

Scattering of Human Ashes in the Inshore Rivers (SHANTIR) Project

Proposal Paper

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Scattering of Human Ashes in the Inshore Rivers (SHANTIR)

Executive Summary

Scattering of ashes is a significant last rite for the deceased. It carries deep spiritual meaning for people of Dharmic faiths (Hindu, Sikh, Buddh and Jain) and is an obligatory stage that marks the end of physical life. According to the latest census 2021 data, there are at least 44775 people of Dharmic faiths living in the Greater Manchester area. It is estimated that 400 to 500 deaths occur per year where families have to travel to sea shores or other places to scatter ashes in undesignated places. Currently, there is no such facility available in whole of Greater Manchester and there has been a long felt need to have a facility which is inshore within Greater Manchester and has the sanctity and dignity to perform this last rite safely and peacefully.

The law permits scattering of ashes in inland rivers. The Environment Agency has conducted studies and concluded that scattering of ashes can take place provided some simple precautions are taken to ensure that other items should not be placed in the water with the ashes and permission should be taken from landowners and local authority.

This paper identifies potential sites, names all the 23 local organisations supporting this project and presents a nine month long work programme which will be led by a local charity Raj Kaushal Gita Bhawan Hindu Temple Manchester (RKGBHTM).

Our aim is to select a site in agreement with relevant local authority and start the design and construction as soon as possible to get the facility commissioned in 2023.

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1. Background

Asthi Visarjan (scattering of ashes) is a significant last rite for the deceased. It carries deep spiritual meaning for people of Dharmic faiths (Hindu, Sikh, Buddh and Jain). It is almost an obligatory stage that marks the end of physical life. According to the tradition, the ashen remains of a deceased are immersed in a flowing river to be taken to the oceans. This is sanctioned in the ancient Hindu scripture Yajur Veda and also in the Sikh Rehat Maryada (Sikh Code of Conduct) that the ashes are to be disposed off by immersing them in the nearest river or sea. The philosophical belief is that the mortal body made from the five physical elements (earth, air fire, water and space) is returned back to the elements, the eternal soul (Atman) achieves freedom from the physical bonds attaining Moksha, Mukti or Nirvana. It is the final homage and is normally performed as soon as possible.

2. Current Need

According to the 2021 census, in the Greater Manchester area, there are 27892 Hindus, 9529 Buddhists and 7353 Sikhs who declared their religious beliefs. Geographical distribution of their population density is shown in Appendix-1. Overall, there are at least 44775 people of Dharmic faiths living in the Greater Manchester area. It is estimated that 400 to 500 deaths occur per year where families have to travel to sea shores and other places to scatter ashes in undesignated places.

In addition to the need to meet the religious and spiritual needs of citizens of Dharmic faiths, there is also some concern about safety. There was a case where a lady almost slipped into a river while scattering her father's ashes.

Currently, there is no such facility available in whole of Greater Manchester and there has been a long felt need to have a facility which is inshore within Greater Manchester and has the sanctity and dignity to perform this last rite safely and peacefully.

What is needed is a small (about 9 square meters) jetty like platform on a river bank to allow scattering of ashes in flowing river water.

3. The Law

The following advice is provided by the Government ([Cemeteries and burials: prevent groundwater pollution - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/guidance/cemeteries-and-burials-prevent-groundwater-pollution)) on disposal of ashes [Ref 1]:

You do not need permission to scatter ashes from a single cremation on your own land, or make any formal record of doing so. You should seek permission from the landowner if you want to scatter ashes on someone else's land.

If you scatter ashes across surface water you should:

- *make sure the effect on the environment and wildlife is minimal and not affect other watercourse users*
- *not include casting wreaths or memorabilia as they may harm the environment and wildlife*

Crematoria owners and managers must carry out a site-specific risk assessment if ash is scattered at their sites.

4. Support from the Environment Agency

In a letter from the Deputy Director of the Environment Agency, Helen Wakeham [Ref2], it is made clear that “the scattering of a funeral ashes on water is not classed as a water discharge activity and can be carried out without requiring permission from the Environment Agency if simple precautions are taken to prevent any impact on water quality”. The following advice was received from Mark Easdale, Area Environment Manager, Greater Manchester of Environment Agency:

The funeral ashes themselves have little impact on water quality, and permission is not required from The Environment Agency to scatter ashes on moving water. Faith Leaders would need the permission of the land owner to carry out this activity, and should seek the advice of the local authority before commencement.

When a suitable location is identified and permission granted, other items should not be placed in the water with the ashes. Personal items and wreaths might contain plastic and metal parts, which can cause litter and harm wildlife. They must not be put into the water or left on the riverbank where they could be washed into the water. The following points should also be considered:

- The site you choose should not be near any buildings, people bathing or fishing, or marinas.
- Your site should be more than 1km upstream of any abstraction of water. You can check this by phoning your local Environment Agency office.
- Ashes should be spread as close to the surface of the water as possible and you should avoid windy days so that ashes do not affect people living or working nearby.
- If the site you have chosen is in regular use, we will need to assess it first to check there is enough water to disperse the ashes, that no one is using the water just downstream and that other river users are not going to be affected.

All of the above points will be duly considered in our project.

5. Example from Other Cities (Leicester and Cardiff)

5.1 Cardiff

The site at Llandaff Rowing Club in Cardiff, on the River Taff, is the first of its kind in Wales. The Antim Sanskar Group Wales (ASGW) established this site where Sikhs and Hindus can scatter the ashes of loved ones. See more details on [Sikh and Hindu ashes scattering site opens in Cardiff - BBC News](#)



5.2 Leicester

The Leicester City Council has deemed the waters behind the National Space Center to be an approved spot for scattering ashes. This area is serving the members of the Hindu, Jain and Sikh communities. The water can be accessed by a well maintained path that leads to a sturdy platform above water which now has safety railings. Scattering ashes on the River Soar is free and there is no need to submit a request form.

A quiet location has been selected that does not affect other users of the river. It is near the National Space Centre at Abbey Meadows and can be found by following the level path alongside the Centre towards the river.

Cars can be parked close by using the pay and display facilities at the National Space Centre, Exploration Drive, LE4 5NS. There is a signboard giving instructions to place only natural biodegradable objects in the water.



6. Environmental Impact

The impact of scattering of human ashes has been studied by B. O'Donovan [Ref 3]. This includes data from physico-chemical sample points, established downstream of the area used for the Ash Scattering Ceremonies over a period of 3 years in Soar river.

Phosphate represent the largest biologically active component of the cremated ash. One cremation can yield on average 0.5-1.2 Kg of ash. Approximately 45% of the ash is composed of Phosphate, some of which is immediately entrained in river sediment on scattering. In the report it is stated that two cremations add approximately 0.00001mg of Phosphate to each litre flowing through the Soar river. It was concluded "relative to the other inputs, Phosphate from cremated remains has no measurable impact".

7. Potential Locations in Greater Manchester

Study of the distribution of population density of people of Dharmic faiths across Greater Manchester shown in Appendix-1 indicates that there is concentration in central to southern region of Greater Manchester where river Mersey is the main river. There are many potential locations

along the banks of river Mersey flowing through Greater Manchester. Some potential locations worth considering are:-

7.1 Sale Water Park



Fig 1. Potential sites near Jackson's bridge close to Sale Water Park

This site shown in Fig 1 is near Jackson's bridge and has car parking facilities and is easily accessible.

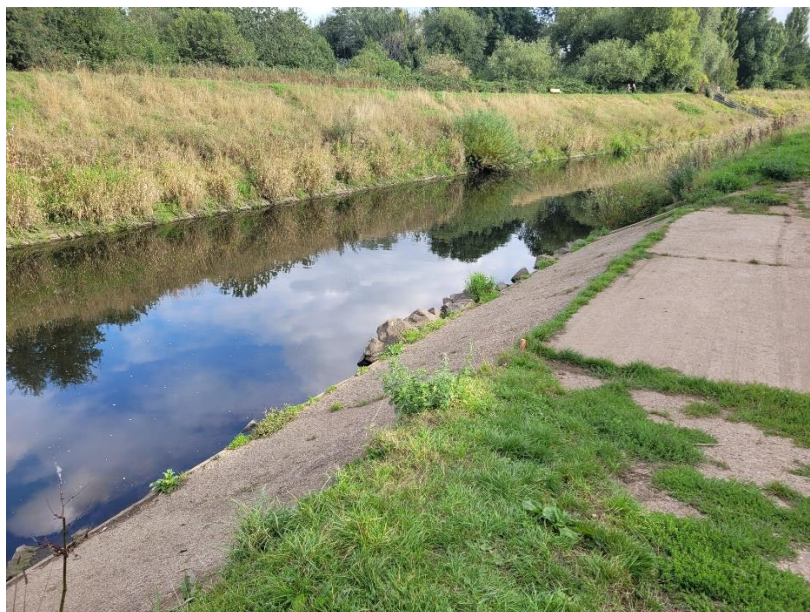


Fig 2. Potential site near Sale flood defence sluice gates in Sale Water Park

Another potential site is near Sale EES Flood Defence Sluice gates shown in Fig 2.

7.2 Northenden Riverside Park

Northenden Riverside Park just off Mill Lane in Northenden, Manchester is another potential site shown in Fig 3. It has car park and is accessible.



Fig 3. Potential site on River Mersey in Northern Riverside Park

7.3 Other Potential Sites

Following are other potential sites on banks of river Mersey which can be considered:-

- i. Chorlton Water Park
- ii. Ashton-on-Mersey Golf Club
- iii. Trafford MV RFCC

8. Brief Project Outline

We envisage the following work stages in the SHANTIR project and propose the timeline in Fig4:-

- i. Finalisation of the project proposal
- ii. Selection and approval of site by the local authority
- iii. Design of the facility
- iv. Design and plan approval
- v. Construction
- vi. Commissioning of site with dissemination of information regarding its use through supporting organisations and media
- vii. Project management

Our estimate is to complete the project within 9 months from finalisation of this proposal.

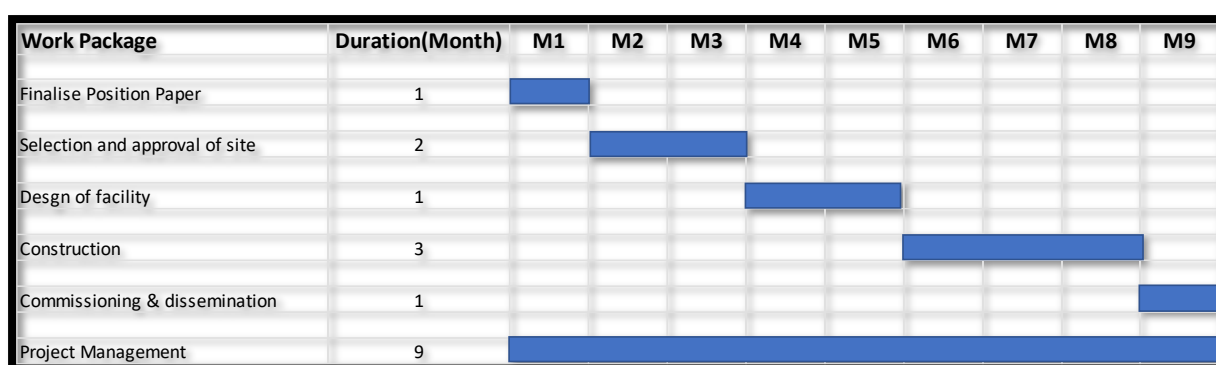


Fig 4. Proposed work plan and time scale for the project

9. Responsibilities

The responsibility for design, construction and maintenance of this facility will be taken by the Raj Kaushal Gita Bhawan Hindu Temple Manchester (RKGBHTM) which is a Charitable Incorporated Organisation (No. 1197206). The RKGBHTM will liaise with all the supporting organisation and act as the main contact point with the local authority.

10. Supporting Local Organisations

The Raj Kaushal Gita Bhawan Hindu Temple Manchester, a Charitable Incorporated Organisation will lead the project. To date the following 23 organisations have agreed to support:-

- (i) Raj Kaushal Gita Bhawan Hindu Temple Manchester
- (ii) Vishwa Hindu Parishad (UK)
- (iii) Shrimad Rajchandra Mission Dharampur (SRMD)
- (iv) Jain Samaj Manchester
- (v) National Hindu Students Forum Manchester (NHSF)
- (vi) Hindu Swayamsevak Sangh (HSS)
- (vii) Vedic Organisation for Indian Culture & Education (VOICE)
- (viii) UK Telugu Hindu Organisations (UTHO)
- (ix) Sale Indian Cultural Society (SICS)
- (x) Bengali Hindu Adarsh Sangh (BHAS)
- (xi) Kannadiga Hindu Organisation (KAHO)
- (xii) Kashmiri Pandit Association
- (xiii) Indian Metaphysical Society
- (xiv) NW Telugu Sangam
- (xv) Indian Religious Charitable Trust (IRCT) -Ganghi Hall
- (xvi) Greater Manchester Malayalee Hindu Community
- (xvii) Sewa UK
- (xviii) The Greater Manchester Bengali Hindu Cultural Association (GMBHCA)
- (xix) Sri Guru Gobind Singh Gurdwara Education and cultural Center
- (xx) Manchester Sikh Foundation
- (xxi) Gurdwara Sri Guru Harkrishan Sahib Ji
- (xxii) Gurdwara Dasmesh Sikh Temple
- (xxiii) Sri Guru Singh Sabha (Central) Gurudwara Manchester

11. Proposed Structure

It is proposed to build a small (about 9 square meters) jetty structure that will overhang over the river bank linking to a footpath onshore. Detailed design will be done after the exact location is finalised but a conceptual design is presented in Figure 5.

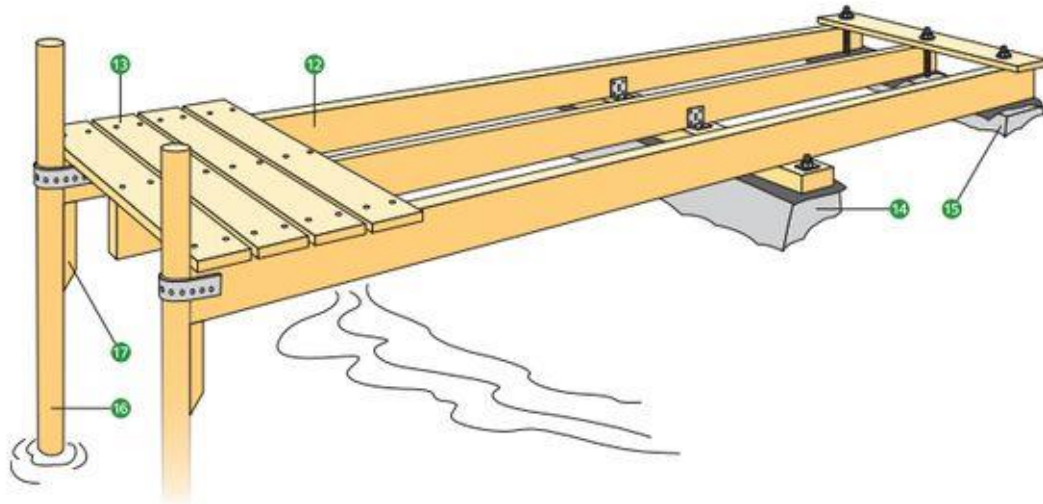


Fig 5. Conceptual design of a small jetty structure

We are expecting groups of 5 to 10 people to use the facility on average once per day. The decking area will be about 3m x 3m. Both the decking and the safety railings will be of composite material. The decking will be supported by structural steel beams. The steel beams will be supported by concrete plinths on land and steel piles if required.

The structure will not be visually intrusive and planning will be sought for any additional footpath, access road or parking if required.

12. Next Steps

The following next steps are planned:-

- i. Submit this paper to local authorities controlling the potential sites mentioned in Section 7.
- ii. Select a site in agreement with the relevant local authority and land owner
- iii. Do detail design and construction work with aim to commission the facility in 2023.

13. Acknowledgements

We wish to acknowledge support and guidance received from the Greater Manchester Faith Community Leaders (GMFCL) particularly from the Chair, Rt Revd David Walker (Bishop of Manchester) and the Secretary Steve Williams, of GMFCL. We are also grateful for the regulatory advice given by Mark Easdale, Greater Manchester Area Environment Manager of Environment Agency and acknowledge the visionary leadership being provided by the Chair of the RKBHTM, Mr Raj Kaushal.

14. References

1. Cemeteries and burials: prevent groundwater pollution - GOV.UK (www.gov.uk)
2. Letter from Helen Wakeham, Deputy Director, Water Quality, Groundwater & Land Contamination, Environment Agency, HW/3956, dated 16 July 2019.

3. Update on the Investigation into the Scattering of Cremated remains at Barrow upon Soar 2019. East Midlands A&R Investigation 2019. Report by B. O'Donovan.

Appendix – 1

Geographical Distribution of People of Dharmic faiths in Greater Manchester (Census 2021 Data)

Figures A1, A2 and A3 present Location Quotient of Hindu, Sikh and Buddhist population from in Greater Manchester based on the Census 2021 data.

The location quotient (LQ), a ratio of ratios, is a widely used geographic index. It is used to measure and map relative distributions or relative concentrations of a subarea to the area as a whole. An example of its use is to measure the residential distribution of Hindus within Greater Manchester area compared to total population. The formula is:

$$LQ = \frac{X_i / \sum X_i}{N_i / \sum N_i} \cdot 100$$

where LQ is the location quotient, X_i is the value of a variable (Hindus) in area i , $\sum X_i$ is the value of the variable (Hindus) in all the subareas combined (Greater Manchester area), N_i is the total population in each subarea, and $\sum N_i$ is the total number of Hindus in Greater Manchester area. Thus, the location quotient varies in our example with the proportion of Hindus in a given subarea to the total number of residents in that subarea. A value of 100 indicates that there is the same proportion of Hindus as total population. The values less than 100 shows that there are fewer Hindus than “expected” compared to the total number of Hindus. In contrast, values greater than 100 indicate that there is a higher proportion of Hindus than “expected” living in the subarea compared to the total number of residents.

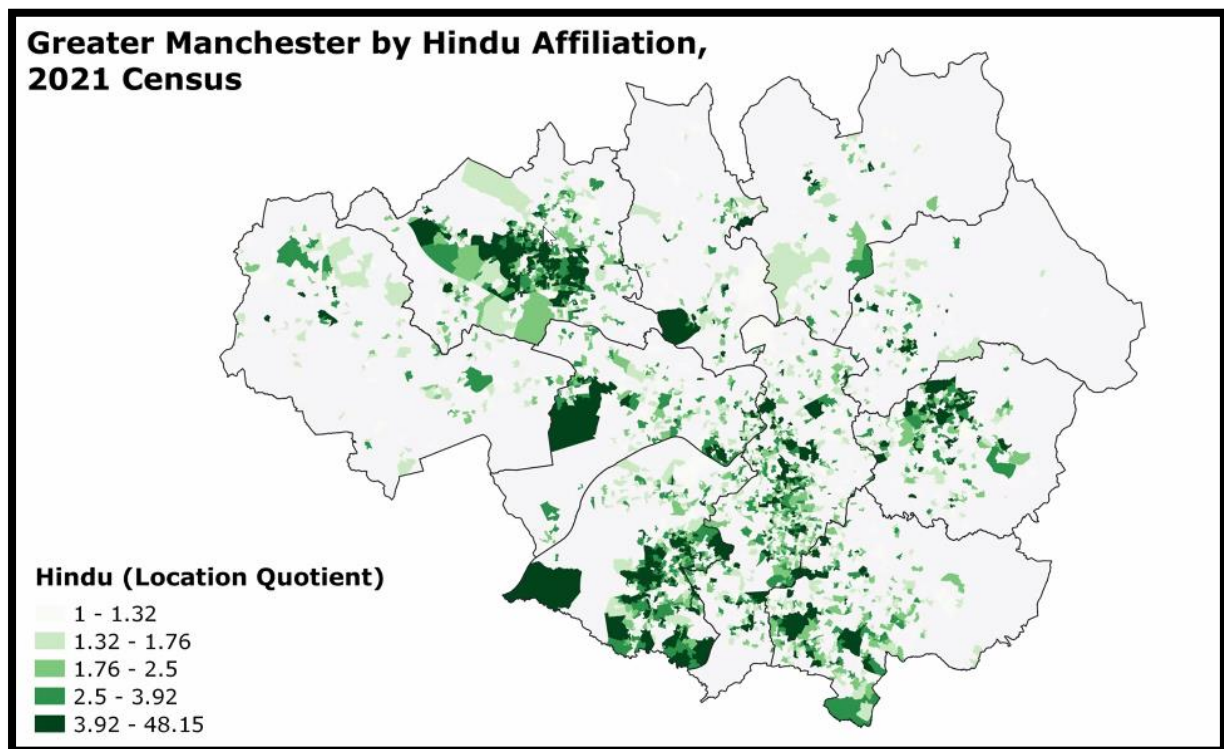


Fig A1. Location quotient of Hindu population in Greater Manchester

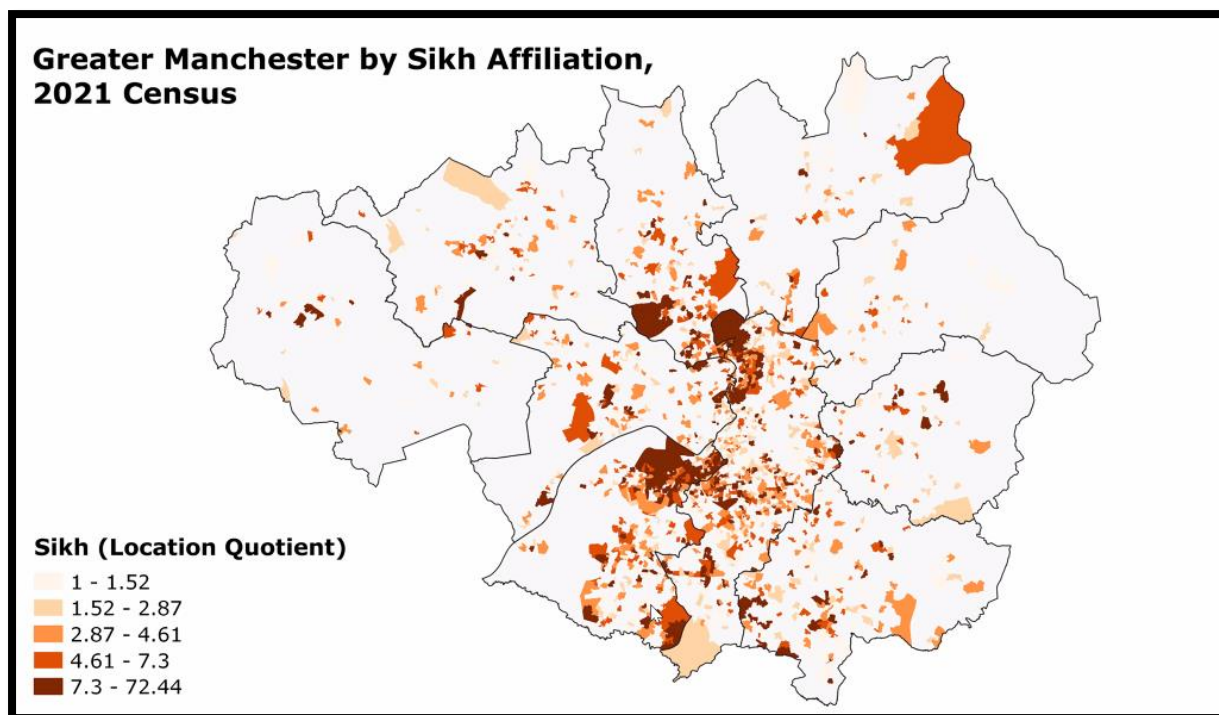


Fig A2. Location quotient of Sikh population in Greater Manchester

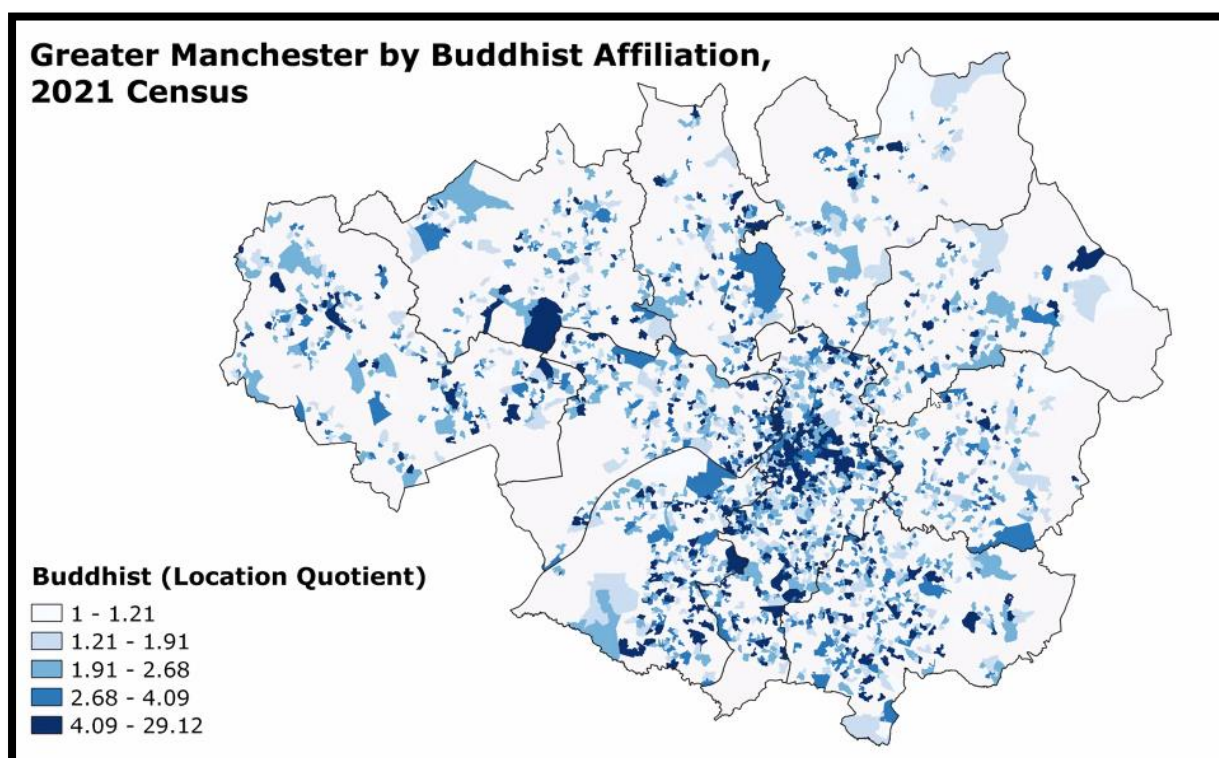


Fig A3. Location quotient of Buddhist population in Greater Manchester

The data shows that people of Dharmic faiths are integrated and live in areas full of diversity as all boroughs show $LQ < 80$. Overall, concentration is in centre and southern regions.