Complying with the Biodiversity Duty – Our Policies and Objectives for Thriving Wildlife in Oldham

(Photo taken from Oldham GI Strategy by TEP: Landscape near Denshaw)

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Introduction

Purpose of report

1.1 This report sets out Oldham Council's policies and objectives on conserving and enhancing biodiversity to demonstrate how we are complying with the biodiversity duty.

1.2 The Environment Act 2021 introduced a strengthened 'biodiversity duty' into the Natural Environment and Rural Communities Act 2006 which requires all public authorities in England to consider what they can do to conserve and enhance biodiversity.

1.3 Oldham Council as a public authority, must:

- Consider what we can do to conserve and enhance biodiversity
- Agree policies and specific objectives based on our consideration.
- Act to deliver our policies and achieve our objectives.

1.4 There was a need to complete our first consideration of what action Oldham Council intends to take for biodiversity no later than 1 January 2024 – this report can be viewed here.

1.5 Following this initial consideration, Oldham Council must agree our policies and objectives as soon as possible after. This report fulfils this second step.

1.6 Following on from this report, future reports will be published setting out how these policies and objectives have been implemented (see Reporting and Monitoring section).

The purpose of Biodiversity

2.1 Biodiversity refers to all the various kinds of living organisms within a given area, including plants, animals, fungi, and other living things.

2.2 All species are interconnected; they depend on one another. Forests provide homes for animals. Animals eat plants, which need healthy soil to grow. Fungi helps decompose organisms to fertilize the soil. Bees and other insects carry pollen from one plant to another, which enables the plants to reproduce. With less biodiversity, these connections weaken, and sometimes break, harming all the species in the ecosystem[1].

2.3 Biodiversity has a strong role to play in our lives and offers many benefits as outlined in the draft Local Nature Recovery Strategy (LNRS)[2]:

Benefits for people:

- A green and healthy environment to grow up, get on and grow old.
- More recreation and leisure opportunities.
- Improved air quality and less noise pollution.
- Improved physical health, including better heart health and healthy lifestyles.
- Improved mental health, including reduced stress and reduce mental health conditions.
- More resilience and adaptation to climate change, including flooding, droughts and extreme heat.

[1] National Geographic
[2] The draft LNRS can be found at https://www.greatermanchester-ca.gov.uk/media/hmsj013u/gm-local-nature-recovery-strategy-consultation-draft.pdf

- Less water pollution and safer opportunities for water-based recreation.
- Greater connection to our natural and historic environment.
- Stronger communities, proud of where they live and work.
- Healthier soils, ensuring long term sustainability of food supplies.

The benefits for businesses:

- A more attractive place to work, visit and do business, encouraging local economic growth.
- Increased resilience through reduced risk of, and better adaptation to, environmental hazards.
- A healthier, happier and more productive workforce.
- Higher land and property values.
- Increased green jobs and skills.
- More visitors and sustainable tourism opportunities.
- More productive land for food security and other resources that can be grown locally.

The ecological benefits:

- Protection of rare and threatened species and habitats.
- Repaired natural cycles and natural processes.
- A greater abundance and diversity of wildlife and healthier ecosystems, reversing biodiversity decline.
- Capture and sequestration of carbon dioxide, helping tackle climate change.
- More resilience to future changes in climate.
- Greater resilience of species to pests and diseases.

2.4 Quite often when we talk about biodiversity, we talk about it alongside Green Infrastructure (GI) more generally.

2.5 GI is a network of green spaces and water environments that sustains the ecosystems we need for a decent quality of life. We refer to both GI and biodiversity within this report.

The threats to Biodiversity

3.1 Our GI is vital to the quality of life of our residents, workers and visitors. Looking after our GI is part of our goal to become a carbon neutral Borough, and plan for climate change. Investing in our GI will deliver multiple benefits including environmental enhancements, improved public health and a contribution to Oldham's economy.

3.2 Although GI is extensive, we need to manage it more effectively to better respond to the needs of people and nature, and ensure it is resilient to the changing climate.

3.3 The Greater Manchester State of Nature[3] report was compiled to highlight the urgent challenges faced by nature across the city-region, which was reflected in the declaration of a biodiversity emergency in GM in March 2022. The report covers trends in our wildlife, the use of land and pressures on nature, the wider benefits we receive from nature and people's access to nature and engagement with it.

3.4 Some of the headline findings from this report are:

[3] https://www.greatermanchester-ca.gov.uk/media/9526/gm-state-of-nature-report.pdf

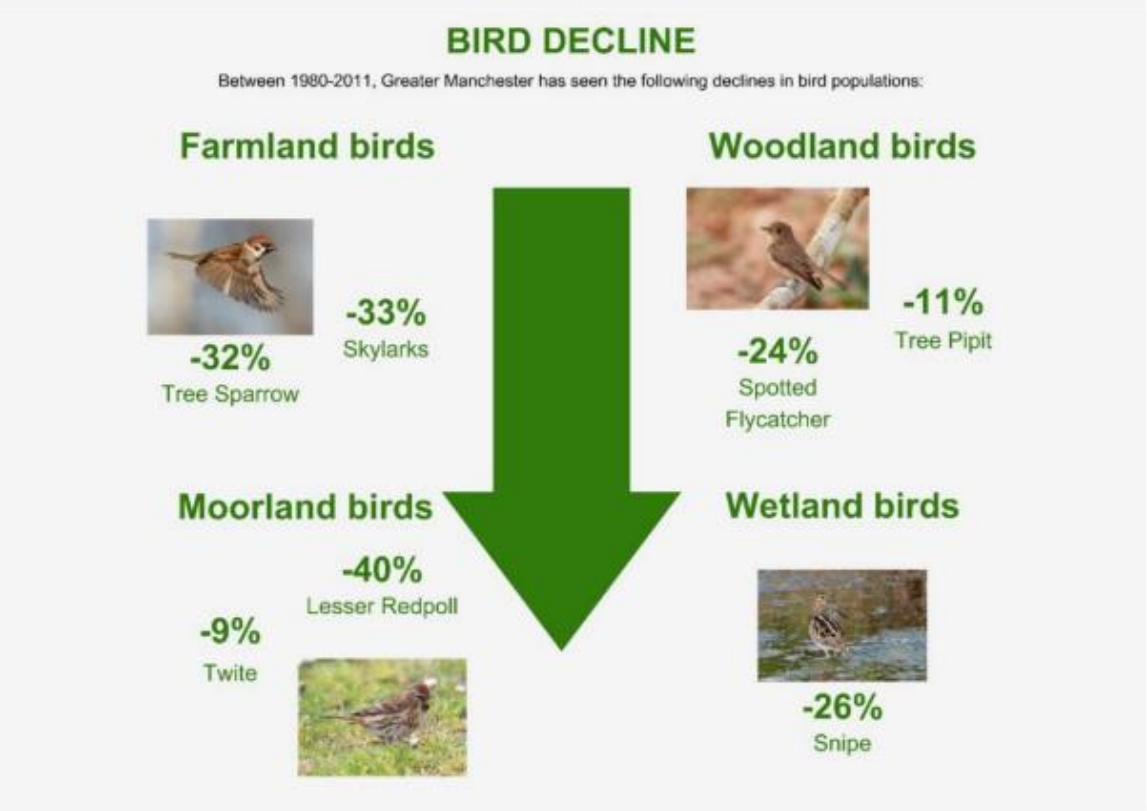
- Echoing national trends, key species of birds and mammals in GM and the North West of England are declining. Individual bird species population show declines of up to 40% over the last 40 years and the abundance of once common mammals has dropped by between 20-40% since 1995.
- Our protected sites provide valuable refuges for nature but cover just 11% of GM and are highly fragmented rather than forming a connected network for nature. Although recovering at present they are not in as good as condition as they could be.
- 80% of our water bodies have been heavily modified by human activities. Currently none of our rivers are in good ecological condition and we are far from meeting national targets for 75% of our waterbodies to reach this status.
- Our tree canopy covers 16% of GM (in Oldham specifically, the tree canopy cover is 13.4% of the borough) and significant efforts are being made to increase the number of trees being planted across the city region. However, our existing woodlands could be much better managed for nature.

3.5 The report highlights trends for birds and mammals:

Our Birds

3.6 Bird populations are used to provide a good indication of the broad state of wildlife in the UK. GM is home to many populations of birds. Mirroring national trends, we have seen some worrying declines in our bird populations.

FIGURE 1: BIRD DECLINE (GREATER MANCHESTER STATE OF NATURE REPORT)



Our mammals

3.7 The population trends for mammals are relatively poorly known in Greater Manchester and we are reliant on data for the whole of the North West. 25-year trends for the North West show us that we are losing once common species.

FIGURE 2: MALLAL DECLINE (GREATER MANCHESTER STATE OF NATURE REPORT)

Returning Species:

3.8 However, there are signs that nature can recover, and there is evidence that the following species have been returning, which can give hope for future efforts:

- Otters – sights in districts across Greater Manchester;
- Fish and Mayfiles have returned to all sections of the River Medlock;
- Butterflies – Manchester Argus Butterfly (Large Heath Butterfly) has been reintroduced at Astley Moss;
- Birds – Nightjars returning around Chat Moss; and
- Bog plants – Sundew, Lesser Bladderwort, Bog Asphodel and White Beak Sedge all now thrive on lowland peatlands.

Pressures on Nature

3.9 Some of the pressures of biodiversity noted within the State of Nature report are:

- Pressures on land use - Land in GM is limited and is under increasing demand to meet a variety of needs. These needs include providing homes, commercial space, transport and utilities for the city-region; supporting energy generation, carbon sequestration (e.g., tree planting and peatland restoration) and climate adaptation (e.g., nature-based solutions); and food growing and recreation.

- Pressures on water and waterbodies - Water in GM is under pressure from a range of sources. Over 20% of the water in most GM rivers has been discharged from a Wastewater Treatment Works. For some rivers this is as high as 60 to 80%.

- Pathogens and diseases - As well as invasive plant species, microorganisms that cause disease pose a threat to wildlife and ecosystems. The most significant of these currently affecting GM and the rest of the UK is ash dieback. Other diseases, like avian influenza, may emerge to pose threats to wildlife (in that instance, to birds).

And climate change is likely to increase risk of the introduction and spread of pathogens.

- Climate change - Climate change has already impacted biodiversity in GM as species shift northwards. As temperatures increase, climate zones will move northwards at 5km per year by 2050 – equivalent to moving from the south to north of Greater Manchester in 8 years, a process which took 800 years at the end of the last ice age. Risk assessments for species in England show that more species are expected to increase their ranges rather than decrease. However, upland habitat species in the north and east of the city-region are particularly vulnerable to climate change due to northwards and upwards range contraction. Given the importance of uplands to water management and carbon storage, this may have knock on impacts. These effects will be exacerbated further by the projected increase in hazardous fire weather conditions in summer, meaning greater risk of wildfires in the uplands and extension of the wildfire season into late summer and early autumn.

Context for change

National Context

4.1 In 2010 the Lawton Review 'Making Space for Nature' was published. The Lawton Review concluded that England's wildlife sites, despite their diversity, did not comprise a coherent and resilient ecological network, let alone one capable of coping with the challenge of climate change and other pressures. To address this, the Lawton Review called for the creation of a healthy ecological network operating across the landscape, not in isolated sites. To do this, Lawton says, we need to make our network of sites bigger, better and more joined up. This means:

- Protecting and enhancing what we have, with better management;
- Increasing the size of wildlife sites;
- Enhancing connection by creating new wildlife corridors or stepping stones;
- Creating new sites; and
- Reducing pressure on wildlife by improving the wider environment.

4.2 The recommendations of the Lawton Review are now being taken forward across the UK, and elsewhere in the world. It is integral to the Environment Act 2021 and has shaped current national policy and government ambitions for a national nature recovery network.

4.3 The Environment Act 2021 introduced a strengthened 'biodiversity duty' which requires all public authorities in England to consider what they can do to conserve and enhance biodiversity.

4.4 The Environmental Improvement Plan[4] (EIP) 2023, sets out government plans for significantly improving the natural environment. The EIP is a revision of the Governments 25-year Environment Plan (2018).

4.5 By 2030, the government has committed to:

- halt the decline in species abundance; and
- protect 30% of UK land.

4.6 By 2042, the government has committed to:

- increase species abundance by at least 10% from 2030, surpassing 2022 levels;
- restore or create at least 500,000 ha of a range of wildlife rich habitats;
- reduce the risk of species extinction; and
- restore 75% of our one million hectares of terrestrial and freshwater protected sites to favourable condition, securing their wildlife value for the long term.

4.7 In addition, statutory instruments have seen the introduction of Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG).

4.8 BNG became mandatory from 12 February 2024 for major developments and 2 April 2024 for minor developments. This requires developments, unless exempt[5], to meet a

[4] https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/environmental-improvement-plan

[5] Current exemptions include permitted development, urgent crown development, development impacting habitat of an area below a 'de minimis' threshold of 25 m2 or 5m for linear habitats (such as hedgerows), householder applications, biodiversity gain sites (where habitats are being enhanced for wildlife), small scale self-build and custom house building (conditions apply) and development related to the high-speed rail transport network.

minimum of 10% BNG. Where this cannot be achieved in full on-site, the developer is required to find off-site solutions to achieve the target. This presents opportunities across the borough to enhance biodiversity.

Greater Manchester Context

4.9 In March 2022, the Greater Manchester Combined Authority (GMCA), of which Oldham Council is a member, declared a "biodiversity emergency".[6] As part of this a Green Spaces Fund, managed by the Greater Manchester Environment Fund, has been established to help community groups create or improve green spaces.

4.10 Greater Manchester (GM) responded to environmental challenges that threaten the health and prosperity of our region through the Five-Year Environment Plan[7] (2025-2030). This Plan looks at achievements since the last Environment Plan, and sets out a vision, aims, objectives and actions.

4.11 Aim 4 states "Our natural environment is enhanced providing benefits for people, economy and nature". The objectives under this aim are:

1. Expand and enhance our best spaces for nature
2. Better connect the best spaces for nature by creating and restoring habitats
3. Reduce pressures on our water environment
4. Increase the amount of green and blue spaces (parks, countryside, public realm etc) that are better managed for nature
5. Increase the number of green and resilient transport routes, streets & highways
6. Increase the amount of green and resilient new infrastructure, regeneration and development
7. Increase the amount of community-led action and better connection to nature

4.12 The Environment Act 2021 introduced a range of measures to seek to halt the decline in biodiversity. This included the requirement for Local Nature Recovery Strategies (LNRS) to cover the whole of England setting out where and how efforts should be focused locally to contribute to halting and reversing the decline in biodiversity. There are 48 strategy areas across England, including one for GM.

4.13 Approval was given in March 2023 to support the proposed appointment (by the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs) of the Mayor as the responsible authority for the preparation of a LNRS for GM.[8]

4.14 The GM LNRS[9] is an opportunity to set out a long-term vision for a greener city region, where nature is returning, and more people have better access to greenspace.

4.15 The strategy is aimed at encouraging all organisations, communities and residents to take action to support nature's recovery. It will be of particular importance for landowners

[6] https://www.greatermanchester-ca.gov.uk/news/greater-manchester-declares-biodiversity-emergency-and-reiterates-rapid-drive-to-net-zero/
[7] https://www.greatermanchester-ca.gov.uk/what-we-do/environment/five-year-environment-plan/
[8] https://democracy.greatermanchester-ca.gov.uk/documents/s25477/11%20GM%20Local%20Nature%20Recovery%20Strategy_29.02.2023.pdf
[9] https://www.greatermanchester-ca.gov.uk/what-we-do/environment/natural-environment/our-plan-for-nature-recovery/

and, once adopted, will incentivise investment through Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG) and environmental land management schemes.

4.16 The strategy sets out a Nature Network for GM. This has its basis in the national policy and evidence on nature recovery and the principles of “more, bigger, better and joined up” spaces for nature. This uses existing core local nature sites as its basis by:

1. Improving the quality of those sites by better habitat management.
2. Increasing their size.
3. Enhancing the connections between them, through corridors or stepping stones.
4. Creating new sites.
5. Reduce pressures by improving the wider environment, including buffering those sites.

4.17 The LNRS identifies core local nature sites and opportunity areas.

4.18 As a local authority, Oldham Council will have to have regard to any relevant LNRS when performing its duty under section 40 of the Natural Environment and Rural Communities Act 2016 when considering what action they can take to “further the general biodiversity objective” of conserving and enhancing biodiversity when delivering their functions. Local Planning Authorities will need to “have regard” to the LNRSs in local planning policy and decisions.

4.19 The Places for Everyone Plan[10] (PfE Plan) is a joint development plan document of nine GM authorities (Bolton, Bury, Manchester, Oldham, Rochdale, Salford, Tameside, Trafford, and Wigan), adopted on 21st March 2024.

4.20 The PfE Plan sets out a clear spatial strategy for delivering new homes and businesses along with infrastructure to support development and to protect and enhance our towns, cities and landscapes. It covers a period up to 2039.

4.21 The plan includes policies on GI on landscape character, green infrastructure network, river valleys and waterways, lowland wetlands and mosslands, uplands, urban green space, trees and woodlands, a net enhancement of biodiversity and geodiversity and the Green Belt which all link to enhancing biodiversity. Other plan policies will also have links to biodiversity.

Oldham Context

4.22 The Oldham Plan 'Pride, Progress, Partnership’ (2024-2030), prepared by the Oldham Partnership, sets the direction for the borough including “Green and Growing” and seeks to lead the way on green projects across the country.

4.23 The council’s Corporate Plan ‘Ready for the Future’ 2024-27 sets out the council’s priorities and works in parallel with The Oldham Plan. One of the three missions is “Green and Growing” which seeks to drive economic growth in relation to green technologies.

4.24 In June 2019, Oldham Council declared its ambition to be the UK's first Green New Deal Council. It subsequently declared a Climate Emergency in September 2019.

4.25 The Oldham Green New Deal Strategy was adopted by Oldham Council in March 2020. The Strategy’s objective is to 'Future-proof the regeneration of the borough by establishing Oldham as an exemplar Green City on energy, carbon, water and green infrastructure'. Whilst this strategy has links to GI its focus is on carbon neutrality.

[10] https://www.greatermanchester-ca.gov.uk/what-we-do/planning-and-housing/places-for-everyone/

4.26 To support Local Plan evidence, Oldham's Green Infrastructure Strategy was commissioned and published in 2022. The Oldham GI Strategy sets out the vision for GI:

> "*By 2037, Oldham will be a carbon neutral exemplar with a resilient, multifunctional Green Infrastructure network which brings multiple benefits to the natural and built environment and provides a solid foundation for the Council's response to climate change. Oldham will be a greener and healthier place to live, work and visit."*

4.27 'Thriving wildlife' is one of the seven priority themes within the strategy. The strategy sets out opportunities for wildlife in each district across Oldham borough (excluding the Peak District National Park).

4.28 Oldham's Local Plan includes PfE (mentioned above) and saved policies within the Joint Core Strategy and Development Management Development Plan Document (Joint DPD).

4.29 A Local Plan review[11] is underway which will replace saved policies within the Joint DPD. Consultation on the Draft Local Plan[12] took place between January and February 2024. This includes draft Policy N1 Protecting Nature; Policy N2 Restoring Nature; Policy N3 Enhancing Green Infrastructure through development and Policy N4 Tree Replacement.

[11] The Local Plan review webpage can be found at https://www.oldham.gov.uk/info/201233/local_plan_review
[12] The Draft Local Plan can be found at the following webpage https://www.oldham.gov.uk/info/201233/local_plan_review/3095/draft_local_plan

Oldham's Biodiversity Resource

5.1 The Borough of Oldham covers 11,800 hectares and is within the north east of GM and has a mix of urban townships and rural villages. Being on the edge of the Pennines, Oldham is also home to an abundance of GI assets which form a key part of the fabric of our towns, villages and landscapes.

5.2 Approximately 77% of Oldham consists of GI, of which 10% is designated for international, national or local biodiversity value. The table below shows the percentage of different types of GI in Oldham:

TABLE 1: GREEN INFRASTRUCTURE TYPES IN OLDHAM PLANNING BOUNDARY (SOURCE: OLDHAM GREEN INFRASTRUCTURE STRATEGY 2022)

GI Type	Approximate hectares	Approximate Percentage (%) of Oldham borough land (planning authority)
Agricultural land	2931	24.86
Allotments	17	0.14
Amenity	724	6.14
Grounds to public buildings	127	1.08
Grounds to religious buildings	64	0.54
Parks and gardens	79	0.67
Private Gardens	1370	11.62
Sport facilities	356	3.02
Transport corridors	55	0.47
Other Greenspace	189	1.60
Semi-Natural Habitat	2165	18.36
Water	163	1.38
Coniferous woodland	58	0.49
Deciduous woodland	726	6.16
Other woodland	23	0.20
Unclassified	19	0.16
Urban	2725	23.11

5.3 Oldham borough has a rural character to the east and an urban character to the west. The rural east includes moorland, grassland, woodland, watercourses, reservoirs and villages nestled in valley bottoms. The urban west is extensively developed but does include wooded river valleys, a canal corridor and a network of green spaces.

5.4 The borough and the surrounding areas support a wide variety of wildlife-rich habitat. The eastern half of Oldham supports large tracts of moorland (upland heath and blanket bog), much of which lies within the South Pennines Moor SPA (Special Protection Area) and Peak District National Park (PDNP). This area contains over a third of the county's wet heath. Major upland reservoirs at Castleshaw and Dovestone add to the diversity of habitats.

5.5 The rivers Medlock, Irk and Tame have their sources high up in the Pennines and provide important corridors for wildlife to move through, as they flow through the borough. Oldham also has significant areas of both unimproved and semi-improved acid grassland.

5.6 The moorland supports important numbers of breeding upland birds, including Golden Plover, and is also home to a small population of Mountain Hares. Ravens have recently

returned to the borough's high land. They can be located by their gruff calls and can be seen in late winter performing their spectacular aerial displays.

5.7 Roe Deer are an increasingly common site in the woodlands and Badger, Fox, Stoat, and Weasel add to the variety of mammals to be found in Oldham.

5.8 During spring large numbers of Common Toads head towards the ponds and lodges in the Uppermill area to spawn. Oldham's ponds also support three species of Newt as well as the Common Frog. Extensive conifer plantations provide a habitat for specialist species of bird and fungi.

5.9 The stretch of the Rochdale canal that runs through the borough has been designated as a Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) and a Special Area for Conservation (SAC).

5.10 The Oldham section of the Rochdale Canal SSSI contains important habitats for submerged plants and emergent vegetation including floating water-plantain and an assemblage of aquatic flora. The canal also provides habitat for a number of waterside bird species. Coot, Moorhen and Mallard breed along the length of the canal, whilst Grey Wagtail also breeds in smaller numbers and Kingfisher use the canal for feeding. Improvements in habitat management at Daisy Nook have resulted in an increase in Orchids, relocated when the M60 was extended.

5.11 Many of the borough's habitats can be categorised as important sites for wildlife and are defined as a key habitat type in line with the designations or descriptions below:

Designated Sites

5.12 Internationally Designated Statutory Nature Conservation Sites:

- South Pennine Moors Special Protection Areas (SPAs);
- South Pennine Moors Special Area of Conservation (SACs); and
- Rochdale Canal Special Area of Conservation (SACs).

5.13 Nationally Designated Statutory Nature Conservation Sites:

- Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSIs) - Rochdale Canal; South Pennine Moors; Standedge Tunnel; Ladcastle and Den Quarries; Lowside Brickworks; and Dark Peak.

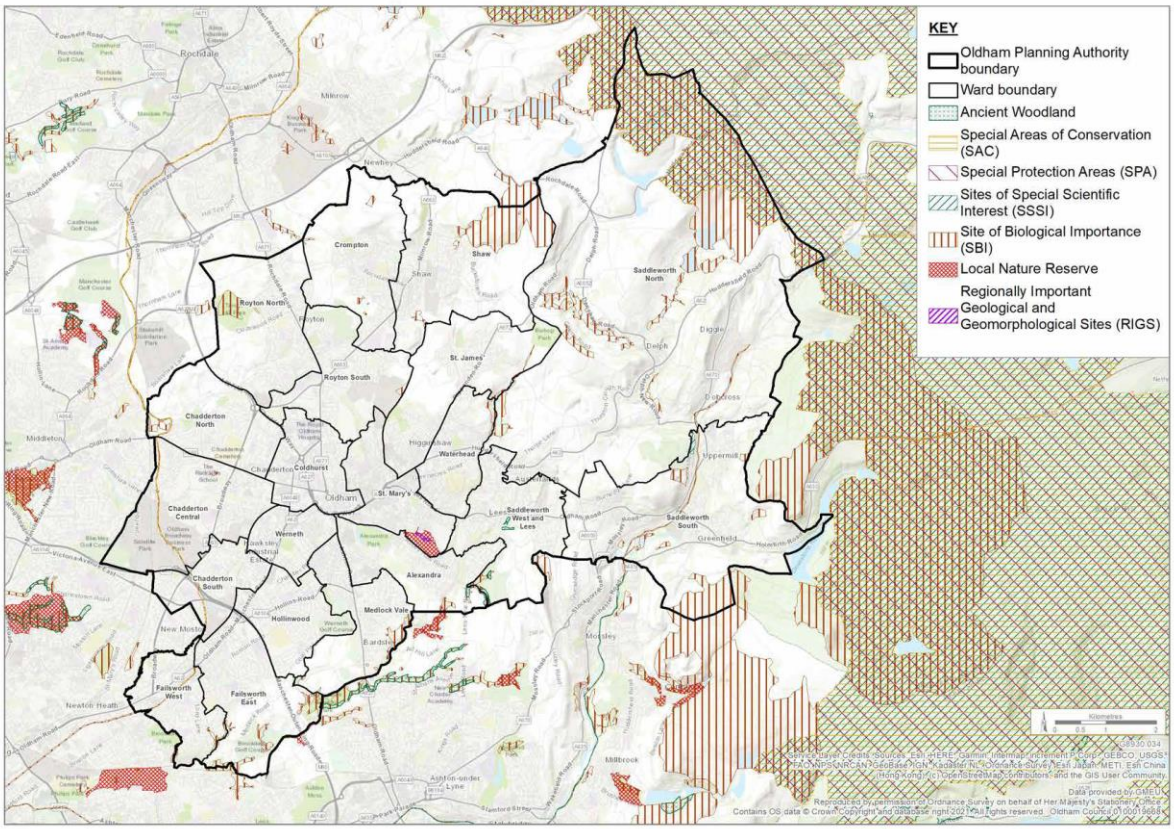
5.14 Locally Designated Non-Statutory Sites:

- Sites of Biological Importance (SBIs) – see Appendix A.
- Local Nature Reserves (LNRs) – Glodwick Lows

5.15 The GM State of Nature report highlights that there is a need for designated sites to have appropriate management, to ensure they are in the best condition possible for nature and to avoid them being lost. It states we know more about the condition of sites that are designated at a European (SAC and SPA) and national (SSSI and NNR) level than we do about those designated locally.

5.16 Restoring, protecting and improving existing habitats can improve the resilience of Oldham's biodiversity in the face of climate change and human pressures. Effective networks of GI provide opportunities for wildlife to move and colonise new habitats, which is a key ecological response to climate change.

FIGURE 3: DESIGNATED SITES IN OLDHAM



Other Planning Designations

Green Corridors and Links

5.17 The Local Plan currently designates 'green corridors and links' and seeks to maintain, extend or link green corridors. The boundaries for the green corridors and links will be reviewed as part of the Local Plan to ensure they still support wildlife corridors. This will consider the work done on the LNRS.

Other Protected Open Land / Local Green Space

5.18 The Local Plan currently designates areas of land called 'Other Protected Open Land' (OPOL). These are being reviewed through the Local Plan review and assessed against Local Green Space (LGS) criteria set out in National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF). LGS can be designated where it is important to local communities due to proximity to the community and because they are demonstrably special and hold local significance due to beauty, historic significance, recreational value, tranquillity, or richness of its wildlife.

5.19 We want to protect any LGS that are important for wildlife from inappropriate development.

5.20 For more information on proposed LGS please see the Draft Local Plan[13].

[13] https://www.oldham.gov.uk/info/201233/local_plan_review/3095/draft_local_plan

Tree Cover

5.21 The GI Strategy used the National Tree Mapping dataset to present canopy cover across the borough. The dataset confirms that the average canopy cover across the borough is 13.4%. The borough's average tree canopy cover compares with 16% for GM and 14% for Greater London. The Canopy Cover of England's Towns and Cities advises that the mean tree canopy cover of England's towns and cities is 16.4%.

5.22 In terms of Oldham there is a notable spatial pattern to the tree canopy in that it tends to extend along some of Oldham's main river corridors including the River Medlock from its source near Strinesdale Country Park and then along a south westerly direction towards the boundary with Manchester. There is a similar pattern of tree cover along the course of the River Tame from Delph towards the boundary with Tameside. Other areas of extended tree canopy are at Tandle Hill Park, Crompton Moor and Oldham Edge.

5.23 There is an absence of tree canopy in some of the more elevated areas of Saddleworth and Shaw wards due to the presence of peatland habitat, which contributes to the lower percentage of boroughwide tree cover overall.

Notable species and habitats in the borough.

5.24 Oldham has a range of landscapes across its rural and urban areas, providing many different habitat types, all providing opportunities for nature to reside and thrive. Wildlife habitats are found in a diverse range of green and open spaces across Oldham as listed below.

- Urban green spaces and buildings
- Rivers, canals and waterbodies
- Woodlands, trees, scrub and hedgerows
- Lowland wetlands and mosslands
- Upland moorlands
- Grasslands, farmland and lowland heath

5.25 When wildlife habitats are in a healthy and favourable condition, they have the capacity to be nature-rich, supporting a wide variety of species. These areas are recognised to be of substantive nature conservation value and need to be protected and managed in a way that will enable nature to continue to thrive.

5.26 There are sites across the borough that have been designated as a SBI by Greater Manchester Ecology Unit (GMEU). These sites are recognised for supporting notable habitats and species. The table below lists a random selection of these sites across Oldham and the species they support, which gives us an understanding of the range of notable habitats and species.

TABLE 2: NOTABLE HABITATS AND SPECIES NOTED AT A SELECTION OF SITES OF BIOLOGICAL IMPORTANCE TO GIVE INDICATION OF NOTABLE HABITATS AND SPECIES IN THE BOROUGH

Site Name	Notable habitats and species
Bankfield Clough	Woodland (Wd1); Grassland (Gr2); Heathland & Bog (HB1)
Castleshaw Pasture, Castleshaw	Grassland (Gr2); Breeding Bird (Br5)
Crime Lake & Fairbottom Branch Canal, Failsworth	Open Water (Fw3); Reedbed, Swamp & Fen (FW1)
Crompton Moor South, Shaw	Heathland & Bog (HB1)
Daisy Nook (West), Failsworth	Woodland (Wd1); Plantation Woodland (Wd2)
Hull Brook, Delph	Running water (Fw4); Ponds & Small Lodges (Fw2); Grassland (Gr2); White Clawed Crayfish (GSG1)
Medlock Headwater and Strinesdale	Running water (Fw4); Open water (Fw3); Grassland (Gr2); Birds (Br6)
Moorgate Quarry, Uppermill	Heathland (HB1); Grassland (Gr2); Habitat Mosaics (HM1)
Shaw Side, Shaw	Swamp (Fw1); Grassland (Gr2)
Slackcote Valley, Delph	Grassland (Gr2); Heathland (HB1)
Tame Water Woodland, Dobcross	Woodland (Wd1)
Tandle Hill Country Park, Royton	Birds (Br6); Fungi (GSG1)

5.27 The implementation of the Greater Manchester LNRS from 2025 will help nature to recover.

5.28 The LNRS provides guidance and recommends practical actions to help with future habitat management across all habitat types. The implementation of the LNRS should result in the wildlife value of these habitats being enhanced as well as being better connected due to its ambitious plans to expand the nature network across Greater Manchester.

5.29 Some individual species, and groups of species, are particularly at risk locally and need bespoke action beyond wider wildlife habitat management. Focused attention on these species can help them to recover and avoid local species loss.

5.30 The LNRS lists individual priority species and priority species groups which the strategy aims to support due to their importance. These species are locally significant in GM, with many found in and around the Oldham area.

LNRS Individual priority species

- Mountain hare, Water vole, Willow tit, Black-necked grebe, Hedgehog, European hornet, Black poplar & Slow worm

LNRS Priority species groups

- Upland bees, butterflies and moths: Bilberry bumblebee, Tormentil mining bee, small copper butterfly, Wall butterfly, Small Heath butterfly, Dark green fritillary butterfly, Gypsy bumblebee, Manchester treble-bar moth
- Urban birds: Swift, House martin, Black redstart
- Farmland birds: Tree sparrow, Corn bunting, Linnet, Yellow wagtail and Yellow hammer

- Grassland fungi: Pink waxcap, Jubilee waxcap, Oliver earthtongue, Powdercap stranglers, Violet coral
- Migratory fish: Atlantic salmon, European Eel
- Grassland ground-nesting birds: Curlew, Lapwing, Twite, Skylark, Golden plover, Dunlin, Snipe
- Brownfield insects: Dingy skipper, Common blue, Trifurcula cryptella
- Mossland insects: Large Heath, Crambus hamella, Gelechia cuneatella, Glyphipterix haworthana, Lampronia fuscatella, Large red-belted clearwing, Monochroa suffusella, Phiaris schulziana, Purple-bordered gold.

Enhancing Oldham's Biodiversity

6.1 The GI Strategy provides an analysis of thriving wildlife in terms of need and opportunities.

Need

6.2 Core biodiversity areas (those areas that are designated for their importance) provide habitats for wildlife. However, with more challenging conditions caused by climate change, it is important that corridors between core areas are provided to assist species to disperse and find forage and shelter.

6.3 Core biodiversity areas include Castleshaw Moor, Crompton Moor, sections of the River Tame valley and the Huddersfield Canal. Core areas are more fragmented in the west of the borough, but include Tandle Hill, the Rochdale Canal and the River Medlock corridor.

Opportunity

6.4 Gaps between core areas could be partially filled by enhancing the existing GI resource including increasing tree canopy cover, establishing wetlands and managing open spaces with biodiversity as an objective (in a manner appropriate for the type of open space).

6.5 Key corridors and "stepping stones" could be enhanced from the source of the River Medlock north of Strinesdale Country Park downstream towards Manchester City. An additional corridor could be promoted extending northwards from Alexandra Park across Oldham Town Centre (with suitable stepping stones) towards Oldham Edge, the Beal Valley and Royton. In the east of the borough, there is also opportunity for better connectivity along the River Tame.

6.6 Priority for ecological networks should also be focussed on 'nature deprived' Oldham wards of Chadderton South, Coldhurst, Hollinwood, Waterhead and Werneth. This would require improving the functionality and biodiversity value of existing open spaces, as there is little opportunity to create new greenspace.

6.7 The GI Strategy sets out place-based opportunities for thriving wildlife across the districts within Oldham as shown below:

FIGURE 4: CENTRAL DISTRICT GI OPPORTUNITY (GI STRATEGY)

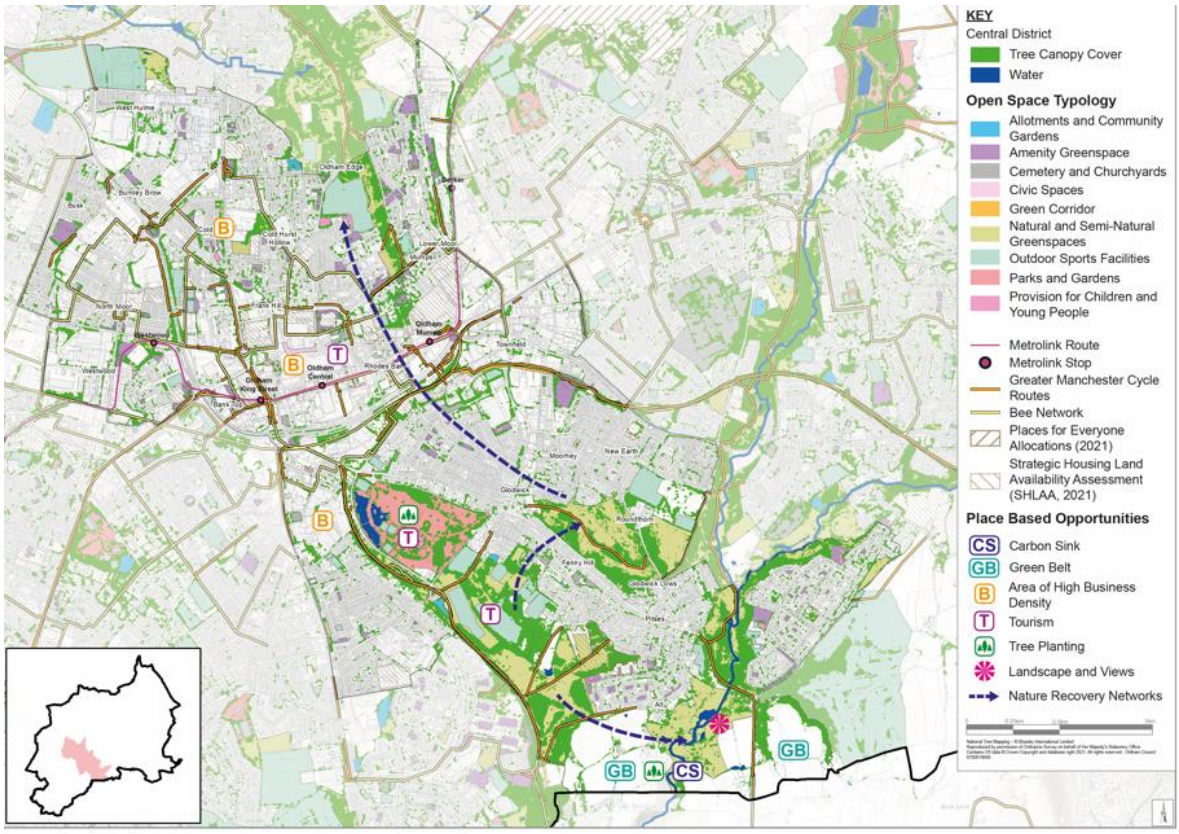


FIGURE 5: EAST DISTRICT GI OPPORTUNITY (GI STRATEGY)

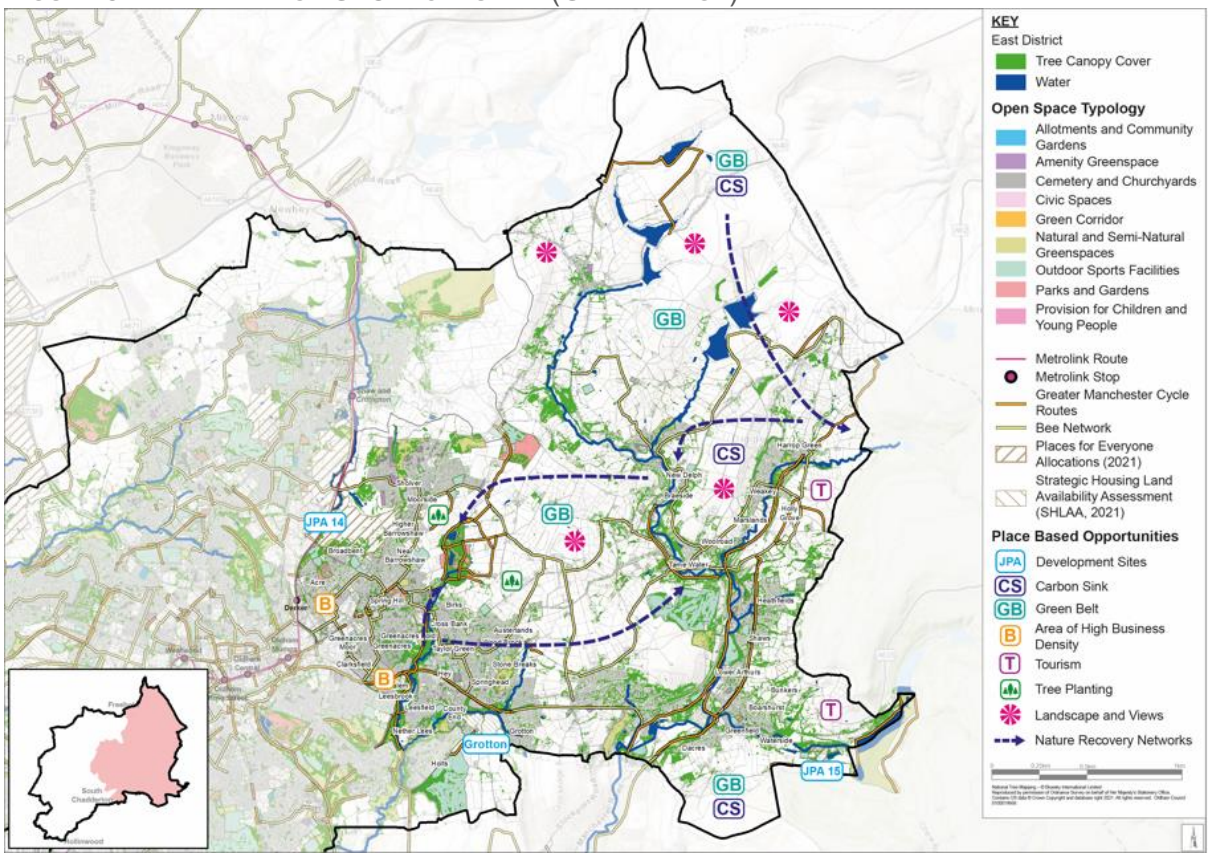


FIGURE 6: WEST DISTRICT GI OPPORTUNITY (GI STRATEGY)

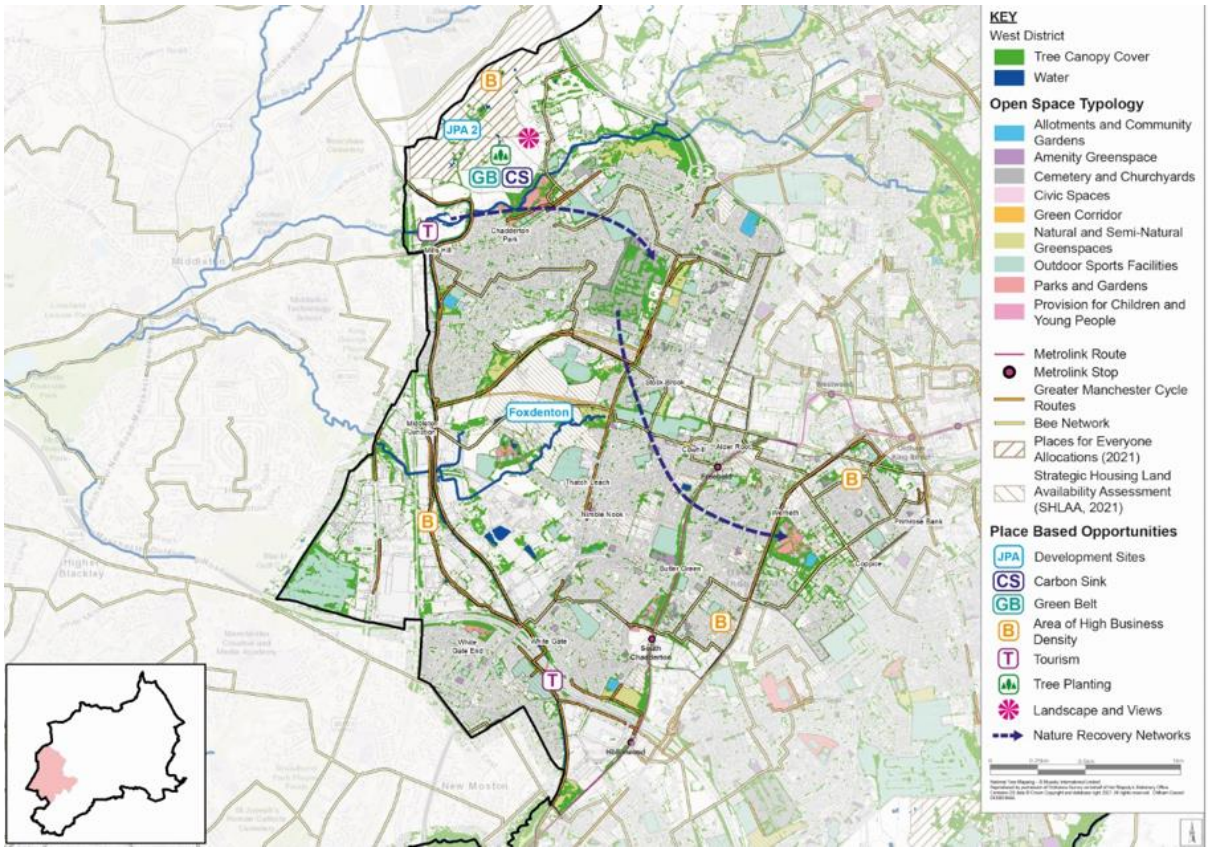


FIGURE 7: SOUTH DISTRICT GI OPPORTUNITIES (GI STRATEGY)

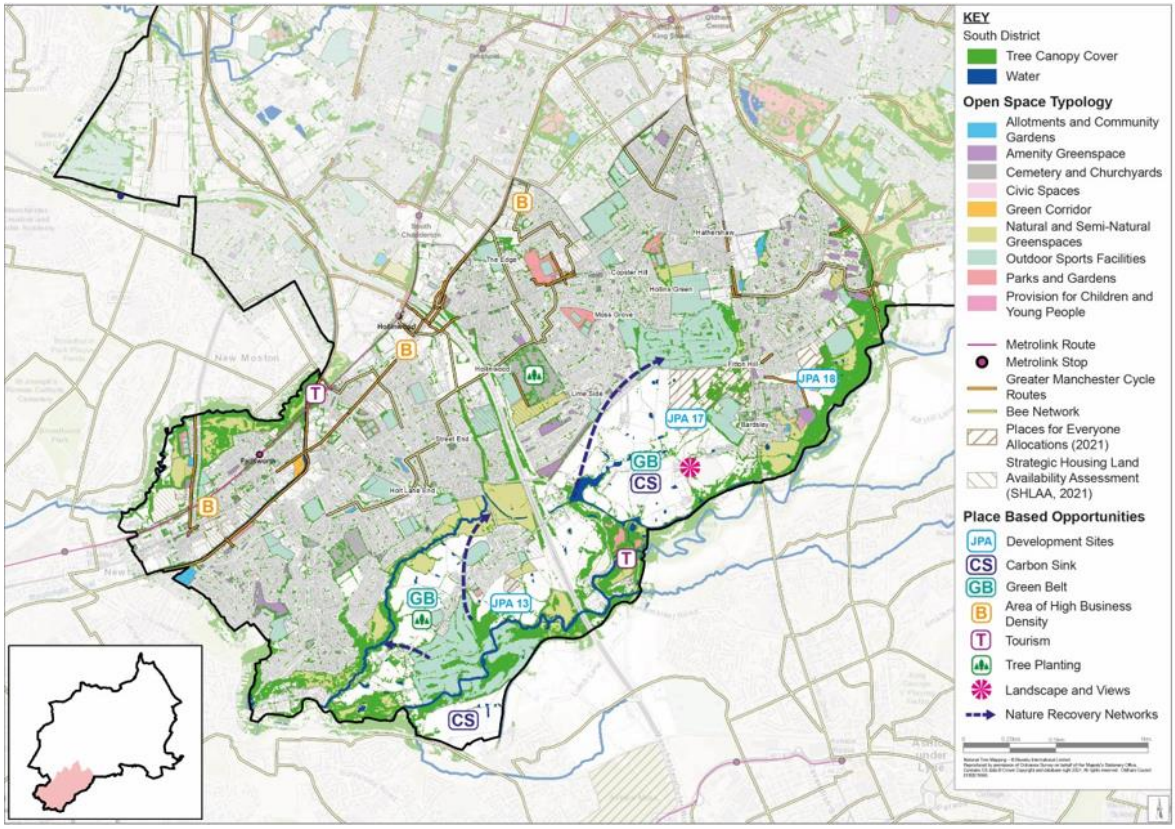
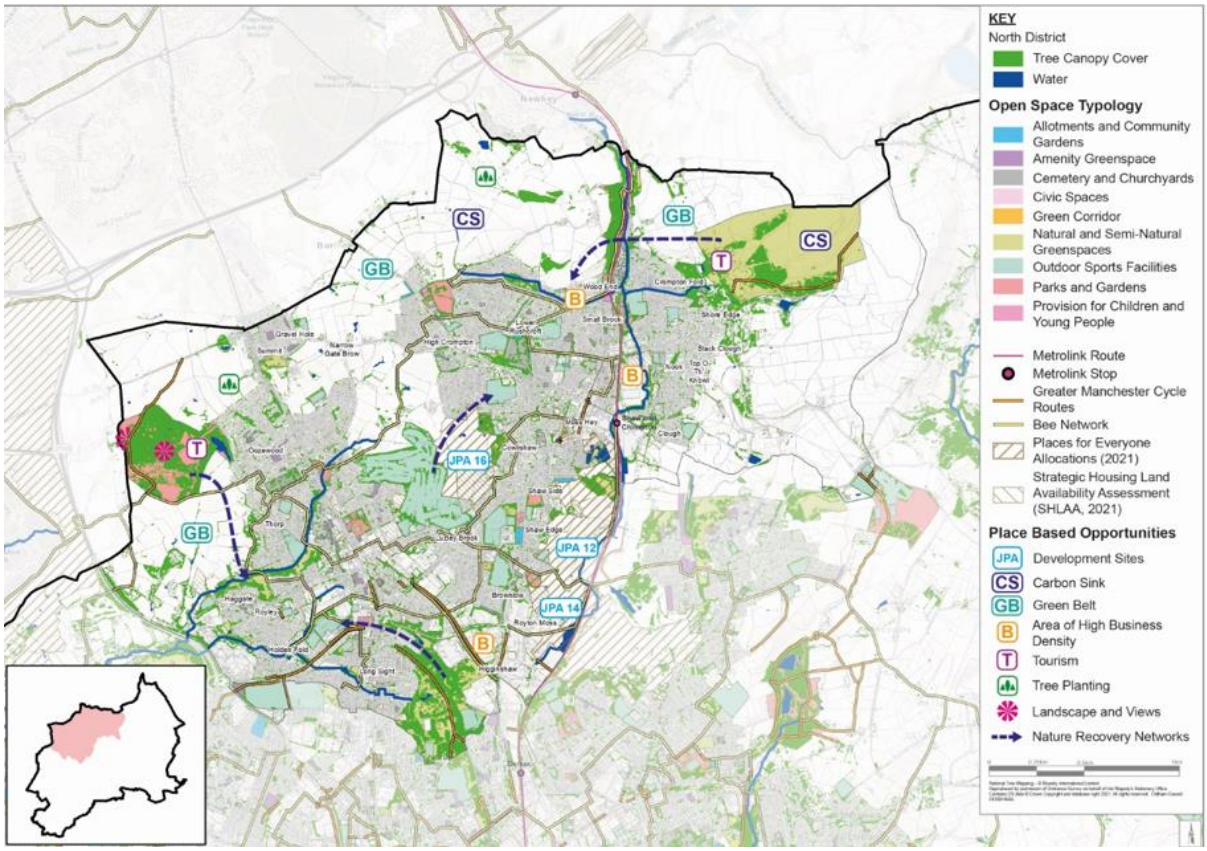


FIGURE 8: NORTH DISTRICT GI OPPORTUNITIES (GI STRATEGY)



Objectives for Thriving Wildlife (including policies)

6.8 The seven objectives below have been developed through considering the aims of the draft LNRS and the Oldham GI Strategy. The objectives support the aims of the emerging LNRS so we can ensure that we are having regard to the LNRS. The objectives are:

6.9 To support thriving wildlife in Oldham we will:

1. Protect and restore core areas of wildlife;
2. Promote nature recovery networks in areas of lower biodiversity;
3. Optimise the GI functionality of existing open spaces to encourage wildlife;
4. Promote multi-functional GI in allocated and potential development sites;
5. Encourage habitat creation and enhancement in the Green Belt;
6. Raise awareness and appreciation of biodiversity; and
7. Consider biodiversity in corporate plans and decisions.

6.10 The draft LNRS aims are:

- **Enhance and protect:** Safeguarding, enhancing and restoring wildlife-rich spaces.
- **Create and connect:** Creating more wildlife-rich resilient spaces, where they will expand and connect spaces for wildlife and people.
- **Build resilience:** Managing and reducing pressures on our environment and waterways, and maximising nature's role in adapting the city-region to climate change.
- **Act together:** Working together to act for nature and embed space for nature and people to thrive across all our communities.
- **Improve access:** Improving local access to nature and ensure there are more opportunities to enjoy nature, in those areas which need it the most.
- **Engage and value:** Improving engagement with nature and better understanding of its value in our lives.

6.11 Actions are identified relating to each objective and these include the review of policies to enhance biodiversity. Objectives 2 and 3 have been grouped together as actions often meet both objectives.

6.12 In addition to these actions, Oldham Council will continue to work in partnership with other organisations and stakeholders, such as City of Trees, Moors for the Future and the Irwell and Upper Mersey Catchments, to enhance biodiversity as opportunities arise.

TABLE 3: LINKAGES BETWEEN OLDHAM'S BIODIVERSITY OBJECTIVES AND THE LNRS

Biodiversity objective	**LNRS aim**
Protect and restore core areas of wildlife	Enhance and protect.
Promote nature recovery networks in areas of lower biodiversity	Create and connect; Build resilience; Improve access; and Act together.
Optimise the GI functionality of existing open spaces to encourage wildlife	Create and connect; Build resilience; Improve access; and Act together.
Promote multi-functional GI in allocated and potential development sites;	Enhance and protect; Create and connect; Build resilience; Improve access; and Act together.
Encourage habitat creation and enhancement in the Green Belt	Enhance and protect; Create and connect; and Improve access.
Raise awareness and appreciation of biodiversity	Engage and value; Improve access.
Consider biodiversity in corporate plans and decisions	Enhance and protect; Create and connect; and Engage and Value.

TABLE 4: OLDHAM'S OBJECTIVES AND POLICIES FOR BIODIVERSITY TO PROTECT AND RESTORE AREAS OF WILDLIFE

Actions	**Who will we work with to achieve this**	**What supporting information / work will we need**	**When will we achieve this**
To increase the amount of land designated for nature.	GMEU/ Strategic Planning	Update on Sites of Biological Importance Reports	Annual reports from GMEU
Bringing Local Wildlife Sites into active management for nature conservation and enhancement (LNRS has overall target of 50%)	Countryside services / commissioned	Funded Management Plans with aims, objectives and targets for key habitat types and ways to improve GI functionality and benefits.	Management Plans prioritised and phased over 3 to 5 years.
Prepare, adopt and implement South Pennines SAC / SPA Supplementary Planning Document SPD	GMCA, Oldham Council, Rochdale Council, Tameside Council / GMEU	Stakeholder input	Adoption March 2025
Application of mitigation hierarchy in planning decisions and planning policy	Oldham Council planning officers in liaison with GMEU / Natural England as required.	Local Plan policies / SSSI Impact Zones / consultation with consultees / use of mapping constraints	Ongoing
Review of green corridors and links designation as part of Local Plan review to ensure the designation supports nature networks.	Oldham Council	Evidence to feed in such as LNRS	By January / February 2026
Designate Local Green Spaces, including where they are important for wildlife	Oldham Council	Review Other Protected Open Land (OPOL) and re-designate as Local Green Space where they meet the relevant criteria. Updated Local Green	Adoption of Local Plan Spring 2027.

Actions	Who will we work with to achieve this	What supporting information / work will we need	When will we achieve this
		Space Assessment with updated ecology evidence from GMEU.	

TABLE 5: OLDHAM'S OBJECTIVES AND POLICIES FOR BIODIVERSITY TO PROMOTE NATURE RECOVERY NETWORKS IN AREAS OF LOWER BIODIVERSITY AND OPTIMISE THE GI FUNCTIONALITY OF EXISTING OPEN SPACES TO ENCOURAGE WILDLIFE.

Actions	**Who will we work with to achieve this**	**What supporting information / work will we need**	**When will we achieve this**
To support preparation of the LNRS	GMCA, Natural England, GM Local Authorities and other interested stakeholders	LNRS / stakeholder input	Summer 2025
To have regard to the LNRS in planning decisions and land management.	Partnerships, landowners and developers when looking at how the LNRS can inform site development and enhancement opportunities	LNRS	From publication of the final LNRS in Summer 2025.
Baseline review / Management Plans for countryside sites that are not designated / other Green Infrastructure assets in council ownership.	Countryside services, highways, LLFA and transport,	Funded Management Plans with aims, objectives and targets for key habitat types and ways to improve GI functionality and benefits.	Management Plans prioritised and phased over three to five years.
To expand our tree canopy cover from 13.4% to 15% within a generation and support the LNRS tree canopy cover within the LNRS for GM.	Development Management, GMEU and developers	Tree canopy surveys	2040
Explore and support offsite BNG / Habitat Banks within Oldham	Third parties, Habitats Bank providers, GMEU, internal colleagues.	GMCA guidance on Habitat Bank Verification and Auditing Guidance Management Plans and a procurement framework if on Oldham Council land.	As approached. Ongoing

Actions	Who will we work with to achieve this	What supporting information / work will we need	When will we achieve this
Implement the GI Strategy and open space audit through Local Plan review Policies	Planning / developers	GI Strategy (completed)	Open Space audit currently being used. Local Plan to be adopted Spring 2027.
Preparation of an Oldham Design Code which integrates biodiversity	Planning	Technical support	Draft by January / February 2026
Production of a Local Cycling, Walking & Infrastructure Plan (LCWIP) and opportunities to enhance biodiversity.	Internal colleagues – Parks, Highways, Planning, Strategic Transport and TfGM and external consultants (yet to be appointed)	Current infrastructure, land allocations, local input and knowledge plus engagement with stakeholders, members and the public.	Draft LCWIP to be produced by first quarter of 2025.
Progression of the City Region Sustainable Transport Settlement (CRSTS) schemes and opportunities to boost biodiversity e.g. through rain gardens[14].	TfGM, Jacobs, Highways, Strategic Transport, United Utilities, Plan-it, contractor.	Completion and approval of full business cases by Jacobs with our input, then delivery from Autumn 2025 onwards.	CRSTS schemes are funded and due to be delivered by 2027.

[14] an area of natural greenery or foliage which helps soak up excess rain water to help prevent flooding.

TABLE 6: OLDHAM'S OBJECTIVES AND POLICIES FOR BIODIVERSITY TO PROMOTE MULTI-FUNCTIONAL GI IN ALLOCATED AND POTENTIAL DEVELOPMENT SITES

Actions	**Who will we work with to achieve this**	**What supporting information / work will we need**	**When will we achieve this**
Implement PfE allocation and thematic policies relating to biodiversity	Developers / Planning / external stakeholders	PfE	Ongoing
Liaise on production of masterplan / design codes for strategic allocations in PfE and seek to enhance GI.	Landowners / Developers / Planning / Statutory bodies	Masterplans / Design Codes	During 2025 for Broadbent Moss / Beal Valley
Establish wetland catchment area at Broadbent Moss / Beal Valley	Developers / Landowners / EA / Planning	Masterplan and partnership work	PfE plan period for implementation (by 2039)
Encourage multi-functional GI in other development sites through the Local Plan review policies and consideration of mapped measures in the LNRS.	Planning / Developers	Local Plan Review / LNRS	Adoption of Local Plan by Spring 2027. Final LNRS expected Summer 2025.
Support neighbourhood planning groups in preparing policies to enhance biodiversity in neighbourhood plans.	Designated Neighbourhood Forums / Parish Councils	Draft neighbourhood plans / signposting to sources of information	As required

TABLE 7: OLDHAM'S OBJECTIVES AND POLICIES FOR BIODIVERSITY TO ENCOURAGE HABITAT CREATION AND ENHANCEMENT IN THE GREEN BELT

Actions	**Who will we work with to achieve this**	**What supporting information / work will we need**	**When will we achieve this**
Implement Green Belt policy in PfE (JP-G9 The Green Belt) on enhancing the remaining Green Belt in relation to habitat restoration.	Planning / Developers / GMEU	PfE and supporting evidence / LNRS	Ongoing / as opportunities arise
Explore and support offsite BNG / Habitat Banks within Oldham, which may include Green Belt land.	Third parties, Habitats Bank providers, GMEU, landowners, Internal colleagues in legal, property, finance, procurement, strategic planning and environmental management	GMCA guidance on Habitat Bank Verification and Auditing Guidance	Ongoing / as opportunities arise

TABLE 8: OLDHAM'S OBJECTIVES AND POLICIES FOR BIODIVERSITY TO RAISE AWARENESS AND APPRECIATION OF BIODIVERSITY

Actions	**Who will we work with to achieve this**	**What supporting information / work will we need**	**When will we achieve this**
To develop an Oldham Mapping tool to make information about designations and wildlife more accessible and digital.	GIS Team and Strategic Planning / GMEU	Up to date GIS on designations, wildlife corridors, LNRS etc	2025 and updated as necessary
Encourage residents to provide more wildlife friendly gardens	Communications	Plain English information to signpost to	During 2025 and once a year thereon (link events such as to 'no mow May')
Plant tree every house sold – partnership	Environmental Management / Partnerships (Pearsons are a current example of this)	Ongoing dialogue	Ongoing
Keep a log of work undertaken by countryside officers and celebrate successes through Communications	Environmental Management / Communications	Database to record successes	All year / annual
Raise awareness of funds such as the Greater Manchester Green Space Fund	Comms in liaison with Strategic Planning and Environmental Management	Stakeholders' communication	As opportunities arise
Identify, advise and assist community / voluntary groups	Environmental Management	Grants, government information etc	As opportunities arise
Include the public /interest groups in projects such as town centre linear park, Northern roots and leaky dams	Oldham Council / Northern Roots / other external organisations	Comms, staff to facilitate	As opportunities arise
Consider staff training courses to consider how biodiversity can be enhanced in all our roles	Learning and Development Team / Communications	Purchase course	Early 2025

TABLE 9: OLDHAM'S OBJECTIVES AND POLICIES FOR BIODIVERSITY TO CONSIDER BIODIVERSITY IN CORPORATE PLANS AND DECISIONS

Actions	**Who will we work with to achieve this**	**What supporting information / work will we need**	**When will we aim to achieve this**
Consider inclusion of biodiversity duty when preparing and updating other internal plans and policies (such as the Corporate Plan).	All services	Cross team involvement in projects and decision making	As opportunities arise
Consider biodiversity implications in decision-making reports and through the Oldham Impact Assessment Tool.	Constitutional Services	Decision making templates and Oldham Impact Assessment Tool amended	During 2025
Consider biodiversity implications as part of impact assessment when considering disposal of land.	Property / Constitutional Services	Impact Assessment Tool amended / specific property impact tool created	During 2025

Reporting and Monitoring

7.1 The actions identified will be tracked and monitored regularly throughout each year.

7.2 Oldham Council will prepare the first formal Biodiversity Report on progress that has been made no later than 1 January 2026. This will be updated at least every 5 years.

7.3 This report will summarise the actions we have taken, the progress underway, and how we have met our biodiversity net gain obligations over the reporting period.

7.4 Indicators on biodiversity are also included in our monitoring report[15] related to the implementation of the local plan.

[15] https://www.oldham.gov.uk/info/201230/monitoring/263/oldhams_monitoring_report

Appendix A- Sites of Biological Importance in Oldham

Table 10 shows the Sites of Biological Importance in Oldham as at 2021. The grades are defined as follows:

Grade A - of Regional or County Importance

Grade B - of District Importance

Grade C – of importance within the identified geographical locality.

TABLE 10: SITES OF BIOLOGICAL IMPORTANCE IN OLDHAM (2021)

Site of Biological Importance name	Grade
Armit Road Lodge	C
Alphin Pike & Buckton Moor (North)	A
Bankfield Clough	B
Boardman's Edge	B
Brookdale Golf Course	C
Brookdale Clough (East)	C
Crime Lake & Fairbottom Branch Canal	B
Crompton Moor (South)	A
Crompton Fold Wood	C
Castleshaw Pasture	B
Dacres	B
Daisy Nook (West)	B
Dick Clough	B
Dark Peak Moors (Peak Park)	A
Fennifield Lily Ponds	C
Fields by White Brook	C
Huddersfield Narrow Canal (North)	B
Grasscroft Pasture	B

Site of Biological Importance name	Grade
Hunt Lane	C
Hull Brook	A
Hey Bank	B
Jericho Clough	C
Meadow North of Moss Gate	C
Medlock Vale & Lumb Clough (North)	C
Moorgate Quarry	B
Medlock Headwater & Strinesdale	B
Oozewood Flushes	A
Ponds at Cowlishaw Farm	B
River Irk Marsh	B
Rochdale Canal, Lock at Scowcroft Farm - Stott's Lane	A
Rocher Vale (North)	C
Rowton Clough	B
Royal George	B
Shaw Side	C
Slackcote Valley	A
South Pennine Moors (South)	A
Sudden Brook (East)	B
Tame Water Woodland	C
Tandle Hill Country Park	B