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**Manchester City Council  
Report for Information**

**Report to:** Neighbourhoods Scrutiny Committee – 23 February 2016

**Subject:** Update on Parks Strategy

**Report of:** Deputy Chief Executive (Neighbourhoods), Strategic Lead  
(Parks, Leisure & Events)

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**Summary**

This report sets out the background, the analysis of the existing approach and the framework for a revised Parks Strategy. The report highlights the challenges ahead, the proposed vision, and the priorities for generating new ways of working, which will transform our approach, raising standards and making a major contribution to the Council's priorities over the next 5-10 years.

The emerging strategy outlined in this report indicates that we have a unique opportunity to deliver a significantly enhanced community offer through our parks and green spaces, whilst at the same time making these spaces more productive, increasing financial success and reducing operating costs. It is proposed that this overarching framework will be utilised as a basis for consultation to inform the detailed Strategy and priorities for directing funding.

**Recommendations**

Members are recommended to:

1. Note and comment on the contents of this report, the plans to undertake consultation on the Strategy and to note that a future report detailing the final draft Strategy will be presented to the Neighbourhoods Scrutiny Committee and Executive following the consultation process.
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**Wards Affected:** All

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**Background documents (available for public inspection):**

The following documents disclose important facts on which the report is based and have been relied upon in preparing the report. Copies of the background documents are available up to 4 years after the date of the meeting. If you would like a copy please contact one of the contact officers above.

- Parks for All Seasons – A Park Strategy For Manchester (2001)
- State of UK Public Parks 2014: Renaissance to Risk - Heritage Lottery Fund
- Rethinking Parks – 2014-16 Nesta (formerly the National Endowment for Science Technology and the Arts)

## **1.0 A New Parks Strategy for Manchester**

- 1.1 Manchester's parks are an essential component of our City. They contribute to the life of communities in countless ways - places where people relax and take a break from the pace of daily life or pass through on the way to work, school or the shops. They are regularly used by children, parents and families to play together, by people to exercise, improve their health and take part in sport or simply provide a location where friends can meet up and hang-out. They are at the heart of our thriving, sustainable and liveable city.
- 1.2 Manchester understands these values well and has purposefully chosen to invest in its parks since Victorian times. The Manchester Strategy sets out a clear vision for the City over the next ten years from 2016 to 2025. A key part of this strategy includes a continuing commitment to invest in the City's culture, sport and parks.
- 1.3 Whilst the challenges are great there are many things to be encouraged by. From the vast and historic landscapes of Heaton Park in the north, to the smaller and intimate Parsonage Gardens in the south, the quality and accessibility of some of the City's parks has improved over the past 10 years. More people are using them and supporting them through Friends groups and other forms of volunteering. Alexandra Park is the latest example of how these great community assets can be protected and given new life in a way that remains true to their original character and heritage.
- 1.4 It is now 15 years since the City published its last Parks Strategy and whilst much has been achieved over this time we must now revisit and update the strategic aims, objectives and goals of the City's parks and park services. In describing 'a City, where all residents have access to green spaces in which they feel safe to exercise and socialise' the new Manchester Strategy will provide a clear vision and focus for this work.
- 1.5 This new Parks Strategy will be informed and refined by consultation, on-going research and analysis. Consultation will involve both individuals and organisations who have a stake in the future of our parks. The strength of this process lies as much in the journey as the destination and much of the value of the final document will be attributed to its collaborative preparation and consultation.
- 1.6 From the outset Manchester has been considered a pioneer of the public parks movement and was the first of the major industrial cities to develop municipal parks. Unlike many other towns and cities that took a more traditional approach to public funding the whole of Manchester's community was involved in fundraising through public subscription.
- 1.7 Whilst it was heavily industrialised, 'Manchester took its civic duties very seriously, and by the early 20th century it boasted more public parks than any other English City outside London'. In many ways these original motives for park-making remain as true today and the legacy of Manchester's early park

pioneers provide a strong foundation on which to continue to invest in the City's great wealth of public parks.

- 1.8 The last two decades has seen Manchester undergo a significant physical transformation. High levels of inward capital investment have resulted in a much more modern, vibrant and populous city. This transformation has been undertaken at a time when the resources available to support the maintenance of parks and green spaces have faced reductions year on year. As a consequence Manchester's green assets have not always been maintained or achieve the standard a world class city would aspire to.
- 1.9 Parks and green spaces continue to make a major contribution to the Council's priorities and provide many economic, environmental, health, recreational and social benefits for Manchester's residents. It has been calculated that there are over 28.5m visits to the City's parks per year. Parks and green spaces make a regular and important contribution to quality of life by providing free, accessible, high quality provision at a local level making a significant contribution to both the health and social and physical regeneration of an area. They also contribute to vibrant neighbourhoods which attract people to want to live, work, visit and invest in Manchester.
- 1.10 The Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF) has published the *State of UK Public Parks 2014: Renaissance to Risk* report which documents public and Lottery investment over the last two decades and the improvement that this funding has made. The report highlights that parks are drivers of local and regional economies, and are recognised as such by decision makers and governments worldwide. There has been a shift in focus from the park's own 'bottom line' to seeing parks as part of a bigger picture for the economics of the City and its region which includes:
- Parks being part of policy frameworks for property development, taxation incomes and service charging.
  - Stimulating economic regeneration beyond their own boundaries.
  - Working across sectors – no longer just working in the public sector, but also with the private sector.
  - Being seen as positive value added investments, and a platform for 'good economics'.
  - Active investment in parks to stimulate economic and social development including creating new jobs, increased land value, increased rental values, and also house price rises that on average are 6% higher in areas close to parks.
- 1.11 The City is in a period of growth with an expanding population, improvements to transport networks and residential growth with the forecasted creation of 55,000 new homes. We are entering a new era with a staged approach to the to the Greater Manchester governance arrangements, in return for the

devolution of significant additional functional and fiscal responsibilities by Government. The network of Parks in the City will support the response to some of the challenges and opportunities posed by this period of change.

- 1.12 Provision of and access to public open space is recognised as being a key contributor to wellbeing and quality of life which includes parks being central to:
- The character of the built environment
  - Social functions; especially health, recreation and play, social inclusion and community development
  - Environmental quality, economic vitality and sustainability
- 1.13 To deliver best value, a strategic proactive management approach combined with an increasing role played by partnerships must continue to evolve with a broad base of stakeholders that should include existing and future Friends, user and community groups alongside organisations including the Wildlife Trusts, the National Trust, Natural England, Historic England, the Heritage Lottery Fund, Registered Social Landlords and appropriate commercial entities.
- 1.14 New ways to engage and empower stakeholders that builds on their strengths will be identified and new behaviours from partners will be encouraged to improve the social and physical connectivity of parks across the City. This will enable the continual care and regeneration of the City's parks over the 10 years of this strategy and beyond.

## **2.0 The Wider Context**

- 2.1 Whilst Nationally there has been a trend of decreasing funding to parks, this has been recognised by significant investment in Manchester in the last 12 months. *The State of UK Public Parks 2014*, published by the Heritage Lottery Fund, describes a picture where parks are seeing increasing levels of park use and the growth in numbers and membership of Friends groups. At the same time parks' departments have faced unprecedented cuts to both staffing and budgets.
- 2.2 In response Nesta, a national innovation charity (formerly the National Endowment for Science Technology and the Arts) has led a national programme on *Rethinking Parks*. New business models for parks in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century, a two year programme has supported almost a dozen park innovation projects across the UK, concluding at the start of 2016. All these models provide valuable points of reference which may also be trialled and tested as approaches to managing and resourcing Manchester's parks the future.
- 2.3 Recent reports from leading UK think tanks have also focused on the continuing importance of parks and urban green spaces and ways they can be managed and resourced in the future. *Places to Be* suggests that rather than being exclusively responsible for delivering services, councils may

increasingly play a different role as custodians of place and the facilitators or convenors of local action. *Green Society* describes a number of alternative funding strategies including the development of park improvement districts, endowment funds and living legacies. It also recommends a greater incentivisation of public participation and volunteering through council tax rebates and community cash-back schemes for those communities making a more direct contribution to the management of their local green spaces.

### **3.0 Scope**

- 3.1 Whilst Manchester has a wide variety of different types of open spaces, this strategy focuses specifically on public parks. It should be considered as a supporting strategy to the Manchester Strategy 2016-2025 and is a parallel document to the Green and Blue Infrastructure Strategy and the emerging Playing Pitch Strategy. In total there are 143 individual spaces that include a relatively small number of significant Destination Parks and a larger number of Community Parks and Local Parks and Green Spaces in Manchester. This represents over 1,040 hectares of publically accessible open space that is distributed across the City.
- 3.2 Heaton Park is the largest municipal park in Europe and as such has a significant place in our Parks' portfolio. In recognising this, the Council has already undertaken a strategic review of Heaton and has adopted a Strategic Framework for its future development. Progress on this framework will be reported to Neighbourhoods Scrutiny Committee.
- 3.3 The Parks Strategy will guide four specific aspects associated with the City's park provision, management and maintenance:
- A description of the parks resource and how it is distributed across the City.
  - A vision and set of four strategic themes that will inform the provision and management of our Parks over the next ten years.
  - Approaches to the future funding and resourcing of our Parks.
  - Approaches to the future management and maintenance of our Parks
- 3.4 A broad programme of consultation will be undertaken to inform and guide the development of this strategy. This will build on the strong relationship with stakeholders to focus on shaping the vision, principles, themes and objectives and will engage with community groups, Friends and user groups, stakeholders and partner organisations who will support the delivery of the strategy. This is set out in section 9.

### **4.0 The Vision and Strategic Themes**

- 4.1 It is imperative that the strategy and vision builds on the City's existing

strengths; these form a solid foundation upon which to create a truly great infrastructure of parks and green spaces. Getting the basics right is the key to unlocking the future potential in this area of service. However, without investment in the fabric of these spaces it will be very difficult to attract high quality commercial and social partners and private sector investment.

4.2 The key strengths to build on are:

- Expanse, variety and quality of landscape: both designed and natural. In the main the council has the skills and expertise to ensure that these are all well maintained.
- Popular play areas: reflecting parks as a significant neighbourhood asset.
- Numerous attractions in many parks, including: horticulture, walled gardens, historic buildings, monuments, sports facilities, community events, spectacular views, boating lakes and animal attractions.
- A number of excellent yet untapped Destination Parks which could drive a more enterprising focus.
- Numerous parks with flat and serviceable areas for events.
- Existing audience base: both regular park users and proven potential to attract over 100,000 in a single weekend.
- Engagement and work with communities, volunteers and partners to add value to the service offer and to transfer or to share responsibility for delivering services.

4.3 It is essential that Manchester's parks and green spaces directly support the delivery of the objectives of the Manchester Strategy and contribute significantly to the Council's Neighbourhood Focus Strategy.

4.4 The City needs to provide quality public spaces to relax, exercise and step away from the busy city. These spaces will play a key role in reducing carbon and promoting active lifestyles. This means making the most of our green spaces, parks, network of waterways and canals and the spaces between buildings: designing these in to the city as it continues to develop. There are 143 parks and open spaces in Manchester and it has one of the highest levels of tree cover of any large city at 20% of our area against a UK average of 8.2%. We need to make sure that our parks and open spaces are accessible and people can use them easily.

4.5 There is a strong need for a holistic and integrated approach to the development and management of individual neighbourhoods and investment and maintenance of the City's parks and green spaces sit at the heart of this approach.

4.6 Neighbourhood management will be an essential framework for this new strategic approach and parks and green spaces will contribute directly to the following Neighbourhood Focus Strategy objectives to ensure these places are:

- Clean, safe and green.
- Where communities want to live, creating neighbourhoods of choice.

- Valued with a clear sense of pride with positive perceptions of the area.
- Recognised as having a leisure offer that is high quality, proportionate and easy to access.
- Providing direct access to employment opportunities.
- Where people are engaged with regular social and volunteering opportunities

#### 4.7 The Proposed Vision for Manchester's Parks is:

***“Creating world-class green spaces to meet, relax and play.***

***Our distinctive parks will improve wellbeing and provide focal points for vibrant neighbourhoods. Bringing communities together, providing new opportunities for learning, sport, culture and events for Mancunians. Thriving parks are the heart and lungs of our growing city.”***

4.8 We will continue to regenerate and improve Manchester's parks and green spaces, creating new opportunities for education, employment, community cohesion, enhancement of the visual environment and participation in a range of healthy, active, cultural or social events and activities.

#### 4.9 Four key principles have been established to guide the themes of the strategy and supporting objectives. These focus on:

- **A robust framework for the provision of parks and green spaces and directing resources.**
- **The clear programming of use and activity.**
- **A co-ordinated approach to management and maintenance.**
- **The development of more productive and active partnerships.**

4.10 Within this Strategy there are opportunities to review the current scope and approach to our network of assets; optimising the use of existing spaces and establishing new public open spaces for recreation, play, sport, health, learning, biodiversity, heritage, climate change mitigation and adaption to meet the needs of communities. These spaces will be strategically located and adaptable to future requirements.

4.11 The strategy will also ensure that all public open spaces support the wellbeing of communities, encourage participation and facilitate social inclusion. The strategy will promote and uphold standards of quality that will ensure parks and green spaces are safe and welcoming and represent nationally recognised standards of care and upkeep that are monitored and reviewed regularly.

4.12 Close working relationships and partnerships with various organisations in the city, including disabled people's organisations will help to draw on the invaluable experience and expertise that exists within our communities. This approach will also ensure that we correctly identify the barriers that disabled people face and work together to remove them.

- 4.13 It is important that the investment into the infrastructure of parks achieves the Council's standards on design for access as set out in DFA2. This will help to promote exciting, vibrant and creative accessible design as well as being proactive in the local and national debate concerning securing access for all.
- 4.14 To assist in setting the strategic direction across the portfolio of 143 spaces, Manchester's parks are grouped together in three levels across the City - Local Parks and Green Spaces, Community Parks and Destination Parks.
- 4.14.1 **Local Parks and Green Spaces:** these small parks provide a focal point for the immediate community and may include one or a combination of some of the following; a play area, sports facilities, grass areas and flower beds. Examples include Anfield Road Open Space, Chesterton Road Park, High Bank Park and Mersey Bank Park.
- 4.14.2 **Community Parks:** defined as local parks with more than a single leisure use, have significant throughputs and are capable of being programmed to accommodate formal and informal recreational and small community events. Examples include Brookdale Park, Chorlton Park, Crowcroft Park, Fog Lane Park, and Swinton Grove Park.
- 4.14.3 **Destination Parks:** sites that provide a range of facilities and visitor attractions including major events, are in predominant areas of open space which have a combination of attributes including a diversity of facility and uses. Examples include Heaton Park, Wythenshawe Park, Alexandra Park, Boggart Hole Clough, Chorlton Water Park and Platt Fields Park.

Four **Strategic Themes** are proposed here which can provide a framework for the future management, engagement in and enhancement of parks in the City.

#### 4.15 **Strategic Theme 1 - Parks at the Heart of Neighbourhoods**

- 4.15.1 This theme focuses on the future provision of parks, where they are currently located across areas (North, Central and South) and Wards, their grouping and how they fit within and support their surrounding neighbourhoods and communities. Ensuring these spaces are sustained at a neighbourhood level to create places where people want to live including raising standards and building capacity in the voluntary and third sectors by fostering stronger relationships with stakeholders to jointly identify new ways of working.
- 4.15.2 In principle this focuses on issues of physical planning and future provision and aligns with the objectives and policies of The Manchester Strategy 2016-2025; Manchester's Local Plan (2012); and the Green and Blue Infrastructure Strategy (2015). Central to this theme is the need to support areas of growth across the City and promote neighbourhoods of quality and choice. It will also address issues of environmental equality to promote a more balanced standard of parks provision across the City. Whilst much of this will focus on the management and refurbishment of existing parks it will also consider where the creation of new parks, green and open spaces are needed and

where new green links between existing parks and open spaces can be established.

<b>4.15.3 Detailed objectives - Parks at the Heart of Neighbourhoods</b>	
01	Establish a clear inventory of parks across the City including a register of heritage assets, an agreed grouping of each type of park that has a defined role that is aligned across other strategic planning and policy areas and an up to date schedule of current park investment and establish strategic priorities for capital investment in new parks and open spaces.
02	Review current planning standards for quantity and accessibility for parks across the City and assess whether the current distribution and provision for each district and ward is adequate or needs to be adapted to meet the needs of a growing city.
03	Identify where current under-provision of park facilities can be addressed by refurbishing, providing additional or improving the fabric and content of existing parks to enhance their performance and their ability to generate appropriate levels of income.
04	Undertake a detailed analysis of the socio-economic and cultural role of parks to promote greater equality and social cohesion across the City and fulfil specific social, economic and cultural needs and aspirations of surrounding communities.
05	Prepare a carefully constructed programme of activities in appropriate locations across the City, reflecting our diversity and the seasons
06	Promote greater environmental functionality of parks and promote better connectivity between separate green spaces to improve the resilience to climate change and deliver more benefits from ecosystem services.

#### **4.16 Strategic Theme 2 - Active Parks, Healthy Communities**

4.16.1 This theme focuses on promoting greater use and enjoyment of parks. It considers what individual parks do, their principle purpose and what they specifically provide for their users. Ensuring that there is a strong universal service that is accessible to all residents and communities across Manchester.

4.16.2 This will take direct account of the socio-economic and cultural context of the surrounding communities and ensure that every neighbourhood has good access to a park or green space. This should identify reasonable public transport routes and calculate appropriate access standards for walking to provide a strong universal service. The provision of facilities should take account of the park grouping and local need and may include the provision for:

- Informal recreation and play opportunities for children and young people
- Organised regular recreational activities such as bowls, park runs, cycling or outdoor health and adventure activities
- Formalised conservation, heritage and community engagement activities
- Organised educational opportunities
- A clear offer which targets the following population segments: 0-5's, youth, adults, families and older people connecting through the Age Friendly Strategy.

<b>4.16.3 Detailed objectives - Active Parks, Healthy Communities</b>	
01	Prepare detailed inventory of facilities for individual parks that includes an assessment of quality that is reviewed annually and captures accurate figures on levels of visitor use and resident satisfaction in park resources and maintenance.
02	Establish and maintain seasonal schedule of recreational activities and events held in individual parks that is widely publicised and regularly refreshed to ensure activities attract a wide and diverse range of audiences of different ages.
03	Undertake a programme of investment in the infrastructure of specific parks more suited to holding events, festivals and markets which will include the need for power, water and Broadband/WIFI/high speed Internet access.
04	Develop a specific programme of facilities and activities across selected parks that focus on the needs of young children, parents, carers and families which will include high quality and contemporary play provision.
05	Develop a specific programme on improving the active use of parks to encourage more healthy lifestyles that includes specific thematic and spatial health targets and indices identified jointly with Manchester's Health and Wellbeing Board.
06	Develop a specific programme with set targets on improving the natural capital of specific parks to enhance levels of biodiversity and improve the performance of natural systems and processes.

#### **4.17 Strategic Theme 3 - The Manchester Parks Standard**

4.17.1 This theme focuses on improving standards of management and maintenance and considers how parks are looked after now and in the future.

4.17.2 Central to this objective is the need to ensure that every neighbourhood has access to a vibrant and well-maintained park or green space which is accessible to all and of high quality. To achieve this effectively the park strategy, management and contracting teams need to join up with single leadership at a local level, which needs to ensure that every park conforms to a Manchester common standard.

4.17.3 The Components of a Manchester Parks Standard could be

1. A welcoming place
2. Safe and secure
3. Clean and well maintained
4. Environmentally friendly
5. Places which promote healthy lifestyles
6. Promoting conservation and heritage where appropriate
7. Managed through an appropriate workforce and or volunteers
8. Involving the local community
9. Moving towards a more sustainable funding model
10. Communicated and marketed appropriately

<b>4.17.4 Detailed objectives - The Manchester Parks Standard</b>	
01	Establish effective governance arrangements for Parks to strengthen internal and external partnerships to work towards jointly agreed priorities.
02	Update and agree a clear parks management structure across the City that is organised to deliver an integrated and coordinated approach to neighbourhood management that secures efficiencies across all open space maintenance activities.
03	Establish and maintain a clear resourcing and financing schedule that sets out full costs for managing individual sites to help identify key cost centres and assist year-on-year accounting to support cost-effective and efficient service delivery.
04	Update and expand the use of digital and information technology to develop a single source of data for quality assessment of all parks to assist in prioritising investment, improve service delivery and the cost effective use of resources.
05	Establish a regular programme of training and horticultural skills development that is available to core MCC grounds maintenance teams, community groups and stakeholders that also includes apprenticeships and back to work programmes.
06	Develop a management and maintenance innovation programme to pilot and trial new techniques in landscape maintenance that seeks to enhance the environmental quality of parks and improves cost effective delivery of the service.

#### **4.18 Strategic Theme 4 - Productive Parks in Partnership**

- 4.18.1 This theme focuses on encouraging greater collaboration in the care and upkeep of parks and green spaces that captures additional income streams, establishes an increased role for stakeholders with a greater sharing of responsibilities across neighbourhoods and communities and fosters different relationships and ways of working.
- 4.18.2 There is a clear need to be more enterprising in appropriate parks, including Destination Parks, to offset mainstream costs whilst providing complementary subsidised services. This should include examining opportunities for catering and conferencing activities, private sector arrangements with complementary income generating sporting activities (such as 5-a-side, golf and community events etc.) and the hosting of medium to large-scale events.
- 4.18.3 As part of this programme there is a Strategic Framework for positioning Heaton Park as a major Destination Park capable of attracting private sector investment whilst caring for the park as a cherished local resource. There is also clear need to work with partners to collaborate on projects with shared objectives to lever in more external resources to deliver collective objectives.

<b>4.18.4 Detailed objectives - Productive Parks in Partnership</b>	
01	Identify additional and alternative sustainable income generating opportunities and enterprising business models for specific parks which includes setting realistic targets for the generation of both direct income and income-in-kind that can be ring-fenced for parks and green spaces.
02	Maintain a regular and structured programme of consultation and engagement with Friends groups, community groups and stakeholders as a pilot Green Partnership Board that establishes shared responsibilities for local parks.
03	Undertake a capacity building programme for volunteers, Friends' groups, community groups and third sector organisations that provide an organisational structure, potentially in the form of a social enterprise, and dedicated resources for park management and maintenance.
04	Develop a programme that engages with the private sector to promote the creation of new green spaces and support the management of existing open spaces that should also include a programme of corporate volunteering.
05	Identify and promote opportunities for philanthropy, sponsorship and fundraising that should consider the potential for establishing a charitable foundation for increasing resources for Manchester's parks and green spaces.
06	Establish a community management pilot and programme for appropriate local parks and green spaces that provides the opportunity to trial alternative models of management that can harness additional services and resources such as community-pay-back schemes.

## **5.0 Future Funding for Our Parks**

- 5.1 The delivery of savings across the Service in 2011/13 and more recently in 2013/15 in response to the successive challenging government settlements has impacted directly on the provision of parks and green space services.
- 5.2 It has been recognised that the effect the budget reductions have had on parks and green spaces is beginning to impact on creating and maintaining attractive neighbourhoods. In response, additional funds have been secured, including Clean City funding, to enable us to reach standards and support the City to effectively resource our parks.
- 5.3 The building blocks below have been identified as being critical to the development of a robust Fiscal Strategy:

**Focus on Enterprise - Clear strategy for financial success embedded within the service**

Invest in creating a focus on Enterprise in order to increase revenue and identify potential forms of revenue-in-kind from existing and new income sources and streams.

**Enhanced Contracting & Partnering Arrangements**

Implement new contracting and partnering arrangements to ensure that standards are achieved. Examine the options for City-wide grounds maintenance provision and localised arrangements.

**Infrastructure Investment to reduce overheads and or raise income**

Poorly maintained parks create a tipping point; costs increase disproportionately. Replacement equipment and materials will be chosen with robustness and longevity as key qualities.

**Capacity building in communities**

Investment in building capacity in the Third Sector and jointly identifying opportunities to deliver services, care for assets and deliver programmes of activity, where appropriate.

**Focused Approach – Scope**

Assess the number of green spaces within the scope of the strategy and explore alternative management structures and approach for the use of non-strategic sites for optimal outcomes.

**A clear understanding of the costs of delivering the Manchester Standard**

The current financial/commercial intelligence available across the service is patchy. A clearer understanding of the investment required to ensure that the minimum standards can be achieved is needed.

- 5.4 The primary principle is that parks should remain free at the point of entry. However a variety of charges will be, or have already been, set for specific services and activities that parks provide and support, such as Football, Bowls and new initiatives like the Tree Top Adventure in Heaton Park. The national trend to increase the charges that parks services are having to implement is occurring across many parts of the UK and this has been shown by recent

studies. The challenge is to ensure that these charges are cost-effective, that they continue to represent good value for money and that resources generated are re-invested back into parks.

- 5.5 It is essential that adequate capital funding is allocated to maintain the fabric and facilities of parks and green spaces across the City. In times of austerity with reduced revenue funding there is increasing risk that the level of capital investment is severely reduced, leading to increased quantities of equipment and infrastructure needing repair and/or replacement. This can represent a build-up of significant levels of cost for the service in the future. Priority should be given to those parks that will provide greatest benefit to our communities, generate the greatest return on investment and ensure that potential risks to health and safety are minimised. Additionally it is important that recent capital investment for the refurbishment of historic parks, including those part-funded by the National Lottery, are protected.
- 5.6 In principle the target is to establish a break-even position for the service within five years in order to ensure that staffing costs are met through income (currently 60% of these costs are recovered from income). Achieving this goal will be assisted by identifying potential additional efficiencies in the service delivery model, growing the role of partnerships and greater support from the community and third sectors alongside developing additional models for funding and managing the service. All of these opportunities will take time to build capacity and generate returns.
- 5.7 Developing additional funding models and mechanisms - whilst the National Lottery and other government agencies have an on-going programme of support for parks across the City it will be important to explore new opportunities to secure external income. This may include other national and regional agencies and organisations as well as repositioning some outcomes of the parks service to meet shared objectives. These may include targets for economic development, health and wellbeing, biodiversity and resilience to climate change.
- 5.8 Opportunities to establish greater investment from the academic, environmental, private and commercial sectors should be explored alongside scope for promoting philanthropy, sponsorship and fundraising.
- 5.9 There are clear advantages to develop wider Greater Manchester opportunities to share aspects of the service delivery and resourcing along with the co-financing of strategic green infrastructure initiatives for mutual benefit.

## **6.0 Future Management and Maintenance of Our Parks**

- 6.1 Strategic leadership, clear vision and strategy is provided by the Neighbourhood Management Framework - the overarching service model built around the City-wide Neighbourhoods Service for Parks, Sports, Events and Leisure. Each of the functions acts as a trading service and needs to deliver

excellent customer standards to generate increased throughput and income to sustain the service.

- 6.2 Operational teams within the service cover the North, Central and South Neighbourhood Areas with responsibility for the day-to-day delivery and operations of parks, allotments and green spaces. Whilst Heaton Park has retained a dedicated delivery section, which will develop and implement the Strategic Framework for positioning Heaton Park as a Major Destination Park which could attract new investment whilst protecting the park as a cherished local resource. The team is also responsible for the day-to-day delivery and operations of Heaton Park.
- 6.3 The Parks Team will explore new partnership models appropriate to the action plans identified for groupings of and individual parks. There has already been successful models at Alexandra Park, for example, and further case studies from around the UK tested through Nesta's *Re-thinking Parks* give some exciting examples that could be explored in Manchester.

## 7.0 Consultation Plan

- 7.1 The main objective of the Consultation Plan will be to communicate, engage and consult with residents, partners and stakeholders as widely as possible on the future strategy and their aspirations for Manchester Parks and to use this information to help shape the final vision and strategy.
- 7.2 It is proposed that an extensive programme of consultation is undertaken running from the **7<sup>th</sup> March – 31st May 2016**. Information relating to the consultation about the Parks Strategy will be made available at [www.manchester.gov.uk/consultations](http://www.manchester.gov.uk/consultations) with a summary of the Strategy and links to supporting documents easily accessible. Specifically, residents will be directed to a bespoke web page dealing with the consultation. Hard copies of the specific consultation will also be made available in Council facilities and parks across the City, and specialist formats will be made available on request (including alternative languages, Braille and large print).
- 7.3 There are a number of guiding principles that will be used throughout the communications, consultation and engagement on the strategy:
- Consultation will draw out some of the personal stories and provide the opportunity for a personalised conversation around the future of Parks.
  - More detailed response is required from partners and stakeholders but need a broader participative conversation with residents.
  - A qualitative response is more important than quantity. We are not looking for a percentage of residents agreeing or disagreeing with the strategy but a qualitative response and conversation about residents' views.
  - A variety of channels will be used to engage people in the conversation.
  - Communication needs to be clear, exciting and engaging with no jargon. It should be less about strategy and more about actions.
  - The engagement needs to look and feel "Mancunian" and create a sense of ownership from residents, partners and stakeholders.

- 7.4 A range of approaches will be taken to consultation ensuring the best use of the online resources alongside more traditional methods such as workshops and paper based questionnaires. A snapshot of the stakeholders and different methods of consultation are captured overleaf:

<b>Audience</b>	<b>Method of Consultation</b>
Individual residents	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Extensive use of social media to communicate key messages.</li> <li>• Use Blogs and Twitter question and answer sessions for more discussion on individual themes.</li> <li>• Use on-line and paper-based questionnaire via key locations.</li> <li>• Suggest residents pick the priority or theme that is most important to them from the Strategy by placing voting boxes in high footfall Council and partner locations.</li> </ul>
Friends of Parks and community representatives	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Targeted workshop sessions in various geographical locations (North South and central) to allow local attendance.</li> </ul>
National and Regional Organisations such as the Heritage Lottery Fund, RSPB etc	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Formal briefings followed by bespoke workshop sessions.</li> <li>• Partners and key stakeholders will all be asked to share messages on their own social media.</li> </ul>
All	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Creation of a #hashtag that will be used to identify campaign e.g. #MyMCRParks</li> <li>• Icon and carousel image on the Council's webpage.</li> </ul>

- 7.5 All front-line parks employees will be briefed and made aware of the channels available for collecting and recording responses from residents. Residents who contact the Council will be offered an assisted digital recording of comments on the consultation via the operators in the Customer Contact Centre. In addition, any consultation related enquires, complaints and comments received by Members and Officers will be logged, responded to and incorporated on a case by case basis.

- 7.6 The table below sets out the indicative timescale for consultation.

Update on Park Strategy at Neighbourhoods Scrutiny Committee	23 <sup>rd</sup> February 2016
Launch of consultation – A series of workshops across various locations	7 <sup>th</sup> March 2016
Consultation ends	31 <sup>st</sup> May 2016
Production of Final Strategy	31 <sup>st</sup> July 2016