



The Urban Lab of Europe!

#### CASE STUDY

#### REPORT

Democratic Transitions for All

#### PROJECT

IGNITION - Innovative financing and delivery of nature-based solutions in Greater Manchester

Greater Manchester, United Kingdom

#### TOPIC

Climate adaptation

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## IGNITION, Greater Manchester, UK

See on UIA website



# 1. What has the project been about?

### The project's context

Extreme weather events are becoming an increasing feature of life in Greater Manchester, whether it is rivers bursting their banks, rain creating standing water after only a relatively modest downpour or heat waves. In addressing these impacts, Greater Manchester feels that significant opportunities lie in substantial retrofit programmes of urban green infrastructure or nature-based solutions (NBS). The city-region aims to substantially expand its urban greenspaces to adapt to the projected climate change impacts of flooding and overheating and increase its climate resilience by 2038. Implementing and funding delivery at the scale and pace needed, requires much higher investments.

### The project's goals and vision

To tackle the financing gap, the project aimed at developing innovative financing and delivery schemes to enable the implementation of nature-based solutions. Over the course of the project, it became evident that the solutions may not to be found in traditional large-scale projects, but also that a multitude of smaller co-implementation actions, in particular community actions, could make a useful contribution.

### Links to Just Transitions

The approaches and tools developed under the project are in line with the Greater Manchester Strategy 2021-2031 with its vision of the city region being a place where everyone can live a good life, grow up, work, and grow old in a greener, fairer, more prosperous city region. When it comes to achieving this vision, ensuring equality and involving stakeholders are among the key factors of success.

The Environment Plan for Greater Manchester 2019-2024 includes mitigating climate change as well as building resilience and adapting to the impacts of climate change and also seeks to engage and educate residents, communities, and businesses. IGNITION used community engagement methods with an eye, firstly, on delivering the city's plans and strategies. Making the application of these methods and tools truly inclusiveness was less the focus of the project initially, but this aspect was much strengthened for the project's rollout activities after it had ended, particularly with the ecostreet approach.

## 2. What solutions for Democratic Transitions have been found?

The project used different approaches to engage people interactively. These included hackathons, workshops, exhibitions, or school classes. Among these co-implementation approaches, the ecostreet action stands out as being a truly bottom-up approach where citizens decide themselves on how to green their alleyways or small exterior public spaces, create them with support from charities, and maintain them themselves. Due to its success, this action was scaled up after the project ended in April 2022 with 21 new projects.

## Ecostreet competition

In its citizen engagement survey and the park user survey, the project identified that people value greenspace in the city very highly, but that their understanding of the many benefits is limited, as is their understanding of how they can develop them themselves. The COVID lockdown and other restrictions played into the hands of the project. Accessible greenspace was now even more highly valued as one of the few pleasures – if available – in that crisis. The project used this motivation as well as people's longing to experience something positive during the difficulties of the crisis. In this situation, the project ran an ecostreet competition. More than 200 expressions of interest were received and 45 applications made of which 4 were granted funding to be implemented.

To avoid the situation where only already active and knowledgeable community applies, the project:

- made the application process as simple as possible using layman's language
- organised preparatory online workshops on green infrastructures
- showed good practices and inspiring ideas on what residents could undertake
- provided '[How to' guides](#) for simple nature-based solutions; and newsletter guidance.

Still, it was a competition and not all the community groups that needed a greenspace upgrade in their area could be reached and enabled.

After the project ended, the ecostreet approach was continued by the IGNITION partner Groundworks Greater Manchester with funding from the new Greater Manchester Greenspace Fund. The focus is now on making the selection more just. As a start, Groundwork will screen districts to identify the areas in neighbourhoods that are most deprived and in need of greenspace.

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## Community advisors to reach out to different people

Groundwork invests in community advisors that each take care of a district. They analyse the different community groups they find there, which may relate to different cultural backgrounds and ethnic minority groups, people of colour, older people, people that may not be fluent in English or generally have no knowledge on how to establish and manage more greenspace themselves. These are more often isolated. Much more direct conversation is needed to build up trust and interest.

The community advisors' language skills are important as this enables them to access groups that can only speak in their own language. Equally, information flyers and brochures were provided in different languages. The advisors listened carefully to people where they lived, preferably on their home street. Personalising the approach by being present at neighbourhood level proved more work-intensive but it paid off in the end.

With the Black lives matter agenda, the topic of inclusiveness sparked discussions within Groundwork. This led to a view that a way to deliver better inclusiveness in the projects may be to further diversify the staff in the charity organisation itself by adopting new recruitment procedures.

If the residents of an area were too hard to involve, community advisors would look at nearby areas. Once a greenspace was enhanced it would provide a tangible example for other people to experience and this would build interest. Community advisors would also try to connect to places, initiatives, and activities already established in a neighbourhood - a health centre, a library, a mosque network, or something else as a starting point.

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## Co-design and co-implementation of ecostreets

The design of the ecostreets and small public urban spaces is done by local residents in workshops and at meetings in the street. To make it work, the community advisors supplied information on different solutions, practical advice, and hands-on support with implementation and maintenance. Easy-to-use tools, such as vision boards and inspiring examples from other locations, helped to enable residents' participation.

It can sometimes be difficult to keep people involved over the longer term. The Groundwork team (Manchester) and other charities would try to bring people from the target area together, find the right community activists, build their capacity, and look for allies to form a stable group. Constant input from the community manager and building trust, skills, and confidence are necessary to keep the ecostreets programme going.

An important enabler for this co-design approach is the newly established Greater Manchester Greenspace Fund, which provides the financial resources for the projects, for the intensive work of the community advisors and for the implementation of the co-designed green solutions.

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## People become nature and climate activists and advocates

People who are fully empowered to create their own green spaces develop pride and ownership for them, which is important for the maintenance of the ecostreets in the long term. People felt empowered to take local action on the climate. Community interactions and outdoor activities increased. At the same time, they began to learn about climate change adaptation and the role of nature-based solutions.

“Groups of people submit applications for grants to green a street, but it’s getting people to fully understand what the project (IGNITION) is. You just have to give them the information and explain how it works.” Violet, local resident of Boscombe Street.

“Six months into the pocket park project, participants shifted from identifying as LGBT people participating in a gardening project, to feeling like environmental ‘activists’. IGNITION Project manager.

A broader awareness emerged and this triggered even more support for establishing and maintaining nature-based solutions in neighbourhoods around Greater Manchester. Ecostreets provided visible tangible experience and have opened people’s eyes to the beauty and the benefits of nature-based solutions. This made them more supportive of extending and improving greenspaces elsewhere. People want more. And indeed, many new green roofs, green facades, pocket parks and greened old viaducts are popping up around Greater Manchester.

Although its greening works are small in scale, the ecostreet model has increased awareness and support in the community for the nature-based solutions that can help Greater Manchester become more climate-resilient. If managed well, it can become a self-reinforcing process.

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## 3. What can cities learn from the IGNITION’s governance?

### Keys to success

- Figure out people’s needs, listen carefully to them where they live, speak their language. Connect to their individual motivations, even if that seems far from the topic of greenspace and climate resilience.
  - Invest in community advisors with sufficient resources, skills, and time to develop targeted approaches that bring the right people together and build trust, confidence, and capacity for change over the longer term.
  - Have an open mind and let people develop their own ideas but provide them with sufficient and regularly updated information, as well as advice and training.
  - Make funding available for community advisors, as well as for developing projects. Provide seed money to support their implementation. Community development needs time and resources and is not a quick fix.
  - It is also a learning process for supporters and community advisors. It helps to organise exchange and regularly review the experience gained and discuss how to improve.
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## 4. Scaling up and replication potential

The ecostreet approach is already being scaled up. Experience from the first round of ecostreets helped to improve the whole process of accessing different citizens and social groups, enabling their participation in co-creation and buy-in for lasting results and changes in behaviour. The lessons learned from IGNITION and the new funding opportunity created by the Greater Manchester Greenspace Fund enabled ecostreets to multiply. 21 new projects have been added to the originally 4 ecostreets, and more grassroots initiatives have joined in the calls. More calls will follow. The different charity organisations also work as advisors to the Greenspace Fund. Exchange between them and learning what worked well and what less well, helps to further improve action. They can provide feedback to the Fund’s advisors on how to spend the money in an equitable way. The activity also provides ideas on how to empower people which, in the future, could be used for larger projects and decisions.

This approach can generally be replicated in any city. In fact, the ecostreets model is not a new approach. IGNITION adapted it to support the expansion of greenspaces, which in turn supports climate resilience. Other cities could adapt it to their specific circumstances bearing in mind the approach’s key success factors.

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