STATION SANCTUARY

GARDEN NEWSLETTER
MARCH - MAY 2026

Your bimonthly dig into garden happenings!



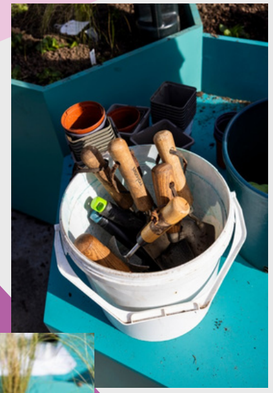
LINDA PITTWOOD, NATIONAL TRUST

Linda Pittwood is a Project Manager in the National Trust's Greater Manchester Urban team, supporting partner-led projects that help connect people with nature, beauty and history in urban spaces.

She became involved in the Station Sanctuary project through conversations between the National Trust and Network Rail about how the two organisations could work together on shared goals — improving the station experience, creating social value, and bringing more nature into the city centre. At the same time, women from MASH, who had been visiting The National Trust's Castlefield Viaduct, for wellbeing and gardening sessions, expressed an interest in creating a public garden of their own. Since MASH is based near Piccadilly Station, they approached Network Rail about transforming unused land into a green community space.

This created the perfect opportunity for collaboration. Network Rail, the National Trust, MASH and Sow the City came together to co-create Station Sanctuary — Greater Manchester's first community garden at a train station. Opened in Spring 2026, the garden provides a calm green space for travellers, local people, pollinators and wildlife in the heart of the city.

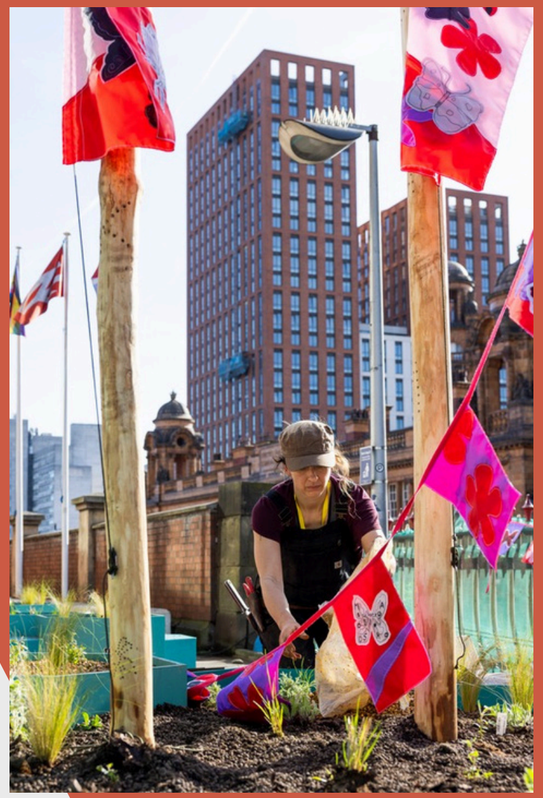
The project was co-designed with women from MASH, with Sow the City leading the garden design and community engagement programme. The garden includes low-maintenance, pollinator-friendly planting, flexible seating and a colour scheme inspired by Manchester's suffragette history.





ALL OTHER IMAGES SHOW MASH AND
SOW THE CITY BUILDING THE STATION SANCTUARY GARDEN





sow the city

MASH

National Trust

NetworkRail







WHAT'S HAPPENING IN THE GARDEN?

The garden was officially launched on **19 March**, with representatives from Network Rail, National Trust, MASH, Sow the City, Transport for Greater Manchester, United Utilities and Manchester City Council in attendance. The event also marked the first appearance of Tom, The Chubby Northerner, our resident poet.
Rebecca Foy from National Rail spoke proudly about how the Station Sanctuary Project had transformed a grey, underused space into a thriving, biodiverse garden through collaboration with local charities and community organisations.

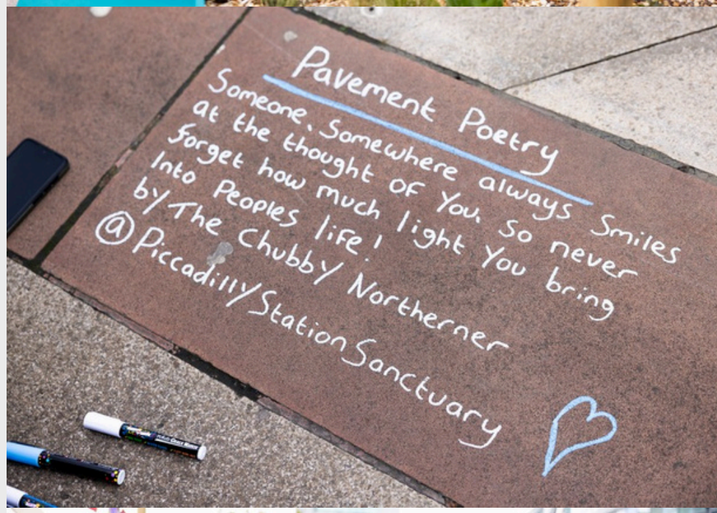
Sow the City hosted a wildflower seed bomb pop-up during the easter holidays to coincide with the opening of the garden. We're hoping to see lots of pollinators heading over to the garden over the coming months so this workshop was a fab and simple way to show people how they can bring biodiversity into their local green spaces.

To our right, we see Tom, The Chubby Northerner (@thechubbynortherner) enjoying some "po-e-tea" with a couple of Station Sanctuary visitors. Head over to the Station Sanctuary Instagram page to watch the interviews in full (@piccadillystationsanctuary).

Another treat for the Station Sanctuary garden was being chosen as the starting point for the CyanLines project walk on Saturday **2 May**, guided by Jonathan Schofield. CyanLines is an ambitious project co-founded by Tom Bloxham MBE and Pete Swift, with plans to create over 100 miles of routes connecting Manchester's parks, waterways, and green corridors.

At the starting point, Jonathan took time to explore the history of the buildings surrounding the garden, particularly the beautiful former fire station building, which stands prominently beside the space.









What's growing?

MEXICAN FLEABANE

A delicate, daisy-like flowering plant that's loved for its long flowering season and relaxed cottage-garden look. Native to Mexico and Central America, it produces masses of tiny flowers that start white and gradually turn pink, giving the plant a two-tone appearance.

It's incredibly popular in UK gardens because it's:

- Easy to grow
- Great for pollinators like bees and hoverflies
- Drought tolerant once established
- Happy in cracks, walls, pots and borders
- Flowering for months — often from late spring right through autumn

Mexican fleabane has a soft, slightly wild look and tends to self-seed gently, which helps it spread naturally through paving gaps and sunny corners. It works especially well in urban gardens because it can thrive in poor soil and doesn't need much maintenance.

Growing tips

- Prefers full sun or partial shade
- Likes well-drained soil
- Avoid overwatering
- Trim back lightly if it becomes straggly
- Can survive mild UK winters

Because of its long flowering period, it's often used in wildlife-friendly planting schemes and community gardens — especially where low-maintenance but colourful planting is needed.



Meet me at the garden

Who's using the Stations Sanctuary Garden? Garden users have an informal chat with resident photographer, Bec, about train journeys, green spaces and wellbeing

Who are you? Philip. I live in Manchester and work at TFGM just over the road from Piccadilly Station.

What brings you to Station Sanctuary today? I came to get lunch.

Do you have favourite green space? The first place that comes to mind, because I came to university here in Manchester, is Platt Fields Park. But I love any green space. Platt Fields Park is big enough to get a little bit lost in, but not too big — you can easily navigate your way around. I often like that about green spaces.

Do you have a favourite train journey? London to Manchester, because you go through so many different landscapes on that journey.

What do you do to keep yourself happy and healthy? What I tend to do, especially on a day like today when the weather's nice, is go for a walk or a nice cycle around the city.

Do you think cities benefit from green spaces like Station Sanctuary? And can you think of any great examples you've seen around the world? Absolutely. I think the most obvious and relevant example for the UK is London because not only have they had more green spaces, but they continue to build more. There's a very obvious difference when you go to certain parts of the country. Sheffield as well — I think it's known as one of the greenest cities in the UK. I've noticed that in their city centre, along the streets, they have planting with nice trees, flowers, and bushes. I'd love more of that in Manchester.