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Response to the Green and Blue Infrastructure Strategy for Manchester

May 2025

Contents

1. Introduction	1
2. Assessment of the Proposed Development	4
3. Summary	8

1. Introduction

- 1.1. This ‘Response to the Green and Blue Infrastructure Strategy for Manchester’ (“the Statement”) accompanies an application for Full Planning Permission submitted to Manchester City Council (MCC) for:
“Erection two storey structure with flexible commercial uses (Use Classes E(a), E(b), and Sui Generis (p, q, and r) at ground and first floor, with associated access arrangements, WC, landscaping, lighting, signage, and other associated works including external seating areas.” (the “Proposed Development”).
- 1.2. An application for Advertisement Consent for four possible signage types is also submitted concurrently with this application as described further in the Planning Statement.
- 1.3. The Applicant is the Eastlands Arena Limited (the ‘Applicant’).
- 1.4. The Statement sets out how the Proposed Development responds to the vision and objectives set out in the Manchester Green and Blue Infrastructure Strategy (2022) (‘The G&BI Strategy’).
- 1.5. In turn, this Statement also demonstrates how the Proposed Development addresses the following policies from the Local Development Plan:

Manchester Core Strategy (2012) – Updated March 2024 following adoption of Places for Everyone Joint Development Plan	Policy EN9 – Green Infrastructure
	Policy EN15 – Biodiversity and Geological Conservation
The Places for Everyone Plan (2024)	Policy JP-Strat13 – Strategic Green Infrastructure
	Policy JP-G2 – Green Infrastructure Network
	Policy JP-G3 – River Valleys and Waterways
	Policy JP-G6 – Urban Green Space
	Policy JP-G7 – Trees and Woodland
	Policy JP-G8 – A Net Enhancement of Biodiversity and Geodiversity

- 1.6. It should be read in conjunction with the Design and Access Statement (prepared by Populous) and submitted in support of the application.

The G&BI Strategy

- 1.7. Manchester’s Great Outdoors: A Green and Blue Infrastructure Strategy for Manchester 2015-25 was adopted by MCC in July 2015 and subsequently updated in 2022, highlighting approaches, challenges and projects that will help bring the Strategy to life over the coming years.
- 1.8. MCC recognises that green and blue infrastructure is an essential part of creating a successful, liveable city. Parks, river valleys, gardens, street trees, green roofs, canals and many other components all form part of a rich network that is integrated with the built environment in the world’s most popular cities.
- 1.9. The overarching vision for the Strategy remains as follows:
“By 2025, climate-resilient well-maintained green and blue spaces remains an integral part of all neighbourhoods. The city’s communities will be living healthy, fulfilled lives, enjoying access to parks and

green spaces, and safe green routes for walking, cycling and exercise throughout the city. Green and blue infrastructure will be supporting Manchester's growth."

- 1.10. Four objectives have been established to enable the vision to be achieved:
- Improve the quality and function of existing green and blue infrastructure;
 - Use appropriate green and blue infrastructure as a key component of new developments to help create successful neighbourhoods and support the city's growth;
 - Improve connectivity and accessibility to green and blue infrastructure within the city and beyond; and,
 - Improve and promote a wider understanding and awareness of the benefits that green and blue infrastructure provides for residents, the economy and the local environment.
- 1.11. Section 3 of the updated G&BI Strategy outlines the progress to date and noted that the G&BI Strategy has acted as catalysts for some of the most groundbreaking environmental projects in Manchester. The Strategy has encouraged collaboration, bringing together organisations in order to deliver bold, innovative action that will benefit Manchester for many years to come.
- 1.12. Section 3.4 of the G&BI Strategy recognises that Manchester is a growing city, with plans for significant growth and development over the coming decade. High quality, green and open space that is appropriate to its location, well designed and well maintained will be an important and integral part of creating successful developments and supporting the city's growth.
- 1.13. The G&BI Strategy provides initial guidance on how developers can achieve this and recognises that different approaches will be required for different types of development and that different solutions, appropriate to the location, will be needed on each scheme. By considering green infrastructure from the beginning of the design process, developers will be able to understand the surrounding landscape, opportunities to enhance and link to it, and the types of green and open space that could be incorporated within and add value to the development itself.

The Application Site

- 1.14. The Application Site ("the Site"), comprises 0.067 hectares and consists of an area of hard landscaping and associated external stepped seating on the podium between Co-op Live and the Ashton Canal, and between Joe Mercer Way and Forge Lane Bridge, located at the Etihad Campus.
- 1.15. The Site's existing green infrastructure is limited, but includes four trees in planters established recently as part of the construction of Co-op Live.
- 1.16. The Site's southern boundary adjoins the Ashton Canal, which features a well-lit, pedestrianised towpath providing pedestrian links to the City Centre and Clayton, frequently used during events at the Etihad Campus.

The Proposed Development

- 1.17. The Proposed Development will provide new ancillary food and beverage and retail space, to principally support event day operations at the Co-op Live Arena. Further to this principal use, it will also be open outside of event days providing ancillary daytime coffee and pastries to accommodate Etihad Campus visitors throughout the week and will also be available for private hire / community use. The intention is to support the array of other uses at the Etihad Campus, and to provide a supporting offering for employees, visitors and the local community.

- 1.18. It directly faces and addresses the Ashton Canal, aiming to leverage the opportunity to promote the use, and enjoyment of, the Ashton Canal towpath and its associated blue infrastructure. This connection with the Ashton Canal is central to the development's identity, fostering a vibrant and welcoming environment.
- 1.19. The link to the existing surroundings is also considered by the enhancement of biodiversity with the proposed vegetation which upgrades the quality of nearby green infrastructure. The existing trees on-site are also proposed to be relocated elsewhere within the Site.

Figure 1: CGI of the Proposed Development in proximity to the canal.



Etihad Campus G&BI Vision

- 1.20. The Etihad Campus aspires to be a pioneer for the whole of Manchester in pursuing its twin objective of realising locally-inclusive, globally-competitive economic growth, whilst simultaneously transforming to a zero-carbon campus. A key theme that underpins the delivery of this vision is for the campus to be a beacon of Manchester's rapid transition to a zero-carbon city, rich with wildlife and green infrastructure.
- 1.21. The vision for the Campus masterplan centres on creating an accessible and enjoyable public realm connected to the existing green and blue infrastructure, particularly the Ashton Canal.
- 1.22. The Proposed Development will contribute to the wider Green and Blue Infrastructure vision for the Etihad Campus, which seeks to ensure that each forthcoming plot development addresses the following:
- The proposals are tied into existing green corridors to maximise connectivity and value to both wildlife and pedestrians.
 - Lessons are learnt from successful plant species and habitat establishment within the Campus to inform future landscaping proposals.
 - Green-blue infrastructure and biodiversity initiatives which unlock wider social value and co-benefits are prioritised.

2. Assessment of the Proposed Development

2.1. This section outlines the vision and objectives of the Manchester Green and Blue Infrastructure Strategy 2022 and response from the Proposed Development.

Green and Blue Infrastructure Objectives

2.2. As set out in Section 1, the G&BI Strategy establishes four objectives to enable the vision to be achieved. Table 2.1 below considers the Proposed Development (as described in Section 1) against these objectives.

Table 2.1 The Proposed Development’s Response to Green and Blue Infrastructure Objectives

Objective:	Responses:
1. Improve the quality and function of existing Green and Blue Infrastructure to maximise the benefits it delivers.	The original Co-op Live development significantly enhanced a previously vacant site, substantially improving the green and blue infrastructure network. This Proposed Development builds upon that legacy, further amplifying the benefits to the canal and its surrounding environment. By focusing on enhancing connectivity and the pedestrian experience, it strengthens the link between the Co-op Live Arena and the Ashton Canal, creating an attractive and accessible blue infrastructure corridor. The Proposed Development capitalises on the Site's prime location, offering attractive views of the Canal and Etihad Stadium, while maintaining convenient proximity to the arena. It transforms the towpath into a more appealing and safer environment, encouraging increased footfall and promoting active travel such as walking and cycling. This, in turn, enhances the setting of the Ashton Canal and nearby heritage assets. Furthermore, the proposed landscaping improvements create a more seamless pedestrian connection between the Ashton Canal and Philips Park, fostering greater integration with the city's green spaces. Strategically placed access and egress points facilitate efficient crowd management while simultaneously raising awareness of the surrounding area. In essence, the Proposed Development optimises the existing Green and Blue Infrastructure, maximising its value and appeal for the community.
2. Use appropriate green and blue infrastructure as a key component of new developments to help create successful neighbourhoods and support the city’s growth.	The Proposed Development will provide further activation to Co-op Live, creating vibrant new frontage along the Ashton Canal and open viewpoints, providing accessible and inclusive spaces for both event-day visitors and the general public to experience the existing green and blue infrastructure. Serving as a catalyst for further Etihad Campus investment, the development supports the council's vision for a major visitor

Objective:	Responses:
	destination. It will increase footfall along the canal towpath, offering a pre-event gathering space for ticket holders and visitors. Furthermore, its availability for use as a café and community hub will broaden engagement beyond match days, providing further facilities for the local community. The Proposed Development prioritises a strong sense of place, encouraging community interaction and appreciation of the area's natural beauty. By enhancing local character and integrating with the canal's unique attributes, the development aims to make a positive contribution to the health, safety, and wellbeing of the community, while honouring its history. The project's sustainable design, incorporating recycled shipping containers, aligns with the Greater Manchester Strategy 2013-2020. The proposals will also stimulate commercial growth, and create jobs during construction and operation.
3. Improve connectivity and accessibility to Green and Blue Infrastructure within the City and beyond.	The proposals will directly face the Ashton Canal and therefore encourage increased use of this key green and blue route through the city. It will also increase activity overlooking the towpath, increasing safety through natural surveillance and therefore making it a more attractive environment. In doing so, it will improve pedestrian and cyclist awareness of this route and will encourage the City's communities to use these active modes of travel.
4. Improve and promote a wider understanding and awareness of the benefits that Green and Blue Infrastructure provides to residents, the economy and the local environment.	The Proposed Development will make effective use of an underutilised part of the Co-op Live site and for the reasons above, will encourage the use of the City's green and blue infrastructure. It also includes places for the local community and visitors to dwell and enjoy, providing an attractive canal edge destination for use throughout the week and not just on event days. The proposals will be accessible for all to enjoy and will promote the benefits associated with the blue and green infrastructure environment, including supporting active travel, community cohesion, and health and wellbeing.

Relevant Local Development Plan Policies

Manchester Core Strategy (2012)

Policy EN9 Green Infrastructure

- 2.3. Core Strategy Policy EN9 sets out that new development will be expected to maintain existing green infrastructure in terms of its quantity, quality and multiple function. Where the opportunity arises and in accordance with current G&BI Strategy, the Council will encourage developers to enhance the quality and quantity of green infrastructure, improve the performance of its functions and create and improve linkages to and between areas of green infrastructure.

Policy EN15 Biodiversity and Geological Conservation

- 2.4. Core Strategy Policy EN15 states the Council will seek to maintain or enhance sites of biodiversity throughout the City and that developers will be expected to identify and implement reasonable opportunities to enhance, restore or create new biodiversity, contributing to linkages between valuable or potentially valuable habitat areas where appropriate.

Places for Everyone Plan (2024)

Policy JP-G2 – Green Infrastructure Network

- 2.5. Policy JP-G2 states *“a strategic approach will be taken to the protection, management and enhancement of our Green Infrastructure in order to protect and enhance the ecosystem services which the Green Infrastructure Network provides, including flood management, climate change mitigation and adaptation.”* Where it is deemed feasible, new and existing green infrastructure should be integrated into new development so as to protect, enhance, and expand the green infrastructure network.

Policy JP-G3 – River Valleys and Waterways

- 2.6. Policy JP-G3 states *“river valleys and waterways will be protected and improved as central components of our Green Infrastructure Network and a vital part of a Nature Recovery Network, making a major contribution to local identity, quality of life and the natural environment.”*

Policy JP-G6 – Urban Green Space

- 2.7. Policy JP-G6 stipulates that existing urban green space will be protected whilst new urban green space is encouraged to be delivered. Development should be designed to support the positive use of nearby green spaces, such as by offering a high-quality setting, providing natural surveillance, and facilitating easy access by walking and cycling.

Policy JP-G7 – Trees and Woodland

- 2.8. Policy JP-G7 references there should be a considerable increase in provision of street trees within urban areas, and public access to trees should be enhanced particularly by sustainable travel models.

Policy JP-G8 – A Net Enhancement of Biodiversity and Geodiversity

- 2.9. Policy JP-G8 promotes biodiversity enhancement through various initiatives and put strong emphasis on nature conservation, access to nature, and habitats enhancement.

Applicant’s Response to Relevant Planning Policy

- 2.10. The Proposed Development aims to make effective use of the Site to enhance awareness of, and activate, the green and blue infrastructure adjacent to the Site through directly facing and addressing the Ashton Canal.
- 2.11. The Proposed Development will generate additional activity overlooking the canal and towpath, increasing its safety through natural surveillance. Therefore, supporting the Ashton Canal as an attractive pedestrian and cyclist route to and from the Etihad Campus and the surrounding communities, and promoting linkages between areas of green infrastructure, such as Philips Park.
- 2.12. The Proposed Development therefore actively addresses Core Strategy Policy EN9 (Green Infrastructure) and Places for Everyone Policy JP-G2 (Green Infrastructure Network) and JP-G6 (Urban Green Space), promoting the use of green infrastructure and providing a high-quality setting with natural surveillance.
- 2.13. This Proposed Development will have a local identity and will provide a new space where visitors and the local community can dwell, relax and enjoy the canal and its heritage setting, contributing to the overall quality of life. It will continue to shape East Manchester as a tourist and visitor destination and generate new employment opportunities during construction and operation.
- 2.14. The link to the existing surroundings is also considered by the enhancement of biodiversity with the proposed vegetation, which upgrades the quality of nearby green infrastructure, improving their functions

and creating connections with them. The four existing young trees in planters will be relocated elsewhere within the Site. Measures will be implemented to ensure the tree's survival during the moving process.

- 2.15. The focus on biodiversity improvements through considered planting directly responds to Policy EN15 (Biodiversity and Geological Conservation). The Proposed Development's commitment to enhancing the attractiveness of the canal towpath and promoting its use as a key blue route also adheres to Places for Everyone Plan Policy JP-G3 (River Valleys and Waterways), contributing to local identity and quality of life.

Biodiversity Net Gain

- 2.16. The Environment Act 2021 mandates a minimum 10% biodiversity net gain (BNG) for most new developments, calculated using a standard metric. This involves assessing pre-development habitats and planned enhancements, aiming to balance development needs with environmental protection. Developers must either create new habitat or offset losses elsewhere, while still adhering to the established mitigation hierarchy. Exemptions apply to developments with minimal habitat impact (less than 25 square metres) or where the biodiversity value is already zero.
- 2.17. Classified as developed land (U1b), the site holds a zero-biodiversity value under the Statutory Biodiversity Metric, qualifying for a 'de minimis' exemption from BNG requirements. While existing planters approach the minimum habitat threshold, their isolated nature, recent installation, and limited flora make their classification as formal habitat inappropriate. Furthermore, plans to reuse existing plants, including trees, within the new development will largely retain the current ecological value on-site.

3. Summary

- 3.1. Building on the significant improvements to green and blue infrastructure delivered by the original Co-op Live development, the Proposed Development further enhances the canal corridor, creating a safer, more attractive, enjoyable offering between the arena and the Ashton Canal. The enhanced towpath promotes active travel and strengthens links to surrounding green spaces, including Philips Park, while maximising the amenity value of this key blue infrastructure asset.
- 3.2. The Proposed Development will also incorporate soft landscaping, including a central garden, climbing plants, and integrated planters, to improve biodiversity and the overall visual and sensory experience.
- 3.3. This aligns with the Manchester Green and Blue Infrastructure Strategy's vision and objectives, as well as relevant local planning policies, by improving the quality and function of existing green and blue infrastructure, integrating it into new development, improving connectivity, and promoting awareness of its benefits.
- 3.4. The Proposed Development therefore accords with the vision and objectives of the G&BI Strategy and the relevant Local Development Plan policies when taken as a whole.



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