

12. Civic spaces

Definition

- 12.1 Civic spaces include civic and market squares and other hard surfaced community areas designed for pedestrians. The primary purpose of civic spaces is the provision of a setting for civic buildings, public demonstrations and community events. Civic spaces often define the character of urban environments and have been particularly instrumental in the regeneration of Manchester City Centre.

Piccadilly Gardens, Manchester



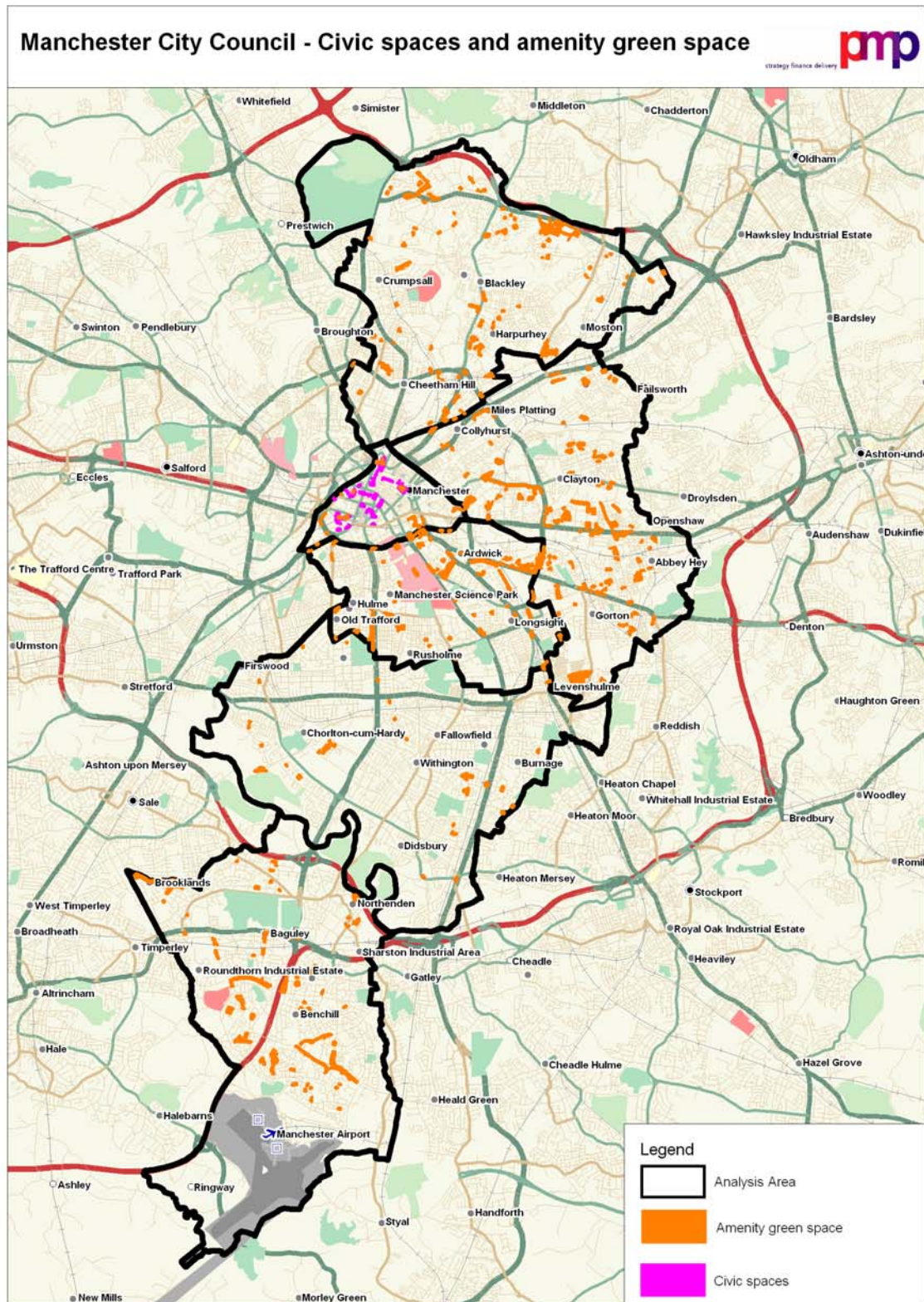
Strategic context and consultation

- 12.2 PPG 17 states that “the purpose of civic spaces, mainly in town and city centres, is to provide a setting for civic buildings, opportunities for open air markets, demonstrations and civic events. They are normally provided on an opportunistic and urban design led basis. Accordingly it is for planning authorities to promote urban design frameworks for their town and city centre areas”.
- 12.3 Over 40% of residents use civic spaces more than once a month, making this type of open space one of the more frequently used spaces. Furthermore, civic spaces are particularly important to visitors to the City and to workers. Civic spaces are predominantly located within the City Centre area. There are however civic spaces located sporadically across other areas of the City, for example the Wythenshawe Forum Area.
- 12.4 There are no definitive national or local standards for civic spaces. However, the City Centre Strategic Plan 2008 - 2012 does make references to the provision of public open space. The plan provides a framework to build on previous successes and for continued regeneration, investment and service improvement in the City Centre over the coming years. The creation of world class public realm is central to the achievement of the objectives of this plan, and the importance of effective design, management and promotion are key strategic objectives of the strategy.
- 12.5 Civic spaces that meet local community need will be a key means of raising the profile of Manchester on a national and worldwide scale.

Current Provision

- 12.6 29 civic spaces have been identified throughout the audit. These range from small squares to large shopping areas. Consultation highlights the following key issues with regards the quality, quantity and access to civic spaces:
- 56.41% of residents feel that there should be more civic spaces in Manchester. The highest level of dissatisfaction was located in Wythenshawe where 65.22% of residents felt that the level of provision was nearly enough/not enough
 - 29% of respondents to the household survey felt that the quality of sites was good or very good, with 40% stating that civic spaces were average. The remaining 31% felt that the quality of sites was either poor or very poor. The quality ratings given by residents were similar across all analysis areas, and the modal response that the quality of provision was average
 - perhaps unsurprisingly, the most satisfied residents were those in the City Centre where 43% felt that the quality of the sites was good or very good. Despite this, there was some concern over the design of civic spaces and pedestrian areas within the City Centre. It was felt that due to the high volume of people and proximity to busy transport routes, City Centre civic spaces (Piccadilly Gardens and Albert Square) were being over used. For this reason it was felt that more sites were needed that were functional and located in suitable areas. The need for more green space within the City Centre was a particularly frequent comment received during consultation
 - some comments from the consultation stressed the need for better linkages between public realm within the City Centre, with some respondents noting the difficulty in getting from one site to another.
- 12.7 Site assessments concluded that the quality of civic spaces is lower than some other types of open space, with an average score of only 65%. Despite this, many comments made suggested that the civic spaces provided a nice environment. The key issues raised during site visits were:
- a lack of appropriate ancillary accommodation (for example seating) at some sites in the City
 - litter and rubbish
 - lack of vegetation.
- 12.8 The civic spaces in Manchester are illustrated in Map 12.1. In light of the interrelationship with amenity green spaces, these are also illustrated. It can be seen that civic spaces are interspersed across the City Centre, providing rest and relaxation opportunities as well as areas for social gathering.

Map 12.1 – Civic spaces in Manchester



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Setting a quantity standard

- 12.9 PPG17 suggests that it is not realistic to set a quantity standard for civic spaces in light of the specialist nature of this type of open space.
- 12.10 Therefore **no provision standard** has been set. However, PPG17 adds that it is desirable for planning authorities to promote urban design frameworks for their town and city centres. The design and planning of new neighbourhoods in Manchester should take into account the demand for new civic spaces from local residents and ensure that such spaces are incorporated within master plans.

Quality standard

- 12.11 The quality of each site has been assessed through a detailed site visit and the completion of a detailed pro forma described in Section 2. More detail is provided in Appendix G. It is important to note that the quality score represents a snapshot in time and records only the quality of the site at the time of the site visit. Consultation indicated that the quality of civic spaces has significantly improved in recent years. As illustrated in the quality standard below, ancillary provision is of particular importance to residents.
- 12.12 Full details of the consultation and justifications for the recommended local standard are provided within Appendix G. The recommended local standard, derived directly from consultation across Manchester has been summarised below. While many residents indicated that the quality of civic spaces in Manchester is good, residents stressed the importance of creating a perception of green space in the City Centre. The future evolution of the City Centre should take this into account.

Quality Standard (see Appendix G)

Recommended standard – CIVIC SPACES	
Local consultation, national guidance and best practice suggest that the following features are essential and desirable to local residents:	
Essential	Desirable
Clean/Litter free	Flowers/trees
Seating and litter bins	Security
Detailed analysis of the local consultation suggests that with regards to civic spaces, the relative importance of the key components is as follows:	
Component of quality	Weighting
Security and Safety	1
Cleanliness and maintenance	3
Vegetation	2
Ancillary accommodation	4

Setting an Accessibility standard

- 12.13 PPG17 states that there is no realistic requirement to set catchments for such a typology as the provision of civic spaces will not be appropriate in every environment and cannot be easily influenced through planning policy and implementation.

12.14 Appropriate access to sites is however paramount in maximising usage.

Applying provision standards

12.15 Given that it is not appropriate to set any local quantity or accessibility standards, it is also not appropriate to state areas of deficiency or need based on standards.

12.16 As suggested by PPG17, planning policy should aim to facilitate the delivery of civic spaces where appropriate and to provide guidelines as to the appropriate design for such facilities. The interrelationship between civic spaces and other types of open space in the City Centre is discussed later in this report.

Summary

12.17 There are 29 civic spaces across the City. Throughout the consultation, the aesthetic importance of civic spaces is highlighted and they are perceived to be regularly used by both visitors and residents. Civic spaces function as a key meeting place and provide a release from the stress of work. The redevelopment of civic spaces in Manchester has been a key component of the recent regeneration of the City.

12.18 The nature of this typology means that sites are very specific to their locality. The design and planning of new neighbourhoods in Manchester should take into account demand for new civic spaces from local residents and ensure that such spaces are incorporated within master plans.

12.19 A quality standard has been set as a benchmark for new areas of civic space and the maintenance of existing areas across the City.