



So, you want to start a bike library

A guide by
Manchester Bike Kitchen

In Our Nature is a collaboration between

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Manchester Bike Kitchen have been successfully operating since 2021, helping people across the city to become confident, self-sufficient cyclists. Whether you're seriously considering starting your own bike library or just interested in finding out what's involved, Manchester Bike Kitchen have some advice to help you on your journey.

This year, Manchester Bike Kitchen teamed up with In Our Nature through our Community Support initiative to set up a new bike library in Wythenshawe!

“Bike libraries are a great way to encourage more people in your community to give cycling a try. Not only do they remove the financial barrier of buying a bike for one-off journeys, but they also provide opportunities for people to see how a bike would fit into their lives longer-term. If you're new to cycling you might be wondering where to store your bike when it's not in use, how to carry your shopping, how to get to work or college, or how you might be able to get your children to and from school. The beauty of a bike library is you can give it a go and once you find out a bike is for you, your travel habits can change overnight.” – Andy, Manchester Bike Kitchen.

Cost and securing funding

Bike libraries aren't cheap. If you consider that each bike will cost in the region of £250, a reasonable fleet of 10 bikes will easily set you back £2,500+. Typically, we will allocate around 40% of our budget on bikes alone.

The remaining 60% of our budget is then spent on delivering a fully costed out maintenance programme with qualified mechanics and materials, costs to rent out a space to store the bikes and loan from, as well as staff time and any volunteer expenses. We advise that when you apply for funding you factor these costs in accordingly.

How to secure funding

Below are some funding opportunities specifically targeted around cycling or active travel, but you should also consider other angles that allow you to broaden the types of funding you could be eligible for. Cycling projects can have loads of other benefits that funders are looking to support, like mental and physical health, the environment and recycling (if you're refurbishing old bikes) to name a few.

- Mobility Foundation - Active Travel Grant Programme: [Active Travel Grant Programme](#) | [Charitable Grants](#) | [Motability Foundation](#)
- Manchester City Council Scheme Activation funding: [Apply for Scheme Activation funding](#) | [Scheme Activation grant funding](#) | [Manchester City Council](#)
- Sport England - The Movement Fund: [The Movement Fund](#) | [Manchester Community Central](#)
- GM Moving – Greater Manchester Walking and Wheeling Fund: [GM Walking and Wheeling Fund](#) | [Manchester Community Central](#)
- Allen Lane Foundation: [Allen Lane Foundation](#) | [Manchester Community Central](#)
- Manchester Active - European Capital of Cycling Grant Scheme: [Manchester Active European Capital of Cycling Grant Scheme Survey](#) (surveymonkey.com).

In Our Nature's top tip for securing funding for your bike library

Whilst all funders are different, and their exact criteria may vary, one thing they all have in common is that they love when you can include evidence and clearly demonstrate the need for your project in your application.

The 2022 Update to the Manchester Climate Change Framework stated that road vehicles contributed to 24% of Manchester's direct emissions. Did you know, we've created a carbon footprint for every ward in Manchester – why not take a close look at how your area is doing in terms of car use for short journeys and public transport accessibility to include in your funding bid? Find your local carbon footprint here: www.inournature.uk/our-carbon-footprints.

Check out Transport for Greater Manchester's website to find out where bike libraries already exist in Manchester, and which areas could do with a bike library being set up: [Bike libraries](#) | [TfGM Bee Active](#).

Maintaining your bikes

A number of bike libraries fall into the problem of only setting aside enough budget to buy the bikes themselves but maintaining your bike fleet is key to the success of your bike library.

As a library, your loanees will expect to receive working, safe bikes. Bikes that are poorly maintained are dangerous and they certainly won't make people feel confident using a bike in the future. In addition to this, as a library loaning a bike to someone you are liable for providing them with a safe bike and can leave yourself in a position where you could be sued for negligence if an accident caused by your bike ever happened. Having a qualified, experienced mechanic and maintenance programme for the bikes is an imperative.

For our libraries we secure funding to purchase bikes and pay for a maintenance programme with qualified mechanics as well as spare parts, such as inner tubes, brake blocks, cables and lubricants.

We schedule the checks in to correspond with a bike loan return.

Usually monthly. So, the loanee borrows a bike for a month and once it's returned, it's checked, serviced and signed off as safe for the next user.

This doesn't have to be done in-house. A bike maintenance company can be hired to do the work. Either way, the liability is with the mechanic / company.

This maintenance covers the main things that could go wrong on a bike but not everything, so we do recommend you also get your riders to sign a form to say that they will look after the bike as their own and are liable for repairs if the bike is misused.

Storing your bikes

We're lucky at MCR Bike Kitchen that we are able to fully operate from a shop space. As a bare minimum we would advise that you need a secure container to store your bikes safely and a covered location in which you can fix your bikes.

What bikes should I buy?

If you're going to buy bikes, we recommend trying to source quality, heavy duty preloved bikes in a range of styles (e.g. shopper, mountain, road) so your clients can find something that suits them. Brand new bikes, while great, are expensive and for the same price, if not less, you can buy bikes of a much higher specification. By buying second-hand, you'll also be helping the planet too and saving perfectly good bikes from going to landfill.

The higher specification means better components and a nicer ride, which will greatly improve the rider's experience. Not only that, using a refurbished, preloved bike is better for the environment as it has no impact on the supply chain.

Promotion

So, now you've got your bike library established, you'll need to find some willing cyclists. Don't forget to leave some budget behind for promotional materials like leaflets and posters to distribute and display on community noticeboards. Having a social media presence and turning up to events in your local community will help you reach new people too.