, Greater Manchester has made great strides.

We have succeeded because of an ability to think big, to act as one and because of a shared passionate belief in this place, its people and its potential.

Today we stick to that approach as we set out our plans for the future of Greater Manchester in the next 20 years.

This is the right time to do it.

At a time of national uncertainty, Greater Manchester is starting the year with confidence and a clear, united statement about our future direction.

We know where we want to go and today we invite partners and investors to join us on that journey.

We believe the package we are announcing is radical, offers new thinking on the big challenges - housing, transport and the environment - and cuts through the policy paralysis of Brexit.

Increasingly, city-regions will be the engines of social and economic change.

Governments around Europe are struggling to keep up with the pace of change and hold people together. There is a strong feeling that some places are being overlooked and left behind, others held back.

City-regions can provide the answer to this, driving change more quickly but also more inclusively from the bottom up.

In the UK, we're well placed to lead this. Manchester was after all the original modern city. We are today signalling our clear intention to be part of the group of the most progressive, most forward-thinking city-regions in the world, working together to bring the future forward.

We want to accelerate change towards a cleaner, greener, fairer Greater Manchester and it is to that end that, since the Mayoral Election in 2017, the Deputy Mayors, Leaders and I have been reviewing all our policies.

We have been thinking deeply about how to take maximum advantage of our unique selling point - the most advanced devolution deal of any city-region in England - and turn it to the full benefit of our three million residents.

Today we put the pieces of the jigsaw together for the first time and reveal the big picture: a Greater Manchester where prosperity, opportunity, health, hope and happiness are widely and fairly shared across all our people and places.

Where everyone has a secure job and safe home.

Where young people are supported to have high ambitions and older people can live life to the full.

Where we catch people if they fall and no-one is forced to sleep on our streets.

And where, crucially, everyone has green space to enjoy and clean air to breathe.

These are big ambitions which require big decisions and big changes.

We are ready to make them.

We start with the foundation for it all - our spatial and planning framework.

None of our goals will be achievable unless they are underpinned by a credible plan to deliver the right homes in the right places, good jobs in modern industries - whilst at the same time protecting valuable green space.

Of course, finding a balance between these things is much easier said than done.

When we consulted on the first GMSF, the public sent us back a pretty clear message that we hadn't found the right balance.

The burden of development was too weighted towards green space, they said.

It wouldn't produce homes people could afford, was too dependent on road transport and would worsen congestion, they warned.

We listened, reflected and today present a radical re-write as promised.

The new GMSF is driven by a different, more interventionist approach: not developer-led but place-led.

A radical re-write which doesn't just protect more green space but supports radical new housing, industry, transport and environmental policies for Greater Manchester.

It starts from the right place – a clearly-stated “brownfield-preference” approach, directing development in the first instance to our urban sites with greater proximity to public transport.

As a result of this, I can today confirm a major cut in the proposed use of greenbelt land from the original GMSF of over 50%.

We are also proposing significant new protections on other green space. As a result, 60% of all green space in Greater Manchester will have enhanced protection.

The truth is I would have liked to go further and get closer to the aim of “no net loss” of greenbelt. That was under active consideration but effectively made impossible by the Government’s insistence on us using the old population and housing figures, which are significantly higher than the most recent ONS projections.

It was decided that our plan would be at considerable risk if it diverged from the methodology and the greatest risk of all to our greenbelt is to have no plan in place.

So it is right to push ahead, to keep high ambitions for growth in jobs and homes but, by focusing on higher-density development and town centres, we can do so while still protecting more precious green space.

We have all been hearing about the decline in the traditional high street.

This new GMSF anticipates this accelerating trend and foresees a new future for the proud towns that circle this great city; as residential rather than retail centres; good living centres with flexible workspace, quality public realm, public transport and cycle-ways.

Just as this city pioneered city-centre living 20 years ago, so we will now show how our towns can provide the modern, affordable homes we need for young and old alike.

These new communities will breathe new life into our towns, filling redundant space with a new leisure and cultural offer.

Reversing the decline of our towns is a big prize and we recognise that it will not come with the old piecemeal approach to town centre development.

We need to help councils galvanise partners around a shared town masterplan and use new powers to make it happen.

So, to this end, I can today confirm our intention to consult on the creation of the first Mayoral Development Corporation in Greater Manchester and the first in the UK to focus on a town centre.

The Stockport MDC, which will be locally funded, will complete the regeneration of Stockport town centre with a new plan for the area around the famous railway arches. It will be supported by the new Stockport Interchange - a pioneering example of how new homes, quality open space can be integrated within new public transport infrastructure.

If successful, we will extend the MDC approach to other towns through our Town Centre Challenge.

Its great attraction is that it simultaneously allows us to tackle two big problems - town centre decline and the housing crisis - and provides an integrated solution.

Where the first GMSF was a plan to build more homes, the second supports a plan to solve the housing crisis. And there is a very big difference between those two things.

That's why it must be read alongside the radical new housing vision for Greater Manchester, which the City Mayor of Salford will unveil shortly.

It contains a new commitment to build over 50,000 truly affordable homes in Greater Manchester - 30,000 of them for social rent - and is a solution equal to the scale of the housing crisis, given the numbers on our waiting lists.

But we can't realise our goal of a good home for everyone without a radical plan for our existing housing stock.

Too many homes in our private-rented sector are not maintained to the decent standard.

They are used to rake in public funds even when they present a risk to the residents inside and our communities around them.

We are not prepared to let this continue.

So we will launch a new drive to raise standards in the private-rented sector, including the development of a GM Good Landlord Scheme.

This will allow the public to make a clear separation between the many good landlords we have from the unscrupulous operators who disrespect our residents and communities.

They are not welcome here.

A GM Good Landlord scheme will help us ensure the safety of the housing stock by targeting enforcement action, led by our councils, Greater Manchester Fire & Rescue Service, HMRC and other partners.

As part of this, we will work with GM Housing Providers in considering all routes to tackle unfit, unsafe properties, including an amnesty. This would give owners of unfit properties an opportunity to arrange the transfer property to partner organisations at an agreed price to avoid enforcement action.

These policies will be funded from a new surplus fund created by the successful Greater Manchester Housing Fund. It is a policy which powerfully symbolises our redistributive, inclusive growth approach.

In effect, proceeds on loans on city-centre developments will be recycled to support housing renewal in existing, outlying communities - a great example of how a successful city-centre can benefit all parts of Greater Manchester and why it makes sense to work as one GM.

Radical new thinking on housing needs to be matched with the same on transport.

Alongside the new GMSF, we are today publishing a Transport 2040 delivery plan listing 65 projects that we will seek to prioritise over the next five years supported by the latest allocation from the Transforming Cities Fund.

The new GMSF seeks to create a much clearer link between development and public transport, rejecting the outdated thinking of building only for the car.

We are committing today to prioritise projects which encourage people to change how they commute and reduce use of the car, including new train stations, two new Metrolink stops, as well as boosting parking capacity at existing sites.

This will form the basis of a new, high-profile Park & Ride service across Greater Manchester launched to coincide with the extension of Metrolink to the Trafford Centre.

It will all be reinforced by our radical commitment to invest £160 million in a world-class cycling and walking network - the ground-breaking Beelines concept pioneered by our Commissioner Chris Boardman.

New thinking on integrated transport is crucial if we are to help people change how they move around, bring levels of road congestion under control and achieve our legal obligations to clean up our air.

But they are not enough on their own to do that.

We will shortly submit proposals to the Government showing how we intend to bring levels of air pollution to within legal limits as quickly as possible.

There is still work to be done on the precise detail of the proposals, as Cllr Alex Ganotis will shortly explain.

But we are minded to support the introduction of a Greater Manchester-wide Category C Clean Air Zone, seeking to restrict the most-polluting HGVs, LGVs, buses and taxis from using our roads.

I want to stress two things as emphatically as I can. First, this is not a charge to use the roads – a congestion charge – but a penalty scheme for non-compliant vehicles. People with a compliant vehicle would have no fine to pay.

Second, it would not apply to private cars registered in Greater Manchester, 80% of which are already compliant.

We believe that restrictions on the remaining 20% would neither be progressive nor proportionate.

We recognise that this approach will have significant implications for business – particularly small businesses and the self-employed – and we will therefore be seeking support from the Government to establish financial schemes to help GM-based businesses to change their vehicles.

This process will help us begin the reform of bus and taxi services in Greater Manchester, by applying a clearer set of GM standards for all vehicles.

As difficult as this change will be for some, we are not prepared to delay it.

It is the poorest kids in the poorest communities who are today breathing in the most polluted air.

We have a moral obligation to act to improve their health and early development.

Our clean air plan is part of a radical new environmental policy for Greater Manchester.

The new GMSF proposes a deadline of 2028 for all new development here to be zero-carbon and a new GM-wide policy of opposition to fracking.

In turn, these policies support the proposal that will go to our Green Summit in March of a carbon-neutral Greater Manchester by 2038.

By embracing the future ahead of other areas, we will not only clean up our air and our environment, we will can become a global leader in the green, clean economy.

There is no reason why the place which led the first industrial revolution cannot lead the fourth.

But, for that to happen, it brings me back to where I started.

Our ambitions for Greater Manchester will only be realised if we get the most out of our best asset – our people.

That means good, secure employment for everyone.

Sir Richard Leese is leading the process of developing a new Industrial Strategy, with the help of partners in our business community and our outstanding universities, which we hope to agree with the Government later this year. As Sir Richard will shortly explain, it will be a plan to make Greater Manchester a global force in future industries, such as health innovation, new materials and advanced and digital manufacturing.

The new GMSF allocates the sites where these new industries could be developed at scale. So while we have MediaCity and SportCity today, think HealthCity, GrapheneCity and TechCity of the future.

But, more than just new jobs, we need to be thinking about improving the quality of all jobs.

Alongside the Industrial Strategy, we will launch Greater Manchester's Good Employment Charter – a plan intended to improve business productivity as much as people's working lives.

We will also publish a Local Skills Plan to help connect our businesses with our schools and colleges in a more coordinated system.

Getting the best from our people means focusing much more on the true future of Greater Manchester – our young people.

Too many growing up here cannot see their place in the new economy we are building.

Too many, when asked, say they don't have hope for their future.

Unless we do something about that, our best-laid plans will fail.

We need to break the cycle of low educational achievement, low ambition and paying for the consequences of social failure.

So this is my final announcement.

From this September, on a two-year trial basis, as part of our progress towards bus reform, we will give all 16 to 18 year-olds here an Opportunity Pass – free bus travel to ensure that life horizons are not limited by financial barriers; a passport to study, apprenticeship or work but more than that; free or reduced entry to participating sporting, cultural and leisure venues.

We will now ask our Youth Combined Authority to help us build the Opportunity Pass so that we empower our young people to get the support that they feel they need to make their way in the world.

From most of the outlying boroughs in Greater Manchester, young people can see this city centre changing on a weekly basis, rising upwards.

Some tell me that it feels like a different world; that they can't imagine themselves working here.

The message I am sending them today is clear and direct.

This is your city. Explore it, own it, build it.

We believe in you and we will back you.

Help us build the future for Greater Manchester we have set out today.

We recognise that some of the policies we are announcing today imply significant change.

That's why we will continue to consult and listen as we take them forward.

But the time has come to make decisions, stake out our course and make this next 20-year chapter in Greater Manchester's story even more exciting than the last.

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