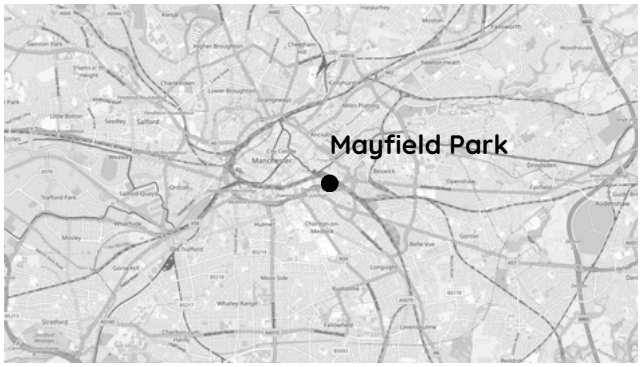
Mayfield Park, Manchester

Green Infrastructure Framework case study

Mayfield Park is a 2.6 hectare city centre regeneration project on the River Medlock in central Manchester. The first city centre park to be delivered for Manchester in over 100 years, it delivers quality greenspace, play space and ecological habitat. The park opened to the public in September 2022 and received a Green Flag Award in 2024.



What was the vision?

A major new park for the city of Manchester, at the heart of a new city neighbourhood. A regeneration project connected to its history, with people, place and nature at its heart.

How did the Green Infrastructure Framework help to realise the vision?

A green infrastructure strategy is an essential rallying point from where to assess where you are, where you're going and how you're going to get there. It facilitates the development of a long-term vision alongside evidence. Mayfield Park is an example of how a strategy can be applied on the ground, with Natural England's Green Infrastructure Framework providing critical guidance and a framework from which to recognise opportunities for green infrastructure and how to exploit them.

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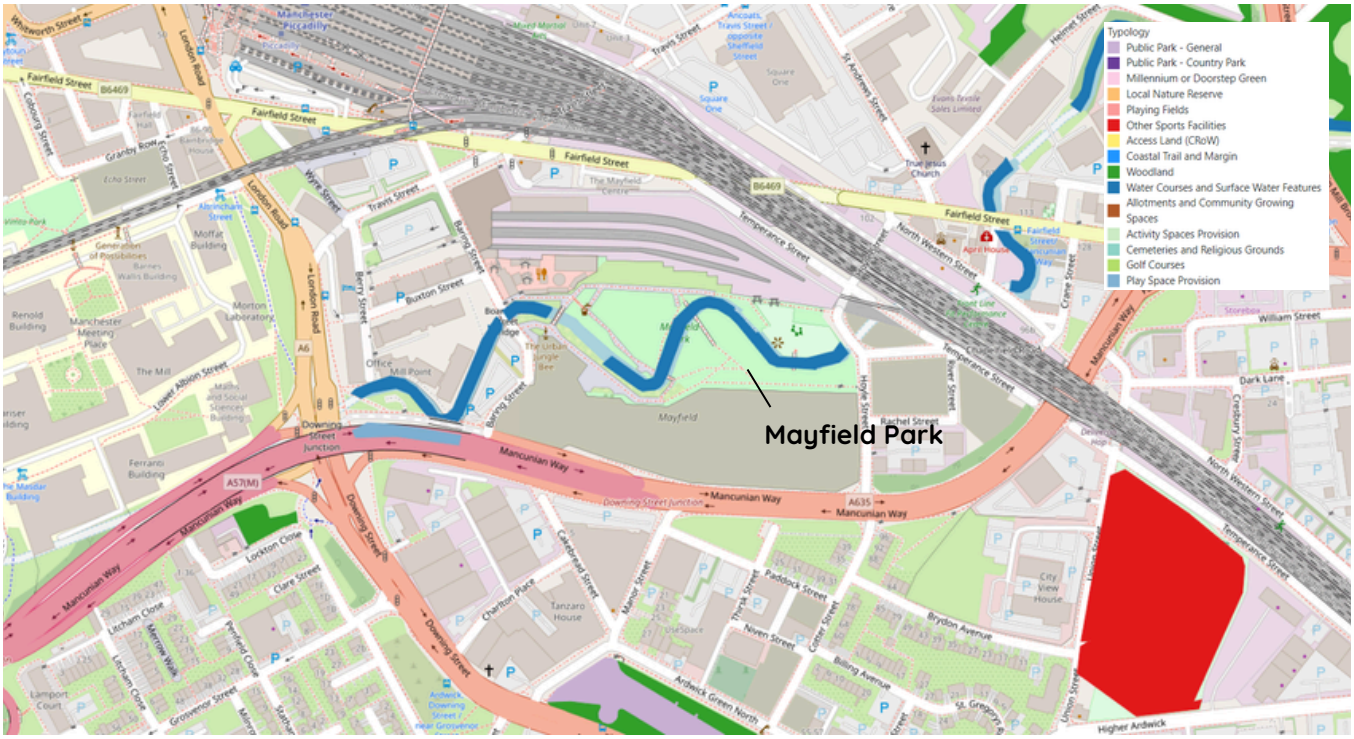
Flood attenuation features are designed to accommodate flood water and use planting that will tolerate periodic flooding.

Over 150 new trees contribute to tree canopy cover, improving air quality and helping to regulate the local climate through shading.

The fully accessible spaces include an accessible play space designed to reflect the industrial chimneys of the surrounding area.



Map produced from the England Green Infrastructure Mapping Database on 13/01/2025. © Crown Copyright and database rights 2025. Ordnance Survey 100022861.

Achieved Green Flag Award status in 2024 and described by judges as “an outstanding urban park”.

Retention of structures celebrates Mayfield’s rich and unique industrial history and context.

The previously concealed River Medlock has been opened up to draw wildlife into the heart of Manchester.

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What's been achieved?

A landscape-led approach and creative design have delivered a special place in the heart of the city, only a minute's walk from the main train station, on the doorstep of residential areas. A place celebrating a fascinating industrial past, with real impact on people's lives. It's free, it's accessible, it's interesting, and its city centre location is expected to stimulate significant investment.

Mayfield Park has won many prestigious industry awards and commendations. Including, Commended, Best Practice Award for Large Scale Mitigation, Chartered Institute of Ecology and Environmental Management (CIEEM) 2023. Green Flag Award, 2024.

Creative design has delivered innovative features, making the site adaptable to the conditions it might face as the climate changes. In particular, flooding. The previously concealed River Medlock has been opened up, providing a flood defence for the city, creating new wet-dry habitat and drawing wildlife into the heart of Manchester. Substantial tree planting is improving air quality and helping to regulate the local climate through shading.

What were the problems to overcome?

A thorough understanding of the site, a previously contaminated brownfield site, derelict for more than 50 years, was essential, including the state of the ground and how the existing structures were designed and built. Heavily contaminated soil had to be removed to specialist waste sites, but 80% of the site's materials were reused, reducing Carbon emissions by an estimated 240 tonnes. For example, hogback beams have been uncovered and reused to support three new bridges, saving an estimated equivalent of 23.8 tonnes of CO_2.

What lessons have been learnt?

Working in partnership, collaborating to realise a shared vision and investment in green infrastructure has made a measurable contribution to economic, climate and biodiversity objectives.

How was the green infrastructure strategy funded?

The Mayfield Partnership benefitted from a £23 million grant from the Government's Getting Building Fund, allowing work to begin on the park before all other development and making the scheme more appealing to potential buyers.

How is the infrastructure being managed and funded going forward?

An estate management strategy has been developed in consultation with the community.

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Green Infrastructure Framework Principles: The benefits

1. Nature-rich, beautiful places
The park is a transformative and sustainable public amenity for the people of the city, turning a derelict wasteland into a lush, fully accessible, biodiverse and healthy greenspace for the whole community and provides an estimated 90% net gain in biodiversity.

2. Active and healthy places
Greenspace provision supports active lifestyles, community cohesion and nature connections, benefiting physical health, mental health & wellbeing and quality of life. The park provides new bridge connections, across the river, creates walking and running loops, and areas within the park have been designated for skateboarding.

3. Thriving and prospering communities
Mayfield Park's green infrastructure is expected to create and support a prospering community, adding value by creating a quality environment that supports the local economy and regeneration. The redevelopment will support over 600 construction jobs and thousands more in office, retail, leisure and supply chain. A 'Real Worth' report forecast the generation of £49.5 million in social and environmental value between 2020-2024, with £20.6 million attributed to wellbeing benefits.

4. Improved water management
The new river design promotes a more natural approach to flood mitigation. Previously undiscovered and unused wells now provide a sustainable supply of water for irrigation, saving 3 million litres of water every year.

5. Resilient and climate positive places
Well-designed greenspace is an effective tool for tackling climate change. For example, the park has been designed to accommodate day-to-day flooding events, plus 1-in-100-year and climate change flooding. Substantial tree planting is improving air quality and helping to regulate the local climate through shading.

Green Infrastructure Framework Principles: The attributes

1. Multifunctional
This clever design illustrates beautifully how a multifunctional space can be created to connect people with the environment, improving health & wellbeing, while also protecting and making improvements for nature and the climate.

2. Varied
Landscaped and informal spaces, including play areas, riverside walkway, wetland boardwalk, terraced garden and open lawns. A diverse planting strategy, with over 150 new trees of different species, wildflower lawns, shrubs and flowering plants combine with biodiverse habitat.

3. Connected
The new park sits at the heart of Manchester city centre, connected to its public transport and wider active travel networks. The River Medlock is a green corridor, drawing nature into the city.

4. Accessible
The Mayfield Partnership has achieved its aspiration to create an inclusive public park providing access to nature for all ages and abilities, close to where people live.

5. Character
The site's industrial heritage has been celebrated in a place for the future, rooted in its past. A fascinating 250-year-old industrial story of thriving print and dye works, breweries and bathhouses. The cavernous freight depot, former ticket office and railway arches from Mayfield Station, closed to the public since the 1960s, have been incorporated. Three bridges have been retained, and historic details such as well-preserved Victorian tiles from Mayfield Baths have been saved for reuse.

Interesting features such as Victorian wells were unearthed and have been brought back into use to irrigate the plants and trees throughout the park, each pumping up to 20 cubic meters of water per day, with no additional water needed from the grid.

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Green Infrastructure Framework Principles: The process

1. Partnership and vision
The success story at Mayfield Park is attributed to partnership working, collaboration and a shared vision. With effective engagement and involvement of planners, environmental managers and specialists from a range of organisations from the outset.

2. Evidence
The site is in an area with poor access to green space and high levels of deprivation. There is clear evidence that the blue and green infrastructure investment contributes to achieving wider economic regeneration, climate and biodiversity objectives.

3. Plan strategically
The philosophy underpinning the site flows from Manchester City Council's award-winning green and blue infrastructure strategy and its 'Our Rivers, Our City' strategy. The 'Great Outdoors' Green and Blue Infrastructure Strategy won the Chartered Institute of Ecology and Environmental Management (CIEEM) National Award for Knowledge Sharing in 2018. The 'Our Rivers, Our City' strategy aims to leverage the city's natural resources to enhance quality of life, improve environmental resilience and support sustainable development, and is a key component in work to revitalise the city's rivers.

4. Design
The park and river are a 'designed ecology', creating connected and richly-vegetated and floral landscapes that boost ecosystem services and seasonal interest, while creating a sensory experience for visitors.

5. Managed, valued, monitored and evaluated
An estate management strategy has been developed in consultation with the community and industry experts. An independent ecological report concluded that the provision of the park provides a significant net gain in biodiversity for the Phase 1 development of Mayfield.

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