

MANCHESTER CITY COUNCIL

REPORT FOR INFORMATION

COMMITTEE: Physical Environment Overview and Scrutiny Committee
DATE: 6th March 2007
SUBJECT: Progress Report on the Manchester Waterways Strategy
REPORT OF: Strategic Director, Neighbourhood Services

PURPOSE OF REPORT

To provide Members with an overview of progress with regard to the Manchester Waterways Strategy.

RECOMMENDATIONS

That Members note the report.

FINANCIAL CONSEQUENCES FOR THE REVENUE BUDGET

None at present

FINANCIAL CONSEQUENCES FOR THE CAPITAL BUDGET

None at present

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BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS

Reports to the Physical Environment Overview and Scrutiny Committee:
a) Waterways Strategy for Manchester October 2003
b) Progress Report on the Waterways Strategy 8th March 2005

WARDS AFFECTED

All

IMPLICATIONS FOR KEY COUNCIL POLICIES

Anti Poverty	Equal Opportunities	Environment	Employment
No	No	Yes	Yes

1. Introduction and Background

- 1.1 In October 2003 the Executive agreed the Manchester Waterways Strategy. The aim of the strategy is to maximise the potential of the City's waterways in terms of the benefit they offer to local residents, the economy and the environment. The strategy is based around the seven objectives of management, access, regeneration, environment, recreation, crime & safety and social inclusion.
- 1.2 Quarterly progress monitoring since the beginning of 2005/06 has established a baseline of activity across the City's waterways and it is intended that this will inform future strategic decision-making by the Council and other partners.
- 1.3 a number of waterways-based projects and partnerships are ongoing. A range of Council services are represented at the steering groups for these projects and partnerships, with the purpose of promoting and progressing the Manchester Waterways Strategy. Attendance at the steering groups has enabled regular partner updates, the opportunity to influence the activities of partners and has identified areas of potential joint working.
- 1.4 In recognition of problems being encountered in the maintenance of certain canals, a working group has been formed between ourselves, other affected authorities and British Waterways. This will aim to identify and resolve the highly complex land ownership and maintenance liability issues that are currently adversely affecting the quality of our canal infrastructure, and put in place a long-term plan to secure their onward use and improvement.

2. Progress to Date

- 2.1 Since the Strategy's launch in 2003, over £6m of environmental improvements have been realised across Manchester's rivers and canals.
- 2.2 Since January 2006 the City Council and partner organisations have undertaken a range of actions in support of the Manchester Waterways Strategy. Particular highlights from the last 12-months are listed briefly below.
 - 2.2.1 *New Islington, Ancoats* – the new water park at New Islington that links the Ashton and Rochdale Canals was opened in the Summer 2006. This features the first new stretch of canal seen in the UK for many decades, and native planting schemes and landscaping provide an important habitat for wildlife.
 - 2.2.2 *Medlock Valley NWDA Funding* – the NWDA have approved nearly £3m for access and environmental improvements in the Medlock Valley. This includes the development of strategic gateways, high quality access routes, signage and interpretation as well as long-term site-specific management and maintenance programmes. Recent improvements include new fencing, and landscaping.

- 2.2.3 *Irk Valley Local Plan* – the Irk Valley is Manchester’s longest river valley, extending from the City Centre to Heaton Park in the North of the City. The Irk Valley Local Plan aims to focus on strategic and detailed open space improvements, in order to address the fragmented management and maintenance of the existing open space network outside the major parks. The Executive approved the Plan on 17/01/07. To date, over £3m has been spent on significant environmental regeneration. This will compliment large scale Housing Market Renewal works scheduled for the forthcoming years in the Lower Irk valley.
- 2.2.4 *Moston Vale, Irk Valley* – one of 23 sites in the Mersey belt chosen to pilot the Newlands land regeneration programme. Over £1.7m of work has now been completed on this 21hectare derelict former landfill site. The partnership includes Red Rose Forest, MCC, Groundwork and the Forestry Commission. Over 7,500 trees have been planted, 2km of new paths constructed lit by one of the largest solar lighting projects in Britain installed. A unique 20-year long-term management agreement with the Forestry Commission will ensure the long-term viability of Moston Vale.
- 2.2.5 *Waterways Planning Policies* – new waterways planning policies are being introduced through The Guide to Development in Manchester 2. These tighten up the approach to flood risk assessment, and advocate the use of Sustainable Urban Drainage schemes (SUDS) in new developments. Further information on SUDS, and their uptake in Manchester is available in the Water Quality Report.
- 2.2.6 *Environment Agency* – A memorandum of understanding is in place to ensure that MCC and the Agency work closely to deliver common goals.
- 2.2.7 *Safety Measures* – work to the city centre canals has included new lighting, help points, and graffiti removal. Together with Groundwork, Greater Manchester Police and British Waterways we have put a scheme in place to secure two rangers, working four times per week to patrol the City Centre waterways. The rangers will be provided with a radio link to the Police with the primary purpose to deter crime. A Rochdale Canal patrol has been set-up between British Waterways and GM Police to help reduce crime and tackle anti-social behaviour in Ancoats, Clayton, Miles Platting and Newton Heath.
- 2.2.8 *Green City Targets* - Six litter hotspots on Manchester’s rivers were identified in 2005. At the latest review in August 2006, 2 sites were recognised as no longer being litter hotspots, with significant improvement at 3 of the other sites. The Green City target is to increase the percentage of sites of satisfactory litter cleanliness from 80% to 100%. Further information is in Appendix A.
- 2.2.9 *Community Activities and Awareness Raising* - Ensuring local people are aware of and involved in our waterways is key to successful regeneration. Examples of the range and breadth of activities includes the 333 public events which have been run in the Medlock Valley since 2003. These have included weekly, organised heath walks, school visits and activities by the

Friends of Groups. Cycling events have been run in conjunction with the Velodrome, while many practical conservation days are organised to complement the Wildabout Manchester fortnight in 100 Days. Four walks were carried out in the City Centre with elderly Chinese residents, working with the Manchester Oriental Organisations Alliance. Using translators, the residents were informed about projects and historical data about the waterways. During Mersey Basin Week October 2006 a clean up event was held in Castlefield with volunteers from the Mersey Basin Business Foundation and Manchester University. Three boat trips were also held to show local children the Bridgewater Canal. Piccadilly Village was included in the City Centre entry in 2006 that won the silver gilt award in the Regeneration Category. In 2007 the City Centre waterways will form a separate entry to the competition. British Waterways has produced a web-based resource for use by all local primary schools and enables self-guided visits to the Rochdale and Ashton canals. Details are available at www.wow4water.net

2.2.10 *Biodiversity Improvements* - Blackley Forest was designated as a Local Nature Reserve in July 2005. In 2006 Clayton Vale and Chorlton Meadows were designated as a Local Nature Reserves. Broadhurst Clough was designated as a Site of Biological Importance in 2005. Many of the improvements detailed above will enhance the biodiversity of our waterways and continued awareness raising events such as Wildabout will provide Manchester people with an insight into the wealth of wild habitats and species which are on their door step.

3. Summary

- 3.1 Irwell City Park, the Rochdale Canal regeneration strategy, the Irk Valley and the Medlock Valley are just some of the ongoing projects that recognise the valuable contribution Manchester's rivers and canals make to the City's residents, visitors and businesses.
- 3.2 It is clear that since the Manchester Waterways Strategy was launched in 2003 there has been significant activity and progress across all of the City's rivers and canals, in terms of the seven wide-ranging objectives. However, we need to remain realistic about how much is still to be done. Significant work is still needed citywide not only in terms of improvements at specific sites but also in terms of how these improvements are sustained through long-term management and maintenance by the Council and partners.
- 3.3 In terms of recreational usage there is evidence, particularly from the Irk, Medlock and Mersey that visitor numbers and event attendance continue to rise. As the river valleys mature this recreational usage will undoubtedly increase. The role that the river valleys play as key elements in establishing citywide sustainable communities is also set to increase, as recognised in North Manchester, for example, within the Irk Valley Local Plan.
- 3.4 Whilst there has been considerable success in relation to Manchester's waterways, it is recognised that the scope of the Strategy does not encompass all of the issues pertinent today. The Green City Programme

has a target to achieve acceleration of the water quality improvement programme with the Environment Agency and United Utilities. Flood risk and water resource levels in the waterways are likely to be affected by climate change. In addition to this, the recently introduced Water Framework Directive aims for all European waters to achieve “good” ecological and chemical status by 2015. Future work will therefore require us to broaden our approach to the waterways so that water quality and climate change issues are also addressed. Further information on this is in section 4.

4 Action Plan for 2007/08

- 4.1 The EC Water Framework Directive (WFD) is the most significant piece of water legislation of the past 30 years. The core environmental objectives of the WFD are to prevent deterioration of aquatic ecosystems and to restore polluted surface waters and groundwater to “good” ecological and chemical status by 2015.
- 4.2 This coming year and beyond will see a particular focus on water quality, in partnership with the Environment Agency and United Utilities, as part of a the timetable of work stretching to 2027 for implementation and review of progress on the WFD.
- 4.3 It is important to appreciate the full scope of the WFD. Land management issues are identified as a key element of achieving the challenging water quality improvements that the WFD requires. Work is therefore necessary to influence the form and design of the built environment to ensure it does not have direct and/or indirect impacts on water quality. This is particularly important in terms of the effect that buildings and hard-surfacing can have in terms of surface water run-off, localised flash flooding, sewerage back-up and combined sewer overflow into Manchester watercourses. Work is also required to ensure that areas of greenspace adjacent to waterways are appropriately managed so that water quality improvements are realised. The importance of this has been reflected in the revised Guide to Development 2, and as part of the core brief for the production of a new Local Development Framework.
- 4.4 The WFD further recognises the opportunity to naturalise culverted and canalised waterways in terms of improving water quality and reintegrating waterways into the wider environment. In Manchester this is likely to take place through the delivery of wide scale regeneration schemes and specific developments adjacent to waterways. It is therefore important that such schemes are fully informed by the Manchester Waterways Strategy and the requirements of the Water Framework Directive.
- 4.5 Opportunities to proactively improve waterways through non-development related activity are also important. The works at Blackley Vale, for example, were realised through securing £47,000 of Environment Agency money, which acted as a tool in leveraging in an additional £50,000 of support.
- 4.6 A joined-up approach across a range of Council services is required in order to realise both the potential of the City’s waterways and to comply with the legal requirements of the Water Framework Directive. Planning, Highways,

Regeneration, Environmental Services and Leisure, among others, all have important roles to play. Continued joint working with the Environment Agency is also planned as a key element for the coming year.

- 4.7 Council working with the various waterways-based projects and partnerships is also set to continue for 2007/08. This will enable regular partner updates, the opportunity to influence the future activities of partners and the ability to identify areas of potential joint working.
- 4.8 The Environment Agency's 'SuperSUDS' project is an example of the joint working planned for 2007/08. 'Sustainable Urban Drainage Systems' (SUDS) are a more natural way to manage surface water run-off from buildings and areas of hard-standing. Whilst required by national planning policy, SUDS are largely under-utilised in England, including Manchester. MCC's involvement in SuperSUDS will provide practical information and guidance to enable MCC to implement and require SUDS in new regeneration and development schemes.
- 4.9 *Irwell litter boat* – the proposal for a litter retrieval boat to operate on the River Irwell is being prepared by Mersey Basin Campaign. In order to purchase the boat a funding application is being submitted to Onyx for landfill tax credits, towards the total cost of £155,000, this bid is supported by funding commitments from Manchester, Salford and Trafford Councils. The outcome of the application is expected in 2007/08. Baseline survey work to assess litter levels in order to monitor the impact of the boat commenced in January 2007.
- 4.10 The follow up to the first ever *Greater Manchester Waterways Forum* is being planned by Mersey Basin Campaign to take place in May/ June 2007, with the intention to hold the event in Manchester.
- 4.11 *University links* – MCC and Mersey Basin Campaign are continuing to build on established links with the local universities. Masters students at both Manchester and the Metropolitan Universities will produce projects in May 2007 looking at case studies and the value of best practice waterside regeneration.
- 4.12 *Lower Medlock Regeneration* – New East Manchester have appointed Taylor Woodrow, Lovell and Bellway Homes as development partners in the Lower Medlock Valley. A masterplan is currently being prepared to increase housing in this area and to link the Lower Medlock to surrounding regeneration areas and the City Centre through access and open space quality improvements. This should be available in 2007/08.
- 4.13 *Black Redstarts* are a rare, protected species of bird, which have had a population in Manchester since at least 1989. They have recently been spotted in the Northern Quarter and around Piccadilly Basin, particularly on the adjacent waterways and brownfield land, which provide a home to insects that the birds feed on. In 2007/08 discussions between the Council and developers are expected to come to fruition on a number of City Centre schemes where rooftop habitat for Black Redstarts has been suggested.

- 4.14 *Venice of the North* – Action Manchester Waterways is delivering the Venice of the North element of the Sense of Place project being led by Marketing Manchester. £220K of ERDF funding will be spent on improvements to infrastructure and furniture along the towpaths, a coloured lighting scheme and a heritage trail along the City Centre waterways. The project will be delivered in 2007/08.
- 4.15 *Rochdale Canal Regeneration Strategy* – this is being prepared by British Waterways, Calderdale, Manchester, Oldham and Rochdale and is expected to be in place by Summer 2007.
- 4.16 *Irwell City Park* – a joint project between Manchester, Salford and Trafford Councils is underway in order to regenerate the River Irwell corridor. The project will be submitted to the Big Lottery Fund in May 2007 for up to £25m funding, and is centred on making a major improvement to the quality, access and amenity of this major waterway. Proposed measures include new bridges over the waterways and significant improvements to the public realm.
- 4.17 *Moston Brook* –The Moston Brook corridor is made up of approximately 60 hectares of land, and runs between two local authorities; Manchester City Council and Oldham Metropolitan Borough Council (the river marks the boundary). Past work to improve the corridor has led to its use for fishing, other recreational activities such as bowls, and as a walkers route between New Moston and Failsworth. However, it is listed as a polluted river according to Environment Agency data, and issues regarding its use by flytippers, off road bikers and historical contamination mean that the area is of poor environmental quality. MCC is now providing £20,000 in funds and leading on a partnership project with Oldham MBC. The money will be used to produce a detailed feasibility study and action plan, and identify and secure further funds to improve the quality of the Moston Brook Corridor.

Appendix A – Litter Hotspots

MED 14 – Palmerston Street, Ancoats

This site forms part of the Lower Medlock Valley regeneration area and as such will be improved as part of wider scale regeneration. In the short term works are planned for 2007/08 to carry out ongoing litter removal and vegetation management.

MED 23 – Bank Bridge Street

A 2m-high fence was been installed in early-2006 to prevent the significant fly-tipping problem that has been prevalent for a number of years. There is need for the removal of historic debris but there has been a drastic improvement in this hotspot following the installation of the fence. The site is now part of ongoing Medlock Valley management and maintenance programme with regular biodiversity activities arranged for the adjacent Bank Bridge Meadow site.

IRK 3 – Collyhurst Road, Newtown

This is now included in the Irk Valley management programme. Recent visits have shown improvements and would suggest that site is no longer a litter hotspot priority.

IRK 9 – off Smedley Lane, Crumpsall

This is now included in the Irk Valley management programme. Recent visits have shown improvements and would suggest that site is no longer a litter hotspot.

IRW 27 – Julia/ Mary Street, Cheetham

This site is in Valuation and Properties (V&P) ownership and has had basic maintenance works carried out on it early-2006. A 100 Days event was carried out in May 2006 with MCC, Environment Agency and the Mersey Basin Campaign. The site is also part of Irwell City Park so will form part of wider plans for the Irwell corridor. In the short term events are being planned for 2007/08 with MCC, Mersey Basin Campaign and the adjoining Hope City Church.

MED 10 – off Hoyle Street, City Centre

There are very limited opportunities for intervention due to access restrictions at this narrow, heavily canalised stretch of the river. Improvement is dependent on regeneration activity in this area.