

Piccadilly Gardens Redevelopment

Statement of Community Involvement

Prepared by Counter Context Ltd

JULY 2026

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1. Introduction

1.1 Overview

This Statement of Community Involvement has been prepared by Counter Context Ltd for Galliford Try on behalf of Manchester City Council, hereby referred to as 'the Applicant'. It reports on the programme of pre-application consultation undertaken in relation to proposals for the redevelopment of Piccadilly Gardens, Manchester. It provides:

- An account of the pre-application consultation undertaken with key stakeholders, local residents and businesses about the proposals.
- A summary of the feedback received from these consultees.
- Evidence that this feedback has been considered in the development of the proposals.

The pre-application consultation strategy was designed to reflect guidance within Manchester City Council's adopted Statement of Community Involvement (2025) and the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) (2025).

1.2 Site Location and Description of Proposed Development

The site comprises 0.93ha of land bound by Piccadilly to the north, Portland Street to the east, Parker Street to the south and Mosley Street to the west.

The Application proposes the following:

Redevelopment and reconfiguration of Piccadilly Gardens comprising works to the public realm including public open space and use of space for events, together with decommissioning and removal of the existing fountain; creation of play space, lawn area, hard and soft landscaping; lighting; and drainage and other associated infrastructure; and a severable plot for a future ancillary structure with associated interim landscaping.

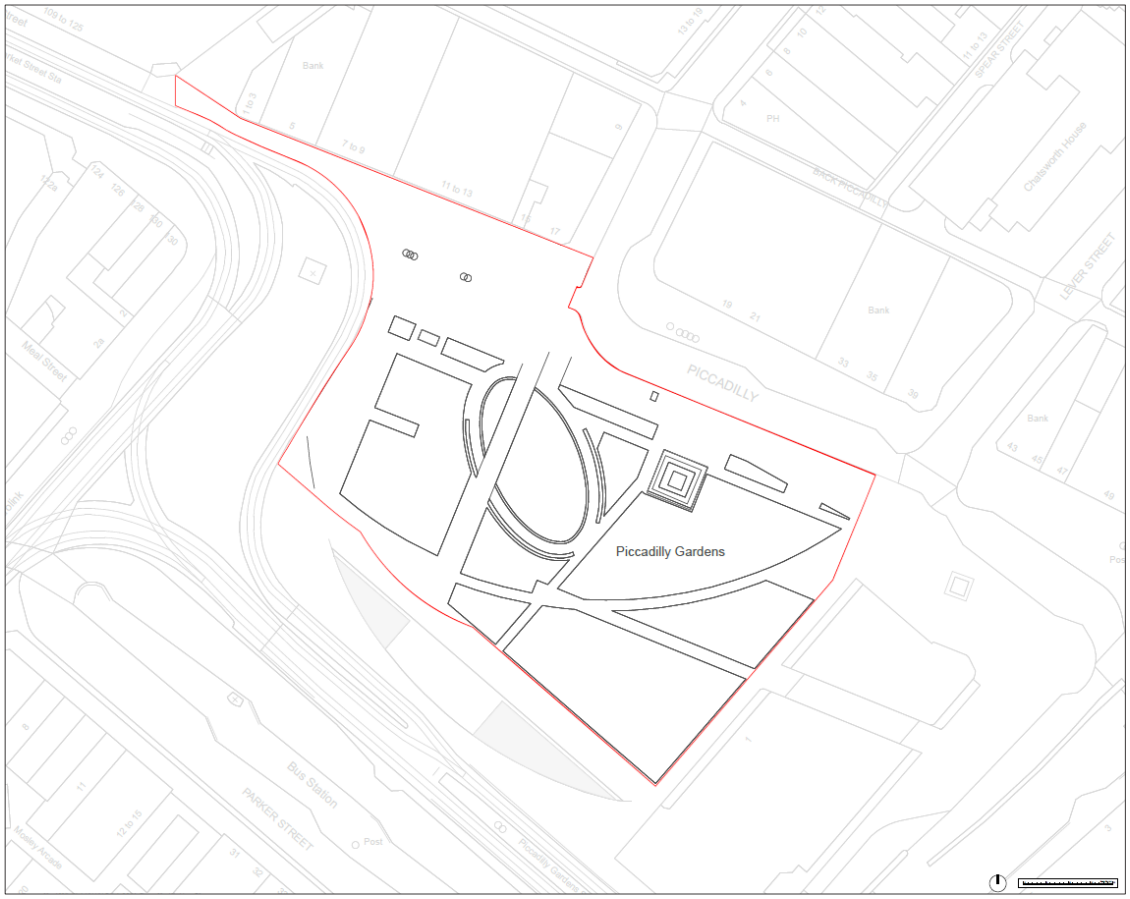


Figure 1: Site Location.

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1.3 Policy Requirements

Conducting an early and transparent pre-application consultation is consistent with the guidance within the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) (2025).

Paragraph 40 of the NPPF states that:

> *Early engagement has significant potential to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of the planning application system for all parties. Good quality pre-application discussion enables better coordination between public and private resources and improved outcomes for the community.*[1]

The NPPF goes on to state that:

> *[Local Authorities] should also, where they think this would be beneficial, encourage any applicants who are not already required to do so by law to engage with the local community and, where relevant, with statutory and non-statutory consultees, before submitting their applications.*[2]

…

> *Design quality should be considered throughout the evolution and assessment of individual proposals. Early discussion between applicants, the local planning authority and local community about the design and style of emerging schemes is important for clarifying expectations and reconciling local and commercial interests. Applicants should work closely with those affected by their proposals to evolve designs that take account of the views of the community. Applications that can demonstrate early, proactive and effective engagement with the community should be looked on more favourably than those that cannot.*[3]

This Statement of Community Involvement also fulfils a formal recommendation of the Local Planning Authority to provide people with an opportunity to feed into the design process of a scheme at an early stage.

Manchester City Council's adopted Statement of Community Involvement (2025) sets out '*how developers can ensure that there is an effective opportunity for people to comment and steer development'*[4].

In providing guidance to developers on how they should carry out pre-application consultation, Manchester City Council's Statement of Community Involvement provides recommendations on the types of methods that developers can adopt as part of their pre-application consultation strategy.

> *Pre-application consultation is beneficial to both the community and the developer as it allows the developer to design a proposal which takes on board the opinions of the community…*
>
> *…The format of the consultation that the developer uses is likely to be discussed with us as part of pre-application discussions, to help ensure that there is an effective opportunity for people to comment and steer development. The following methods are likely to be suitable and should be used as appropriate:*
>
> - *Letters sent to residents and businesses in nearby streets telling them what is proposed, how they can get more information and how they can give the developer their views*
> - *Public exhibition in an accessible location close to the development (e.g. library or supermarket) which tells the public about what is happening and gives them an opportunity to make comments*

[1] Secretary of State for Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government, National Planning Policy Framework, 2025, paragraph 40.
[2] Secretary of State for Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government, National Planning Policy Framework, 2023, paragraph 40.
[3] Secretary of State for Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government, National Planning Policy Framework, 2023, paragraph 132.
[4] Manchester City Council's Planning and Development Statement of Community Involvement, 2025, page 29.

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- *A website set up by the developer*
- *Leaflets distributed to nearby streets and placed in facilities near the proposed developments which have a tear off slip for comments*
- *Social media used by the developer to advertise the development and associated consultation events…*

…We can't require developers to carry out pre-application consultation using the methods set out above, but it is encouraged. Where developers have not engaged with local residents and businesses, it is possible that an application could generate more objections once submitted. This could result in the developer having to amend their application to address the objections which could delay the decision-making process.[5]

From the beginning of the development process, the Applicant set out to undertake a transparent and meaningful consultation. Throughout the process, stakeholders and local people had the chance to provide feedback to the Applicant and engage in an ongoing dialogue through the consultation channels.

[5] Manchester City Council's Planning and Development Statement of Community Involvement, 2025, pages 29-30.

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2. Approach to Pre-Application Consultation

2.1 Consultation Background

The pre-application consultation for the Piccadilly Gardens Redevelopment built on extensive previous consultation and engagement concerning this part of Manchester city centre, which has been undertaken over several years.

Initial consultation on a new vision for Piccadilly Gardens, titled "*Help Shape Piccadilly"* took place between January and March 2021. Conducted primarily online due to Covid-19 restrictions, this consultation featured a virtual exhibition with early-stage design ideas. The consultation asked users of the area what changes they would like to see, including their ideas for new features and events. Despite using a slightly different site boundary and including questions about transport which are outside the scope of the current plans, relevant feedback from this consultation was used to inform the new designs for the Gardens. Key themes identified through this consultation included:

- Requests for more trees, planting and greenery in the area.
- Requests for clear and uncluttered routes through the Gardens.
- Requests for opportunities for food and beverage spill out and outdoor seating.
- Concerns about antisocial behaviour in the area.

Since the 2021 consultation, there has been further ongoing dialogue with a range of key stakeholder groups and interested parties about Piccadilly Gardens. This has included a commitment to partnership working from key stakeholders who play a role in the function and management of Piccadilly Gardens (especially Manchester City Council, Greater Manchester Police, Transport for Greater Manchester and CityCo). It has also included regular liaison with landowners and key occupiers representing the buildings surrounding Piccadilly Gardens.

Freestanding pieces of engagement work have also been undertaken to gain a more detailed understanding of particular challenges and opportunities, and this work helped to inform the design brief for the current project. An example of this is the "Piccadilly Gardens Youth Safety Perceptions Report" (April 2026) which was a detailed piece of work undertaken by SMSR Research to explore how young people experience and understand safety in Piccadilly Gardens, which comprised more than 8 hours of interviews. The full report is provided as **Appendix 1**.

2.2 Pre-application Consultation Objectives and Key Principles

The overall objective of the pre-application consultation was to build on this extensive previous consultation and engagement activity and to undertake a transparent, proactive and meaningful consultation on the detailed design proposals ahead of the submission of the planning application.

A bespoke consultation strategy was developed to provide meaningful opportunities for local residents, businesses and key stakeholders to engage with the Applicant and contribute to the progression of the development proposals. Throughout the process, stakeholders and local people had the chance to provide feedback to the Applicant and engage in an ongoing dialogue through the consultation channels which were established.

To ensure that the consultation was carried out in the most appropriate way possible, the consultation strategy was shared with Manchester City Council planning officers for their input ahead of implementation.

Key principles

The Applicant was committed to consulting openly with key stakeholders, residents, businesses and local community groups. Throughout the consultation, engagement activities have been guided by the following key principles:

- Being clear and 'plain speaking', avoiding the use of jargon or technical terms where possible.
- Ensuring that all public engagement materials can be easily accessed by local stakeholders and the wider general public.
- Being open and honest with stakeholders and members of the local community when presenting all information about the proposals.

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- Identifying different audiences and developing appropriate communication techniques that effectively engage with each one.

2.3 Components of Pre-Application Consultation

Delivered between May and July 2026, there were three key components of the pre-application consultation. The following sections of this SCI provide a description of the activities undertaken within each area:

Strategic and Technical Stakeholder Engagement

As part of the development of proposals for a complex and very busy area of public realm, there was a clear requirement to engage with an extensive set of key stakeholder organisations and technical consultees throughout the pre-application period. This strategic and technical stakeholder engagement is reported on in **Section 3** of this SCI.

Engagement on Children's Play Space

A significant component of the Proposed Development is the relocation and enhancement of the children's play space at Piccadilly Gardens. As part of the development of the bespoke Pre-Application Consultation Strategy, the children's play space was identified as a particular opportunity for more in-depth engagement with children and parents/carers to help shape the detailed design proposals for this space. This part of the engagement process is reported on in **Section 4** of this SCI.

Main Pre-Application Public Consultation

Finally, the main pre-application public consultation was undertaken between June and July 2026. This was the main opportunity for local residents, businesses and other interested stakeholders to view the proposals and provide their feedback. The public consultation employed a multi-channel approach, including opportunities to participate online as well as via in-person events. This part of the consultation process is reported on in detail in **Section 5** of this SCI.

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3. Strategic and Technical Stakeholder Engagement

3.1 Introduction

Throughout the pre-application period, the Applicant shared the emerging proposals and sought feedback from a range of key strategic and technical stakeholders. Often, this pre-application engagement built on extensive previous dialogue and shared work around the future of Piccadilly Gardens, recognising the nature of this part of the city centre and that several organisations share responsibility for the use and management of the space.

A summary of this pre-application engagement is provided below. More detailed information on feedback received and how it has been reflected in the final proposals can be found in the Design and Access Statement, Planning Statement and individual technical reports.

3.2 Manchester City Council Programme Boards and Multi-Agency Steering Group

At a strategic project level, Manchester City Council Progress and Programme Boards brought together strategic leads within Growth and Development, Neighbourhoods, Highways, Capital Projects, Facilities and Estates, among others. This ensured holistic and joined-up working from the outset: helping to set the design brief and then inputting into the emerging design to ensure that strategic priorities and operational practicalities were considered and responded to.

Partnership working across key organisations is also critical to the success of this project. The Piccadilly Gardens Multi-Agency Steering Group was formed in 2025 and consists of representatives from the following organisations:

- Manchester City Council (Neighbourhoods, City Centre Partnerships & Communications)
- Transport for Greater Manchester (TfGM)
- Greater Manchester Police (GMP)
- CityCo

This group meets regularly and also fed into the process to set the design brief. Within the pre-application engagement period, a specific meeting took place on 18 May 2026 to introduce the design proposals. This included a presentation to introduce the emerging design and an overview of the pre-application consultation programme.

Feedback on the plans received from the group within this session included a request to consider how taller trees interact with CCTV sightlines, and further work to try to ensure that planters and planting beds are designed in such a way to prevent them from being used as ‘hides’ to facilitate anti-social behaviour. It was also agreed within this meeting that further meetings with technical teams (particularly with TfGM and GMP) would be required to work through the detailed design proposals in more depth so that these organisations could provide more detailed input and feedback. This further engagement is summarised in the sections below.

3.3 Manchester City Council Ward Councillors

The Piccadilly Gardens site is located within Piccadilly ward, but directly adjacent to Deansgate ward. As such, both sets of Manchester City Council ward councillors have been actively engaged. Again, this engagement stretches back before the current pre-application period, but specific meetings have taken place as part of this pre-application engagement.

These engagement meetings took place at the end of May 2026, with one meeting with the Labour ward councillors and another with the Green ward councillors. The meetings included an introduction to the design proposals and approach to public consultation, with questions and comments invited from the councillors. Questions and areas of discussion included:

- Discussions around tree loss and tree planting, including requests to ensure that there was direct replacement for any tree loss.
- Discussions around the lawn, including positive feedback that it would be raised to prevent people walking through as a cut through, but also wanting to encourage biodiversity.

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- Discussions around the pros and cons of increased surveillance.
- Discussions about how this project interacts with the wider accessibility improvements being considered outside of the red line boundary.
- Discussions around the play area and how to address safety.

3.4 Strategic Stakeholder Group

The Piccadilly Gardens Strategic Stakeholder Group is comprised of representatives from the key landowners and occupiers in and around Piccadilly Gardens, including the owners of One Piccadilly, Rylands, City Tower, 111 Piccadilly, The Royal Buildings (among others), and McDonald's and Primark.

As part of the pre-application engagement, a briefing meeting with the Strategic Stakeholder Group was held on 21 May 2026. Information on the emerging design proposals, including CGI images, and an overview of the consultation programme was provided to members of the group. A second meeting was held on 25 June 2026, providing an update on the consultation and changes made to the proposals as a result of feedback. Feedback on the plans received from the group across these two sessions included:

- Positive feedback about the design concepts, particularly the planting and use of colour.
- Discussions about the children's play space, including general support for the provision but questions about the proximity to office entrances. As a result of this feedback, the children's play space location was adjusted and an enhanced landscape buffer provided to ensure sufficient separation.
- Discussions about the potential for desire lines to be created across the lawns and how to discourage this.
- Discussions around feelings of safety if people sit along the lawn podium at night, as well as lots of interest in the new approach to managing Piccadilly Gardens.

As with other stakeholders listed above, the Applicant intends to provide regular updates to the Strategic Stakeholder Group on an ongoing basis.

3.5 Technical Stakeholder Engagement

Throughout the pre-application period, extensive engagement has taken place with a range of technical and statutory stakeholders. This engagement is summarised below.

Greater Manchester Police (including Counter Terrorism Unit): Several meetings took place between May and July 2026 to provide GMP with the opportunity to comment and feed into the emerging design proposals. This included input on CCTV positioning and the lighting strategy, as well as specific input around the design of the pavilion and on Hostile Vehicle Mitigation. Specific meetings were held to discuss the Crime Impact Statement.

Transport for Greater Manchester, MCC Highways and MCC Cycle Smart: Considering the crucial interplay between the design of Piccadilly Gardens and the role of this area as a transport hub, extensive engagement has taken place with transport-related stakeholders during the pre-application period.

Following on from initial briefing sessions, representatives from TfGM were invited to attend the project's regular Design Team Meetings to ensure alignment with their workstream around the wider Piccadilly area and iterative input into the design proposals. Likewise, extensive engagement with MCC Highways and MCC Cycle Smart has taken place to discuss and agree approaches to pedestrian flow and pedestrian crossings; cycle movement and cycle parking; and vehicular movements and servicing.

Manchester City Council Estates Management, Facilities Management, Environmental Health, Parks and Trees: Considering the interaction between these areas, several meetings included representatives from across these areas to input into the detailed design proposals, with meetings held between May and July 2026. Extensive discussions took place around the approach to CCTV and lighting, including the night-time activation strategy, as well as the detailed tree planting strategy. Another key workstream was around the approach to the children's play space, including involvement from members of the Manchester City Council team with previous experience designing and managing play spaces within the city.

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Manchester City Council Welfare, Equality & Diversity and Internal Access Group Panel: An accessibility review workshop was held with Manchester City Council and accessibility specialists to consider how the proposed design would perform for a wide range of users. As part of this process, the project team presented the emerging landscape and public realm proposals, including the proposed lighting strategy, and received feedback on issues relating to accessibility, wayfinding, safety and user experience.

Lighting was identified as an important consideration in ensuring the Gardens remain welcoming, legible and accessible throughout the day and into the evening. Key themes raised through the review included the need to support intuitive wayfinding, provide a consistent and evenly lit environment, maintain clear sightlines across the Gardens and ensure that any feature or event lighting remains inclusive for all users.

In response, the lighting strategy has been developed to improve visibility, orientation and personal security across the site. The proposals incorporate clear and well-lit routes, an even distribution of lighting throughout the Gardens and design measures that support natural surveillance, including maintaining open views through the space and avoiding planting arrangements that could restrict visibility. The strategy also recognises accessibility considerations associated with feature lighting, with any dynamic lighting effects to be carefully designed to ensure they do not create barriers to use. Collectively, these measures respond directly to the accessibility review feedback and support the creation of a safer, more accessible and inclusive public realm.

Utilities: Ahead of the public consultation period, the Applicant met with representatives from utilities and broadband internet providers to discuss the project and, where required, commission detailed surveys. Guidance was received from Cadent Gas, United Utilities, SP Electricity North West, BT and Virgin Media. The findings of these discussions and any supporting surveys have informed the proposals and are reflected within the technical information submitted as part of this application.

On 7th July 2026 a meeting was held with United Utilities to discuss surface water and foul water management on the site. United Utilities provided initial feedback to the Applicant, with a follow-up meeting scheduled for 21 August 2026.

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4. Children's Play Space Engagement

4.1 Introduction

At the outset of the pre-application consultation process, it was noted that there was a particular opportunity to seek input and feedback to help shape the design proposals for the relocated children's play space within Piccadilly Gardens.

There was a desire to engage with a wide cross-section of children and parents/carers from across the city, to understand how the play space at Piccadilly Gardens is used currently and the opportunities to make the redesigned play space a more engaging and usable space.

As such, a bespoke approach to engagement was designed, with input from Manchester City Council leads from Parks, Neighbourhoods and Manchester Child Friendly City, to undertake targeted engagement which included 'listening sessions' within existing city centre play spaces and a series of workshops.

4.2 Listening Sessions in Piccadilly Gardens and Mayfield Park

The play space-specific engagement activity commenced with two 'listening sessions' undertaken within Piccadilly Gardens and Mayfield park on 28 May 2026 (during Half Term week). The aim of the listening sessions was to hear from parents and children about what brought them to each space and to gather their views and experiences of play and facilities.

Five questions were asked to parents and carers. In total, responses were collected from 32 parents/carers at Mayfield Park and 6 parents/carers at Piccadilly Gardens. The questions posed were as follows:

- How did you travel to the park today?
- Approximately how far did you travel to the park today?
- How often do you visit this park?
- How long do you typically spend here?
- Is there anything specific that made you choose this park today?

The following feedback and observations were gathered during conversations with parents and carers:

- Visitors to Mayfield Park frequently identified the quality of the green space, children's enjoyment of the park, and opportunities for picnics and outdoor recreation, including nearby food and drink destinations, as key reasons for visiting.
- Several visitors to Mayfield Park reported that recommendations from online sources, local networks or accommodation providers had influenced their decision to visit, with some having discovered the park incidentally whilst travelling through or visiting the city centre.
- A number of respondents described their experiences at Mayfield Park as having a positive effect on their wellbeing and quality of life.
- Some parents at Piccadilly Gardens stated that they would be more likely to visit with their children if the space provided a more family-friendly environment.
- Security and the perception of a safe environment were frequently cited by visitors to Mayfield Park as important reasons for choosing to visit with children.
- Some respondents compared Mayfield Park and Piccadilly Gardens, describing Mayfield Park as feeling safer and more suitable for families. Concerns raised in relation to Piccadilly Gardens included antisocial behaviour, visible drug use and rough sleeping, which some respondents considered to detract from its suitability for children and families.
- Those visiting Piccadilly Gardens noted its proximity to city centre shops and it fulfilling a useful purpose in giving children the opportunity to run around and play during a visit to the city centre.

The listening sessions were a useful exercise to help clarify the role of the proposed play space at Piccadilly Gardens. Rather than being a 'destination play' facility, like Mayfield Park, its role is seen as providing the opportunity for a shorter stop-off within the context of a visit to the city centre, an opportunity to let children run around and enjoy a space specifically for them.

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These insights helped to shape the next part of the engagement process, which was to undertake more in-depth discussions with smaller groups of children and parents/carers.

4.3 Engagement Workshops

The Applicant hosted a series of workshops close to the city centre to hear from parents and younger children about their aspirations for the new play space within Piccadilly Gardens. Workshops were hosted through Sure Start Centres and Family Hubs in a range of neighbourhoods within and surrounding the city centre, with the aim of engaging with a wide cross-section of different demographics. In total, **38** families gave feedback through these workshops. The table below shows a breakdown of the workshops:

Location	Date	Families Attending
Ancoats and Miles Platting Sure Start Centre	Wednesday 24 June	10
Ardwick Sure Start Centre	Wednesday 24 June	3
Cheetham Hill Family Hub	Wednesday 24 June	5
Gorton Mount Road Family Hub	Thursday 25 June	7
Moss Side Sure Start Centre	Friday 26 June	5
HOME Manchester Creative Tiny Humans	Friday 26 June	8

Workshops took place within the existing play sessions for parents and toddlers. Children aged 1-3 were asked simple questions such as “show me what toys you like to play with” and “what do you like to do at the park?”. To encourage relevant responses, younger children were sometimes given prompts like “do you like to run/ do you like to use the slide?” etc. This was then followed with “what else do you like to do?” to encourage open responses.

Parents and carers were asked what kind of play equipment their children enjoy using. Parents and carers were then asked their current thoughts on the play equipment in Piccadilly Gardens, how they would like to see this area improve, and what nearby amenities would make them more likely to choose Picadilly Gardens as a space for their children to play.

Play Responses from Children

Common responses from children when asked what they like to do in the park included:

- Jumping and bouncing (including trampolines)
- Swinging
- Climbing
- Sliding
- Playing with or near water
- Sand and digging activities
- Exploring nature and wildlife

Amenities and Comfort Responses from Parents and Carers

Common responses from parents regarding supporting facilities and amenities included:

- The importance of public toilets and baby changing facilities.
- Requests for seating close to the play area, particularly benches with backs and armrests for breastfeeding.
- A desire for shaded seating areas to provide protection from the sun.
- Requests for drinking water facilities, including bottle refill points.
- Support for accessible and inclusive play equipment suitable for children of different ages and abilities.
- The importance of ensuring the play area feels safe, well supervised and separated from surrounding roads, tram lines and busy pedestrian routes.

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Feedback from the workshops was presented to members of the Design Team at the start of July 2026, ensuring that the feedback could influence the emerging design proposals. This was especially timely as discussions were starting about the specific type of play equipment to include within the new play space, and the engagement feedback was able to directly influence these discussions.

The wider feedback provided during the play-specific workshops is considered and responded to as within the Applicant Response Table within Section 7 of this SCI.

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5. Main Pre-Application Public Consultation

5.1 Introduction

The main pre-application public consultation ran for four weeks from 17 June to 15 July 2026. To make the consultation as easy and accessible for people to find and respond to, a multi-channel approach was employed, including direct outreach, social media, on-street advertising, web-based information and in-person events. The detailed consultation activity plan is set out below.

5.2 Publicising the Consultation

5.2.1 Consultation postcard

A consultation postcard was delivered to all residential and business addresses located within a distribution area of **185 addresses** (see Figure 2 below) at the start of the consultation period.

The A5 sized postcard introduced the proposals for the redevelopment of Piccadilly Gardens and directed recipients towards the consultation website to find out more and provide their feedback via the dedicated online feedback form or by email. The postcard also provided details of the in-person consultation drop-in sessions held during the consultation period. The consultation postcard is provided as **Appendix 2**.

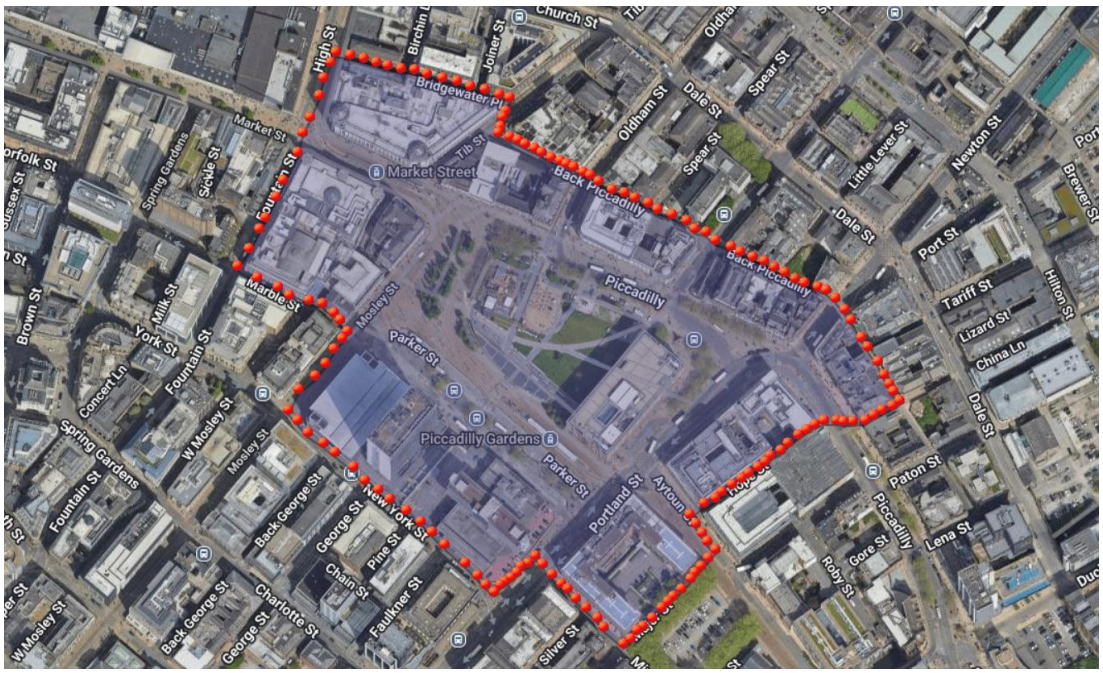


Figure 2: Consultation postcard distribution area.

5.2.2 Press release and media coverage

A press release was issued on **17 June 2026** to a range of local and regional media publications to promote the consultation and the opportunities to engage. It detailed the website details as well as the details of the in-person drop-in events.

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Extensive media coverage was generated from the press release, with articles subsequently appeared in the BBC, Manchester Evening News, Place North West, I Love Manchester, Manchester's Finest, Insider Media, and Manchester Wire, among others.

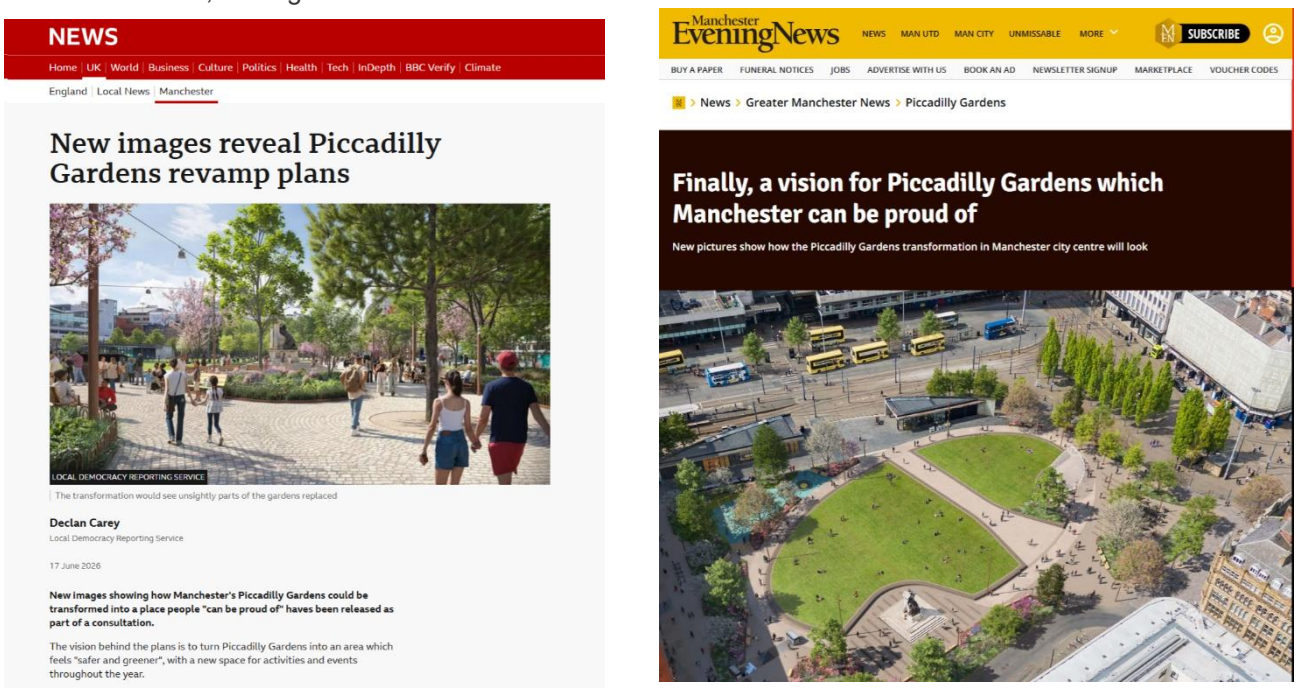


Figure 3: Screenshots of the articles about the proposals that appeared on the BBC and Manchester Evening News.

5.2.3 Social Media Promotion

A total of 21 social media posts were published during the consultation period. Collectively, these posts generated 139,358 impressions, 1,144 link clicks, 1,297 likes and 176 shares. An example of the graphics used is provided as **Appendix 3**

5.2.4 Digital Advertising Boards

During the consultation period, a consultation advert was displayed on 12 outdoor sites in and around the Piccadilly Gardens.

5.2.5 Local stakeholder emails

The following stakeholders were contacted by email directly on 15th June 2026 to inform them of the consultation:

- Manchester Civic Society
- Manchester Victorian Society
- Manchester 20th Century Society

5.3 Consultation Webpage

A dedicated webpage on Manchester City Council's website (https://www.manchester.gov.uk/planning-and-regeneration/regeneration/city-centre-growth-and-infrastructure/city-centre-regeneration-areas/piccadilly-gardens) was used to host information and the feedback questionnaire during the consultation.

The webpage provided:

- A summary of the proposals
- Information on in-person consultation events
- A digital copy of the display boards
- A digital feedback form

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Links to the page and QR codes were provided across all consultation materials. In total, the web page received 1,534 visits through the consultation period. The consultation boards received 552 views throughout the same period.

A copy of the consultation display boards is provided as **Appendix 4** and the feedback form as **Appendix 5.**

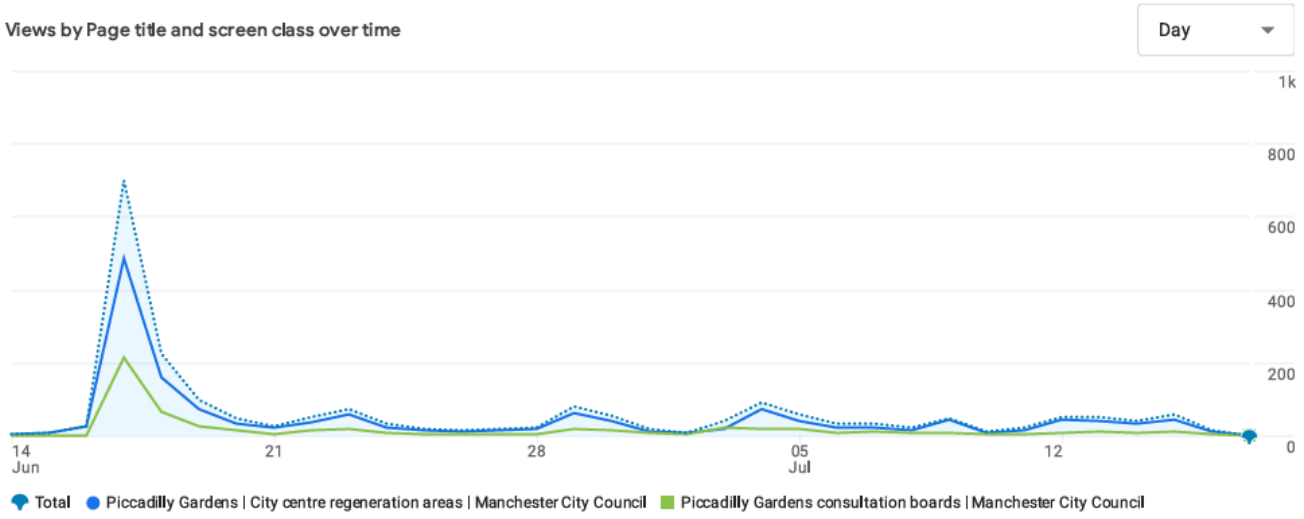


Figure 4: Graph showing the number of visits to the consultation website over the consultation period.

5.4 Consultation Drop-in Events

As part of the consultation, three four-hour public drop-in events were held at Manchester Art Gallery, allowing direct engagement with the project team and opportunities to ask questions.

Drop-in events featured a large copy of the display boards and a looping video showing 3d rendered models of the park from various human-scale angles. Paper feedback forms and QR codes linking to the online feedback form were made available at the event.

Events were held at a range of times including weekdays and weekends to maximise opportunities for attendance. The table below shows the details and number of attendees at each event:

Date	Time	Attendees
Tuesday 23 June	1pm – 5pm	54
Friday 26 June	10am -2pm	30
Saturday 27 June	11am -3pm	22

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In total, **31** paper feedback forms were received at public drop-in events.



Figure 5: Images showing the public consultation events.

5.5 Methods for Receiving Feedback

5.5.1 Email Address

An email address (city.centre@manchester.gov.uk) was publicised on the consultation website, allowing people to contact the consultation team with any questions, as well as offering an alternative channel to submit feedback.

5.5.2 Online Feedback Form

An online feedback form to provide feedback on was clearly signposted on the consultation website. As the primary method for channel for consultation feedback, the feedback form (or questionnaire) invited respondents to share their views on the proposals overall, as well as specific aspects or areas. As stated above, paper copies of the questionnaire were available at the consultation drop-in event for attendees to complete.

5.5.3 Library Displays

A small display featuring a copy of the consultation boards and hard-copy feedback forms was erected at Manchester Central Library. The display also contained a secured box for the return of completed feedback forms, and information on how to access the consultation online.

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6. Pre-Application Consultation Feedback

6.1 Summary of Feedback Received

A total of 405 responses were received during the pre-application consultation via the following channels:

Response Type	Number
Online feedback form	374
Paper feedback forms	31
Total	**405 responses**

All of the responses received during the pre-application consultation period have been logged and considered by the Applicant's team.

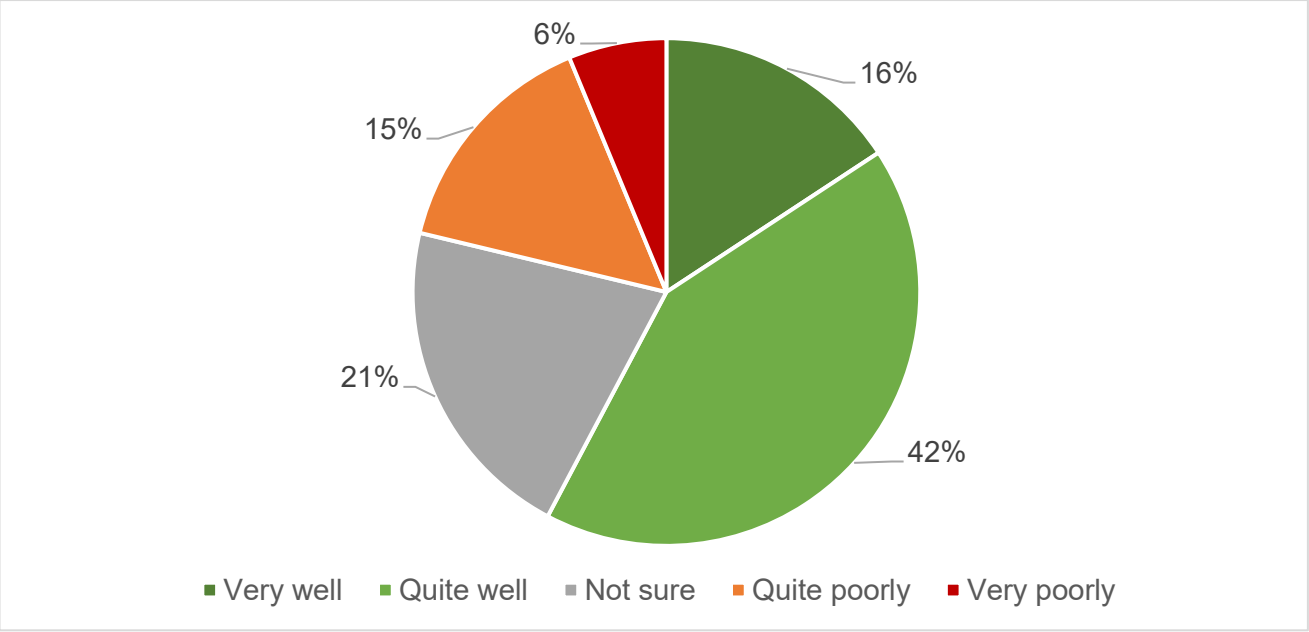
6.2 Analysis of Feedback

The consultation feedback form (or questionnaire) included a combination of closed (multiple-choice) questions asking respondents to select the most appropriate option(s) from a pre-defined list, and open questions allowing them to elaborate further and explain their responses through open text feedback.

Comments received through the open-text questions included in the feedback form, and via engagement workshops, are summarised and responded to in **Section 7**.

6.2.1 Responses to Closed Questions

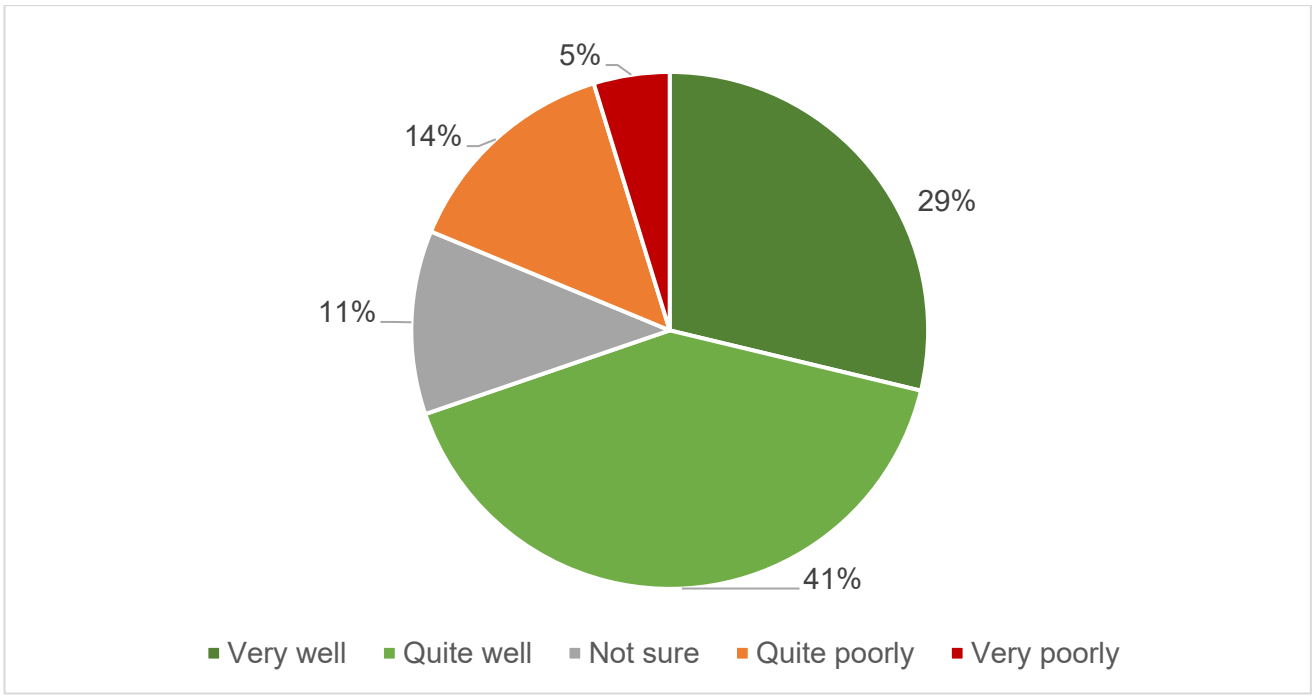
We heard people want more safe and welcoming spaces to sit and relax in Piccadilly Gardens. How well do you think the new plans provide this?



Over half (58%) of respondents thought that the new plans provided more safe and welcoming spaces to sit and relax in Piccadilly Gardens. Almost a quarter (21%) of respondents were not sure, with the final 21% thinking the plans did so 'quite poorly' (15%), or 'very poorly' (6%).

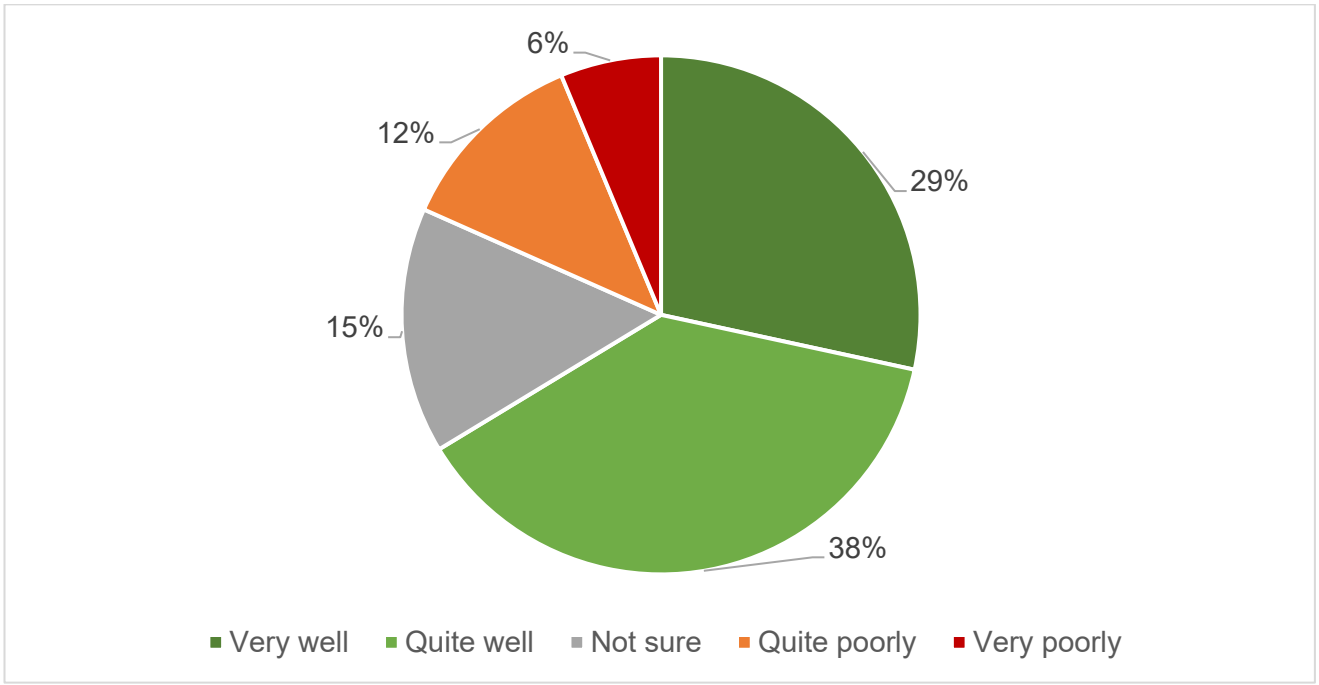
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People said they want Piccadilly Gardens to feel greener, with more colourful plants, flowers, and trees. How well do you think the new plans achieve this?



Almost three-quarters (70%) of respondents thought that the new plans achieve greener, more colourful planting. The remaining 30% either felt this was achieved ‘quite poorly’ (14%), were unsure (11%) or ‘very poorly’ (6%).

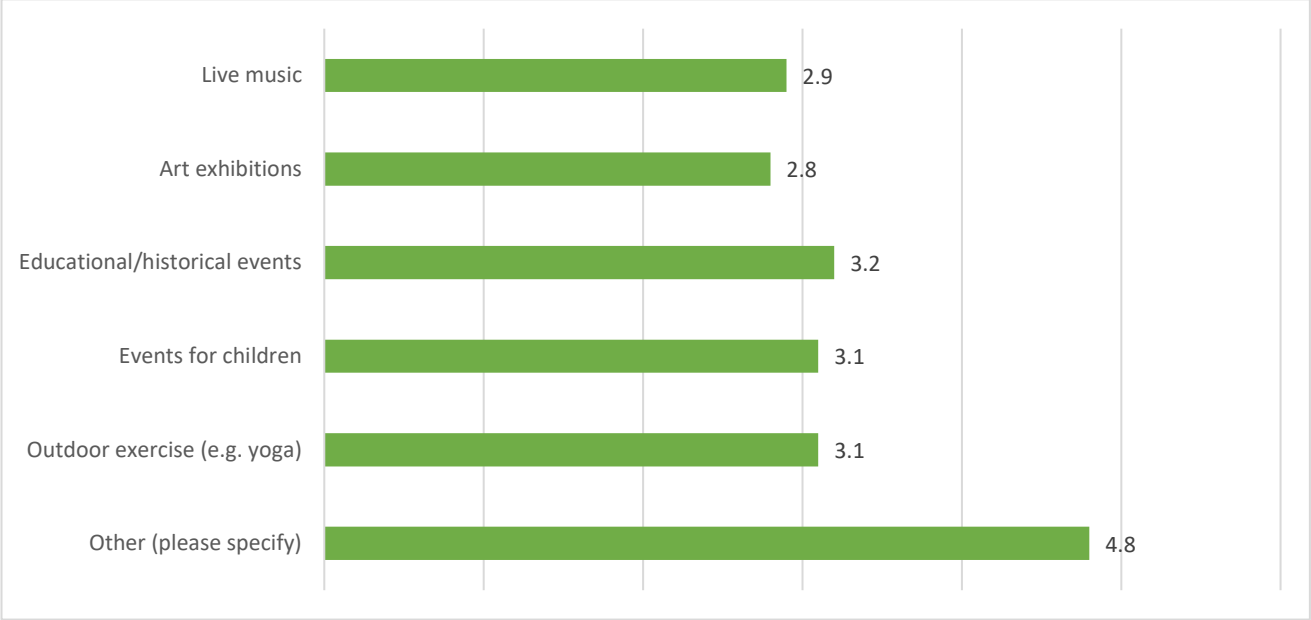
People said they wanted clearer walking routes through Piccadilly Gardens. How well do you think the new plans achieve this?



Around two-thirds (67%) of respondents thought that the plans achieve clearer walking routes through Piccadilly Gardens. The remaining 33% were unsure (15%), or thought this was achieved ‘quiet poorly’ (12%) or ‘very poorly’ (6%).

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We plan to hold more small, family-friendly events throughout the year. Please rank these from 1 to 6, with 1 as your favourite and 6 as your least favourite. You can also add your own suggestion in the comment box.



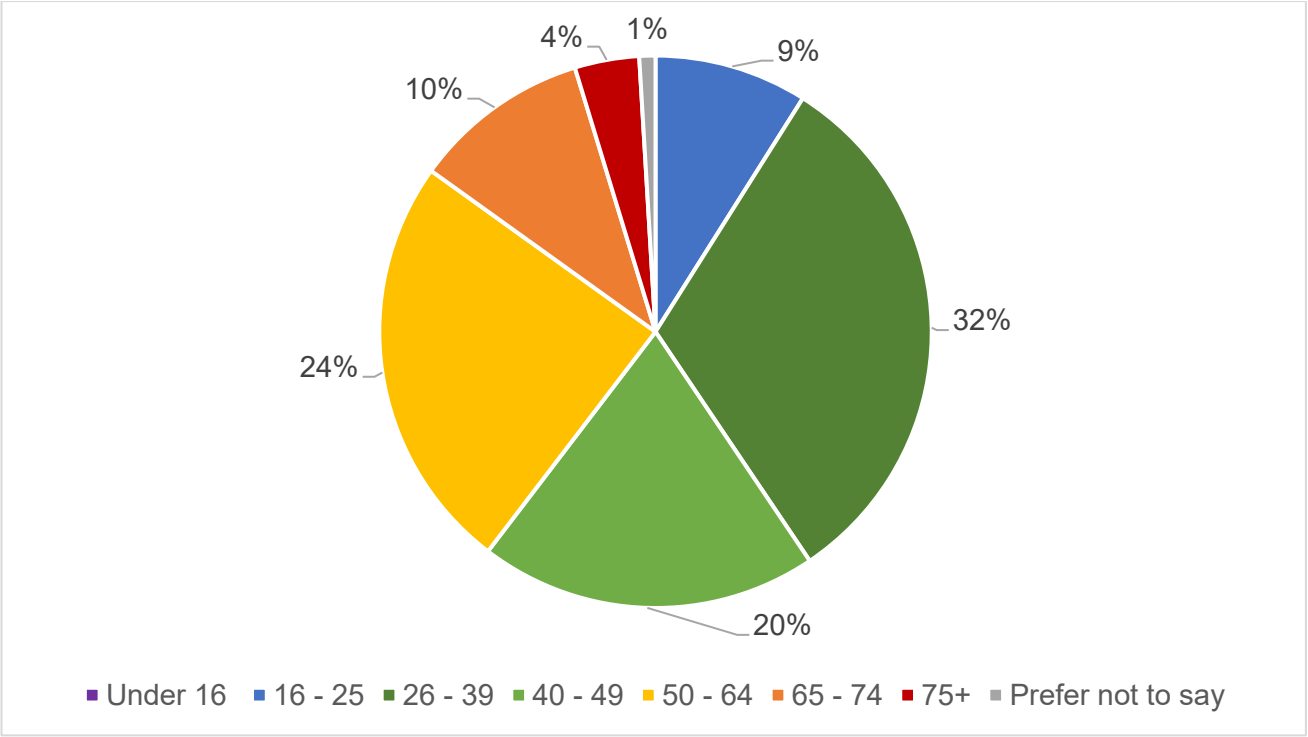
Participants ranked these options with 1 as their favourite, therefore a lower average rank means more support for an option. Art exhibitions were the most popular option, followed by live music. Excluding “other”, which most people ranked last, all options were roughly equal in popularity, with only a 0.4/6 difference between the most and least popular options.

The suggestions made in the ‘Other’ section included:

- Markets, community markets, and food/drink festivals
- Food stalls and food vendors
- Theatre, drama, storytelling, and outdoor cinema
- Live music, particularly gentle or acoustic performances
- Arts, crafts, games, and community activities
- Seasonal attractions and events (e.g. Christmas ice rink, summer gardens, carousel)
- Sports and recreational activities (e.g. roller skating)
- Cultural, heritage, and English history-themed events
- Events for community groups and young people
- Wildlife, gardening, and environmental activities (e.g. sensory gardens, litter picks, plant growing, species identification)
- Accessibility improvements, including sensory gardens, fountains, and links to the viaduct
- Spaces for sitting, relaxing, and socialising

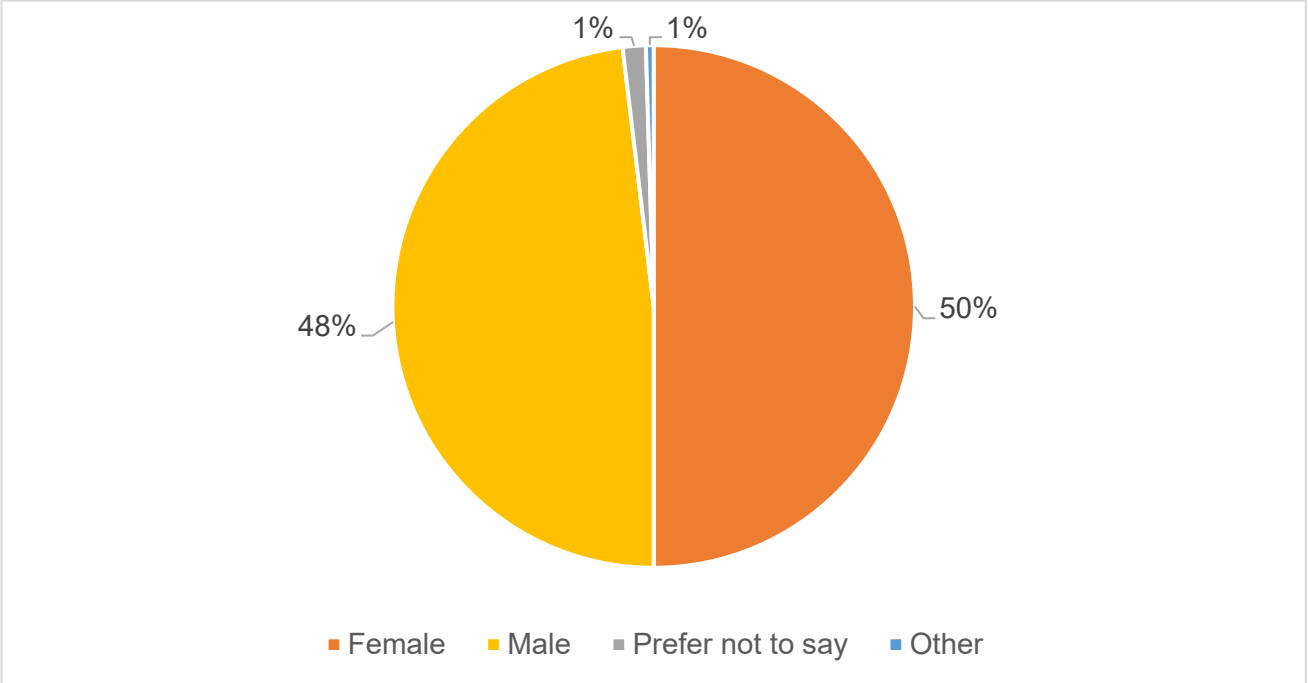
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What is your age?



A broad range of ages responded to the engagement survey. The largest groups were 26-39 (39%), 50-64 (24%) and 40-49 (20%).

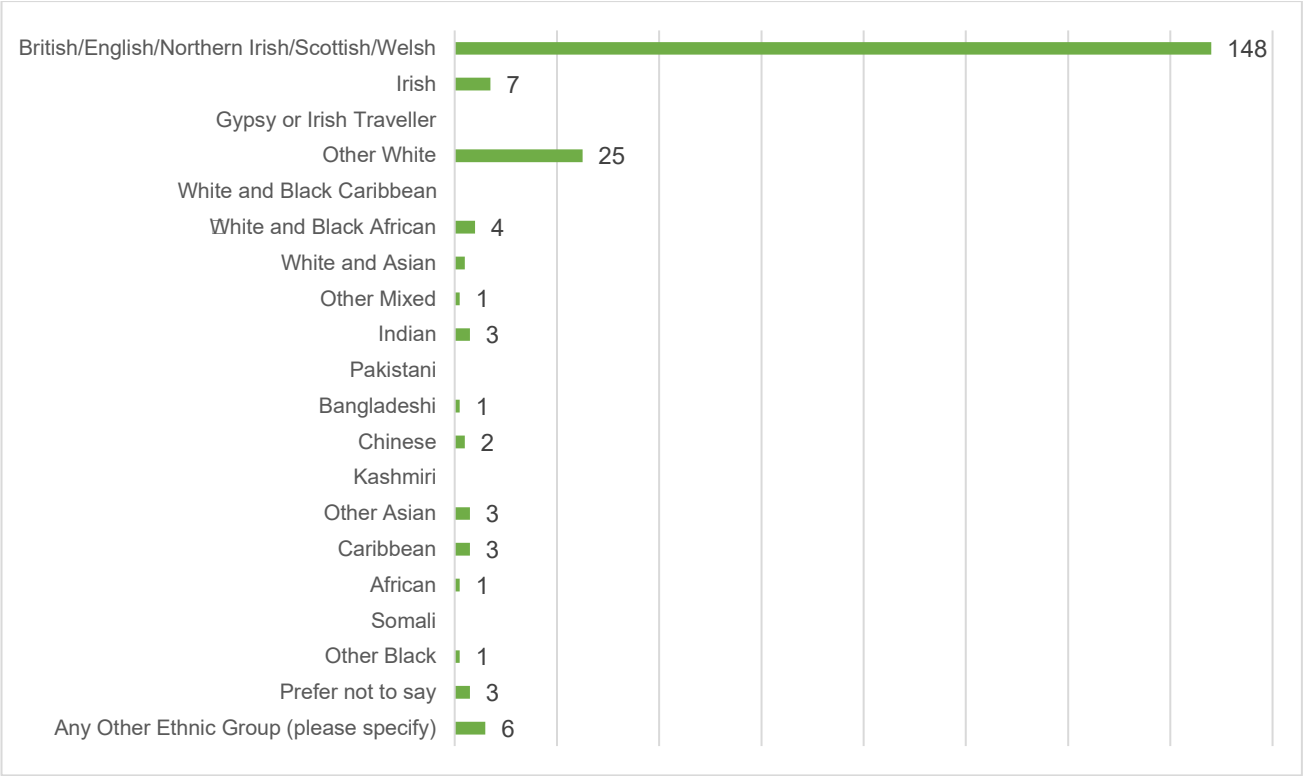
What is your gender?



Respondents were almost evenly split between male (50%) and female (48%), with 1% preferring not to say and 1% 'Other'.

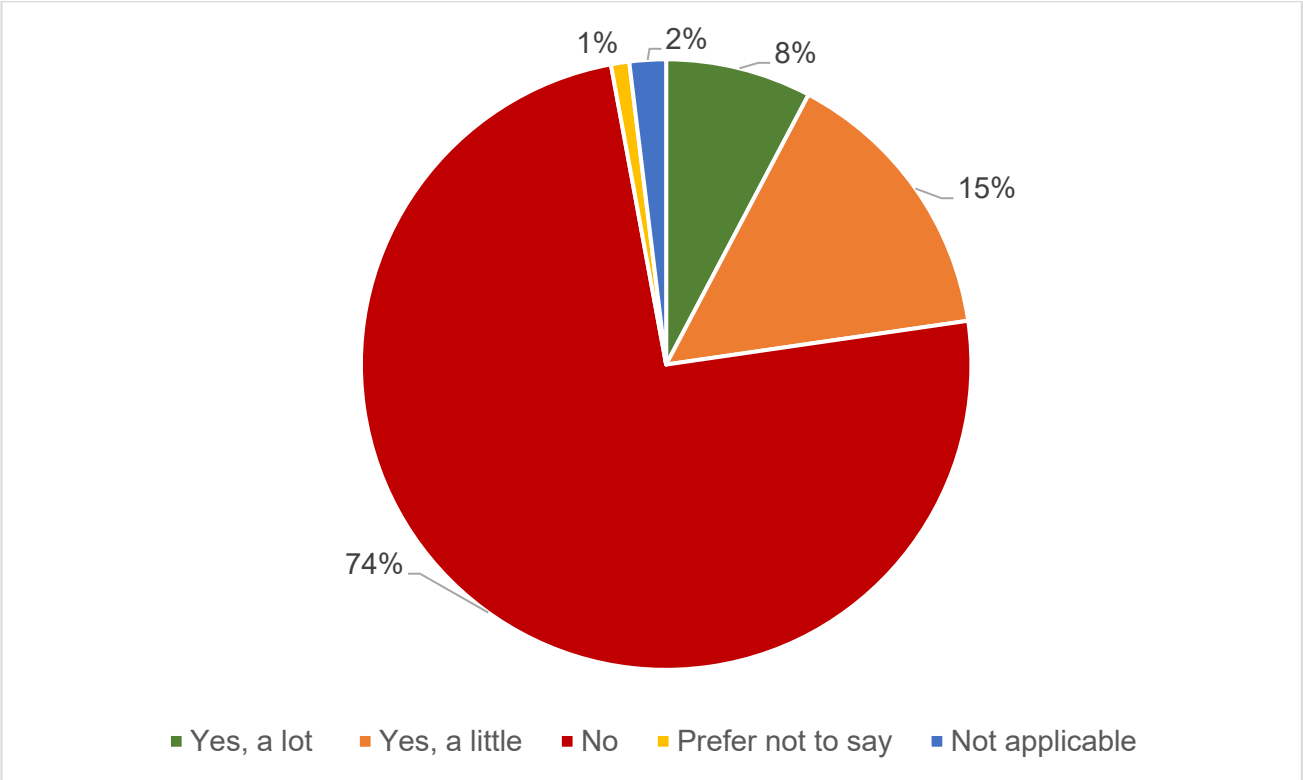
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What is your ethnicity?



Around two-thirds (67%) of respondents were British, English, Northern Irish, Scottish or Welsh. A further 11% were 'Other White', and 3% were Irish or 'Any other Ethnic Group'. The remaining 16% was a mixture of a variety of different ethnic groups, as shown above.

Are your day-to-day activities limited because of a long-term health condition or disability?



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Almost three-quarters (74%) of respondents indicated that their day-to-day activities are not limited. The remaining 26% said their activity was limited a little (15%), a lot (8%) it was not applicable (2%) or they preferred not to say (1%).

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7. Consideration of Pre-Application Consultation Feedback

7.1 Consideration of Issues

A detailed summary of the issues raised by respondents and how they have been considered and responded to by the Applicant is provided in the following table.

Topic	Applicant Response
General support for the proposals	
A number of respondents were highly positive about the proposals for Piccadilly Gardens, describing the plans as “great”, “fantastic”, “good”, and expressing feelings of optimism about the future of the space.	The Applicant welcomes these comments of support, and thanks all respondents for their participation and feedback.
Several respondents welcomed the plans as a significant improvement from the current Gardens and praised the ambition shown in seeking to transform one of Manchester’s most important public spaces.	
Many respondents also praised the proposed design, commenting that they “really like”, “love”, or were “pleased” with the plans, and that the proposed layout would create a more attractive and inviting environment.	
Safety	
A significant number of respondents identified safety, security and anti-social behaviour as their primary concern. Many commented that Piccadilly Gardens currently feels unsafe and emphasised that the success of the proposals will depend on addressing issues such as anti-social behaviour.	The Applicant notes the concerns raised regarding safety, security and anti-social behaviour. These issues have been consistently identified through previous engagement and were a key consideration in the development of the proposals from the outset. The proposed improvements form part of a wider, multi-layered approach which recognises that design alone cannot resolve anti-social behaviour, but can support positive change. The proposals seek to improve natural surveillance through enhanced sightlines, reduce hidden and underused spaces, encourage positive activity throughout the day. Alongside the physical improvements, Greater Manchester Police are already undertaking enhanced enforcement activity within Piccadilly Gardens and the surrounding area as part of a broader programme of interventions intended to improve safety and reduce anti-social behaviour. Beyond the proposed redevelopment of Piccadilly Gardens, a completely new approach to managing the space is being developed. Working in partnership with Transport for Greater Manchester (TfGM), Greater Manchester Police (GMP), city centre businesses and residents, the new management plan will ensure that Piccadilly Gardens is safe, clean and well maintained, addressing community concerns about anti-social behaviour with a proactive, problem-solving approach.
Numerous respondents requested increased police presence, including regular patrols, a police hub or station, and stronger enforcement measures.	
Respondents frequently highlighted the importance of maintaining clear sightlines across the Gardens. Many considered open views and natural surveillance critical to improving safety and reducing opportunities for anti-social behaviour.	

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Improved lighting was widely supported as a key safety measure. Respondents highlighted concerns regarding dark areas and poor visibility, particularly during the evening and winter months.	New lighting and CCTV form an important part of the proposals and will contribute to the creation of a safe, welcoming and attractive environment throughout the day and evening. The lighting strategy has been designed to improve visibility across the Gardens, support natural surveillance, highlight key routes, trees and landmarks, and enhance the overall quality of the public realm after dark.
A number of respondents called for increased CCTV coverage and monitoring throughout the Gardens. Enhanced surveillance was viewed as an important deterrent to crime and anti-social behaviour and a key part of ongoing site management.	
Several respondents also raised concerns regarding the presence and congregation of delivery riders within and around the Gardens, with some calling for designated waiting areas or management measures to reduce conflicts with other users of the space.	These comments have been noted and will be considered through the development of a management plan for the area.
Maintenance	
Many respondents emphasised the importance of long-term maintenance and upkeep, noting that the success of the proposals will depend on effective management of the Gardens over time.	The Applicant agrees that long-term management will be critical to the success of the proposals. The project is being developed alongside an operational approach that places a strong emphasis on ongoing maintenance, management and stewardship of the Gardens following completion. A Public Realm Landscape Management and Maintenance Plan is being development as part of the application that will set out all necessary management and maintenance principles and management tasks to enable successful establishment and ensure the continued maturing of all landscape elements. This includes hard landscaping, soft landscaping, and public realm furniture maintenance.
Several respondents referenced previous difficulties in maintaining Piccadilly Gardens and questioned how planting, lawns, lighting, furniture and other infrastructure would be managed over the long term.	The Applicant recognises concerns regarding the historic maintenance of Piccadilly Gardens. The proposals have been developed with durability, maintainability and long-term management requirements in mind, whilst also seeking to deliver a significantly enhanced public realm and landscape environment.
Many respondents stressed the importance of securing sufficient long-term funding and resources.	
Several respondents called for a robust maintenance strategy, including regular cleaning, litter collection, landscape maintenance and the prompt repair of damaged infrastructure.	The Applicant agrees that a comprehensive maintenance approach will be required to support the long-term success of the Gardens. Cleaning, landscape maintenance, repairs and day-to-day management will form important considerations in the future operation of the space.
Green space and planting	
Many respondents welcomed the introduction of additional greenery, trees and planting within the Gardens. Respondents frequently called for more flowers, increased biodiversity, greater tree cover and more diverse planting throughout the space.	The planting strategy is a key element of the proposals and places a strong emphasis on reintroducing colour, flowers and vibrancy to Piccadilly Gardens. A diverse mix of planting has been selected to provide year-round interest, with seasonally flowering species chosen to ensure the Gardens remain colourful and attractive throughout the year.

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A number of respondents highlighted the importance of trees in providing shade, supporting biodiversity and improving climate resilience. Many suggested that additional trees should be incorporated throughout the Gardens to create more comfortable spaces during warmer weather.	The proposals include a varied tree planting strategy which will contribute to biodiversity, climate resilience and the overall character of the Gardens. Mature trees with high canopies are proposed throughout the space to provide increased shade and comfort during warmer weather, whilst helping to maintain openness, visibility and clear sightlines across the Gardens. In response to the feedback from respondents and further stakeholder workshops with MCC's Parks and Public Realm teams, additional trees are now proposed within the lawns areas to provide additional shading. The locations are being coordinated with the CCTV camera locations
Many respondents expressed concern that extensive lawn areas would be difficult to maintain given the high footfall through Piccadilly Gardens and the impact of high footfall events. Several suggested that the grass could quickly become worn, muddy and inaccessible.	The redesigned Gardens and proposed management approach will no longer be suited to accommodating the large seasonal markets that have historically placed significant pressure on grassed areas. Instead, any events taking place on the lawn areas are intended to be smaller and less impactful. A pedestrian movement survey has been undertaken which quantified flow direction and numbers and across a number of days during the week and weekend. The study tested footpaths widths and provided recommendations to footpath widths to comfortably accommodate peak flows. This data has been used to inform the design, incorporating wide generous pedestrian routes that support the long-term condition and accessibility. Specialist consultants have been appointed to develop a robust lawn specification tailored to the intense demand and use; however it is acknowledged that no lawn can thrive without allowing periods for recovery. This is an important part of the new enhanced management plan, with a rotation of lawn areas to reduce impact on the public and usability of the lawns. A larger consolidated single lawn also supports this approach.
Accessibility	
Several respondents highlighted the importance of clear, step-free routes throughout the Gardens, with wide pathways, suitable surface materials and unobstructed pedestrian connections to support wheelchair users, mobility scooter users, pushchair users and other visitors with mobility requirements.	Accessibility has been a key consideration throughout the development of the proposals. The design incorporates step-free routes, accessible pathways and clear pedestrian connections to support a broad range of users and create an inclusive public environment.
Some respondents suggested that accessibility should be considered throughout the detailed design process, including engagement with disability groups and accessibility specialists, to ensure the Gardens are welcoming and inclusive for all visitors.	The Applicant welcomes these suggestions and recognises the value of continued engagement with accessibility specialists and user groups. An Accessibility Consultant was brought into the Design Team to undertake a review and make recommendations on the emerging design proposals, with these recommendations resulting in changes to the design.
A number of respondents called for additional seating throughout the Gardens, including benches with backs and armrests and seating suitable for a range of ages and mobility needs. Many felt that accessible seating	

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would encourage greater use and enjoyment of the space.	An Accessibility Consultant was brought into the Design Team to undertake a review and make recommendations on the emerging design proposals, with these recommendations resulting in changes to the design. Specific feedback from the Access Consultant has resulted in design reviews of the seating design – testing locations and customisation to improve inclusivity; Maximising material colour contrast - to improve contrast to upstand areas and planting; Inclusive play – including suggestions for sensory play and a specific play equipment comment, for example a 'wide' slide to allow more than one person to use at the same time. Lighting was also a consideration – avoiding dark spots and maximising uniformity. Accessibility considerations will continue to inform the detailed design process as the proposals progress and further meetings with accessibility groups coordinated by Greater Manchester Disability Collaborative are planned for September 2026.
Transport and movement	
Many respondents commented on the relationship between Piccadilly Gardens and the surrounding transport infrastructure. A recurring suggestion was the relocation of the bus interchange or bus stops to create additional space.	The Applicant notes these comments. The redesign of Piccadilly Gardens (the subject of this planning application) sits within a broader context of a partnership-based approach to the wider Piccadilly area, with Transport for Greater Manchester (TfGM) working on a longer-term plan including the potential relocation of the bus interchange.
Respondents also highlighted the importance of maintaining clear and direct pedestrian routes through the Gardens. Several commented that the design should respond to existing desire lines and support the significant volume of people moving through the space each day.	The Applicant recognises the important role Piccadilly Gardens plays as a major pedestrian route. The layout has been designed to balance movement through the space with opportunities for recreation, planting and social activity while maintaining clear and legible routes.
Some respondents raised concerns regarding congestion and potential conflicts between pedestrians, cyclists and delivery riders within the space.	At present, with the exception of Portland Street, the significant tram infrastructure and highway network means the potential for cycling is very limited. The new Piccadilly Gardens has been designed to create a destination space, and cycle movement is not encouraged through the Gardens. To support Active Travel to and around the Gardens however, a total of sixteen (16) new cycle storage racks are proposed. Nine of these are proposed in close proximity to Piccadilly along the northern edge of the Gardens, and a further seven adjacent to Moseley street on the northwestern side of the Gardens.
Many respondents expressed concern that insufficient direct routes across the Gardens would result in informal desire lines developing across lawn areas, potentially leading to worn or muddy surfaces over time.	The lawn areas are raised between 400-500mm relative to the proposed routes to help guide flows and discourage desire lines and minimise wear. Accessibility and usability of the lawns is maintained from the central spine which is flush to the lawn areas.
Pavilion	
A number of respondents suggested that the pavilion should accommodate additional facilities such as a police hub, police station, visitor information centre,	Following the pre-application public consultation, a decision was taken not to include the pavilion within this planning application. There is still an intention to

community space, Manchester shop, water refill points or security presence.	include a structure as part of Piccadilly Gardens in the future, and so the feedback provided as part of this consultation on the purpose, location and design of the pavilion will be helpful in shaping these future plans.
Several respondents questioned the need for a new pavilion given the presence of existing cafés, retail units and food and beverage operators around Piccadilly Gardens. Some argued that existing buildings should be reused or repurposed instead of introducing a new structure.	
Some respondents felt the pavilion's proposed location could create enclosed areas, obstruct views across the Gardens or generate opportunities for anti-social behaviour if not actively managed.	
Several respondents expressed concern that Piccadilly Gardens had already lost too much public space to buildings and commercial uses and felt that any new structure should be carefully justified and designed to support the wider public benefit of the Gardens.	As per the response above, the design development process has carefully considered the location of the proposed pavilion to ensure it complements the overall design of the Gardens. The pavilion has been designed to help activate the gardens, its northern edge provides a information kiosk for TFGM and café and the southern façade provides natural surveillance across the lawn and gardens. In area, the pavilion is less than 2% of the planning application site area.
Design and identity	
Many respondents commented that Piccadilly Gardens should function as a welcoming gateway to Manchester and felt the design should better reflect the city's identity, reputation and ambition.	Manchester has a rich network of civic squares and public spaces, including Albert Square, St Peter's Square, Lincoln Square and Sadler's Yard. In contrast to these predominantly hard landscaped environments, Piccadilly Gardens has long served as the principal green space in the city. Extensive public consultation over recent years has consistently reinforced the desire to retain and strengthen this role, informing a design brief centered on the creation of generous lawns, large trees and rich planting. Storytelling elements will be woven throughout the design, celebrating the city's unique heritage and culture while reinforcing the distinctive Mancunian character of the space.
Some respondents felt the proposals lacked ambition, or 'wow factor', and did not reflect the importance of Piccadilly Gardens as a civic space.	
Several respondents stated that the proposals appeared too similar to the existing Gardens and would not fundamentally change the character of the space.	
Several respondents felt that Piccadilly Gardens would function more successfully as a civic square or plaza, with greater emphasis on open space, pedestrian movement, seating and durable hard landscaping, rather than extensive lawn areas.	
Children's play	
The most common concern was that Piccadilly Gardens is currently perceived as unsafe for children due to drug use, drinking, homelessness, litter, needles, broken glass and antisocial behaviour.	As explained above, the Applicant notes the concerns raised regarding safety, security and anti-social behaviour. These issues have been consistently identified through previous engagement and were a key consideration in the development of the proposals from the outset. The proposals seek to improve natural surveillance through enhanced sightlines, reduce hidden and underused spaces, encourage positive activity throughout the day.

	Alongside the physical improvements, Greater Manchester Police are already undertaking enhanced enforcement activity within Piccadilly Gardens and the surrounding area as part of a broader programme of interventions intended to improve safety and reduce anti-social behaviour. This will be strengthened as part of a new approach to managing Piccadilly Gardens in the future.
Many respondents questioned whether a children's play area is appropriate in a major city centre square or transport hub. Comparisons were frequently made to Trafalgar Square and other European civic spaces, with comments that play facilities would be better located in parks such as Mayfield Park, Ancoats Green or elsewhere.	The Applicant recognises that Piccadilly Gardens is not the right location for a “destination play” facility, such as Mayfield Park, where families make a specific trip to visit the play facilities, and perhaps stay for several hours. Instead, the play space in Piccadilly Gardens is adjacent to the main shopping areas within the city centre, and so it can provide an important function to allow families with young children with the opportunity to stop off for a few minutes to play, let off steam, or re-charge, in the context of a busy city centre environment. As part of the Manchester Child Friendly City commitment, providing welcoming spaces for children within the city’s public spaces is an important priority.
A substantial number of respondents welcomed the proposal, particularly for families living in or visiting the city centre. Many felt the play area could help attract families, increase positive use of the space and support Manchester's child-friendly city ambitions.	The Applicant notes these comments.
Many respondents supported moving the play area from its current location, noting the proposed position appears safer, further from roads and more visible. Some felt it was still too close to transport infrastructure or located in a secluded corner.	The Applicant notes these comments. The new proposed location is intended to be a more suitable location for children’s play, further from the main vehicular routes.
Numerous comments suggested low fencing, gated access, clear boundaries and separation from tram tracks, roads and pedestrian routes. Respondents felt this would improve child safety and discourage misuse by adults.	The play area has been located away from the tram line and surrounding roads, providing a safer environment while benefiting from good natural surveillance from the adjacent retail units, helping to reinforce a welcoming, family-friendly character. The space is intentionally unfenced to ensure it feels well integrated with the surrounding public realm. This approach was recommended by GMP to avoid creating enclosed or defensible spaces that could contribute to anti-social behaviour. Movement and control lines between the tram tracks and footpath areas has been reviewed with TFGM with regards to tramways clearances and specifically clear spaces between tramways and upstands. The design will be developed with TFGM in line with LRG 1.0 Tramway Principles and Guidance (TPG).

Several respondents supported inclusion of water play, splash pads, fountains or interactive water features, while a smaller number strongly opposed additional water features.	The brief for the play area was focused around inclusive play for younger children, up to 11 years old. Year round use and the ability to maintain the play area throughout the seasons without high energy costs or support from external specialists, such as water feature specialists is also a requirement of the design.
Respondents frequently suggested separate areas for toddlers and older children to improve safety and usability. Several noted the current play provision does not adequately serve older children, or toddlers and babies.	The design team are working with a play area specialist who provided support both at Mayfield Park and Ancoats Green. The family focussed play area is designed primarily for toddles and primary age children.
Many applicants requested additional seating with back support for breastfeeding, shaded areas, toilets, baby changing facilities, drinking water options for families.	There will be a variety of seating types. Options with back and arm rests, options without and variations suitable for wheelchair users to transfer to. The design of the gardens delivers a mix of shaded and sunny spaces to sit. There are toilets within the pavilion which can be managed by the operator but external toilets or drinking water are not part of the brief due to safety and management risks associated.
Respondents requested accessible and inclusive equipment, sensory play features and facilities suitable for disabled children and children with additional needs.	As noted above, the design of the play area is being led by a specialist play consultant. Feedback and suggestions are being incorporated from the Access Consultant to ensure that inclusive play in embedded within the design.
Several respondents suggested closing the play area at night, increasing security presence after dark and ensuring regular checks before opening each day.	The Applicant notes these comments. The play area will be included within the new active management approach to be implemented following the redesign of Piccadilly Gardens.
Some respondents showed support for the proposals based on their experience that there are limited free play opportunities in the city centre and that improved facilities would encourage more families to visit Manchester.	The Applicant notes these comments.
Respondents supported incorporating nature-based play, children's gardening opportunities, sensory elements, planting, mature trees and natural materials.	The Applicant notes these comments.

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8. Conclusion and Influence of Consultation on the Proposals

The consultation which has been undertaken is in accordance with both the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) (2025) and with Manchester City Council's adopted Statement of Community Involvement (2025). This document fulfils the requirement for a consultation supporting statement that summarises the methods used, the representations received, and the changes made to the proposals as a result of feedback submitted.

The comments received during the pre-application consultation have been considered by the Applicant's team on an ongoing basis to ensure that the issues raised could be addressed during the development of the proposals.

Overall, the response to the consultation has been positive and has enabled the Applicant to refine the proposals in response to feedback received.

Key stakeholder and technical consultee feedback has been particularly valuable in shaping key elements of the design proposals. Extensive engagement with Greater Manchester Police and a range of Manchester City Council teams has heavily influenced the proposed approach to CCTV, lighting and wider security considerations, helping to respond to key community requests for the redevelopment of Piccadilly Gardens to comprehensively address issues of safety and anti-social behaviour. Likewise, extensive engagement with neighbouring landowners has helped to refine elements of the design such as the position of the children's play space, helping to ensure that different users of the space are considered and the design proposals adapted in response to this.

The specific engagement with children and parents/carers around the children's play space has had a meaningful impact on the design of this space and the ongoing work to refine the specific choice of play equipment. Comments requesting adequate seating with backrests to accommodate breastfeeding, and seating with shade, have been considered and included within the design proposals.

Within the public consultation, strong support was expressed for the introduction of additional greenery, colour, trees and planting. A significant number of respondents identified safety, security and anti-social behaviour as their primary concern. Many commented that Piccadilly Gardens currently feels unsafe and emphasised that the success of the proposals will depend on successfully addressing these issues. The Applicant is working in partnership with Transport for Greater Manchester (TfGM), Greater Manchester Police (GMP), city centre businesses and residents, to develop a new management plan will ensure that Piccadilly Gardens is safe, clean and well maintained, addressing community concerns about anti-social behaviour. Whilst the detailed governance arrangements will be developed as the project progresses, the aim is to establish a collaborative approach capable of supporting the ongoing management, maintenance, activation and enhancement of the Gardens throughout their lifecycle.

The Applicant would like to thank all those who have provided their feedback during the pre-application consultation and looks forward to further constructive dialogue throughout the development process.

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9. Appendices

Appendix I: Youth Safety Perceptions Report

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Youth Safety Perceptions Report

April 2026 (V03)

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1. Executive summary

This report explores how young people experience and understand safety in Manchester's Piccadilly Gardens, drawing on spontaneous, vox-pop conversations conducted around the space itself. The approach prioritised accessibility and authenticity, allowing participants to speak openly about their everyday interactions with the Gardens and the wider city of Manchester. More than 8 hours of interviews, conducted by local Unity Radio presenter, Kai Jasper, have been transcribed and analysed. The result is a detailed picture of how this highly visible public space is currently perceived and used by young people.

Overall, Piccadilly Gardens is viewed as a place that many young people navigate cautiously rather than use with confidence. Feelings of unease are widespread and intensify after dark, with concerns linked to visible drug use, anti-social behaviour, and the general condition of the environment. Rather than relying on the space to feel inherently safe, young people described adapting their behaviour - limiting how long they stay, avoiding certain areas, travelling in groups, or remaining constantly alert. These behaviours indicate a low level of trust in the space to meet basic expectations of personal safety.

The fear of serious violence, particularly involving knives, sits heavily in the background of these experiences. Even where young people had not been directly affected by knife crime, there is a strong perception of unpredictability and risk. Participants spoke about not knowing who might be carrying a weapon and the anxiety this creates when passing through the area. Crucially, violence was never dismissed or accepted as normal; instead, it was consistently framed as frightening, wrong, and damaging to young people's sense of freedom and mobility in the city.

The research also highlights important differences in how safety is experienced. Young women, in particular, described heightened concern related to harassment and unwanted approaches, which shaped when and how they felt able to move through the Gardens. Homelessness featured prominently in young people's accounts as well, with responses ranging from frustration about cleanliness and discomfort to more considered calls for better support and humane responses. These perspectives underline that safety is understood not only in terms of crime, but also dignity, wellbeing, and how shared public spaces are managed.

Despite strong criticism of Piccadilly Gardens itself, young people expressed clear pride in Manchester as a city. The wider city centre was described far more positively, associated with culture, diversity, and opportunity. This contrast suggests that Piccadilly Gardens is seen as falling short of the standards young people expect from the city, rather than reflecting Manchester as a whole. Encouragingly, participants offered thoughtful and balanced ideas for improvement, combining calls for visible reassurance and enforcement with strong support for environmental upgrades, youth spaces, creative opportunities, and services that address the root causes of harm. The findings point to both an urgent need for action and a meaningful opportunity to re-establish Piccadilly Gardens as a place that feels safe, welcoming, and reflective of the city around it.

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2. Background

Piccadilly Gardens is a central and highly visible public space within Manchester city centre, used daily by residents, workers, and visitors. In recent years, concerns have been raised about levels of serious violence and associated criminality in and around the area, particularly incidents involving knives. In response to these concerns, Greater Manchester Police (GMP) has been selected to take part in a new Home Office pilot aimed at reducing serious violence through targeted hotspot policing.

Within Manchester city centre, Piccadilly Gardens has been identified as a priority location. A dedicated policing team has already been operating in the area, using a combination of patrols, stop searches, arrests, and weapons seizures to address criminal activity. Between March and October 2025, this work resulted in a significant number of arrests and charges, alongside the removal of weapons and drugs from the area.

Additional funding through the Home Office pilot has enabled further measures, including increased hotspot patrols, enhanced CCTV coverage, and the trialling of evidence-based approaches to preventing violence. This includes working with youth agencies to improve support, engagement, and visibility within Piccadilly Gardens, as well as environmental activity such as weapons sweeps and litter picks intended to improve feelings of safety and cleanliness.

Alongside enforcement activity, there is increasing recognition that understanding how young people experience and perceive safety in Piccadilly Gardens is essential. As a space frequently used by young people, their views provide important insight into how policing, environmental changes, and support services influence perceptions of safety. This report seeks to capture and explore those views in order to inform future approaches to making Piccadilly Gardens a safer and more welcoming space for all.

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3. Introduction to SMSR Research

Established in 1991, SMSR Ltd. is a dynamic and innovative social research agency with over 30 years' dedicated consultation and evaluation experience. Conducting both public interest and social policy research for over 200 organisations, SMSR has operating divisions that design and deliver research projects on behalf of the public sector across the UK, Europe, and the Far East.

As a full-service agency we offer a suite of quantitative and qualitative solutions in addition to dedicated project management, data processing and analysis functions, from research design to data collection, analysis, and interpretation. Based on technical excellence and social science our data produces opportunities for clients to build insight and make confident operational and strategic decisions.

SMSR supports public agencies to understand the populations they serve and specialises in connecting organisations to communities that are often seldom heard which are often less likely to be engaged. SMSR has been successfully engaging, consulting, and collaborating with often marginalised, underrepresented and minority groups for over three decades. We challenge the term 'hard to reach' by operating effectively in the community, representing its many demographics with equality and efficiency.

Our methodologies are demonstrably effective across the UK, where we have developed relationships with community services, not as a single-serving resource for research but working relationships for long-term sharing of information and ideas. We support approx. 25 UK police forces and OPCCs across the UK in addition to our support of Local Government, health services, education, and the charitable sector.

Examples of our consultancy assignments include: • Essex Police – Understanding public perception • Merseyside Police – Increasing diversity within recruitment • Humberside OPCC – Understanding vulnerability • Great Ormond Street Hospital – Patient pathway re-engineering • Royal Borough of Kensington & Chelsea – Grenfell Tower resident engagement • West Yorkshire OPCC – VAWG evaluation • Greater Manchester Combined Authority – Understanding knife violence & young people • University of Hull & Lancaster – LHOFT (Liverpool-Humber Optimisation of Freight Transport) • GM VRU Knife Crime Consultation • GM Weapon Protocol Consultation • Surrey Police Knife Crime Behavioural Research.

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4. Methodology

Engagement was conducted through a series of on street vox pop interviews led by recognisable Unity Radio presenters, capturing spontaneous responses from young people in and around Piccadilly Gardens. In total, the consultation generated over eight hours of recorded material across three separate sessions, representing a substantial volume of in-situ engagement when compared, anecdotally, with similar exercises undertaken in other UK locations.

The primary target cohort for this consultation was young people aged up to 18 years old. Given the open, street-based nature of the methodology, participation was not formally screened at the point of engagement. Instead, inclusion within the analytical dataset was determined retrospectively, with responses assessed on the basis of perceived age. Contributions from individuals who were clearly identifiable as older than the target cohort were excluded from the formal analysis, ensuring that findings remained grounded in youth perspectives whilst preserving the authenticity of the engagement approach.

This methodological design prioritised accessibility and inclusivity. By removing formal recruitment barriers, such as pre-screening, registration, or the collection of detailed demographic information, the approach enabled a wide range of young people to participate, including those less likely to engage through traditional consultation channels. The absence of structured data capture requirements reduced friction at the point of contact, contributing to both the volume and diversity of responses obtained.
A further strength of the approach was the use of high-profile, trusted local interviewers, whose presence created a familiar and informal engagement environment. This was particularly effective in encouraging participation from younger audiences, fostering candid responses, and generating positive peer-to-peer visibility. The resulting in the moment dynamic supported not only high participation rates but also organic word-of-mouth amplification, with the consultation becoming a visible and socially validated activity within the space itself.

While the methodology does not produce a statistically representative sample and does not support demographic sub-group analysis, it provides a rich, high-volume qualitative dataset grounded in real-world experience. The approach is particularly well-suited to capturing immediate perceptions, social dynamics, and lived experience in a way that more structured methods may not fully elicit.

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5. Responses by interview question

The interviews followed a broadly consistent format, using a similar script during each engagement. The following section collates participant responses under the key question areas used by the interviewers, drawing on the full transcript of data.

5.1 Do you feel safe in Picadilly Gardens

The majority of participants reported some degree of concern about personal safety, with night-time consistently identified as significantly more dangerous than daytime. A notable addition was the explicit gender dimension - several female participants stated they felt unsafe specifically because of unwanted approaches from strangers.

> *"No. Because there are lots of bad people here. Every week something happens - lots of fights, lots of knives."*
>
> *"Not really. I remember walking around town and some guys were screaming, 'Who's that?' I started running. I was scared."*
>
> *"When it gets dark, it's more dangerous. During the day it's all right, but at night - not so good."*
>
> *"When I'm with a guy friend, no one comes up to me. But when I'm by myself or with a girlfriend, guys come up and say weird stuff. That's scary as a girl."*
>
> *"I personally feel safe because of what I know and what I do, but I feel like it's not a safe area for anyone under the age of 18."*
>
> *"Together, yes. Not alone. I don't think I'd ever come to Piccadilly alone at night."*

The pattern of situational safety - feeling safer with others, in groups, or in daylight - recurred across the project. Participants have clearly developed personal risk management strategies for navigating the area, which reflects an absence of confidence in the environment itself providing safety.

5.2 What is your general opinion of Piccadilly Gardens?

General opinions were commonly negative, though some participants felt the area was 'decent' or *'all right'* when qualified by time of day, company, or comparison to other areas. The most negative responses remained consistent.

> *"This is the most scariest place you'll ever be. If you come to Manchester, just don't come to Piccadilly."*
>
> *"It's horrible. Full of drug users. We always see people on the floor. It's a mess."*
>
> *"Crackadilly Gardens, innit? That's all I'm going to say."*
>
> *"It's quite chaotic and unhygienic. There are so many characters all trying to do different things - it's just controversial."*
>
> *"It's not a good place. A lot of shenanigans. Crackheads. And I got pressed once - a guy said he owned the Gardens and threatened to stab me."*
>
> *"The outside area is a bit derelict. There's a lot more they could do to make people feel more welcome in the city."*

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A small number of participants offered more measured or qualified assessments - one noting that daytime was *'very nice'*, another that the area was *'decent'* given its busy, central nature. These were minority views but represent a slightly more nuanced picture than the near-universal condemnation of earlier sessions.

5.3 What are the positives about Piccadilly Gardens and Manchester city centre?

When asked about positives, participants consistently distinguished between Piccadilly Gardens and Manchester city centre as a whole. The Gardens themselves attracted very few positive comments beyond their role as a meeting point and transport hub. The city centre more broadly was valued for its food, nightlife, shopping, diversity, and social atmosphere.

> *"There's a lot of shops, nice food places, a lot of places to go if you want to have fun."*
>
> *"The rave scene in Manchester is brilliant. There's a lot to do."*
>
> *"Manchester people are down to earth. Humble as it comes."*
>
> *"The architecture here is great. Manchester does it well - there's enough shops, enough community."*
>
> *"It's more active actually. There's a lot of people, a lot of things to do. It's a city life.*

One participant highlighted the fountains, currently non-functional, as a specific positive that is missed, and called for their restoration. This echoes comments from other interviews and suggests this is a simple but symbolically meaningful improvement.

Several participants also noted that Piccadilly Gardens functions as an accessible, free public space - something they valued in principle, even if dissatisfied with its current condition. Calls for more free social spaces and places to meet and socialise without spending money were present in the responses.

5.4 What are the negatives about Piccadilly Gardens?

Drug use and associated anti-social behaviour continued to dominate responses to this question across interviews. Some respondents added cleanliness and homelessness as more prominent distinct themes, with several participants specifically referencing litter, rats, and the smell associated with rough sleeping in the area.

> *"Too many crackheads. Smack town. It's a dirty place - too many scraps."*
>
> *"People just smoking weed, selling weed. That needs to stop for starters."*
>
> *"There's a lot of homeless people. You'll just be walking and you smell a strong smell. It's insane."*
>
> *"I'm always seeing the rats around town. Animal control is needed."*
>
> *"There's a lot of littering - people just not watching their surroundings and not being respectful of other people's spaces."*
>
> *"There are so many people trying to shove pamphlets in your face. I'm just trying to walk down the street."*

Participants expressed a range of views - some sympathetic to rough sleepers, others frustrated by the associated cleanliness issues, and at least one advocating for better provision for homeless people rather than simply moving them on.

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5.5 What would you do to improve Piccadilly Gardens?

Suggestions for improvement were consistent across the engagement, with some adding thoughts around creative spaces, community infrastructure, and the physical environment. Tension between enforcement-based and support-based approaches were present.

Enforcement and visibility

> *"Put police around everywhere - no more drugs and that."*
>
> *"More CCTV, more cameras to catch people out. More posters about fines."*
>
> *"Remove all the people drinking and doing drugs."*

Environmental and physical improvements

> *"Turn the fountains back on - that would make it better."*
>
> *"Better lighting in the darker areas. That would make a real difference."*
>
> *"Get rid of the corners where people can just chill and take drugs."*
>
> *"More cleaners around, cleaning up the rubbish. There are loads of bins - I don't get why people don't use them."*

Social, community, and creative provision

> *"We've lost a lot of youth centres over the years. That needs to come back."*
>
> *"More spaces for young people to create. Things sometimes feel like they're reducing the amount of creativity we have. Just spaces to allow that to happen."*
>
> *"We need more social places where you can just hang out with friends without having to pay. Just go in and sit and chill."*
>
> *"More people on the streets who have lived that life with success stories - fund them to go out and talk to people."*
>
> *"Offer them support. Rehab, rehabilitation. That's what they need."*

Support for homeless people

> *"More could be done to ensure the safety of homeless people as well as people walking around in the evening."*
>
> *"There's not a lot of shelter. More could be done to give homeless people a slightly better stay in the evening."*

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5.6 What do you think of knife crime?

Knife crime continued to be condemned universally across all interviews. References to stabbings, the fear of encountering someone with a weapon, and the general sense of unpredictability were consistent.

> *"It's not good. It should be stopped. We need to do more about it."*
>
> *"I've heard loads of stabbings. It's just uncertainty - you don't know who's got something on them."*
>
> *"I like the stories about the stabbings and all of that. You know it's not ideal. That's the vibe."*
>
> *"Someone needs to put a knife down. How do I not know he's got one? I've seen it happen."*

The phrase ***'you don't know who's got something on them'*** recurred across sessions and is a useful indicator of the ambient threat perception young people carry in this area - a low-level but persistent anxiety rather than a specific incident-based fear.

5.7 How does Manchester compare to other city centres in the UK?

Whilst some participants continued to cite London and Liverpool as better maintained or cleaner, others expressed strong civic pride in Manchester, and a small number felt the city compared favourably to alternatives. One international participant from Poland felt London was cleaner but that Manchester was *'decent'*. Participants from Sri Lanka described Manchester as *'more active'* and offering more to do than other places they had visited.

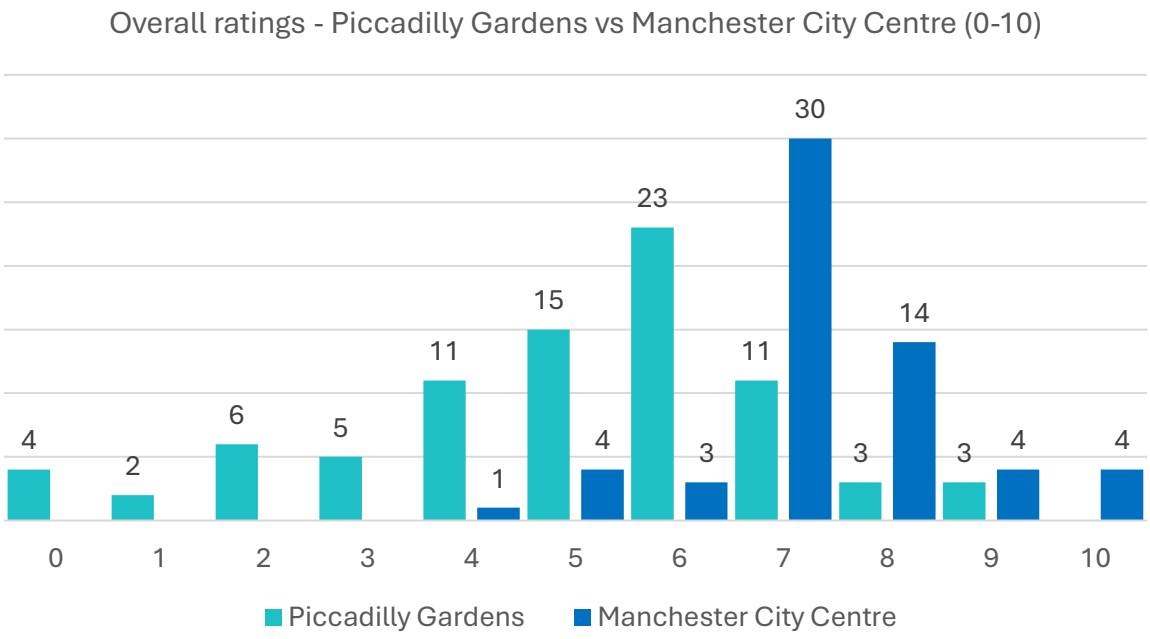
> *"Liverpool is a lot better. A lot cleaner. A lot more people. A lot more things to do."*
>
> *"London - it's a lot cleaner and better than here."*
>
> *"Manchester does it well. The architecture is great. But it all looks a bit the same - a bit gentrified."*
>
> *"As much as I've slandered the place, it's our place. Manchester is where it's at. There's no better place."*
>
> *"It's more active actually. There's a lot of people, a lot of things to do. It's a city life."*

The gentrification comment - from a university student - was the most structurally critical comparison offered across the entire dataset. It reflects a concern that physical investment in the city centre is creating a homogenised, sanitised environment that lacks character and serves commercial rather than community interests.

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5.8 Overall ratings - Piccadilly Gardens vs Manchester City Centre (out of 10)

Participants across all three engagement sessions were asked to rate Piccadilly Gardens and Manchester city centre separately on a scale of zero to ten. A total of 83 ratings were recorded for Piccadilly Gardens across the dataset, with paired city centre ratings captured where both scores were provided within the same interview exchange (60).



The results reveal consistent pattern. Piccadilly Gardens received an average rating of 5.0 out of 10, whilst Manchester city centre averaged 7.3 out of 10 - a gap of 2.3 points that was sustained across all participant groups regardless of age, background, or area of origin.

The distribution of ratings for Piccadilly Gardens was notably wide, spanning the full range from zero to nine out of ten. The most frequently given score was six, awarded by 23 participants, though ratings of four and five were also common, with 11 and 15 responses respectively. Ten participants rated the Gardens at two or below, reflecting strongly negative views of the space. Just 6 participants rated it above seven.

By contrast, ratings for Manchester city centre were more tightly clustered at the higher end of the scale. Seven out of ten was by far the most common response, given by 30 participants, with eight being the second most common at 14 responses. No participant rated the city centre below four, and several gave scores of nine or ten.

This pattern - wide variation for the Gardens, tight clustering for the city centre - is itself a finding. It suggests that whilst there is broad consensus that Manchester city centre is a good place to be, experiences of Piccadilly Gardens are more varied and contested. For some participants the space is tolerable or even enjoyable; for others it is genuinely poor.

6. Thematic analysis

This section presents a thematic analysis of the qualitative data gathered through the youth engagement. Rather than focusing on individual responses or isolated incidents, the analysis identifies recurring patterns, shared narratives, and underlying themes that emerged consistently across the dataset. These themes reflect how young people collectively make sense of their experiences of Piccadilly Gardens, the risks they perceive, and the ways they adapt their behaviour in response to those conditions.

The themes presented below are grounded directly in participants' language and framing, with illustrative quotations used throughout to retain authenticity and clarity. Together, they provide a framework for interpreting the findings of this research and for informing practical, proportionate responses that reflect how young people actually experience and navigate Piccadilly Gardens.

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Theme 1: Drug use as the defining characteristic of Piccadilly Gardens

Drug use emerged as the single most prominent theme across all participant groups. It was raised unprompted in the overwhelming majority of interviews and was consistently described as the primary driver of the area's problems. References to crack cocaine, heroin, cannabis, and the visible behaviour of people in active addiction were present throughout.

The informal renaming of Piccadilly Gardens as 'Crackadilly Gardens' - used independently by multiple participants - remains the most powerful cultural indicator of how deeply embedded this association has become. One participant extended this to rename Manchester itself 'Crackchester', suggesting that the issue is perceived as city-wide rather than localised.

Participants also differentiated clearly between drug users, who were primarily framed as a welfare and safety concern, and drug dealers, who were viewed as a criminal and community safety issue. This distinction has important implications for commissioning, as these groups require fundamentally different responses.

> *"It's horrible. It's full of drug users. We always see people on the floor. It's a mess. This place needs to be shut down."*
>
> *"People are here always just smoking weed, selling weed. That needs to stop for starters."*
>
> *"People injecting crack, people doing spice. That's the only thing, man."*
>
> *'Manchester. It's just Crackchester innit? Nevermind Gunchester, it's Crackhester. You know what I mean?'*
>
> *"A lot of people selling crack outside our stall, which is pretty annoying. It gets dangerous after 6pm — not at all safe."*
>
> *"Crackadilly Gardens. That's all I'm going to say. Everyone knows it."*

Theme 2: Safety concerns - time of day and situational awareness

The day/night safety divide remained one of the most consistent findings. Participants across all demographics and backgrounds drew a clear distinction between the relative safety of daytime and the perceived danger after dark. Weekend evenings were specifically identified as the worst period.

What is particularly significant across the full dataset is the language of personal responsibility and situational awareness that participants routinely deploy: ***'knowing your wits'***, ***'keeping your head about you'***, ***'being with the right people'***, ***'not looking at anyone the wrong* way'**. This language suggests that young people have internalised the management of risk in this environment as an individual responsibility rather than an institutional one. This is a significant finding for public services.

> *"I remember walking around town and some guys were just screaming, 'Who's that?' I just started running. I was scared."*
>
> *"You just got to know your wits about you. If you're with the right people, then it's fine."*
>
> *"You just got to keep your wits about you when you're walking through Piccadilly these days. Honestly."*
>
> *"Once it goes dark - this ends, bro. Dangerous. No one come to this."*

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> *"I keep looking around to make sure I'm safe, because you don't know who's watching you."*
>
> *"Sometimes it's mixed feelings — some days I do feel safe, like when I go to and from school. But most of the time I don't."*

Theme 3: Knife crime as a lived reality

Knife crime emerged as a genuine and lived concern across the data. Many participants described direct personal experiences as well as first and second-hand exposure to knife-related incidents. Even where accounts were not personal, there was a consistent sense of ambient threat, captured in the recurring awareness that someone nearby might be carrying a weapon.

No participant minimised or normalised knife crime. It was uniformly described as wrong, frightening, and in need of urgent attention. This consistency across participant groups and ages represents one of the strongest and most unequivocal signals in the entire dataset.

> *"Someone could just come up right now and put a knife down. How do I not know he's going to come?"*
>
> *"Someone got stabbed in the neck and he's just lying dead on the floor. There was blood scattering all the way up there. I seen the guy drop and everyone run scattering - I just didn't want to come outside after that."*
>
> *"People get stabbed like weekly. I think it has the highest stabbing rate of any part of Manchester."*
>
> *"There's no reason to carry a knife. You can use your hands if you want to sort something out - but even a punch can kill someone. Just be peaceful."*
>
> *"I've heard loads of stabbings, shootings, whatever. It's bad - but there's only so much someone can do about it."*
>
> *"He said he owned the Gardens and he'd stab me and everything. I just stayed silent and walked away."*

Theme 4: A divide between enforcement and support approaches

The tension between enforcement-focused and support-based approaches to addressing the area's problems was clearly evident across the dataset. Several participants articulated a strong case for a support-based model, including publicly funded creative and social spaces as an alternative to the conditions that give rise to anti-social behaviour. This perspective framed the issue as a structural challenge rather than an individual failing.

> *"Get CCTV all around here. And that emergency phone line doesn't work - it's broken. You need a working 999 line right here."*
>
> *"We need more police in this area, and we need them to do something about this mess. It needs to be more supervised."*

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> *"You can't kick them out - you've got to help them. You can't just leave them because they get worse."*
>
> *"Help them sort their lives out. Get the community where we can all chip in."*
>
> *"We've got rid of all the community centres where kids hang out. You need a public place that promotes the same idea of community, especially when you're growing up."*
>
> *"Probably community work — more community work in the centre, especially around younger teens who are coming in and basically getting groomed."*

Theme 5: Pride in Manchester despite frustration with Piccadilly Gardens

Civic pride in Manchester as a city remained a consistent and important counterweight across all three sessions. The ratings gap - low scores for the Gardens, higher scores for the city overall - was maintained across the engagement. Manchester's food, nightlife, architecture, cultural diversity, and character of its people were all cited positively.

One participant described Manchester as 'underrated' in the context of nightlife and the Deansgate area, reinforcing the view that Piccadilly Gardens is seen as an outlier rather than representative. Another participant - originally from Poland - rated the wider city nine out of ten whilst giving the Gardens zero. This pattern was consistent enough across the full dataset to be considered a reliable finding.

> *"It's rough, but it's a brilliant city."*
>
> *"Manchester is the music capital of England. It's brilliant."*
>
> *"As much as I say that about Manchester, it's our place. As much as the UK is in the pits right now, there's no better place to be than Manchester. Manchester's where it's at."*
>
> *"Manchester people are down to earth. We're just humble as it comes."*
>
> *"It's the second best city in the world - after London. I'm biased, but still."*
>
> *"I think it's pretty underrated actually. It's up there - maybe not London, but above a lot of places."*

Theme 6: Systemic frustration - government, council, and public services

Frustration with government and public services was present. Participants described a sense of being let down by structural disinvestment - the loss of youth centres, inadequate support for homeless people, insufficient community provision, and a feeling that decision-makers are not engaged with the realities of life in this area.

> *"The government is greedy for money. They need to work on the community. It's not all about money - it's about people's safety and needs."*
>
> *"The government don't do enough to help the people of the community - to keep them out of bad strains of life."*
>
> *"Things sometimes feel governmental - like they're reducing the amount of creativity we have, rather than creating spaces to allow it to happen."*

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> *"The government actually needs to be accountable for what's happening here."*
>
> *"The councils are not doing enough to help. It's just a rat race."*

This theme is particularly relevant given that Unity Radio conducted this consultation specifically to feed into public service planning. Participants engaged willingly but with a degree of scepticism about whether their views would lead to action. Several explicitly asked to be kept informed of outcomes.

Theme 7: Genders specific safety concerns

Some female participants explicitly described gender-specific safety concerns in Piccadilly Gardens. Several females described feeling unsafe specifically because of unwanted approaches, harassment, and the sense of vulnerability when moving through the area alone or with other women.

> *"I do not feel safe. There's too many men - too many."*
>
> *"I have female friends who tell me they don't feel safe around here."*
>
> *"When I'm with a guy friend, no one comes up to me. But when I'm by myself or with a girlfriend, guys come up and say weird stuff. That's scary as a girl."*
>
> *"There's a lot of people that would go up to you randomly and just try to talk to you - which is kind of scary as a girl."*

The gender safety theme is an important addition to the dataset and warrants specific attention in any improvement programme. Safety interventions that focus solely on knife crime and drug-related disorder may not adequately address the experiences of women and girls in this space.

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7. Recommendations

The following recommendations are drawn directly from the themes and suggestions expressed by participants across all three sessions. They are presented by category of intervention. It is important to recognise that Manchester City Council has already published a clear programme of work to improve Piccadilly Gardens. This plan sets out a package of immediate and longer-term measures focused on improving safety, strengthening management of the space, and enhancing the physical environment. Several elements of this programme directly reflect the recommendations emerging from this research, including increased visible policing and multi-agency presence, enhanced CCTV coverage and lighting, improvements to cleanliness and maintenance, and environmental changes designed to improve visibility and encourage more positive use of the space.

Immediate and visible interventions

1. Increase the visible presence of police and community safety officers in Piccadilly Gardens, particularly during evening and weekend hours, to directly address the primary driver of safety concerns across all sessions.
2. Restore the fountains and other amenity features - cited across multiple sessions as a simple, low-cost signal of investment in the public realm.
3. Improve lighting in darker areas of the Gardens, identified consistently as a practical driver of night-time unsafety.
4. Increase the frequency and visibility of cleaning and maintenance operations - cleanliness was rated poorly, with litter, rats, and smell all specifically mentioned.
5. Address pest control in and around the Gardens

Environmental and design interventions

1. Review the physical layout of the Gardens - specifically addressing areas that facilitate concealed drug use or congregation.
2. Consider the design of street furniture and public space infrastructure to balance the needs of all users, including rough sleepers, whilst maintaining a welcoming public environment.
3. Improve bin provision and enforcement of littering rules - participants noted the presence of bins but frustration that they are not used.

Social and community interventions

1. Invest in or restore youth centre and community space provision - the loss of these facilities was cited across all three sessions as a contributing factor to the problems in the Gardens.
2. Develop funded community mentoring programmes drawing on individuals with lived experience of the issues in the area - a model consistently advocated by participants as more credible than statutory alternatives.
3. Create accessible free social spaces in and around Piccadilly Gardens where people can meet, socialise, and be creative
4. Develop accessible rehabilitation and support pathways for individuals experiencing drug dependency - enforcement-only approaches are unlikely to address the root cause and were explicitly challenged by several participants across the dataset.
5. Ensure that support provision for homeless people is part of any improvement programme - homelessness was identified as a distinct concern, with several participants advocating for better provision rather than dispersal.

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Gender and inclusion

1. Ensure that safety improvements specifically address the experiences of women and girls in the space - including unwanted approaches, harassment, and the feeling of vulnerability when moving through the area alone or in female company.
2. Consider a targeted audit of how Piccadilly Gardens is experienced by different user groups - including women, young people, and those from diverse ethnic backgrounds - to ensure that improvement programmes address the full range of safety concerns rather than focusing solely on crime statistics.

Communication and engagement

1. Close the feedback loop with consultation participants - several individuals explicitly asked to be kept informed of outcomes. A short, published response to this consultation would demonstrate that engagement is meaningful and build trust in future participation.
2. Continue to leverage Unity Radio and similar trusted community platforms as engagement channels - the quality and candour of responses across three sessions demonstrates the value of this approach.
3. Frame any public communications around civic pride in Manchester - the consistent ratings gap between the Gardens and the wider city offers a useful narrative: restoring Piccadilly Gardens to match the quality of the city it sits in.

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Social & Market Strategic Research
Norwich House
1 Savile Street
Hull
HU3 1ES

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Appendix II: Consultation Postcard



The beating heart of Manchester since the 1930s

Piccadilly Gardens is one of Manchester city centre's busiest public spaces. It's an arrival point for visitors, a place for residents, workers and shoppers to enjoy, and a major transport interchange.

Piccadilly Gardens is getting a fresh new look. This is the first step in a bigger plan to make the area a world-class space.

These improvements will help make Piccadilly Gardens more colourful, fun and safer for families, visitors and people who live nearby.

Get involved

The consultation on our plans will be open from **16 June** to **15 July 2026.**

Find out more on our plans by scanning the QR code or visiting **manchester.gov.uk/piccadillygardens**, where you can also tell us what you think.

Come along and meet the team

As part of our consultation, we are holding drop-in sessions. These will be an opportunity to find out more about our plans, speak to members of the project team and provide your feedback.

You can find us at **Manchester Art Gallery, Mosley Street** at the following times:

- **Tuesday 23 June, 1pm - 5pm**
- **Friday 26 June, 10am - 2pm**
- **Saturday 27 June, 11am - 3pm**

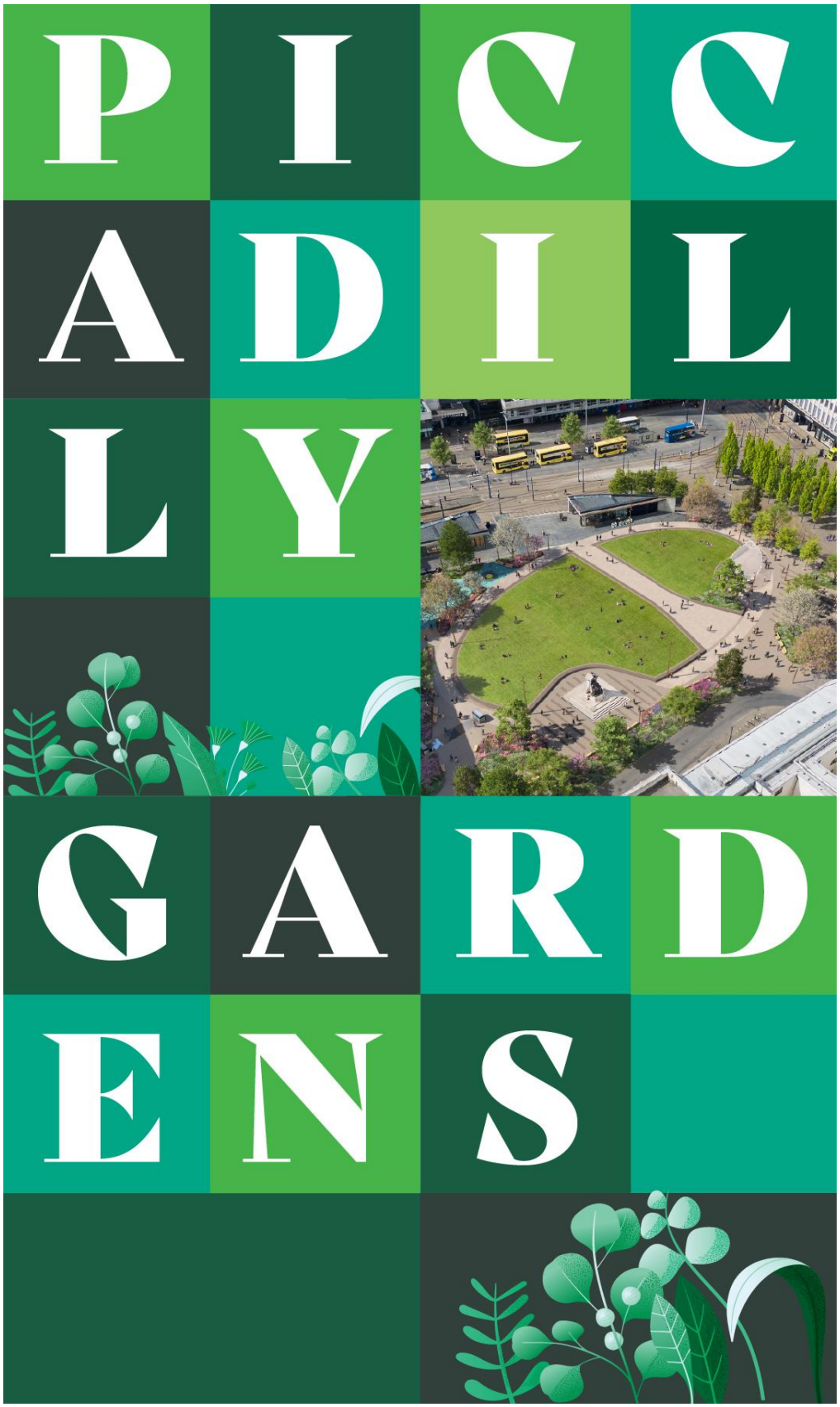
If you're unable to attend the events, please don't worry as all of the information that will be displayed is available to view on the Piccadilly Gardens webpage.

Get in touch

If you have any questions, you can contact us directly using the following email address: **city.centre@manchester.gov.uk**

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Appendix III: Social Media Graphic Example



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Appendix IV: Consultation Display Boards

A bright new chapter for Piccadilly Gardens

We've already transformed some of Manchester's busiest public spaces,

The beating heart of Manchester since the 1930s

Piccadilly Gardens is one of Manchester city centre's busiest public spaces. It's an arrival point for visitors, a place for residents, workers and shoppers of all ages to enjoy, and a major transport interchange.

Piccadilly Gardens is getting a fresh new look. This is the first step in a bigger plan to make the area a world-class space. These improvements will help make Piccadilly Gardens more colourful, fun, accessible and safer for families, visitors and people who live nearby.

As well as a brand-new design, we are also working on a completely new approach to managing Piccadilly Gardens. Working in partnership with Transport for Greater Manchester and Greater Manchester Police – as well as city centre businesses and residents – the new management plan will ensure Piccadilly Gardens is a safe, clean and well-maintained space, addressing community concerns about antisocial behaviour with a proactive, problem-solving approach.

We have already hoarded off half of Piccadilly Gardens to undertake surveys and prepare the site for the work to come. Before we submit a planning application, we want to share our designs for your feedback.



Albert Square



Glade of Light, Medieval Quarter



St Peter's Square

Manchester city centre is busy day and night, so cleaning takes place every day from early morning to evening, with extra work at nights, weekends and during major events.

We've recently increased investment in cleaning, with more staff, vehicles and improved methods such as jet washing. This helps keep the city clean, safe and welcoming throughout the day.

We've been listening...

There has been lots of previous consultation and engagement about Piccadilly Gardens, so we already have a clear idea of what improvements people would like to see and how they would like to use the space. We now want to move forward practically and get on site.

2021: "Help reshape Piccadilly" consultation, with over 1,700 responses

2022-25: Key partners discuss and establish multi-agency steering group for Piccadilly Gardens

March 2026: Galliford Try, Planit and Civic appointed to deliver the design transformation

June - July 2026: Community engagement to help shape detailed design proposals

Why do we need to redesign Piccadilly Gardens?

A renewed Piccadilly Gardens needs to reflect who we are as a city – diverse, welcoming, creative and full of life.

The overall approach is a two-part journey to transform the Piccadilly Gardens area and make it an attractive, well-managed and welcoming space.

The first part of this journey sees Manchester City Council lead on a transformation of the design of the Gardens, making it a more vibrant and colourful space which functions better. Funding has been secured to deliver these improvements over the next year.

The second part of the plan will see a transformation of the wider area in the coming years, including a multi-million pound investment by Transport for Greater Manchester to create a new, modern transport interchange.

Key elements of the brief for the redesign:

Nature | Accessibility and safety | Activation and events | Ease of movement | Perception and local pride



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The concept

Our aim is to create a renewed Piccadilly Gardens – a better designed, high quality and resilient public space centred on a generous lawn, year round planting and a varied tree canopy.

The project will replace the outdated layout with a safer, more accessible and welcoming design.

- Better walking routes and connections
- A greener and more climate resilient environment
- Improved lighting and materials
- Opportunities for small scale activities and events

The renewed layout will strengthen Piccadilly Gardens' role as both a civic destination and a key transport interchange, creating a modern, flexible and more attractive space at the heart of Manchester.



Lawn

A large central lawn to create an open and welcoming space for people to spend time in.



Colour

Bring back the gardens with colourful planting and year-round bloom.



Security

Improve safety with enhanced lighting, CCTV and more proactive management.



Canopy

Mature trees with high canopies to provide much-needed shade.



Nature in the City

A variety of different spaces to enjoy with high quality seating, open lawns, shaded areas and improved children's play.

Heritage

Integrate existing monuments to protect and celebrate the area's heritage.



The plan



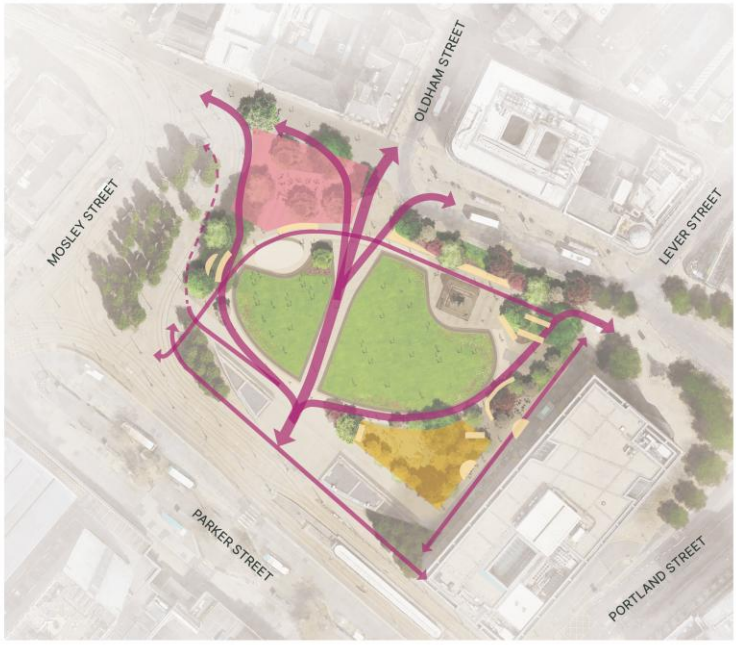
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Access and movement

The renewed layout will enhance the pedestrian journey through Piccadilly Gardens, making routes clearer to navigate with a better layout and less clutter. There's acknowledgement that the space is a busy connection point with many people moving through the area. Entrance points have taken consideration of this and footpaths follow key journeys to ensure users have a positive experience.

Seating along these circulation routes allow for regular rest points, ensuring the comfort of those travelling through Piccadilly Gardens.

- **Wide and clear walking routes**
- **Seating at regular intervals with back and arm rests**
- **Clear sight lines**
- **Key movement routes embedded in design**
- **A range of spaces to cater for variety of users including quieter zones**

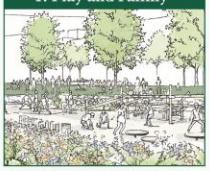


A place for everyone



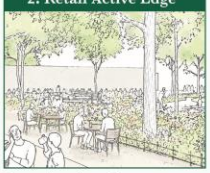
Our ambition is for Piccadilly Gardens to support a wide range of positive everyday use, as well as a regular stream of family-friendly activity and smaller seasonal events to bring people of all ages to the Gardens. Tell us what kind of events and activity you'd like to see.

1. Play and Family



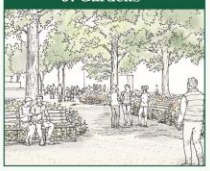
A safe and engaging play space for families to relax while passing through or grabbing a bite to eat.

2. Retail Active Edge



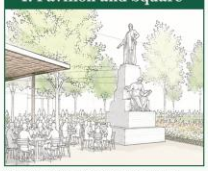
Spaces for cafes and restaurants with outdoor seating to bring life and activity throughout the day.

3. Gardens



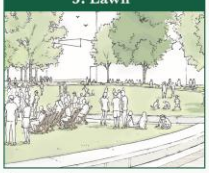
For people to come together in a beautiful seasonal setting, under a canopy of trees with places to meet, stroll and relax.

4. Pavilion and Square



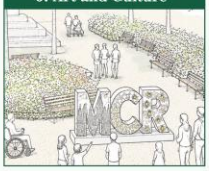
A focal point for meeting, small events, workshops, and everyday social interaction.

5. Lawn



From morning yoga to summer picnics, the lawn provides an open and relaxed focal point throughout the day.

6. Art and Culture



Bringing people together through public art, exhibitions, performances and cultural events.

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We're putting the Gardens back

In Piccadilly Gardens



The planting will play a key role in the redesign of Piccadilly Gardens, with a real focus on bringing back colour, flowers and vibrancy to the space.

Lush colourful planting, selected to bloom and thrive in the local conditions, will sit beneath tall tree canopies providing much needed shade and shelter. Big, high-quality trees will be positioned to frame the outer edge of the space. Bringing nature into the city, they will complement the scale of the surrounding buildings and help create a welcome space within Piccadilly Gardens. Inspiration for this has been taken from Albert Square and St Peter's Square, where fewer but better trees create impact and structure.







Play

Early visual to provide a look and feel for the play. Specific equipment to be selected following consultation.



We want everyone to feel welcome in Piccadilly Gardens, including young children and families. Making our public spaces child-friendly is an important part of our commitment to become a Child Friendly City.

We're proposing to relocate the play area from its current location, which is next to the Queen Victoria Statue and close to the road, to a more contained area in front of One Piccadilly Gardens.

The aim of the play space at Piccadilly Gardens is to create a high-quality, family-friendly space for younger children (under 10s). It is intended to complement, not dominate, the wider function of Piccadilly Gardens. In a bustling city centre, we want to create a location where children can come to run around and enjoy themselves for a few minutes, or to have some quieter time to recharge, in a safe and welcoming space.

As part of the current consultation, we're engaging with families and young people to help shape the way the play area is designed, experienced and managed. This will embed the needs of children, families and under-represented groups to make sure the play space meets real needs.



Physical Play



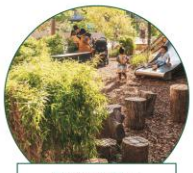
Social Play



Imaginative Play



Sensory Play



Natural Play

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Pavilion

We're proposing a new pavilion as part of the renewed Piccadilly Gardens, creating a welcoming new destination which will bring activity throughout the day.

Set within the landscape, the pavilion is designed to feel open and accessible from all sides. It will provide a café with toilets, along with outdoor seating that connects to the surrounding square and lawn. The café is also intended as a flexible space for small public events and activities.

As well as offering a place to stop, meet and spend time, the pavilion will help introduce more positive daily activity into the Gardens. Its location has been carefully considered to work with key routes, seating, planting and views, while maintaining the open character of the space.

The pavilion's emerging design is shaped by ideas of nature, openness and connectivity, with a shape that responds to the surrounding gardens, lawn and tree canopy. There will be a focus on durable, low-impact construction and the use of natural materials that sit comfortably within the garden setting.





Pavilion Approx Area:
115m^2

Safe and welcoming

at all times of the day

New lighting and CCTV will play a key role in shaping the evening character of Piccadilly Gardens, creating a bright, welcoming and comfortable environment for everyone. Carefully integrated lighting will enhance visibility throughout the space, highlight trees and landmarks, and create visual interest that celebrates the unique character of the gardens. The result will be an inviting civic space that encourages activity, removes opportunities for anti-social behaviour and supports a positive experience after dark. It will reinforce Piccadilly Gardens as a vibrant destination in the heart of Manchester.











counter context

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Next steps

The consultation on our designs for Piccadilly Gardens will be open from Wednesday 17 June to Wednesday 15 July 2026.



Tell us your views!

These proposals represent an opportunity to transform the Gardens into a more welcoming, vibrant and inclusive space for everyone – and we're really keen to hear what you think about our plans.

Please take a few minutes to complete our questionnaire.

The quickest way is to scan this QR code → or visit **manchester.gov.uk/piccadillygardens**

Or you can pick up a paper copy at one of our events.

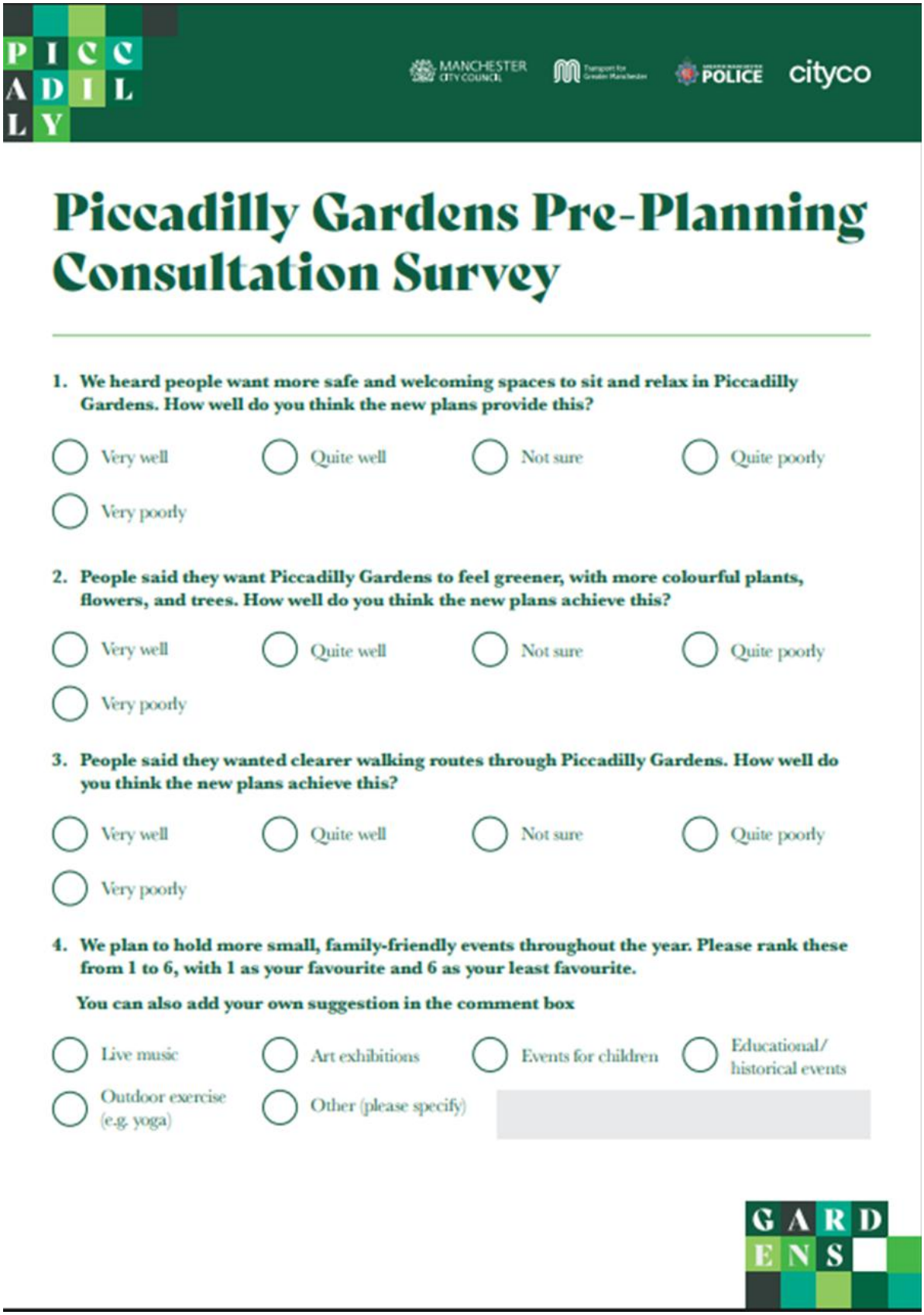
What happens next?

Following this consultation, we will be working to finalise the designs and submit a planning application in the next few weeks.

Subject to planning, we'll be looking to start construction work later in the Autumn, with the new Piccadilly Gardens unveiled in 2027. Throughout construction, we'll work closely with local businesses and key organisations to minimise disruption within this busy part of the city centre.

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Appendix V: Feedback Form



PICCADILLY

MANCHESTER CITY COUNCIL · Transport for Greater Manchester · POLICE · cityco

Piccadilly Gardens Pre-Planning Consultation Survey

1. **We heard people want more safe and welcoming spaces to sit and relax in Piccadilly Gardens. How well do you think the new plans provide this?**

○ Very well ○ Quite well ○ Not sure ○ Quite poorly ○ Very poorly

2. **People said they want Piccadilly Gardens to feel greener, with more colourful plants, flowers, and trees. How well do you think the new plans achieve this?**

○ Very well ○ Quite well ○ Not sure ○ Quite poorly ○ Very poorly

3. **People said they wanted clearer walking routes through Piccadilly Gardens. How well do you think the new plans achieve this?**

○ Very well ○ Quite well ○ Not sure ○ Quite poorly ○ Very poorly

4. **We plan to hold more small, family-friendly events throughout the year. Please rank these from 1 to 6, with 1 as your favourite and 6 as your least favourite.**

You can also add your own suggestion in the comment box

○ Live music ○ Art exhibitions ○ Events for children ○ Educational/ historical events

○ Outdoor exercise (e.g. yoga) ○ Other (please specify)

GARDENS

counter context

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5. **The plans include moving and expanding the play area, with new, high-quality equipment for children aged 0–10. Do you have any comments or suggestions about this?**

6. **As part of this new approach, we are seeking people to join a "Friends of Piccadilly Gardens" group. This could include opportunities to learn about horticulture and nature in the city as well as being involved with small, regular events that bring the new gardens alive.**

   Would you be interested in joining "Friends of Piccadilly Gardens" group? If so, please leave your email address.

7. **Finally, is there any more detailed feedback you'd like to provide about the new designs, or anything else you think we need to consider?**

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Equality Monitoring questions

We would like to ask you some questions about yourself. These questions are optional. You do not have to answer them, but in doing so you are helping Manchester City Council ensure that views collected through the consultation represent the views of the resident population. All responses remain confidential and are protected by Data Protection regulations.

8. What is your age?

- ◯ Under 16
- ◯ 16 – 25 years
- ◯ 26 – 39 years
- ◯ 40 – 49 years
- ◯ 50 – 64 years
- ◯ 65 – 74 years
- ◯ 75 + years
- ◯ Prefer not to say

9. What is your gender?

- ◯ Female
- ◯ Male
- ◯ Prefer not to say
- ◯ Other (please specify)

10. What is your ethnicity?

White

- ◯ British/English/ Northern Irish/ Scottish/Welsh
- ◯ Irish
- ◯ Gypsy or Irish Traveller
- ◯ Other white

Mixed/Multiple Ethnic Groups

- ◯ White and Black Caribbean
- ◯ White and Black African
- ◯ White and Asian
- ◯ Other Mixed

Asian/Asian British

- ◯ Indian
- ◯ Pakistani
- ◯ Bangladeshi
- ◯ Chinese
- ◯ Kashmiri
- ◯ Other Asian

Black/African/Caribbean/Black British

- ◯ Caribbean
- ◯ African
- ◯ Somali
- ◯ Other Black

Other

- ◯ Prefer not to say
- ◯ Any Other Ethnic Group (please specify)

11. Are your day-to-day activities limited because of a long-term health condition or disability?

- ◯ Yes, a lot
- ◯ Yes, a little
- ◯ No
- ◯ Prefer not to say
- ◯ Not applicable

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