



# Learning from Greater Manchester 02 August 2013

## PRODUCED BY

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## TEN Group

TEN (The Environment Network) is a small group of senior local government officers in London who have met regularly over ten years to share ideas and exchange knowledge on how to achieve urban renaissance. Using the principle of *looking and learning* they visit pioneering projects to draw out lessons that can be applied in their own authorities. In the process the members develop their skills as urban impresarios and place-makers, and are able to build up the capacity of their authorities to tackle major projects.

*Photographs: unless otherwise stated provided by TEN Group members and URBED Ltd*

*We would like to thank Mark Lucas from LB Redbridge for his contribution of photos contained in this report*

*Front cover:     Top left - Spinning Fields, The Avenue  
                       Middle - Manchester has some beautiful bridges and canals  
                       Right - Spinning Fields Square*

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## Introduction

Looking round central Manchester on a hot sunny day, the City appeared to have undergone a renaissance. In our discussions with officers from the City, Bury and Oldham, as well as presentations from David Rudlin and Marianne Heaslip of URBED's Manchester office we discovered some of the ingredients in the city's recovery from the loss of much of its former economic strength. We also heard how Allied London has developed a new commercial heart the size of Canary Wharf or La Defence through a partnership with Manchester City Council. This report and accompanying pictures tries to summarise the story.



## Tackling urban flight

When Marx and Engels wrote about class conflict and the evils of capitalism, they were basically attacking Manchester. The first canal and then the first railway opened up connections with other emerging industrial cities. A policy of 'laissez-faire' coupled with a compliant Empire to supply the raw material of cotton and acquire the finished goods resulted in spectacular rates of growth, comparable with what is happening in Chinese cities today. The city itself was the trading hub for a vast network of mills, with Oldham boasting more spindles than anywhere else in the world. Trams and suburban trains enabled white collar workers to move out to suburbs like Bury, while the mill owners lived in leafy Cheshire or retired to Bournemouth. In her classic book, Jane Jacobs compared Manchester unfavourably with Birmingham because of its lack of economic diversity.

So when manufacturing in the UK collapsed in the 1980s, Manchester and its adjoining nine boroughs

inherited a much poorer legacy than similar sized European towns. The docks and canals no longer had any value, and the stock of mainly working class terraced housing and high rise Council estates such as Hulme or the infamous Cardroom estate were liabilities rather than assets. So its recovery to the point where the population actually rose by 11% in the first decade of the 21st century is could be seen as a miracle. However the story in fact follows the pattern set by industrial cities, such as for example Pittsburgh in the USA, that have sought to transform the face and fortunes.

The figure ground maps of Manchester at different times revealed how a once dense city has become full of holes, as manufacturers closed down, and poor housing was cleared. Policies of urban renewal along the main roads into the City at one time presented a very bleak gateway, and one that reinforced the desire of those who could to get as far away as possible.



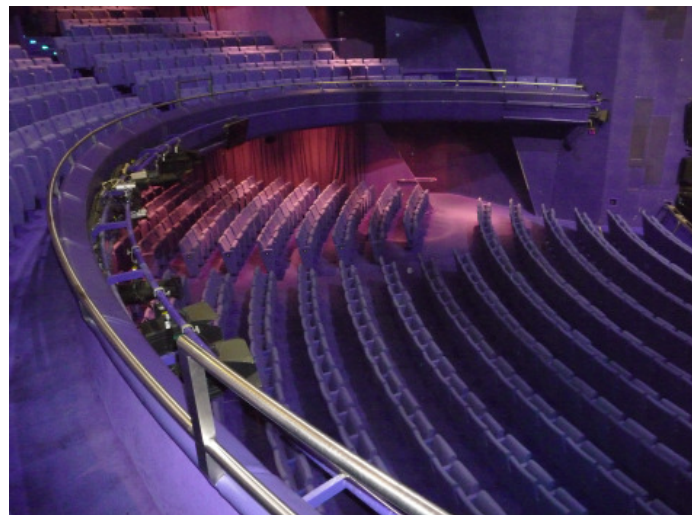
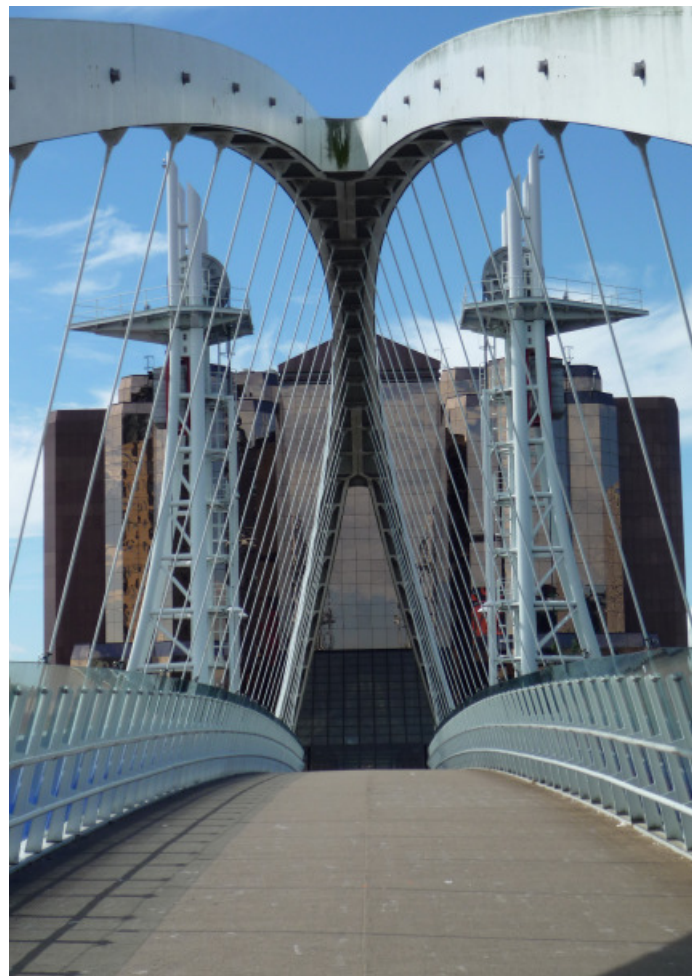
## Regenerating historic areas

The first step towards regenerating was to stem decline by stabilising the state of the environment. Manchester (and some of its neighbours) was an early pioneer of small-scale environmental improvements, and the first Groundwork Trusts were set up to reuse derelict land on the fringes. In the city itself, one of the first ever projects to convert a warehouse into housing was Granby House, a project of a housing association, while the Britannia Hotel near Piccadilly Gardens showed the commercial feasibility of adaptive reuse. Possibly the largest reuse project of the age was the conversion of the former Midland Railway terminus into GMEX, a joint venture with Commercial Union to provide the city with an exhibition and conference centre. Today one of the UK's largest hotels, a Hilton, dominates the area. Smaller projects were undertaken by local property owners, such as the Manchester bookmaker Albert Ramsbottom, who helped a number of Manchester architectural practices make a mark.

### Reconnecting the city

A second step was to make the centre walkable. Rather than filling the canals in because of their perceived danger, as had started on the Rochdale Canal, towpaths and bridges were restored and signing introduced. The City embraced the setting up of the Central Manchester Development Corporation, whose strategy was to develop land along the canal corridor running through the centre. By branding a large area that had Roman associations as Castlefield Heritage Park, what were once largely a series of scrap heaps found a new identity. Public investment into major museums started to draw in the public, and rekindle Manchester's pride in its past. It is now possible to walk for miles away from the City's noise and bustle in neighbourhoods that contain a mix of uses, and that sensitively combine stylish new architecture with well conserved Victorian buildings. The occasional boat adds to the interest, while trains and trams rumble overhead, and architecture is becoming more adventurous.

Cars have largely been tamed in the centre, as Manchester was the first British city to embrace trams again, a policy forced on them by lack of funding to reconnect the two railway termini underground. The tram system has been progressively extended, first out to the commuter suburbs of Bury and Altrincham, and then to the new shopping centre at Trafford and Media City







in Salford, and most recently through Oldham to Rochdale. The frequent service has boosted numbers using public transport, and creates an image of a Continental style city in the centre. With the upgrade of the West Coast main line, and the introduction of 'tilting trains', the city is only just over two hours from London, with an hourly service. Though large parts of the city are dominated by concrete structures, Manchester has managed to avoid the fate of American cities that saw the entire economic activity move to the edge. One further sign we saw of high connectivity are the large satellite dishes at Media City that connect the broadcasting studios with the rest of the world. Manchester is now well-positioned to compete in the new creative industries. The Hacienda Club and Factory Records that helped put the city on the 'cultural map' has been redeveloped as housing, but the Northern Quarter around Smithfield provides a hub for creative people, and the public realm reflects URBED's masterplan for a highly walkable and well-connected area. In passing along the edge of Ancoats, the world's first industrial quarter, we saw a terrace of new offices that are proving popular with professional firms. Though the Oldham Road may have lost its department stores and former retail dominance, it is attracting ethnic and speciality retailers and has consequently not gone the way of the American 'strip'.

## Rebalancing the population

The City's failure to win an Olympic bid helped bring the different authorities together. Even more significantly, they visited Barcelona, which provided such a striking contrast because so many more people lived in the centre. The City decided to redevelop the post war Council estate of Hulme, which supposedly were intended to replicate the form of Bath, and embraced a design guide which for a while became a model of how to draw up simple principles to secure quality. Indeed it was subsequently taken up and applied to the rest of Manchester. Though few buildings achieved the quality of Homes for Change/Work for Change, where URBED's first Manchester office was based, the overall results have produced a mixed area with some 6,000 homes where families are very happy to live.

The upsurge of private investment in the 1990s produced a rash of private housing developments, often by Manchester grown developers such as Urban Splash, Artisan and Igloo. These showed how good design can change an area's image and



draw people back. Many units were bought by 'buy to let' investors, making it much easier for young professionals and students to find somewhere to live. Niche areas, such as Manchester's 'Gay Village' along part of the canal or the housing underway in historic Ancoats are bringing money back to the city centre. More ambitious projects, such as Manchester's Millennium Village at New Islington, with its plan for developing 'five fingers' off new canal extensions, started to stall after the financial crisis of 2008, though Urban Splash has now sold some 700 rental properties to a housing association to enable it to start developing again. Housing is still relatively inexpensive in Manchester, with many signs promoting new apartments for around £120,000, or less than half or a third of the price in London. The Council has therefore not been so concerned to develop new affordable housing, as it has such a large stock already. The issue of 'fuel poverty' and the importance of cutting energy consumption is however a priority. As well as guidance from local authorities, including a new 'green technology centre' at a college in Oldham, and efforts to get suppliers working together, there are new initiatives aimed at tapping Manchester pension funds, and using expected Business Rate proceeds through what is called 'Earn back'. The Manchester area has had a long cooperative tradition, and one promising example is the Carbon Coop, where owner occupiers are working together to share experience in utilising the government's Green Deal, and so far Manchester is ahead of the rest of the country.

For areas on the fringes, such as Oldham, there is a long way to go to tackling deep-rooted inequalities. However we learned that there is new interest from China in using the old mills as showrooms for a range of products, and in reviving manufacturing. As many people still expect to work close to home, this may be key to lifting people out of poverty. So too will be upgrading skill levels and aspirations. The bright yellow trams which are about to run through the streets of Oldham could well help attitudes to change.

## Creating new attractions

An important element in repositioning the city has been a series of 'grand projects' to provide new reasons for coming in. Some like Urbis have failed to be replaced by others. One at least, the redevelopment of the old Arndale Shopping Centre, owes its success to being bombed in 1996, and shows how rapidly the City Council has worked, using architectural competitions to secure quality.







We briefly visited the massive Lowry Centre by architect Michael Wilford, which now houses the largest theatre in Manchester, with three auditoria of 1500, 450 and a smaller studio theatre. We walked through the Imperial War Museum, a building by Daniel Libeskin that draws half a million visitors a year. Both are linked by stylish bridges to the stylish Media Centre, which is becoming a 'great place' as buildings are added, such as a new college of Further Education.

However, some of us were disappointed that almost all traces of the past seemed to have gone, and these internal facing buildings end up creating sterile open spaces. What they do, however, is boost local pride, and in turn pave the way for attracting private investment. The whole area is owned by Peel Holdings, who are currently promoting clusters of residential towers in Liverpool and the Wirral. The pattern of ownership and development is therefore very different from the much more fragmented scene we experienced in Castlefield en route to Spinningfields.

Our discussions took place in one of the many new offices in what has given Manchester something it previously lacked, a quarter to attract national and international companies. Spinning Fields has been developed incrementally through a partnership between Allied London and Manchester City Council, and the flexible attitude of the City Council has been key to it moving ahead (in contrast to some other similar cities, where greater constraints have made projects unviable). Great architecture has been used to create a memorable place that opens up to the River Irwell, where a bridge by Calatrava reconnects back to Salford. We were impressed by how popular the open spaces were, compared with other spaces we had walked through. The development had been very successful in attracting top brands, but was now looking to local restaurateur's rather than national multiples in making a success of the units looking over the river.



At the end of our tour, we walked around the East Manchester area, where some 10,000 new homes are planned. This has been anchored by the development first of the Commonwealth Games, and subsequently the conversion of its stadium to become the home of Manchester City Football Club, which is known throughout the world. This could well draw in the mixed families that will provide a further piece of the jigsaw, or game of dominoes, that is urban renaissance.



# Achieving municipal leadership

At the start of our discussion, the explanation for the City's renaissance was directly attributed to the ambition of the Chief Executive, Sir Howard Bernstein, who had joined the Council as a clerk at the age of 16 and worked there ever since. Acting like a French Mayor, and in close concert with the Labour political leader, currently Sir Richard Leese, the City has provided the leadership needed to take on the centralised power exercised by London. Working through associations of local authorities of different political persuasions, the leadership has managed to show that by being ambitious but flexible, there have been tangible results.

Whereas the London Mayor, who has substantially greater powers, may well create a backlash from other authorities, the Manchester approach had worked so well they there was no demand for an elected Mayor. It was said that if Howard does not like a building that is put up, the architect never gets to work in Manchester again, which has provided a great stimulus for appointing good architects. In turn by going for a broad design guide, but avoiding meddling in the details, work has proceeded faster and with less aggravation. So it may be that, just as in the 19th century, Manchester offers a model for how cities can reinvent themselves.



## Delegates

London based tour delegates:

1. Marc Dorfman | Assistant Director Planning & Regeneration | LB Haringey
2. John East | Director of Community Infrastructure | LB Newham
3. Nicholas Falk | Founding Director | URBED
4. Sue Foster | Executive Director Housing and Regeneration | LB Lambeth
5. David Hennings | Consultant | Currently with LB Ealing
6. Mark Lucas | Chief Planning & Regeneration Officer (Interim) | LB Redbridge
7. Michael Mortensen | Project Director | Grosvenor Developments
8. Susan Parsonage | Director of safer communities | LB Ealing

Manchester based meeting attendees:

9. Pat Bartoli | Head of City Centre Regeneration | Manchester City Council
10. Paul Beardmore | Director of Housing | Manchester City Council
11. Jameson Bridgwater | Head of Planning and Infrastructure | Oldham Council
12. Marianne Heaslip | Urban designer | URBED
13. Steven Lever | Principal officer, Urban design and Development | Bury Council
14. David Rudlin | Director | URBED
15. Graham Skinner | Construction Director | Capital properties
16. Chris Wilkinson | Unit Manager, Environmental planning and sustainability | Bury Council