



Co-operative Councils
Innovation Network

CLIMATE CHANGE ENVIRONMENT

Oldham Council

Partnership working: food, green spaces & the environment

The council and its partners have set up many projects around food, green spaces and environmental stewardship in recent years.

Get Oldham Growing, launched in 2014, had the aim of building skills within communities, reducing loneliness and isolation among residents and offering support to community-based food businesses. This fit well with the aims of Well North, a partnership between PHE, the University of Manchester and Manchester Academic Health Science Centre, to find new ways of creating healthy communities in the North of England. The resulting collaboration resulted in the Well Oldham project, launched in April 2015. This project aimed to work with local people on growing and cooking, and work symbiotically with schools and local businesses to promote learning and an entrepreneurial culture around growing and food.

Going forwards focus will be on the development of the GOG brand and training and volunteering activities, many of which were temporarily suspended or reduced during the Covid 19 lockdown. Opportunities are being considered to access further funding to expand volunteering and training at the hubs as they begin to re-open and volunteers return. The Growing Hubs and community food growing generally are seen as important in helping Oldham to move towards greater food security.

[Northern Roots](#)

This project began in 2017 and concerns a 160-acre site next to Alexandra Park. To scope out a community-determined vision for the site as a whole, the council commissioned E3M, a national “knowledge community” of social enterprise leaders.

They convened “Oldham Alchemy”, a 24-hour event in July 2018, with 85 participants from E3M itself, the council, a range of Oldham organisations and communities, and social investors. Attendees participated in working groups, which explored how the site could be used for:

- Community growing and enterprise.
- Training, skills and research.
- Leisure and tourism.
- Improving health and wellbeing.

They made proposals for amenities, considered governance and a business model for the site, and proposed principles for taking the project forward.

Over the following years, plans for the site firmed up. By March 2020, these included:

- Community growing and market gardening.
- Walking, biking and camping.
- Outdoor education.
- A programme of arts and cultural events.
- A microbrewery.
- Teaching and workshop space.
- Forestry.

Despite COVID, the project has shown considerable progress since then:

- Local volunteers are growing fresh fruit and vegetables on the site for local communities in need.
- 20 Trainee Beekeepers have completed their free 12-month beekeeping programme and Northern Roots bee products are now on sale.
- Following Mountain Bike Discovery day in early 2020, a consultation took place on the creation of a Bike Hub & Trails facility, running from November to December 2020. The site was widely used by mountain bikers and other cyclists during the COVID lockdown.
- A five-month community consultation has just been completed on what local people & visitors would like to experience or operate on the site as a whole.

Behind the scenes there has been progress too:

- Business model and master planning have evolved considerably.
- The first Board of Trustees has been appointed.
- A Landscape Manager has also been appointed, who will lead on the conservation and restoration of the site.
- Funding has been raised through various sources, including the Esmée Fairbairn Foundation, GM Moving, the Rural Community Energy Fund and, most recently, the Towns Fund. This last pot of funding will move the project into its capital build phase and deliver a Visitor Centre and Education Centre.

Monitoring and evaluation of the project as it progresses is being undertaken in partnership with Salford University. There are high-level targets, but also digital sources and participant data are being used to inform the development of the project – for example, the bikers are uploading their routes. Toolkits are being developed during the course of the project for learning from it and the council is considering whether these may have commercial value.

The business model involves setting up a charity which will own the brand and have a long lease on the land. It will sub-licence individual assets to operators. The council has guaranteed funding until September 2021. However, it is determined that in the long term the project will be commercially self-sustaining (besides providing environmental and social benefits). The Northern Roots project team is currently mapping out sources of future revenue and capital funding more generally, which could include ethical investment funds and/or community shares. It is also working on licence terms and assembling a delivery team.

Keys to success

Oldham believes that crucial elements in its success have been:

- A clear co-designed and co-owned vision.
- Building strong partnerships.
- Strong leadership from senior members and officers providing momentum.
- Co-ordination of resources across Council services and the wider Oldham Partnership

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