

# Business-led green regeneration: streetscapes and shopping centres



## Introduction

The IGNITION project, funded by the European Union's Urban Innovative Actions (UIA) fund, brought together twelve partners to accelerate investment in urban nature-based solutions across Greater Manchester. Since 2019, IGNITION has compiled evidence, researched finance solutions, developed business cases and identified priority areas for investment.

To accelerate investment in nature, IGNITION explored the potential of different urban greening interventions across Greater Manchester and created pilots that help inform the business case for investment.

This document is part of a suite of toolkits that provide a snapshot of IGNITION's work, summarising the key investment models investigated and the potential for replication.

This work also features in the following webinars: [Green regeneration - designing and investing for multifunctionality](#) and [Changing the real estate landscape](#).

## The potential of transforming high streets for climate adaptation

The evolution of our urban retail areas in the UK has been gathering pace for the last 20 years, with new forms of street furniture, public art, active travel schemes and a move away from prioritising cars.

This has been fuelled the decline of the high street and more recently the impacts of the pandemic. High-street businesses have faced the twin challenges of a reduction in sales and in many cases a change of physical environment due to social distancing.

The drive for the regeneration of high-streets and struggling retail centres presents a unique opportunity to incorporate nature-based solutions, helping to rejuvenate urban areas and at the same time create climate resilient spaces for people and nature<sup>1</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> Greening streets and installing SuDS not only manages surface water but also improves the quality of place, with knock on benefits for local businesses, local landlords, residents and local government. A UK policy paper<sup>1</sup> found that shops in Sheffield close to green infrastructure had 35% higher footfall and benefitted from £4 million additional customer spending. The Victoria Business Improvement District found that green infrastructure investment has increased spending by up to 40%<sup>1</sup>. Furthermore, consumers have a positive experience shopping in streets located around trees and are willing to pay more to park in shopping areas with greenery<sup>1</sup>.

The IGNITION project investigated the benefits of nature-based solutions and identified multiple benefits to retail sites and high streets including:

- Increasing visitor to high streets and retail centres by creating attractive places, where people are willing to spend more time with knock on benefits to local businesses.
- Reducing commercial unit vacancies by creating attractive places for businesses
- Reducing inequality of green space access in urban areas
- Adapting urban areas to climate change by storing rainfall to reduce flooding and mitigating urban heat island effect
- Restoring nature in urban environments

Whilst the benefits of nature-based solutions are not commonly incorporated within current models of regeneration, they have clear potential for both improving the visitor experience and helping tackle climate change.

Statistics on these benefits for each type of NBS can be found in the IGNITION evidence base and [Nature-based solutions to the climate emergency: The benefits to business and Society report.](#)

## How can we use nature-based solutions to regenerate retail areas?

IGNITION looked at two approaches to addressing this challenge:

- Green regeneration for shopping centres
- Green pedestrianisation for hospitality districts

### Green regeneration for shopping centres

Nature-based solutions can be installed alongside wider regeneration works, to improve quality of place and deliver climate resilience. Nature-based solutions (NBS) such as green walls and green spaces can attract more visitors to an area and even increase visitors' willingness to spend time and money<sup>i</sup>. There are also additional benefits for employees from improved quality of working environment and the local community in terms of an improved community connection to, and pride in, their place with knock on benefits such as reduced anti-social behaviour and improved air quality. These benefits are documented in the [IGNITION evidence base](#).

To accelerate the installation of NBS, IGNITION explored the willingness of retail centre owners to invest in NBS based on the regeneration benefits. The focus was on a relatively small scale retrofit within existing town, district centres, local centres and shopping parks.

### Green pedestrianisation for hospitality districts

The pandemic has led to temporary street pedestrianisation and ad-hoc greening of many city centre streets to provide space for social distancing. These temporary measures demonstrated to the hospitality and retail sector the potential to increase footfall, seating and trading by greening and extending outdoor seating, and provides an incentive for local businesses to invest in NBS.

As the emergency measures instigated to help businesses recover from the pandemic come to an end, many businesses, landowners and local authorities are joining forces to look at the case for permanent pedestrianisation and street greening. To accelerate investment in NBS, this model explores the potential for local business to support NBS nearby to their commercial properties or

take on green space maintenance or stewardship. Due to the financial impact of the pandemic on local business, resources or ability to pay for ongoing management and maintenance costs were considered to be the most appropriate focus for business involvement rather than full capital costs.

## Pipelines, pilots and business cases

### Green regeneration for shopping centres

#### Greater Manchester Pipeline potential

The pipeline gives an insight into the potential for this model within the city region, to green this particular kind of urban space

- 323 retail centres across Greater Manchester
  - Including 50 retail parks and district shopping centres<sup>2</sup>
- Many centres are owned or managed by global or regional commercial retail and property investors and real estate agencies, such as Avison Young, JLL, Aviva Investors, DTZ investors and Peel Land and Holdings.



*Retail centres in Greater Manchester (spatial data provided by the Consumer Data Research Centre) (Contains OS data © Crown copyright & database rights 2022 100037229)*

To scale up this model into a pipeline the IGNITION project's Greater Manchester Green Infrastructure Explorer can be used to further understand scope, alongside strategic considerations that will strengthen investment case, such as:

- Upcoming regeneration areas or economic recovery plans
- Air quality management zones
- Surface water flood risk
- Other opportunities for intervention such as existing green space improvement plans or creation of new such as conversion of car parks
- Site conditions such as aspect, building structural load (for green roof or wall) and utilities

<sup>2</sup> Data on retail centres has been provided by the Consumer Data Research Centre, an ESRC data investment, under project ID CDRC 437-01, ES/L011840/1; ES/L011891/1

- Centre management engagement, utilising data from IGNITION pilot at Swinton shopping centre
- National and local government initiatives including Town Deals, Future High Streets Fund, High Streets Taskforce and Heritage Action Zones

### ***IGNITION Pilot: Swinton Square Shopping Centre***

The IGNITION pilot projects are gathering data on proposed funding models across multiple urban NBS, to provide a framework that could then be scaled up and replicated if successful.

IGNITION partners Salford City Council and Groundwork GM, working with commercial real estate advisor Avison Young, identified Swinton Square shopping centre as a key location for a green regeneration pilot. A visitor survey at the site revealed that **76% of respondents would like more greenery in the shopping centre.**

Proposal for regeneration of centre were developed including NBS:

- 127m<sup>2</sup> proposed new green spaces
  - Including a green roof, green wall, rain garden, planters, bulbs and wildflower planting
- £40,000 cost of proposed new green spaces, invested by Avison Young
  - Including £15,000 staff cost (landscape design, business and community engagement, project management)
  - £25,000 capital installations
  - Maintenance cost taken on by Avison Young, who are prioritising low maintenance solutions to limit increased occupier service charges where possible
- £450,000 estimated natural capital benefits from improved air quality, amenity value, energy savings, carbon sequestration<sup>ii</sup>

Swinton Square shopping centre will be closely monitored to track its performance against the case for investment. Baseline data has been collected, on unit vacancy rates, footfall, visitor frequency and activity tracking using the [Mohawk tool](#) developed by the University of Manchester, and will continued to be captured over the next few years.

The pilot site will serve as a case study for further investment from Avison Young, who are active promoters of the concept of NBS in retail centres. To replicate this approach at other retail sites, Groundwork will utilise evidence from Swinton to inform future discussions with local authorities, replicating discussions with Salford Council which have already highlighted potential opportunities in other priority district centres as part of economic recovery plans.

### ***The business case***

The combined business benefits and natural capital value of the NBS proposed for Swinton Square were sufficiently attractive for the property managers, Avison Young, to invest in the scheme. IGNITION's Nature Based Solutions Evidence Base tool helped Avison Young demonstrate the potential commercial benefits to the asset owner, gaining their approval for the works.

The benefits from this pilot will further enhance existing evidence in the IGNITION Evidence base, which suggest that green space installations can:

- increase customer spend by 40%
- increase customer footfall by 35%

## Green pedestrianisation for hospitality districts

### *Greater Manchester Pipeline potential*

The pipeline gives an insight into the potential for this model within the city region, to green this particular kind of urban space.

To identify locations for green pedestrianisation at a city region scale, a replicable method was created. However, in general, older areas of a district with roads not originally intended for cars are most likely to be suitable for pedestrianisation and street greening.

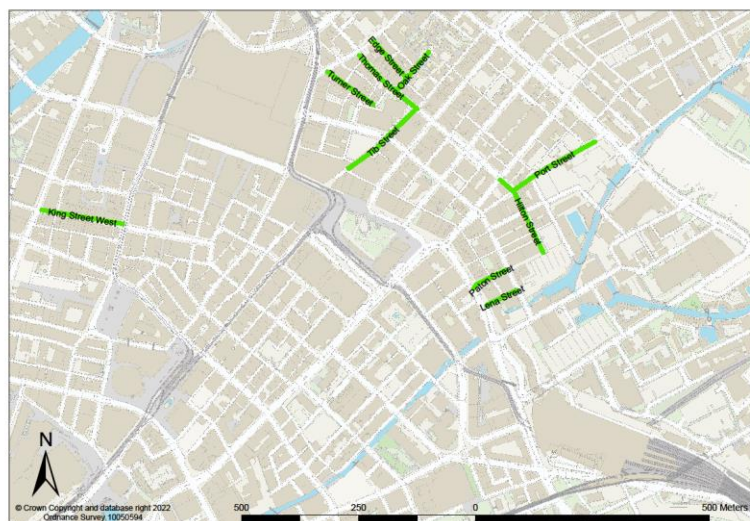
Although it was not possible to assess the entirety of Greater Manchester's streets, the criteria used within the pilot is replicable for any district.

The following criteria were used to assess whether streets had suitable physical and commercial composition:

<b>Businesses</b>	composition of businesses (bars, restaurants, coffee shops, hotels and independent shops) that would benefit from increased footfall as a result of improvements to the street scene through NBS delivery.
<b>Traffic volumes</b>	low traffic volumes including one way roads, underutilised parking spaces or potential for one-way streets.
<b>External down pipes</b>	presence of external down pipes on buildings to make a hydraulic connection to tree pits, to rain gardens or rain garden planters
<b>Space</b>	streets with good natural light sufficient for NBS and pavement wide enough (>2.5m) to accommodate trees and meet accessibility criteria (wheelchairs and buggies).
<b>Building height</b>	streets with low buildings which will not impact the availability of sunlight for NBS.

Although it was not possible to assess the entirety of Greater Manchester's streets the criteria was applied to the Northern Quarter and Deansgate areas of Manchester city centre and identified:

- 9 streets
  - 4629 m<sup>2</sup>



*Manchester City Centre SuDS streets pipeline*

### *IGNITION Pilot: Edge Street, Northern Quarter Manchester*

The IGNITION pilot projects are gathering data on proposed funding models across multiple urban NBS, to provide a framework that could then be scaled up and replicated if successful.



- 125M2, including a rain garden and 8 new street trees
- £2.9 million Natural Capital benefits<sup>iii</sup> identified for this site
- Capital cost and Maintenance will be available May 22

Edge Street was chosen as the pilot area to explore the opportunities and challenges for green pedestrianisation. Edge Street was temporarily pedestrianised during the pandemic, which means the businesses on the street have already experienced the benefits pedestrianisation can bring.

A feasibility study helped the project understand what type of NBS and SuDS interventions could be delivered on Edge Street, but also what would be transferable to other streets with a similar morphology and business composition and would work with plans for the installation of antiterrorism chicanes. This study was informed by engagement with local businesses, Manchester City Council's Highways, Planning, Regeneration, Lead Local Flood Authority and Neighbourhoods Team, United Utilities, and City Co Manchester, the City Centre Management Company.

### ***The business case***

The funding and financing strategy for Edge Street primarily focuses on blending public funding for regeneration and highways improvements with local business investment. Due to the impact of the pandemic on local business ability to pay for ongoing management and maintenance costs were the focus for business involvement rather than full capital costs.

A willingness to pay survey<sup>iv</sup> was undertaken with 17 local businesses within the areas of the Northern Quarter and Deansgate. This survey found that majority of the businesses were willing to pay to support NBS due largely to the benefits for business and biodiversity that the NBS would deliver, there was notably less interest and awareness of the flood risk reduction benefits.

Applying the average reported willingness to pay amount from this survey to Edge Street suggests that annually Edge Street's 19 businesses could be willing to contribute around £760 annually towards the management and maintenance of NBS.

### ***Next steps***

The highway improvement proposals developed by Manchester City Council are currently being discussed with the businesses on Edge Street with regards to the options employed for controlling

unauthorised vehicle access. When these proposals have been agreed the draft designs for introducing NBS on Edge Street will form the basis of an engagement exercise with the local businesses to ascertain their views on the appropriateness of these measures and their willingness to invest and maintain them.

## Considerations for business-led green regeneration projects

Lessons learnt from the IGNITION project are replicable for future developments of these NBS funding models:

- **Loss of space for hospitality seating:** The temporary closure of streets in the pandemic meant hospitality outlets utilised all available space. Installing NBS can draw in visitors but may also be seen by businesses as a potential loss of income.
- **Design constraints:** Essential considerations include ensuring NBS will receive sufficient sunlight; the underground services infrastructure; topography and the location of downpipes or inlets for SuDS features; accessibility and space for emergency services also need to be considered. Underground utilities are often seen as a barrier to the installation of NBS due to perceptions of damage caused by tree roots. However, tree pit design, appropriate species and safe digging practices are beginning to allay concerns.
- **Ownership, maintenance and management:** In many other countries, long established green outside dining areas are directly managed by the business' that own them. In the UK this practice is not established, therefore maintenance and management should be built into the investment case from the beginning, covering cost and upskilling existing maintenance contractors.
- **Evidence –** Additional data is needed on demonstrating the economic case, particularly short-term investment for longer term gains by stabilising occupations, footfall and improving turnover. IGNITION pilot at Swinton should help bridge that gap but having data from multiple sites will help strengthen the economic case.
- **Ensuring support from multiple stakeholders –** Retail areas have a unique combination of stakeholders who see different opportunities and barriers, this needs to be carefully managed to ensure support for investment in NBS. Council planning and highways teams all have specific requirements that need early consideration.
- **Reducing short term income loss for unit occupants -** Minimising disruption on installation to limit any short-term loss of income is important to keep stakeholders engaged with a project. Lessons from our [IGNITION nature-based solutions living lab](#) proved that this can be done, as many systems are modular and built offsite.
- **Alignment with wider co-funding opportunities –** Ensuring alignment between green space strategies, economic growth and regeneration plans, to ensure there are no missed opportunities for blending public and private investment.

## Beyond IGNITION: Progressing business led green regeneration

Recommended actions for **Local Authorities** are:

- A specific review of existing regeneration plans for town and district centres, funded through the recent plethora of government town centre initiatives, should be undertaken to ensure opportunities for including NBS are captured
- Maximise opportunities for NBS within existing plans for local and district centres, such as development proposals and reinstatement after highway or utilities works.
- Embed climate resilience considerations within planning policy frameworks for local and district centres.

Recommended actions for **businesses** interested in green regeneration are:

- Improve evidence on local business benefits to foster private sector appetite to finance NBS proposals in retail areas. This should include work with Business Improvement Districts, which

provide both a convenient mechanism for understanding owner and occupier drivers, priorities and concerns and a means of pooling collective investment.

- Carry out further work to assess suitability of NBS at different types of retail sites where customers are looking for different types of experience.
- Maximise the multiple benefits of NBS compared to hard infrastructure.
- Carry out further research into understanding the costs and skills required for maintenance of NBS and expectations of centre owner and managers in terms of maintenance requirements and budget
- Engaging the wide range of stakeholders takes time, and time is needed to build trust in the project. Start community engagement as early as possible to map key considerations from all effected parties and work towards co-creation. Partner with organisations for engagement who have strong existing community links.

The source of this summary toolkit is an extensive technical report authored by Rachel Morrison (GMCA), Pete Stringer (City of Trees), Michaela Howell (Groundwork). For more information contact Rachel Morrison (GMCA).

## Key resources

- Access economic benefit evidence for different NBS in the [IGNITION NBS Evidence bases](#)
- Determine the benefits of a green roof to your business using our interactive [Green Roof Benefits Calculator](#)
- Read about the business benefits of nature-based solution in the [Nature-Based Solutions to the climate emergency: The benefits to business and society report](#)
- Calculate natural capital benefits of NBS installations using [B£ST tool](#)
- Build evidence of installations by using the [Mohawk tool](#) to assess physical activity and other wellbeing behaviours in urban spaces
- Watch this webinar on [changing the real estate landscape](#)
- Research business led green regeneration in these key articles:
  - o [Ministry of Housing, Communities & Local Government. \(2021\) Build Back Better High Streets](#)
  - o [Potential advantages in combining smart and green infrastructure over silo approaches for future cities.’ Frontiers of engineering management, 8\(1\) pp. 98–108](#)
  - o [Business district streetscapes, trees, and consumer response.’ Journal of Forestry, 103\(8\) pp. 396–400](#)

## More information

Find out more about the IGNITION project by visiting the project website:

[www.IGNITIONgm.com](http://www.IGNITIONgm.com).





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- <sup>i</sup> Wolf (2005) 'Business district streetscapes, trees, and consumer response.' *Journal of Forestry*, 103(8) pp. 396–400.
- <sup>ii</sup> The natural capital benefits have been assessed using the [CIRIA B&ST<sup>iii</sup> tool](#) over a 30-year timeframe (2022 – 2052) for air quality, amenity, building temperature and carbon reduction and sequestration.
- <sup>iii</sup> Calculated using [B&ST tool](#), using identified benefits of Edge Street design on air quality, amenity, carbon sequestration, health and traffic calming.
- <sup>iv</sup> Thompson, S (2021) An Evaluation of Potential Green Infrastructure in Manchester City Centre, A placement report submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Science in Environmental Practice, The Manchester Metropolitan University.