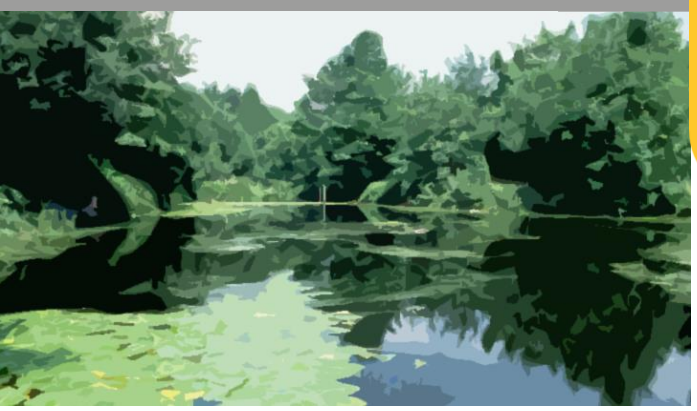
Bury Council




Bury Local Plan

Topic Paper 9:
Green Infrastructure

March 2025





Contents

1. Introduction

1.1. This Topic Paper is one of a series that has been prepared as part of the process of evidence gathering to support Bury's emerging Local Plan. It sits alongside a range of other Topic Papers covering the following:

- Climate change and carbon reduction
- Housing
- Economy
- Centres
- Tourism and culture
- Communities
- Transport
- Built environment and design
- Green Belt
- Water and flood risk
- Air quality, pollution and hazards

1.2 The principal aim of the Topic Paper is to set out current key policies, plans and strategies relating to this topic area that forms the framework for the development of the Local Plan and to present a profile of the Borough that will highlight key issues, problems and challenges that the Local Plan should seek to address and which have helped to shape and influence the direction and focus of the Local Plan's policies and designations.

2. Background

2.1. Green infrastructure is a network of multi-functional green space and other green features, urban and rural, which can deliver quality of life and environmental benefits for communities.

2.2. Green infrastructure is not simply an alternative description for conventional open space. It includes parks, open spaces, playing fields, woodlands – and also street trees, allotments, private gardens, green roofs and walls, sustainable drainage systems (SuDS) and soils. It includes rivers, streams, canals and other water bodies, sometimes called 'blue infrastructure'.

2.3. The key features of green infrastructure are that it is a network of integrated spaces and features, not just individual elements; and that it is 'multi-functional' – it provides multiple benefits simultaneously. These can be to:

- support people's mental and physical health;
- encourage active travel;
- cool urban areas during heat waves;
- attract investment;
- reduce water run-off during flash flooding;
- carbon storage; and
- provide sustainable drainage.

3. Context

3.1. One of the key early stages in the process is to review other policies, plans and strategies which are of relevance to this particular topic area and which help to inform and influence the direction of the Local Plan. There is a need for the Local Plan to be consistent with planning policy at different levels.

3.2. The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) sets out Government policy in respect of planning matters and this is supported by Planning Practice Guidance (PPG). This sets out the broad planning framework within which development plans are produced.

3.3. Sub-regionally, the Places for Everyone Plan joint plan (PfE) establishes strategic policies and site allocations across nine of the ten Greater Manchester districts. Following its adoption in March 2024, PfE is now a key part of Bury's development plan that sits alongside the Local Plan.

3.4. There are also a range of other plans and strategies that, whilst not being policy, are of relevance to the Borough from a green infrastructure perspective.

National Planning Policy

3.5. All development plans must be prepared within the context of the Government's planning policies. These are primarily set out within the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF)[1] which sets out the Government's planning policies for England and how these should be applied. The NPPF provides a framework within which locally prepared plans for housing and other development can be produced.

[1] National Planning Policy Framework

3.6. The NPPF is supported by separate policy documents related to waste[2] and traveller sites[3] as well as more detailed information in Planning Practice Guidance[4].

3.7. Central to the NPPF is the Government's objective of achieving sustainable development and it highlights that achieving sustainable development means that the planning system has three overarching objectives, which are interdependent and need to be pursued in mutually supportive ways:

- **an economic objective** – to help build a strong, responsive and competitive economy, by ensuring that sufficient land of the right types is available in the right places and at the right time to support growth, innovation and improved productivity; and by identifying and coordinating the provision of infrastructure;
- **a social objective** – to support strong, vibrant and healthy communities, by ensuring that a sufficient number and range of homes can be provided to meet the needs of present and future generations; and by fostering well-designed, beautiful and safe places, with accessible services and open spaces that reflect current and future needs and support communities' health, social and cultural well-being; and
- **an environmental objective** – to protect and enhance our natural, built and historic environment; including making effective use of land, improving biodiversity, using natural resources prudently, minimising waste and pollution, and mitigating and adapting to climate change, including moving to a low carbon economy.

3.8. The National Planning Policy Framework defines Green Infrastructure as a network of multi-functional green and blue spaces and other natural features, urban and rural, which is capable of delivering a wide range of environmental, economic, health and wellbeing benefits for nature, climate, local and wider communities and prosperity

3.9. Chapter 8 of the NPPF considers promoting healthy and safe communities. It asks that planning policies aim to achieve healthy, inclusive and safe places and beautiful buildings which:

- promote social interaction, including opportunities for meetings between people who might not otherwise come into contact with each other – for example through mixed-use developments, strong neighbourhood centres, street layouts that allow for easy pedestrian and cycle connections within and between neighbourhoods, and active street frontages;

[2] National Planning Policy for Waste
[3] Planning policy for traveller sites
[4] Planning Practice Guidance

- are safe and accessible, so that crime and disorder, and the fear of crime, do not undermine the quality of life or community cohesion – for example through the use of beautiful, well-designed, clear and legible pedestrian and cycle routes, and high quality public space, which encourage the active and continual use of public areas; and
- enable and support healthy lifestyles, through both promoting good health and preventing ill-health, especially where this would address identified local health and well-being needs – for example through the provision of safe and accessible green infrastructure, sports facilities, local shops, access to healthier food, allotments and layouts that encourage walking and cycling.

3.10. Paragraph 98 of the NPPF states that to provide the social, recreational and cultural facilities and services the community needs, planning policies should pursue a range of measures, including:

- planning positively for the provision and use of shared spaces, community facilities (such as local shops, meeting places, sports venues, open space, cultural buildings, public houses and places of worship) and other local services to enhance the sustainability of communities and residential environments; and
- taking into account and supporting the delivery of local strategies to improve health, social and cultural well-being for all sections of the community.

3.11. Specifically with regard to open space and recreation, the NPPF outlines that access to a network of high-quality open spaces and opportunities for sport and physical activity is important for the health and well-being of communities, and can deliver wider benefits for nature and support efforts to address climate change. Planning policies should be based on robust and up-to-date assessments of the need for open space, sport and recreation facilities (including quantitative or qualitative deficits or surpluses) and opportunities for new provision. Information gained from the assessments should be used to determine what open space, sport and recreational provision is needed, which plans should then seek to accommodate.

3.12. Paragraph 104 is clear that existing open space, sports and recreational buildings and land, including playing fields and formal play spaces, should not be built on unless:

- an assessment has been undertaken which has clearly shown the open space, buildings or land to be surplus to requirements; or
- the loss resulting from the proposed development would be replaced by equivalent or better provision in terms of quantity and quality in a suitable location; or

- the development is for alternative sports and recreational provision, the benefits of which clearly outweigh the loss of the current or former use.

3.13. Paragraph 105 states that planning policies should protect and enhance public rights of way and access, including taking opportunities to provide better facilities for users, for example by adding links to existing rights of way networks including National Trails.

3.14. Chapter 15 of the NPPF outlines how planning should work to conserve and enhance the natural environment. Paragraph 187 of the NPPF states that planning policies should contribute to and enhance the natural and local environment by:

- protecting and enhancing valued landscapes, sites of biodiversity or geological value and soils (in a manner commensurate with their statutory status or identified quality in the development plan);
- recognising the intrinsic character and beauty of the countryside, and the wider benefits from natural capital and ecosystem services – including the economic and other benefits of the best and most versatile agricultural land, and of trees and woodland;
- maintaining the character of the undeveloped coast, while improving public access to it where appropriate;
- minimising impacts on and providing net gains for biodiversity, including by establishing coherent ecological networks that are more resilient to current and future pressures and incorporating features which support priority or threatened species such as swifts, bats and hedgehogs;
- preventing new and existing development from contributing to, being put at an acceptable risk from, or being adversely affected by, unacceptable levels of soil, air, water or noise pollution or land instability. Development should, wherever possible, help to improve local environmental conditions such as air and water quality, taking into account relevant information such as river basin management plans; and
- remediating and mitigating despoiled, degraded, derelict, contaminated and unstable land, where appropriate.

3.15. Paragraph 188 states that plans should distinguish between the hierarchy of international, national and locally designated sites, allocate land with the least environmental or amenity value where consistent with other policies in the NPPF, and take a strategic approach to maintaining or enhancing networks of habitats and green infrastructure. It also states that plans should plan for the enhancement of natural capital at a catchment or landscape scale across local authority boundaries.

3.16. Paragraph 192 clarifies that to protect and enhance biodiversity and geodiversity, plans should:

- Identify, map and safeguard components of local wildlife-rich habitats and wider ecological networks, including the hierarchy of international, national and locally designated sites of importance for biodiversity; wildlife corridors and stepping stones that connect them; and areas identified by national and local partnerships for habitat management, enhancement, restoration or creation; and
- Promote the conservation, restoration and enhancement of priority habitats, ecological networks and the protection and recovery of priority species; and identify and pursue opportunities for securing measurable net gains for biodiversity.

Places for Everyone

3.17. Places for Everyone (PfE) was prepared as a Joint Development Plan Document of nine of the ten Greater Manchester local planning authorities (Bolton, Bury, Manchester, Oldham, Rochdale, Salford, Tameside, Trafford and Wigan). The plan was formally adopted in March 2024.

3.18. PfE is the strategic spatial plan that sets out a collective planning policy framework for the nine constituent boroughs. All policies within the plan are 'strategic policies' and it forms a key part of Bury's wider development plan and is used to determine individual planning applications. As such, Bury's Local Plan will need to be consistent with PfE.

3.19. As a strategic plan, Places for Everyone does not cover everything that Bury's Local Plan would. Therefore, Bury's Local Plan will set out more detailed policies reflecting local circumstances.

3.20. One of the strategic objectives within the Places for Everyone Plan is to improve the quality of our natural environment and access to green spaces through:

- Enhancing special landscapes, green infrastructure, biodiversity and geodiversity;
- Improving access to the natural environment and green spaces (including parks), and;
- Promoting the role of green spaces in climate resilience and reducing flood risk.

3.21. A key aim of the plan is deliver a major net enhancement of biodiversity value and improved access to nature, recognising that, if this is to be achieved then all new development will have to play its part, each delivering

a net gain in biodiversity. This could involve the protection and improvement of existing habitats, the creation of new ones, and/or the strengthening of connections between them.

3.22. Chapter 8, Greener Places, focusses on the varied green spaces and features in the region and supports the important role of our natural assets by:

- Valuing the special qualities and key sensitivities of our landscapes (recognising importance of an area's appearance to the sense of place held by those who live in or visit it);
- Seeking to protect and enhance green and blue infrastructure (the wider network of green (and blue) features which make a huge contribution to quality of life, promote good mental and physical health, create liveable places and support economic growth);
- Seeking an overall enhancement of biodiversity and geodiversity (the living organisms and ground beneath our feet which underpin the value of the natural environment and its ability to provide a wide range of important benefits, including supporting human health and quality of life);
- Seeking to maintain a Green Belt (which plays an important role in restricting unplanned development in a conurbation with a complex urban form, ensuring that its cities, towns and smaller settlements retain their identity).

3.23. Policy JP-G2 Green Infrastructure Network states that a strategic approach will be taken to the protection, management and enhancement of our Green Infrastructure in order to protect and enhance the ecosystem services which the Green Infrastructure Network provides, including flood management, climate change mitigation and adaptation. Alongside this primary function an enhanced Green Infrastructure network will support wider public health benefits, including promotion of active travel, food growing and recreational opportunities.

3.24. The protection, management and enhancement of Green Infrastructure will contribute to the development of a Local Nature Recovery Strategy for Greater Manchester. This Strategy will feed into the development of a Nature Recovery Network locally and nationally.

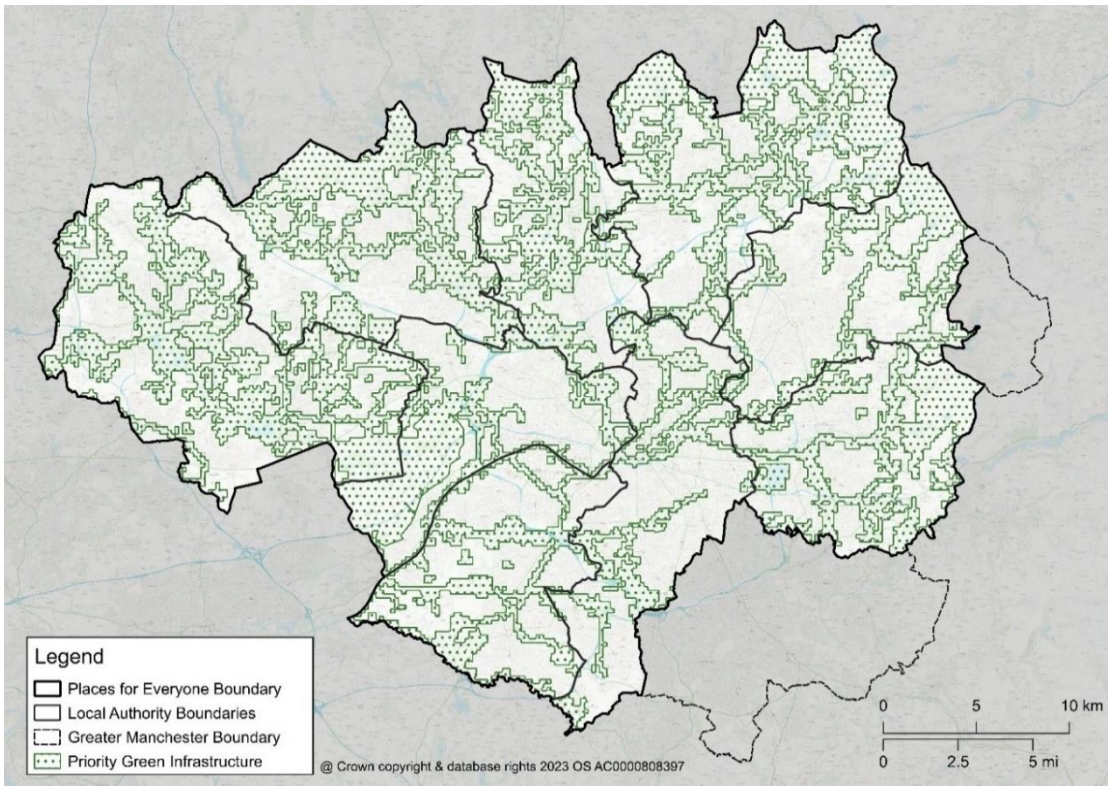
3.25. Development within and around the Green Infrastructure Network should be consistent with delivering major green infrastructure improvements within them and should contribute to improvements.

3.26. Development which involves the removal of land from the Green Belt (including allocations proposed in this plan) will be required to offset the impact of removing land from the Green Belt through identifying and

delivering compensatory improvements to the environmental quality and accessibility of remaining Green Belt in the vicinity of the site. Details of specific sites and projects will be established in discussion with the relevant Local Authority.

3.27. Wherever practicable, opportunities to integrate new and existing green infrastructure into new development will be taken to protect, enhance and expand the green infrastructure network. Where new or improved green infrastructure is delivered as part of a development, the developer should make appropriate provision for its long-term management and maintenance.

Figure 1 – Green Infrastructure Network identified in Places for Everyone



3.28. Policy JP-G3: River Valleys and Waterways states that river valleys and waterways will be protected and improved as central components of our Green Infrastructure Network and a vital part of a Nature Recovery Network, making a major contribution to local identity, quality of life and the natural environment.

3.29. In making planning decisions and carrying out other associated activities, we will seek to deliver the following priorities:

- Retain the remaining open character of the river valleys, avoiding their fragmentation and prominent development on valley edges;
- Promote public enjoyment of the river valleys, including as key features connecting urban areas to the countryside, providing opportunities for

active travel, and enhance their high recreational value as green fingers through densely populated areas;

- Protect and enhance the mosaic of semi-natural habitats, including: riparian (waterside), clough, broadleaved and ancient woodland; wet and semi-natural grassland; meadow; and lakes and ponds;
- Retain existing pockets of relatively tranquillity and seclusion, especially within the more tightly enclosed and wooded valleys;
- Reduce flood risk, through Natural Flood Management (NFM), including careful land management and a catchment-wide approach;
- Improve water quality, including through land decontamination and the management of diffuse pollution from industry and agriculture;
- Return rivers to a more natural state where practicable, including through deculverting and the re-naturalisation of riverbanks and flood plains;
- Where compatible with the requirements of commercial and freight use, increase the use of canals and watercourses for active travel, with improved and extended rights of way alongside the water providing walking and cycling routes for both recreation and commuting, thereby increasing access to natural green space; and
- Ensure that development relates positively to nearby rivers and other waterways, taking advantage of opportunities to integrate green infrastructure through:
  - High quality frontages to the water; and
  - Public realm alongside the water for both recreation use and maintenance access.

3.30. Policy JP-G4: Lowland Wetlands and Mosslands details that the distinctive flat, open landscape and network of habitats of ecologically valuable lowland wetlands and mosslands (identified by the Mosslands and Lowland Farmland Landscape Character Type) will be protected, enhanced and restored, with a strong emphasis on reconnecting local communities to the natural and historic environments.

3.31. In making planning decisions and carrying out other associated activities, we will seek to deliver the following priorities:

- Maintain and enhance the extensive and varied mosaic of semi-natural habitats including brooks, ditches, open water bodies, bog, fen, swamp, flashes, ponds, wet and broadleaved woodland, and grassland;
- Manage and restore the remnant pockets of lowland raised bog, including through restoration from farmland, significantly expanding and connecting the areas of active bog to contribute to important functions such as flood risk management and carbon sequestration;

- Positively manage land adjacent to lowland raised bog and other sensitive wetland habitats in a complementary and coordinated manner, ensuring that their hydrology is not adversely affected and the water table is restored;
- Increase features that act as steppingstones for wildlife moving through the area, such as field ponds, hedgerows and trees, and minimise barriers to movement;
- Removal of derelict structures and the remediation of land where it is beneficial to green infrastructure provision and there is no historic value in their retention; and
- Expand public access across the area considerably, including through the creation of new circular routes, and enhance recreation and active travel opportunities.

3.32. Policy JP-G5: Uplands states that our upland areas, (identified by the Open Moorlands and Enclosed Upland Fringes Landscape Character Type), contain important component parts of the green infrastructure network, including significant areas of blanket bog priority habitat, Sites of Biological Importance (SBIs), Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSIs), Special Areas of Conservation (SACs), Special Protection Areas (SPAs), woodlands and habitats vulnerable to climate change. In making planning decisions and carrying out other associated activities, we will seek to:

- Integrate any new development into the landscape by utilising existing tree/woodland cover and dips in the landform, and adopting the unifying gritstone vernacular where possible;
- Enhance the full range of upland habitats as part of an ecologically connected network, including heather moorland, blanket bog, meadows, acid grassland, native woods, and healthy watercourses;
- Significantly extend the area of active blanket bog, both through the protection of existing sites and the positive restoration of degraded areas to contribute to important functions such as flood risk management and carbon sequestration;
- Protect and naturally regenerate clough woodland, providing a natural connection between the uplands, foothills and lowlands;
- Increase the role of the area in water storage, flood risk management (through Natural Flood Management) and water quality improvements, as part of a catchment-based approach;
- Enable more people to enjoy the distinctive character of the uplands in sustainable ways which balance the pressures that increased access brings with the physical and mental health benefits that this landscape offers; and

- Ensure that new development does not have an adverse impact on protected habitats of the South Pennine Moors SAC, the Peak District Moors SPA and the South Pennine Moors Phase 2 SPA from urban edge effects, loss of and/or disturbance to functionally linked habitats and recreation disturbances. This will be implemented by:
- Within 400m of the SAC and SPAs boundaries, no development will be permitted, unless, as an exception, the development and/or its use would not have an adverse effect on the integrity of the SAC or SPAs;
- Within 2.5km of the SAC and SPAs boundaries, applications for new development should be accompanied by an assessment to determine if the development site provides foraging habitats for the qualifying bird species of the SPAs. If foraging habitats are found on site, appropriate avoidance and/or mitigation measures will be required;
- Within 7km of the SAC and SPAs boundaries, new residential development will be required to mitigate recreation disturbance impacts on the SAC and SPAs through:
- the provision of on-site suitable alternative natural greenspace or financially contribute to off-site provision of such greenspace; and
- A financial contribution to the implementation of a Strategic Access, Monitoring and Management Strategy for the SAC and SPAs.

3.33. Policy JP-G6: Urban Green Space, states that to ensure there is an appropriate scale, type, quality and distribution of accessible urban green space that can support a high quality of life and other important green infrastructure functions:

- existing urban green space will be protected and enhanced in balance with other considerations; and
- we will work with developers and other stakeholders to deliver new high quality urban green spaces.

3.34. The policy also states that development should be designed to support the positive use of nearby green spaces, such as by offering a high-quality setting, providing natural surveillance, and facilitating easy access by walking and cycling.

3.35. Policy JP-G7: Trees and Woodland states that we will work to deliver the aims and objectives of the Greater Manchester Tree and Woodland Strategy[5], aiming to significantly increase tree cover, protect and enhance woodland, and connect people to the trees and woodland around them.

[5] All Our Trees, Greater Manchester's Tree and Woodland Strategy
https://www.cityoftrees.org.uk/app/uploads/2024/01/8082-all-our-trees-report-dr8-mw-1.pdf

3.36. This will be done through local planning and associated activities such as:

- Protecting and expanding the mosaic of woodland habitats, linking fragmented areas of woodland, in particular wooded cloughs and pockets of ancient and riverside (riparian) woodland;
- Encouraging habitat diversity through conserving and managing existing woodland and trees that are of heritage, cultural and/or aesthetic value, including ancient woodland and veteran trees;
- Aiming to plant a tree for every resident in the plan area over the next 25 years as part of the City of Trees initiative;
- Targeting tree-planting at the areas of greatest need where the green infrastructure benefits can be maximised, whilst avoiding the loss of, or harm to, other priority habitats, including encouraging woodland planting schemes on areas of low-grade agricultural land and land in need of remediation;
- Establishing a new City Forest Park in Salford, Bolton and Bury, which will provide a vast urban forest close to the City Centre;
- Considerably increasing the provision of street trees within urban areas;
- Promoting the provision of community orchards to increase fruit consumption;
- Promoting the opportunity for woodland conservation to raise awareness for the sustainable use of timber;
- Securing a diversification of broadleaved species, in order to increase biodiversity and disease resilience;
- Improving public access to woodland and trees particularly by sustainable travel models to capture the health and wellbeing benefits whilst managing the associated pressures; and
- Encouraging the positive management of woodland to bring it into a more productive state, improve habitat diversity, and more effectively contribute to important green infrastructure functions such as flood risk management, urban cooling and carbon storage/sequestration.

3.37. And through development as follows:

- Where development would result in the loss of existing trees, requiring replacement on the basis of two new trees for each tree lost, or other measures that would also result in a net enhancement in the character and quality of the treescape and biodiversity value in the local area, with a preference for on-site provision; and
- Protecting trees and woodland during the construction phase of development.

3.38. Policy JP-G8: A Net Enhancement of Biodiversity and Geodiversity states that through local planning and associated activities a net enhancement of biodiversity resources will be sought, including, where relevant, by:

- Increasing the quality, quantity, extent and diversity of habitats, particularly priority habitats identified in national or local biodiversity action plans and those that support priority species;
- Improving connections between habitats, to protect and enhance the provision of corridors, ecological networks (including Nature Recovery Networks) and steppingstones that enable the movement of species, especially as the climate changes;
- Enhancing the management of existing habitats, including through habitat restoration, avoiding habitat fragmentation and combating invasive species;
- Protecting sites designated for their nature conservation and/or geological importance, with the highest level of protection given to international and then national designations;
- Facilitating greater access to nature, particularly within urban areas;
- Supporting the development and implementation of the Great Manchester Wetlands Nature Recovery Network; and
- Safeguarding, restoring and sustainably managing our most valuable soil resources, tackling soil degradation/erosion and recovering soil fertility, particularly to ensure protection of peat-based soils and safeguard 'best and most versatile' agricultural land.

3.39. The policy also states that development will be expected to:

- Follow the mitigation hierarchy of:
- Avoiding significant harm to biodiversity, particularly where it is irreplaceable, through consideration of alternative sites with less harmful impacts, then
- Adequately mitigating any harm to biodiversity, then
- Adequately compensating for any remaining harm to biodiversity
- Avoid fragmenting or severing connectivity between habitats;
- Achieve a measurable net gain in biodiversity of no less than 10%;
- Make appropriate provision for long-term management of habitats and geological features connected to the development;
- Where appropriate, development should: mitigate air pollution impacts on Manchester Mosses SAC; mitigate urban edge, functionally linked land and recreation disturbance impacts on the South Pennine Moors

SAC/SPAs; and assess and potentially mitigate boat movement, water pollution, and light spillage and shading impacts on the Rochdale Canal SAC; and

- Development proposals should be informed by the findings and recommendations of the appropriate biodiversity/ecological assessment(s) in the PfE evidence base and/or any updated or appropriate biodiversity/ecological assessments submitted as part of the planning application process.

3.40. The Places for People chapter focusses on inclusion and the importance of responding to the diverse needs of different people and communities, recognising the benefits of an active lifestyle for the health and wellbeing of communities, and quality of life. An important component for the overall strategy for green infrastructure, and to key locations such as the uplands, lowland wetlands, and river valleys and canals, is to improve public access to good recreational opportunities, including food growing opportunities, in a manner compatible with other green infrastructure functions. The aim of this is to reconnect people to nature as well as improving health and wellbeing.

3.41. Policy JP-P7: Sport and Recreation, states that a network of high quality and accessible sports and recreation facilities will be protected and enhanced, supporting greater levels of activity for all ages including by:

- Creating a public realm that provides frequent opportunities for play and that all ages can enjoy together;
- Where appropriate setting out more comprehensive and detailed recreational standards and standards for provision for designated play areas in district local plans, having regard to existing and future needs;
- Requiring new development to provide new and/or improved existing facilities commensurate with the demand they would generate. The provision of sports facilities will be determined by individual local authorities through an evidence based approach;
- Locating and designing recreation facilities in relation to housing so as to ensure that they are accessible but also minimise the potential for complaints due to disturbance to residential amenity from recreational activity;
- Protecting and enhancing the public rights of way network, including to:
- Provide safe and attractive routes to sports and recreation facilities;
- Improve access to, and connections between different parts of, the green infrastructure network across Greater Manchester and beyond;
- Expand the network of strategic recreation routes offering longer distance opportunities for walking, cycling and horse-riding;

- Provide everyday options for green travel;
- Encouraging the incorporation of a sports facilities mix in all education settings, that meet both curriculum and local community sport needs as identified by an up-to-date Local Authority Sports Needs Assessment, and made available for community use where possible;
- Enabling the continued development of major sports facilities and events, which can further enhance Greater Manchester's international sporting reputation.

The Environment Act 2021

3.42. The Environment Act received Royal Ascent and became an act of parliament on 9 November 2021. The Act puts forward the Governments legally binding frameworks for biodiversity, air quality, water and waste. The Act makes provision for targets, plans and policies for improving the natural environment, along with statements and reports about:

- Environmental protection;
- waste and resource efficiency;
- air quality;
- the recall of products that fail to meet environmental standards;
- water;
- nature and biodiversity;
- conservation covenants;
- the regulation of chemicals; and
- connected purposes.

3.43. The Environment Act 2021 includes a requirement for all future schemes including the development of land to deliver a mandatory 10 % biodiversity net gain and will effectively amend the Town and Country Planning Act. This net gain will be required to be maintained for a period of at least 30 years. The mandatory requirement is expected to become law in Winter 2023 through amendments to the Town & Country Planning Act in Winter 2023. Biodiversity Net Gain is already part of the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF, Para 170(d) and Para 175(d)) but the NPPF does not specify a number/percentage for the gain.

3.44. The Office for Environmental Protection (OEP), will be established to support environmental protection and hold government to account. Furthermore, in an Environmental Improvement Plan, required by the Environment Act 2021, the government will set interim targets for each five-year period and lay out the steps it intends to take to improve the natural environment.

3.45. The Environment Act 2021 also requires all areas in England to establish Local Nature Recovery Strategies (LNRSs). LNRSs are baseline studies to help map the most valuable sites and habitats for wildlife in their area and identify where nature can be restored. This could see the creation of wildflower habitat for pollinators, green spaces for people, or new woodlands and wetlands which are important for both healthy communities and in the fight against climate change.

3.46. LNRSs will enable local authorities to set out their local priorities for restoring and linking up habitats so species can thrive, and agree the best places to help nature recover, plant trees, restore peatland, mitigate flood and fire risk, and create green spaces for local people to enjoy. GMCA is responsible for the Greater Manchester LNRS which covers Bury, which is detailed in the section on regional guidance and strategies.

Biodiversity net gain planning practice guidance

3.47. DLUHC published guidance for the implementation of biodiversity net gain in Early 2024 which is required by the Environment Act 2021. This states that under the statutory framework for biodiversity net gain, every grant of planning permission is deemed to have been granted subject to a general biodiversity gain condition to secure the biodiversity gain objective. This objective is to deliver at least a 10% increase in relation to the pre-development biodiversity value of the development granted permission. This increase can be achieved through onsite biodiversity gains, registered offsite biodiversity gains or statutory biodiversity credits.

3.48. The guidance states that plan-makers should highlight the statutory framework for biodiversity net gain, but they do not need to include policies which duplicate the detailed provisions of this statutory framework.

3.49. It also clarifies that it will generally be inappropriate for plans or supplementary planning documents to include policies or guidance which are inconsistent with this framework, for instance by applying biodiversity net gain to exempt categories of development or encouraging the use of a different biodiversity metric or biodiversity gain hierarchy.

3.50. It advises that plan-makers can complement the statutory framework for biodiversity net gain by, for instance, including policies which support appropriate local offsite biodiversity sites, including whether specific allocated sites for development should include biodiversity enhancements to support other developments meet their net gain objectives in line with Local Nature Recovery Strategies.

3.51. The guidance also states that plan-makers may seek a higher percentage than the statutory objective of 10% biodiversity net gain, either on an area-wide basis or for specific allocations for development. However, such policies will need to be evidenced including as to local need for a higher percentage, local opportunities for a higher percentage and any impacts on viability for development. Consideration will also need to be given to how the policy will be implemented.

25 Year Environment Plan (A Green Future: Our 25 Year Plan to Improve the Environment, 2018)

3.52. The Environment Plan sets out the government's goals for improving the environment within a generation and leaving it in a better state than we found it. It details how government will work with communities and businesses over the next 25 years.

3.53. The plan sets targets for:

- Clean air;
- Clean and plentiful water;
- Thriving plants and wildlife;
- Reducing the risks of harm from environmental hazards;
- Using resources from nature more sustainably and efficiently;
- Enhancing beauty, heritage and engagement with the natural environment;
- Mitigating and adapting to climate change;
- Minimising waste;
- Managing exposure to chemicals; and
- Enhancing biosecurity.

The Environment Improvement Plan 2023

3.54. The Environment Improvement Plan (EIP) represents the first review of the 25-year Environment Plan. The ten goals set out by the 25-year plan are used as the basis for the review document, which sets out the progress made against and how the government intends to tackle each goal.

3.55. Through the Environment Improvement Plan the government has reaffirmed its commitment to:

- biodiversity net gain;
- sustainable urban drainage systems (SuDS);
- ensuring everyone lives within 15 minutes of a blue or green space and a new Green Infrastructure Framework published by Natural England;
- the roll out of Local Nature Recover Strategies (LNRS);
- air quality;
- water efficiency; and
- ancient woodland.

Natural England's Green Infrastructure Framework

3.56. The Green Infrastructure (GI) Framework is a commitment in the Government's 25 Year Environment Plan. It supports the greening of our towns and cities and connections with the surrounding landscape. Natural England has developed a set of GI Principles that underpin the GI Framework. The Principles are intended to provide a baseline for different organisations to develop stronger green infrastructure policy and delivery.

3.57. The Green Infrastructure Standards are a key component of the Green Infrastructure Framework. They define what good green infrastructure 'looks like' for local planners, developers, parks and greenspace managers and communities, and how to plan it strategically to deliver multiple benefits for people and nature.

3.58. The five Headline Green Infrastructure Standards are:

- S1: Green Infrastructure Strategy Standard
- S2: Accessible Greenspace Standard
- S3: Urban Nature Recovery Standard
- S4: Urban Greening Factor Standard
- S5: Urban Tree Canopy Cover Standard

3.59. The Headline Green Infrastructure Standards distinguish the recommended levels of achievement for major new developments and for area wide application.

Standard 1: Green Infrastructure Strategies

3.60. This strategy is about local authorities working in partnership to assess and strategically plan their green infrastructure provision. Plans set out how green infrastructure will help to create greener, beautiful, healthier and more

prosperous neighbourhoods, with a thriving nature network that can reduce air and water pollution, support sustainable drainage and help places adapt to climate change.

Standard 2: Accessible Green Space

3.61. Natural England have updated the Accessible Natural Greenspace Standards (ANGSt) to broaden their scope, and have re-named them Accessible Greenspace Standards.

3.62. The Green Infrastructure Headline Standards states everyone should have access to good quality green and blue spaces close to home for health and wellbeing and contact with nature, to meet the Accessible Greenspace Standards, with an initial focus on access to green and blue spaces within 15 minutes' walk from home.

3.63. The Accessible Greenspace Standards, including quality standards set out that the basic standards are as follows:

- Size and Proximity criteria: Everyone has access to good quality green and blue spaces close to home for health and wellbeing and contact with nature, to meet the AGS size and proximity criteria, with an initial focus on access to green and blue spaces within 15 minutes' walk from home.
- Capacity criteria: Local authorities have at least 3 hectares of publicly accessible greenspace per 1,000 population and there is no net loss or reduction in capacity of accessible greenspace per 1,000 population at an area-wide scale. Local authorities specify capacity targets for all major residential development informed by a local accessible greenspace baseline, and taking into account local needs, opportunities and constraints.
- Quality criteria: Accessible greenspace meets the Green Flag Award Criteria[6], (Ellicott, 2016) and best practice in accessibility for all: 'By All Reasonable Means: Least restrictive access to the outdoors'[7] (The Sensory Trust, 2020).

3.64. Natural England recommend that major development should be subject to the following standards:

- Size proximity criteria: For all major residential developments, the local authority specifies to the developer the quantity, size and distance criteria (see Appendix 2) for any accessible greenspace to be provided within/

[6] Ellicott, 2016, Green Flag Award Criteria https://www.greenflagaward.org/media/1019/green-flag-award-guidelines.pdf
[7] The Sensory Trust, 2020, By All Reasonable Means: Least restrictive access to the outdoors https://www.sensorytrust.org.uk/uploads/documents/ByAllReasonableMeansEnglandAug2020.pdf

associated with the development, based on the Accessible Greenspace Standards.

- Capacity criteria: All major residential development is designed to meet capacity targets (hectares of accessible greenspace per 1,000 population), specified by the local planning authority.
- Quality criteria: Accessible greenspace meets the Green Flag Award Criteria, (Ellicott, 2016) and best practice in accessibility for all: 'By All Reasonable Means: Least restrictive access to the outdoors' (The Sensory Trust, 2020) in major new developments.

3.65. The standards encourage local authorities to adopt a local Greenspace Close to Home Access target:

Everyone has access to a variety of good quality green and blue spaces within fifteen minutes' walk of their home by date x (local authorities to set date).

3.66. This could be defined in terms of the Accessible Greenspace Standards (Appendix 2):

EITHER a Doorstep OR Local Accessible Greenspace:

- A Doorstep Accessible Greenspace of at least 0.5ha within 200 metres (under 5 mins walk),
- A Local Accessible Natural Greenspace of at least 2ha within 300 metres (5 mins walk from home)

AND a Neighbourhood Accessible Natural Greenspace

- A medium sized Neighbourhood Accessible Natural Greenspace (10ha) within 1km (15 minutes' walk from home).

3.67. As a minimum, there should be an ambition for everyone to have access to a variety of greenspace within 15 minutes' walk from home. This could be a stepping stone to achieving a fuller range of size-proximity Accessible Greenspace Standards.

Standard 3: Urban Nature Recovery

3.68. The Urban Nature Recovery standards are as follows:

- In urban and urban fringe areas, the proportion of green infrastructure that is designed and managed for nature recovery is increased by an agreed percentage based on a locally defined baseline and taking into account local needs, opportunities and constraints. This includes the creation and

restoration of wildlife rich habitats, which can contribute to the delivery of local nature recovery objectives.

- Local authorities in urban and urban fringe areas set targets for nature recovery through provision and sustainable management of Local Nature Reserves and Local Wildlife Sites, to:
- Provide 1 hectare of Local Nature Reserve (LNR) per 1,000 population (for nature conservation and quiet enjoyment).
- Enhance existing and identify new areas that qualify as Local Wildlife Sites (for nature conservation).

3.69. Natural England recommend that major development should be subject to the following standards:

- The developer identifies in the Green Infrastructure Plan for the development (or in the Design and Access Statement, as appropriate), its contribution to nature recovery and the creation and restoration of 22 wildlife rich habitats, which can contribute to the delivery of local nature recovery objectives, including the potential for creation or enhancement of Local Nature Reserves or Local Wildlife Sites.

Urban Greening Factor

3.70. Natural England's Urban Greening Factor is as follows:

- Urban greening is at least 40% average green cover in urban residential neighbourhoods where they do not already meet that standard. There is no net loss of green cover in urban neighbourhoods. (User Guide etc, Natural England, 2023a-e)

3.71. Natural England recommend that major development should be subject to the following standards:

- Major development meets National Urban Greening Factors of at least 0.3 for commercial development, 0.4 for residential development, (and, where appropriate, 0.5 for residential greenfield development).

Urban Tree Canopy Cover

3.72. Natural England's Urban Tree Canopy cover standard is as follows:

- Urban Tree Canopy Cover is increased by an agreed percentage based on a locally defined baseline and taking into account local needs, opportunities and constraints.

3.73. Natural England recommend that major development should be subject to the following standards:

- Major residential and commercial development is designed to meet these targets
- New and existing trees are incorporated into new developments and new streets are tree lined (in line with NPPF requirements)

England Peat Action Plan 2021

3.74. The England Peat Action Plan sets out the government's long-term vision for the management, protection and restoration of our peatlands, so that they provide a wide range of benefits to wildlife, people and the planet. To implement this vision, the plan includes:

- a commitment to end the use of peat in the amateur horticulture sector
- a spatial map of England's peatlands

England Trees Action Plan 2021 to 2024

3.75. The England Trees Action Plan 2021 to 2024 sets out the government's long-term vision for the treescape it wants to see in England by 2050 and beyond. The plan provides a strategic framework for implementing the Nature for Climate Fund and sits alongside the England Peat Action Plan.

State of Nature 2023

3.76. The State of Nature report uses the latest data from biological monitoring and recording schemes to benchmark the status of wildlife in the UK. The latest report finds that the UK's wildlife is continuing to decline. The UK, like most other countries worldwide, has seen significant loss of its plants, animals and fungi. The latest report recognises that although the UK's nature continues to decline, there has been growing recognition of the value of nature, including its role in tackling climate change, and the need for its conservation among the public and policymakers alike.

Conservation 21: Natural England's Conservation Strategy for the 21st Century (2016)

3.77. The government's ambition is for England to be a great place to live, with a healthy natural environment on land and at sea that benefits people and the economy. This strategy sets out Natural England's thinking about what we need to do differently and how we need to work with others, to better deliver this shared ambition.

3.78. The strategy's 3 guiding principles are to create resilient landscapes and seas, put people at the heart of the environment and grow natural capital.

European Protected Species: Mitigation Licensing (Natural England, 2013)

3.79. This guidance explains the process and requirements that must be met to get a licence for activities that affect European Protected Species.

The National Character Area Profiles (2014)

3.80. These divide England into 159 distinct natural areas. Each is defined by a unique combination of landscape, biodiversity, geodiversity, history, and cultural and economic activity. Their boundaries follow natural lines in the landscape rather than administrative boundaries.

North West River Basin Management Plan (Environment Agency, 2022)

3.81. This Plan sets out how organisations, stakeholders and communities will work together to improve the water environment. A River Basin District (RBD) covers an entire river system, including river, lake, groundwater, estuarine and coastal water bodies. The North West river basin district (RBD) river basin management plan describes the challenges that threaten the water environment and how these challenges can be managed. Good quality water is essential for wildlife, agriculture and business to thrive and is one of the means for boosting regeneration (both structural and economic), recreation and tourism.

Greater Manchester Strategy 2021-2031

3.82. The Strategy[8] is Greater Manchester's plan for all communities, neighbourhoods, towns and cities which make up the city-region. It is a plan for recovery and renewal following the pandemic.

3.83. The Strategy aims to achieve the shared vision of 'Good Lives for All: that Greater Manchester is a great place to grow up, get on and grow old; a great place to invest, do business, visit and study' and how this will be achieved.

3.84. The Strategy builds on the work undertaken by the Greater Manchester Strategy - Our People, Our Place (2017), by ensuring that all the people in Greater Manchester have access to safe, decent and affordable transport,

[8] https://aboutgreatermanchester.com/the-greater-manchester-strategy-2021-2031/

accelerate plans towards carbon neutrality, creation of greener homes and communities and better jobs and skills.

3.85. The Strategy focuses on three key themes of:

- A greener Greater Manchester – focusing on tackling climate change and working toward our carbon neutral aim;
- A fairer Greater Manchester – addressing inequality and levelling-up, from access to good jobs, to transport, health and housing.
- A more prosperous Greater Manchester – delivering economic growth which is more equitable and socially responsible, bringing opportunities and prosperity to all.

Greater Manchester Green Infrastructure Framework (2011)

3.86. The Greater Manchester Green Infrastructure Framework was produced in 2011. It reviews the evidence bases produced regarding Green Infrastructure Priorities at a strategic level in order to evidence, explain and position the role of green infrastructure in delivering the aspirations of the City Region. It identifies 7 investment priorities as follows:

- The strategic green infrastructure network;
- Economic centres and growth points;
- Regeneration priority areas;
- Destination parks, landmarks and trails;
- An active travel network;
- Greening the urban environment; and
- Community activism.

Greater Manchester Five-Year Environment Plan (2019-2024)

3.87. The Greater Manchester Five-Year Environment Plan, published by the GMCA in 2019, identifies 5 major environmental challenges that threaten the future health and prosperity of the city region. These are:

- Mitigating climate change
- Air quality
- Production and consumption of resources
- Natural environment

- Resilience and adaptation to the impacts of climate change

3.88. An update to the Five-Year Environment Plan is currently being prepared.

Greater Manchester Natural Capital Investment Plan (2019)

3.89. Greater Manchester is the first city-region in the UK to develop a Natural Capital Investment Plan - a plan that will help us encourage investment in our natural environment to secure financial and social returns. The plan has been developed as a result of the Mayor's 2019 Green Summit.

3.90. The investment plan looks at how the Combined Authority and other stakeholders can work more efficiently in terms of funding and policy/governance effort to:

- Improve health outcomes;
- Improve place;
- Build resilience;
- Support the local economy;
- Conserve and enhance habitats and wildlife;
- Contribute to sustainable travel;
- Improve water quality and flood management;
- Regulate the climate; and
- Improve air quality.

Greater Manchester Clean Air Plan

3.91. Air pollution in Greater Manchester affects the health of our communities and contributes to at least 1,200 early deaths in our region alone each year. The government has instructed Greater Manchester and many other areas to develop Clean Air Plans to bring levels of harmful nitrogen dioxide (NO_2) on local roads within legal limits as soon as possible.

3.92. Government has approved the investment-led Greater Manchester Clean Air Plan as the best route to cutting this pollution, with:

- 117 new lower and zero-emission buses and EV infrastructure.
- Funding to support moving Greater Manchester's taxi fleet to cleaner vehicles.
- Local measures to manage traffic flows in Manchester and Salford.

3.93. The approved Clean Air Plan will allow the city-region to meet legal limits for nitrogen dioxide on local roads in the shortest possible time without the need for a Clean Air Zone.

GMCA Biodiversity Net Gain Guidance for Planners and Applicants (February 2024)

3.94. The GMCA Biodiversity Net Gain Guidance for Planners and Applicants, February 2024, has been prepared to provide greater clarity on how BNG will work within Greater Manchester, provide a consistent framework around planning applications, and help applicants understand submission requirements. The document also enables the consistent verification of biodiversity assessments by local planning authorities and the Greater Manchester Ecology Unit (GMEU).

3.95. The guide includes an introduction to biodiversity net gain, a summary of how the requirements differ for different types of planning application, and a guide to assessing BNG applications to ensure applicants submit all necessary information ready for review by GMEU.

3.96. The latter part of the guide provides guidance on the statutory metric rules, metric principles, validation and determination, pre-commencement planning discharge of conditions, and monitoring.

Biodiversity emergency

3.97. Nature and biodiversity are in decline across the UK and globally. The Greater Manchester Ecology Unit (GMEU) understands that national trends are mirrored locally in Greater Manchester. These issues are set in greater detail in the recently published report of the Greater Manchester Local Nature Recovery Strategy pilot.

3.98. Locally, in Greater Manchester, initiatives across the public, private and third sectors under the 5 Year Environment Plan are seeking to reverse this and deliver the wider benefits that improving our natural environment can bring. However, we are facing a biodiversity emergency requiring more urgent and ambitious action to tackle the decline in the diversity and abundance of key species and habitats.

3.99. Subsequently, on 25th March 2022 the Greater Manchester Combined Authority (GMCA), which Bury Council is a member of, signed the Edinburgh Declaration on Biodiversity and declared a Biodiversity Emergency.

3.100. The Edinburgh Declaration is a statement of intent, agreed in August 2020, which calls on the international Convention on Biodiversity (which has its

15th meeting in April) to take bold action to reverse biodiversity loss. It also calls for greater prominence to be given to the role of cities and local authorities in delivering on this.

Greater Manchester Local Nature Recovery Strategy

3.101. The Environment Act provides GMCA, as Responsible Authority, the statutory basis to co-produce a locally led, evidence-based Local Nature Recovery Strategy, to drive more collaborative action for nature.

3.102. To drive action for nature, this strategy sets out how and where across the city-region we should be taking steps to protect and enhance our natural environment. Over the next ten years, this will be the guiding strategy on the most effective actions for nature recovery and set out the best locations for nature recovery across the city-region.

3.103. The strategy covers the whole of Greater Manchester – including Bury. It is made up of an overarching vision, individual priorities and targets for both habitats and species, alongside a mapped Nature Network for Greater Manchester. The GMCA consulted on the draft Strategy between November 2024 and January 2025 and the final draft is expected to be adopted in late 2025.

3.104. The Local Nature Recovery Strategy is not a delivery plan – this will be produced to sit alongside the strategy in 2025.

3.105. The LNRS does not override existing plans, policies, processes, best practice and protections that are already in place for nature, nationally or locally, nor is it binding for landowners.

Scoping Study: Delivery of Off-Site Biodiversity Net Gain in Greater Manchester (December 2021)

3.106. This action plan sets out the key activities required to get Greater Manchester ready for biodiversity net gain in development as a legal requirement. It has been informed by the outputs of a Greater Manchester local planning authority roadshow, which was a series of meetings held individually with relevant officers from each of the 10 Greater Manchester councils to explore the context and circumstances for each authority, within which the implementation of biodiversity net gain for development will need to be embedded.

3.107. The Study found that few offsite solutions have been secured to date in Greater Manchester in the absence local plans or policies requiring net gain and therefore focusses on the key steps and actions required to develop an interim process for Greater Manchester to transition towards the national model. An Implementation Plan has been produced with actions and outcomes prioritised into immediate, short and medium term timeframes. A Need and Supply Assessment is currently underway to establish the number and type of biodiversity units likely to be required over the next five years within the region.

GM State of Nature report 2024

3.108. Greater Manchester's first State of Nature report was published in March 2024. It highlights the state of nature in the region, showing that:

- Once common species in our region are showing worrying declines, including a 24% decline in Hedgehog populations, 44% decline in Red Foxes and 64% decline in Rabbits.
- This is mirrored by declines in our farmland, woodland, moorland, and wetland birds, with a 32% drop in Tree Sparrow populations, 40% drop in Lesser Redpoll and 36% drop in Snipe.
- Our protected sites are valuable refuges for wildlife, but cover only 11% of Greater Manchester, are highly fragmented, and are not in as good a condition as they could and should be.
- 80% of our waterbodies have been heavily modified by human activity, with none of our rivers in good ecological condition.
- Our tree canopy covers 16% of Greater Manchester, but the management of existing woodlands and trees is under-resourced when compared to the creation of new woodlands and planting of new trees.
- 93% of residents consider it important or very important to live close to green space, but an estimated third of Greater Manchester's population do not live within 15 minutes of a green space.
- Our peatlands have been degraded by human activity over two centuries and now emit an estimated 187,525 tonnes CO2-equivelent per year rather than locking more of it away.
- Our natural environment provides us with around £1bn of benefits each year – but these are under threat with the continuing decline in nature.

Bury's 'Let's Do It!' Strategy

3.109. Bury's Let's Do It Strategy is a ten-year vision and strategy for the Borough. It seeks to build upon a shared sense of local pride and act as a call to arms

for progressing the local vision of achieving *'faster economic growth than the national average, with lower than national average levels of deprivation'*.

3.110. It is a single strategy for the council, police, health, other public services, the voluntary, community and faith sector and business communities and some of its key aims are to:

- Develop every township in the borough to be better and stronger than before the Covid-19 pandemic;
- Tackle the causes of inequality and ensure that our children have a better start in life, with access to improved education and broader horizons;
- Help every adult to have the opportunity to be their very best through access to high quality, local work and to help our older residents stay connected and independent;
- Support local businesses as they seek to recover and thrive; and
- Deliver net zero emissions and a cleaner environment for all.

3.111. Bury's Local Plan will play a key role in delivering the vision and aims of the Let's Do It Strategy and, as such, it is important that there is alignment between these two key local strategies.

Bury Greenspace Audit and Strategy (2015)

3.112. This document includes an audit and assessment of open space, sport and recreation facilities which was first carried out in Summer/Autumn 2012. It also assesses the long-term requirements in terms of quantity, quality and accessibility of the various types of open space, sport and recreation for future provision in meeting local need where appropriate, through establishing minimum standards to be achieved.

3.113. An update to the evidence base was commissioned in 2024 in the form of a Greenspace Assessment. This will provide an updated assessment of the quantity, quality and accessibility of all recreation space in the borough and includes: parks and gardens; natural and semi-natural greenspace; outdoor sports; amenity greenspace; provision for children and young people; allotments; cemeteries and churchyards; and civic spaces.

3.114. The assessment will identify areas where there are deficiencies or gaps in the quantity of provision in each category. This will be available in 2025.

Bury Council's Greenhouse Gas Emissions Report 2023/24

3.115. Since 2008/09 we have measured the greenhouse gas emissions from council activities and each year we produce a greenhouse gas report which describes our progress.

3.116. The latest report shows that since our 2008/09 baseline we have reduced our emissions by 70%.

3.117. Bury Council have set an objective of being carbon-neutral by 2038, this is a boroughwide target and even though the report demonstrates good progress towards carbon neutrality for the Council's operations, these only account for an estimated 1-2% of overall emissions. Therefore, the Council still has a considerable way to go to reach its 2038 target. To achieve this ambitious goal the Council has written a Climate Action Strategy and Action Plan that requires change from partners, community groups and residents.

Bury Climate Action Strategy (2021)

3.118. The Bury Climate Action Strategy outlines the challenges facing the borough and the changes, actions and initiatives required in order to achieve carbon neutrality by 2038.

3.119. The Bury Climate Action Plan is a fluid and organic document that will be annually updated, tracking the progress of climate change initiatives and highlighting where more work is required.

3.120. The Action Plan will keep track of the different projects across different departments, groups and organisations throughout the borough. The Climate Action Plan will help Bury stay on track towards the end goal of carbon neutrality and provide as much accountability and transparency as possible.

3.121. The Bury Climate Action Plan was last updated in March 2024.

Bury Biodiversity Strategy (2024)

3.122. The Biodiversity Strategy considers the current state of biodiversity in Bury, the key issues, and what we can do to conserve and enhance biodiversity such as:

- Managing land for biodiversity;
- Improving advice and awareness;
- Council policies and procedures;

- New development; and
- Preparing for biodiversity net gain.

3.123. It outlines our objectives to conserve and enhance biodiversity in Bury and suggests future actions and policy directions. An action within this strategy is to update local planning policies for biodiversity through the Bury Local Plan.

Bury Playing Pitch & Outdoor Sports Strategy & Action Plan (2023)

3.124. The Playing Pitch & Outdoor Sport Strategy (PPOSS) prepared by Knight Kavanagh & Page provides a clear strategic framework in relation to the provision of playing pitch and outdoor sport facilities.

3.125. The PPOSS Assessment shows that all currently used outdoor sports sites require protection and therefore cannot be deemed surplus to requirements because shortfalls would occur both now and, in the future, if they were lost. Consideration should also be given to the protection of underused and poor-quality sites from development or replacement as they may offer potential to meet shortfalls, particularly for football and rugby, in the future.

3.126. Although there are identified shortfalls of match equivalent sessions i.e., for cricket, rugby union and football pitches, most of these shortfalls can be addressed through quality improvements as demonstrated in the scenarios. It is therefore, not recommended as a priority to identify ‘new’ sites for provision although there may be a need to provide new pitches if quality improvements aren’t achieved.

4. Local Profile

4.1. The Borough's green infrastructure is one of its key assets and a reason that people choose to live and invest here. From the wild moorland in the north to the extensive parks and public open spaces in the south, Bury's natural environment helps define the character of its settlements, provides habitats for other species and provides important recreational space.

4.2. This section sets out a broad profile of the Borough's natural environment. It looks at the main influences and challenges to help identify the key issues that the Local Plan will need to address covering the following aspects of the green infrastructure:

- Landscape, geology and soils;
- Biodiversity and ecosystems;
- River valleys and the West Pennine Moors; and
- Open space, sport and recreation.

Landscape, geology and soils

Landscape

4.3. Bury's landscape character is influenced by factors such as its underlying geology and geomorphology, settlement pattern, land use and management, biodiversity and industrial evolution, all of which combine to help create the environment we are familiar with today.

4.4. Natural England's National Landscape Character Assessment (2005, updated 2014) identified three broad landscape types covering the Borough. They are:

- Southern Pennines
- Manchester Pennine Fringe
- Manchester Conurbation.

4.5. The landscape of the north of the Borough around Ramsbottom is characterised by the distinctive upland features of the South Pennines. The geology is predominately sandstone and millstone grit which is reflected in the building materials used historically in the local area. To the west the villages of Affetside and Ainsworth are located on high ground between the towns of Bolton and Bury.

4.6. The centre of the Borough, categorised by Natural England as 'Pennine Fringe' is characterised by the valleys of the River Irwell and River Roch,

which supported the area's early industrial development. However, the main feature of this area is the urban development spreading from main roads.

4.7. The landscape in the south of the Borough, being nearer to Manchester City Centre, has been much modified. The Irwell Valley here includes large areas of post-industrial open space but its small tributary valleys include relic ancient woodland.

Geology

4.8. The geology of the Borough has had a significant impact on its topography, soil structure and vegetation. The main geology comprises Upper Carboniferous rocks (created 325 to 286 million years ago), which can be sub-divided into the Namurian (formally Millstone Grit) series and the Westphalian (formally coal measures) series. The Namurian rocks comprise coarse-grained buff coloured sandstone and gritstones and form the high ground in the north of the Borough. In the south of the Borough younger Westphalian series of shales, siltstones and sandstones, which are generally softer and have been eroded, overlie these Namurian rocks. In the extreme south of the Borough younger Permo-Triassic Red sandstones and Marls overlie the Westphalian and Namurian.

4.9. Much of the Borough is covered in drift deposits both glacial and more recent, apart from in the extreme northern upland margins of the Borough. The glacial deposits comprise mostly cohesive glacial drift although there are extensive glacial sand and gravel deposits in the Pilsworth, Whitefield and Prestwich areas. Recent river terrace and alluvial deposits occur along the courses of the Rivers Irwell and Roch.

4.10. The most common soil type found within the Borough is slowly permeable, seasonally wet, acid, loamy and clayey soils. However, other soil types are also present, such as:

- Very acid, loamy upland soils with a wet peaty surface (Holcombe Moor);
- Freely draining very acid sandy and loamy soils (south-eastern side of the Borough);
- Naturally wet, very acid sandy and loamy soils (south Prestwich); and
- Loamy and clayey floodplain soils with naturally high ground water (adjacent to the River Roch).

Designated sites – SSSIs and RIGS

4.11. Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSIs) are of national importance for their wildlife, geology or landform and are designated by Natural England. Bury has two SSSIs:

- A small part of the West Pennine Moors SSSI is located in the borough. This is designated in recognition of its diverse mosaic of upland habitats with large expanses of blanket bog, heathland, flushes and mire grasslands, species rich grasslands, and woodland.
- Near the boundary of Bury with Bolton, there is a geological SSSI at Ash Clough, Radcliffe. This is recognised due to the exposure of geology at the river cliff of the Irwell.

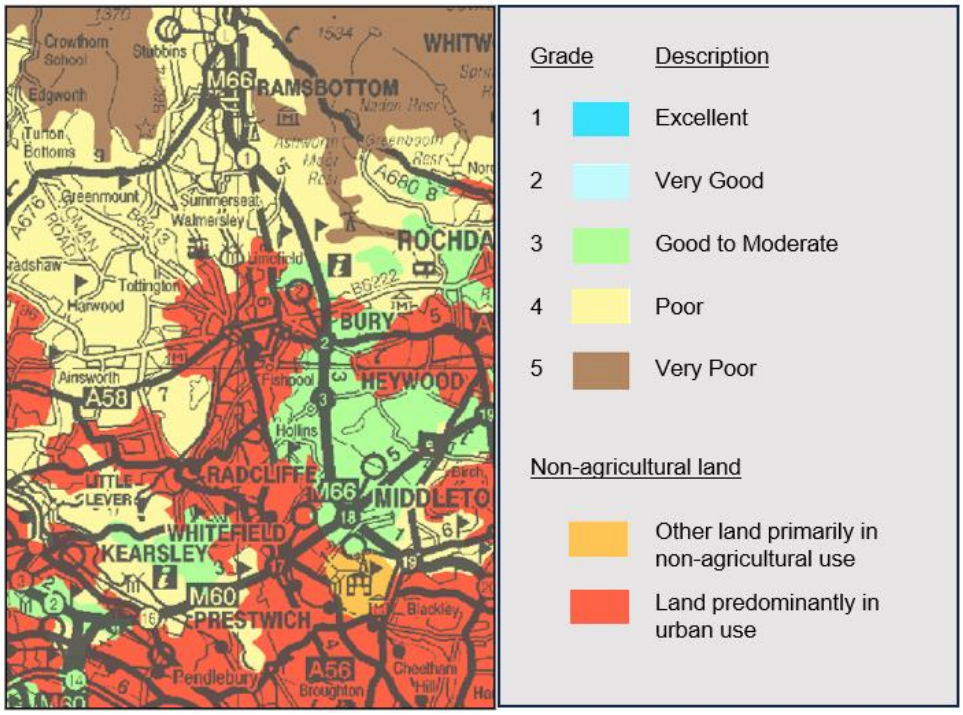
4.12. The borough has three Regionally Important Geological Sites (RIGS) at Gorses Quarry, Limefield, Harcles Hill Farm, and Harcles Hill Disused Farms 1 and 2.

Soils and agricultural land

4.13. Around a third of the Borough's land is farmed (see Figure 2). Whilst some arable, fruit and vegetable crops are or have been grown, livestock grazing is the most common use of the land. Most of the Borough is classified as a 'less favoured area' (disadvantaged) for farming because of poor, infertile soils and steep slopes. Farming is considered to be less financially viable here than in other parts of the country.

4.14. The Borough's 'best and most versatile' soils are limited to Unsworth in the east of the Borough and a small area south of Radcliffe. (See Figure 2).

Figure 2 – Extract from Agricultural Land Classification map North West Region



Source: Natural England 2010

4.15. In the last 20-30 years significant areas of farmland have been turned over to equestrian uses, some areas to recreation uses (e.g. Pike Fold golf course) and some to quarrying and landfill (Pilsworth). There have also been smaller losses to garden extensions and abandonments. These trends may well continue but given Britain's current dependence on food imports, it is conceivable that demand for land for farming in the Borough will increase in the long term.

Biodiversity and ecosystems

4.16. The Borough has a good range of semi-natural habitats such as blanket bog, heathland, ancient woodland, wetlands and unimproved grassland. It also has many man-made habitats such as ponds, lodges and canals that are the result of past industrial development or historic land management practices. Some of them have been retained within reclaimed public open spaces.

4.17. Comprehensive data on biodiversity, i.e. detailed and country-wide, does not exist. Similarly, in Bury, some areas and species are better surveyed than others. The Borough is fortunate in having complete Phase 1 habitat surveys from 1991 and 2001 and a partial survey from 2011. It also has a good number of amateur naturalists who have contributed species records to the GM Records Centre. These indicate that since 1991 there has been:

- An increase in broad-leaved plantation of approximately 200ha, primarily from the efforts of the Red Rose Forest Partnership and mostly occurring in the 1990's.
- An increase in semi-natural scrub and woodland at the cost of more open habitats such as acid grassland and heath owing to neglect of former agricultural and industrial land.
- An overall increase in the number of ponds as a result of planning gain and pro-active habitat creation but a reduction in the number of large water bodies as result of development, natural succession and drainage.
- A gradual increase in wet grassland characterised by Juncus spp as a result of lack of maintenance of drainage systems on agricultural land and recreation sites.

Woodland

4.18. The Borough has approximately 93 hectares of ancient woodland which is mostly located in steep sided valleys in Ramsbottom, Whitefield and Prestwich.

4.19. Total woodland cover in the Borough was 3.8% in 1991, 5.8% in 2001 and 7.6% in 2012, compared with the national average of 12% and the European average of over 30% (Forestry Commission 2010).

Species

4.20. In terms of species, local trends seem to reflect national patterns. A number of highly mobile species such as speckled wood butterfly banded demoiselle and emperor dragonfly have colonised the Borough in the last 15-20 years, mostly likely as a result of the increase in average temperature. Other species have colonised or increased in numbers because of improvements in habitat quality, such as the return of the otter on the Irwell.

4.21. A number of pest species, such as mink, giant hogweed and Himalayan balsam have increased.

4.22. Declining species are less easy to define but farmland specialists such as lapwing and skylark appear now to be less common in the Borough than during the 1990s, as does brown hare.

Designated Sites

4.23. The Borough has the following site designations of relevance to biodiversity:

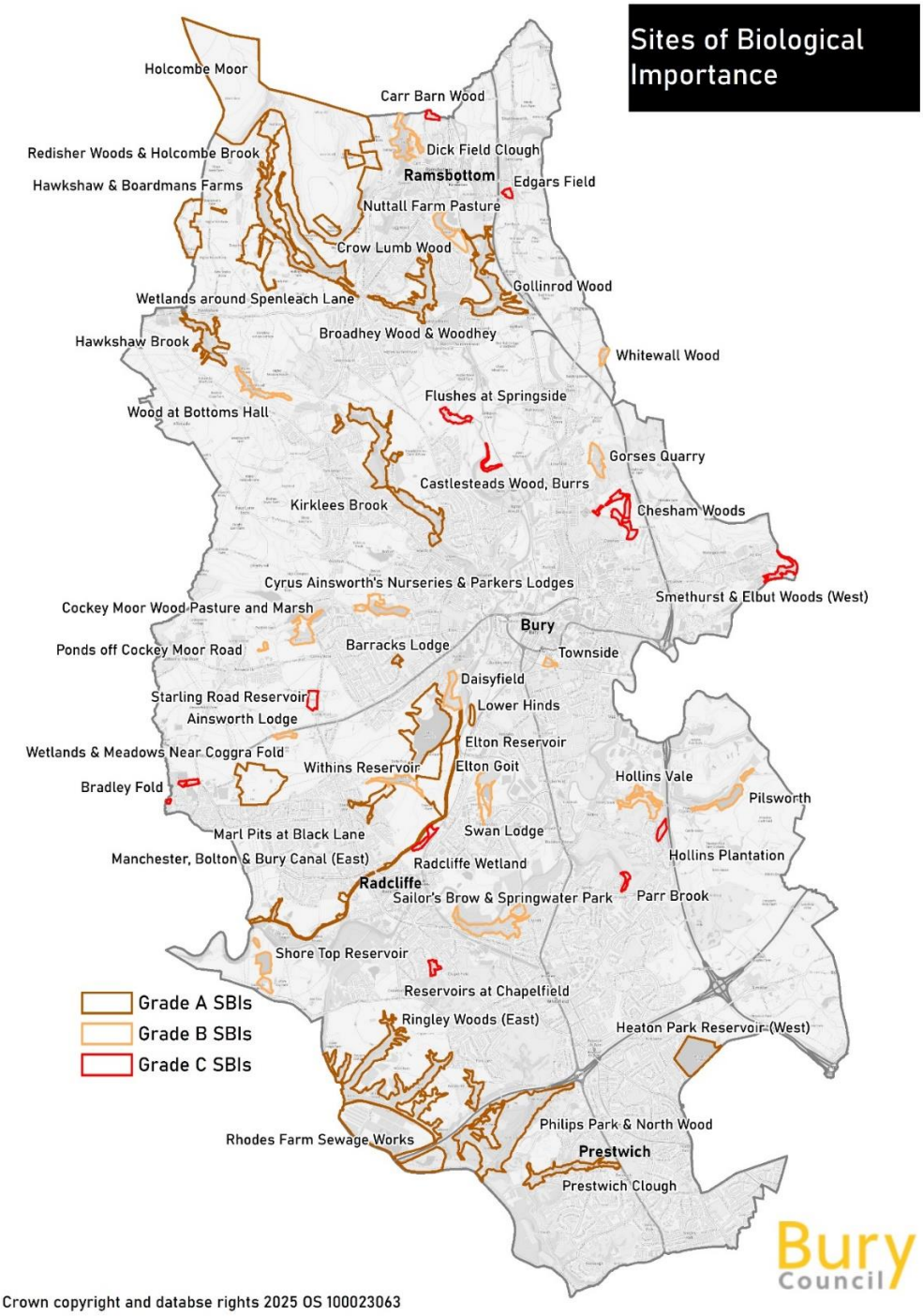
- Site of Special Scientific Interest at West Pennine Moors (awaiting confirmation by August 2017), which is partly within the Borough.
- 76 Local Nature Reserves, at Philips Park, Mere Clough Chesham Woods, Hollins Vale, Redisher Woods, the Kirklees Valley and Chapelfield
- 50 local 'Sites of Biological Importance' (SBIs) of varying grades, as set out in Figures 3 and 4.
- SBIs are surveyed and designated on behalf of the Council by the Greater Manchester Ecology Unit. Table 1 identifies the number and area of SBIs in the Borough.

Figure 3 - Summary of Bury's Sites of Biological Importance

	No./area
Number of Grade A SBIs	20
Area of Grade A SBI	780.0 ha.
Number of Grade B SBIs	18
Area of Grade B SBI	89.2 ha.
Number of Grade C SBI	12
Area of Grade C SBI	47.8 ha.
Total number	50
Total area SBIs	917.0 ha.

Source: Greater Manchester Ecology Unit (2024)

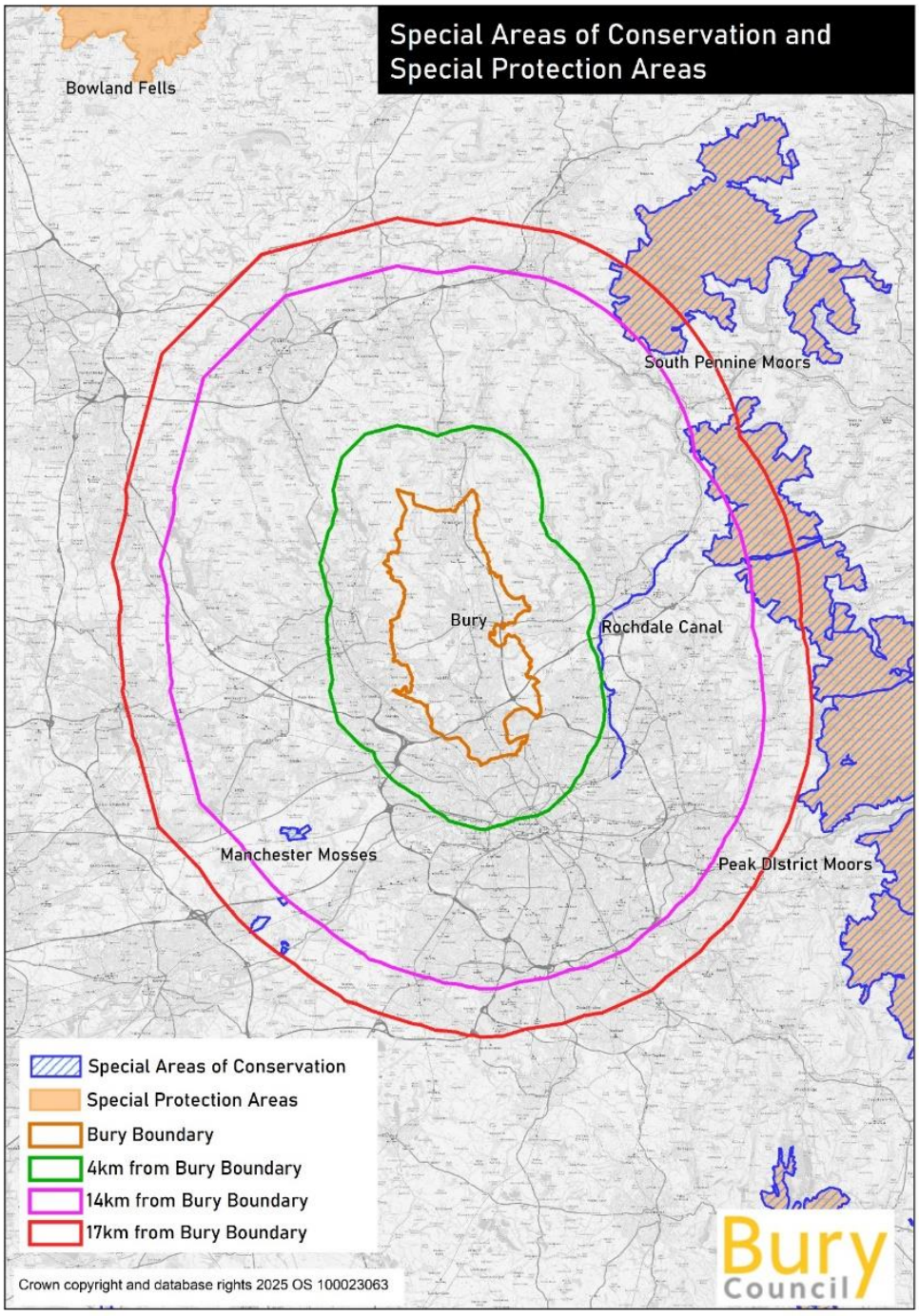
Figure 4 - Bury's Sites of Biological Importance



4.24. There are no sites with European designations in the Borough. However, the Council has a responsibility to consider the impacts of its strategies, plans and projects on European sites in adjacent districts.

4.25. The closest protected site is the Rochdale Canal (located 4km to the south east) which is protected in Rochdale and Oldham. Other more distant sites are the South Pennines SAC (13km), the Peak District SPA (17km) and Manchester Mosses SAC (10-16km) as shown on Figure 5.

Figure 5 - Distance from Borough boundary to nearest Special Protection Areas and Special Areas of Conservation



Protected Species

4.26. Bury has a number of species protected from harm under the 1981 Wildlife and Countryside Act and the Habitats Regulations 2010. They include bats, badgers, great crested newts, kingfisher, little ringed plover, otters and water vole. Bats are widespread and great crested newts are associated with pond clusters in a central belt of the Borough.

Wildlife Corridors/Ecological Networks

4.27. Sites of importance for wildlife are of greater value if they are connected. This is because if they are, territories can be extended or because migration or re-population can occur. The identification of wildlife corridors, encompassing open space to join sites of wildlife value are therefore a common planning tool. Bury's corridors mostly follow water courses, including the Irwell Valley.

Priority Habitats and Species

4.28. The UK 1994 Biodiversity Action Plan produced a list of habitats and species of conservation priority because of their rarity or rate of decline[9]. A number are present in the Borough but not necessarily protected by planning designations. Much acid grassland and urban habitat mosaic (cleared/derelict sites) would fall into this category.

River Valleys and the West Pennine Moors

River Valleys

4.29. The river valleys of Greater Manchester are both major geographical features and of great significance to the sub-region. Waterpower was a driver for the historical development of the area but the valleys also provide landscape character and important places for wildlife and recreation. In Bury, the river valleys follow the two rivers in the borough:

- The River Irwell – which flows all the way through from the north of the borough in Ramsbottom, through Burrs Country Park and under Bury Bridge before meandering through Redvales and Radcliffe. Here the river heads west toward Bolton and Salford before returning to the borough at Drinkwater Park in Prestwich.
- The River Roch – which broadly flows between Bury and Rochdale through Heap Bridge and Hollins before joining the river Irwell at Springwater Park.

West Pennine Moors

4.30. The north-west corner of the Borough, covering a broad area from Holcombe Moor in the north to Ainsworth in the south, is part of a wider area known as the 'West Pennine Moors'. This is an upland outlier from the Pennines

[9] Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs and Natural England Guidance: Habitats and species of principal importance in England https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/habitats-and-species-of-principal-importance-in-england

situated north of Greater Manchester and south of the East Lancashire towns of Blackburn and Burnley.

Open Space, sport and recreation.

4.31. The latest audit shows that the Borough had 446 sites that functioned as a variety of open space, sport and recreation assets, including:

- Parks and Gardens;
- Natural and Semi-Natural Greenspace;
- Outdoor Sports e.g. playing pitches, bowling greens and tennis courts;
- Amenity Greenspace;
- Provision for Children and Young People e.g. equipped play, multi-use games areas and skate parks;
- Allotments;
- Cemeteries and Churchyards;
- Civic Spaces.

4.32. An update to the evidence base was commissioned in 2024 and this will assess the quantity, quality and accessibility of open space, sport and recreational assets in the Borough. The findings of this updated evidence will need to inform the Local Plan going forward.

4.33. New housing development within the Borough brings with it an increase in population and a subsequent increase in demands for open space, sport and recreational facilities. If the increase in demand for recreation is not met through the new development, then this is likely to place excessive demands on existing facilities which, in turn, may have an adverse impact on quality.

5. Summary of Key Issues

5.1. This Green Infrastructure Topic Paper has highlighted a number of Key Issues that need to be considered in taking the Local Plan forward. These Key Issues are considered to be as follows:

- The need to protect and enhance a network of multi-functional green and blue infrastructure and will support proposals to improve the connectivity and quality of the network.
- The need to retain an adequate supply of good quality and accessible open space, sport and recreational assets.

- The need for developers of new housing to make provision for new or enhanced open space, sport and recreation to meet the needs of the prospective residents.
- The need to establish a network of designated recreational routes to provide access for pedestrians, cyclists and horse riders.
- The need to ensure that proposals for new development minimise impacts on the Borough's biodiversity assets.
- There is a statutory requirement for development to provide measurable net gains for biodiversity of no less than 10%.
- As part of the new Biodiversity Duty, there is a requirement for the Local Plan to have regard to the GM Local Nature Recovery Strategy.
- The need to enhance the coverage of trees across the borough due to the multiple benefits they present (such as wildlife habitats and increased resilience to climate change)
- The need to minimise impacts on the boroughs geological and geomorphological assets.
- The need to consider the impact of development upon the borough's soil assets.

Bury Council