

GROUNDWORK

GREATER MANCHESTER



STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT

SUMMARY REPORT

FEBRUARY 2021



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1. Introduction to “Our Rivers Our City”, Background and Context

For hundreds of years, the rivers flowing through our City have been central to its success – providing water for industry, for wildlife and for communities. Today, the river valleys of the Irk, Medlock and Mersey include many of the city’s green spaces, connect Manchester to the wider City Region and contribute to the distinct nature of our neighbourhoods. However, the rivers and their surrounding landscape are also the product of their past usage, and need to evolve in order to claim their rightful place in the story of Manchester’s future.

Our first step on this journey is to develop a long term vision and set of actions which will re-energise the City’s river valleys. Manchester City Council is working with The Environment Partnership (TEP), Groundwork Greater Manchester, Mersey Rivers Trust (MRT) and Vivid Economics on the Our Rivers Our City project to develop a long term vision and set of actions which will re-energise the City’s river valleys.

2. Stakeholder Engagement Activities Programme and Overview

On behalf of the partnership, Groundwork Greater Manchester led the stakeholder engagement, which included a review of previous consultation activities and a range of opportunities to identify challenges and opportunities facing the river valleys:

- Developed by TEP, an on-line survey aimed to establish how much people value and use the rivers, what they don't like and how they would like to use them.
- Delivered virtually with TEP and MRT, a series of on-line workshops with interested partners, organisations and individuals aimed to capture thoughts about the challenges and opportunities facing each river valley. We held separate workshops for each river valley to allow us to focus more clearly and understand the different cultures and experiences in each valley.
- To make sure our reach went beyond people who have easy access to engagement channels, we had planned a number of open access opportunities in the river valleys themselves, to have targeted conversations with the wide range of people who live there. These were affected by Covid-19 restrictions, although for the period that they were relaxed, we were able to commence meaningful conversations but acknowledge that there is still more to do here.

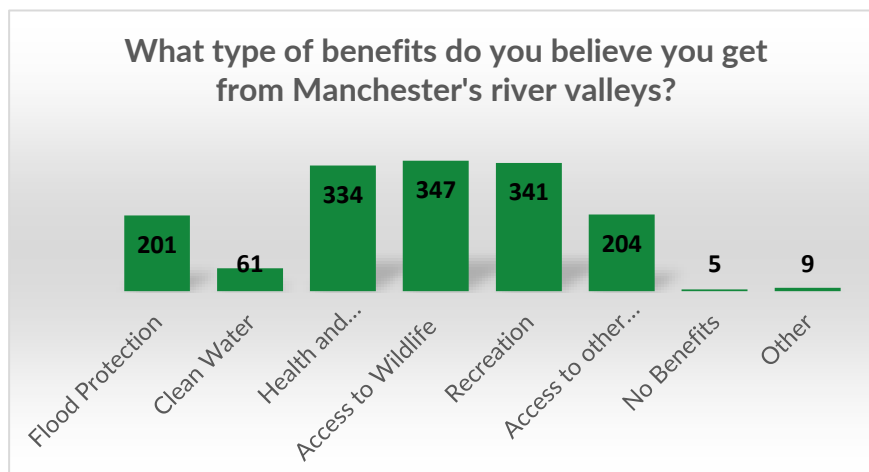
- Our social media campaign, became increasingly important during the Covid-19 restrictions. We created a [project summary](#) document to download and a short film and animation to watch, we were able to drive interest to consistent messages and opportunities to get involved. We used **#OurRiversOurCity** for partners to share any content and ran a series of blogs written by partners.
- We organised a series of one to one meetings following the group workshops for key stakeholders to reflect and build on on discussions at the workshops.

3. What the Engagement Tells Us

On-line survey

427 people took part in the survey which was open between July 2020 and January 2021 and promoted via social media. Results can be found in the [full report](#) but in summary, we found that:

- The majority of survey respondents are more familiar with the Mersey than the Medlock or the Irk, which have similar usage patterns.
- Respondents are overwhelmingly accessing the river valleys for enjoyment and recreation purposes.
- Respondents were asked what type of benefits they felt that they were getting from accessing the river valleys.



Workshops & partner engagement

Twelve young people (aged 10-15years) and 100 adults took part in conversations about the challenges and opportunities facing Manchester's river valleys between August and December 2020 in on-line and in-person conversations. Their comments can be found in the appendices in the [full report](#).

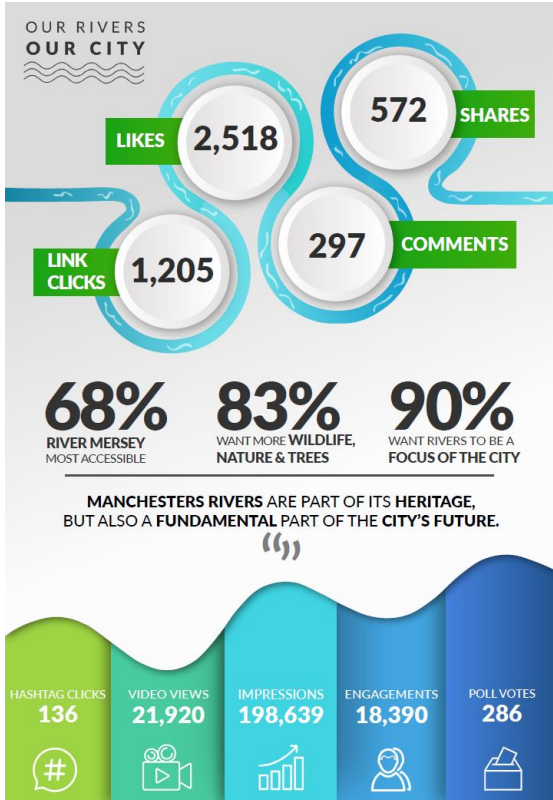
Points raised repeatedly across the three river valleys:

1. There was a real sense that participants recognised the focus on building back better because of the coronavirus pandemic. Together with their increased awareness of the value of green and blue spaces, the engagement activities marked a key moment in time for harnessing focus and energy. This in turn gives a sense of urgency and desire to see change.
2. In addition to making sure that we get the best value from our 'honey-pot' sites, there was a strong message that small-scale projects and big, bold projects should go hand in hand and that projects should include activity on multiple levels.
3. Balancing the need to invest in the Irk and Medlock without letting the Mersey slip was a noted challenge. The greatest need and the greatest opportunities are felt to be in the Irk and Medlock, for example in health gains for the population.
4. There is a call for greater strategic join up between both Local Authorities and catchment-based initiatives. There was wide recognition that a catchment approach is required to tackle a range of issues that do not restrict themselves to administrative boundaries. There was a call for Local Authorities to work together more when accessing funding to address the challenges facing the river valleys.
5. When asked what would constitute success for improvements to the river valleys, there was a strong feeling that it involved local communities being engaged in the rivers and recognising the benefits of healthy local watercourses. Active community groups were seen as key to this, with the recognition that support is needed to establish new groups, re-energise some existing groups and look at the opportunities for them to link and be supported by a more integrated approach.

- 6. A tension appeared in many of the conversations between increasing and improving access and recreational activities on the one hand, yet protecting the biodiversity of the environment and the access control measures installed to manage anti-social behaviour but which restrict access.
- 7. Investment was a common theme in the conversations with some participants calling for current investments to be used more imaginatively and collaboratively. There was also a strong message about making the case that upfront investment has long-term benefits, including health and economic outcomes.
- 8. The industrial heritage of the rivers was a regular feature in discussions, both in terms of the challenges that the relationship brings and the physical and perceptions legacy, with a number of heritage projects suggested.
- 9. Through most of the conversations, there was a focus more on the amenity value of the river valleys rather than water quality and quantity. There is a fundamental relationship between water quality and the draw for people to use the river valleys, but it was mostly the people whose work involves them in the rivers that were more concerned about the quality of the water.

Social Media

The social media campaign began once the on-line survey was open for respondents and used Twitter, Facebook and LinkedIn.



4. Next steps

The detailed findings are available in the [full report](#), and will be used in formulating the river valley action plans in the next phase of the Our Rivers Our City project. There is a real appetite for ongoing involvement in discussions about the river valleys, as demonstrated by the number of requests we received requesting additional opportunities to input into the consultation. We would recommend two considerations for those taking this work forward:

1. We would have liked to have heard more from the “seldom-heard” voices; our planned targeted engagement was made more difficult due to Covid 19 restrictions. Our findings may therefore have an in-built bias and work with our Black, Asian and UK minority communities in particular may be required for a fuller picture.
2. When we organised a ward-based workshop, we found a wealth of current and historical knowledge and the participants raised very specific challenges and opportunities as opposed to some of the more general points raised in previous discussions. This approach may prove useful in the future when consulting on individual projects, although perhaps does mostly reach those who are used to accessing this type of engagement opportunity and reinforces the lack of diverse representation.