

# Plant, Save and Protect

June 29 @ 7:15 PM - 9:00 PM

## Q&A

**Q1: A question for Mike at MUD: Who owned the redundant bowling greens and how did you come to take ownership? How would you advise dealing with objection from large organisations that aren't being collaborative or practical about the use of the space?**

**Mike:** The council and the facilities were already out of use which was an important factor – we didn't have anyone else keen to really utilise it. Another has popped up in Levenshulme and another in Longsight. We've identified 14 across Manchester and are working with the council to see if we can take them on.

Option 1: "Find someone who will give you the keys and just do it".

Option 2: Having community support is vital. If the people, the community and the school is behind you, this can be really powerful. If you can really identify the wider benefit and have lots of voices supporting you, the authorities are much more likely to listen to your request!

**Q2: To Kell, what's the difference between aquaponics and hydroponics?**

**Kell:** They are very similar except that in aquaponics the critical addition is the presence of the fish. The fish feed the plants within a tank that pumps water round. This means it has a cost saving (no need to purchase fertilizer), organic, and a circular farming system.

**Q3: Can the panel tell us how we can encourage the community and the councils to invest in wildlife supporting activities - e.g. no mow May, leaving hedgerows. What is the best technique to get people involved?**

**Adam:** Community organising is an approach we use. Taking the lead from the community and understanding what is important for them to deliver - without it things fall apart. It's not always necessarily driving the topic that we think is the priority but looking for the more tangential benefits to the community, and what they want to drive is a great way to have wider buy in. For example, if there is no access to foodbanks, then we might focus on a community garden. Getting councils onboard is almost always done by saving money - find a cost saving or a the way to appeal to the councils too and you've got a winner.

**Mike:** I'd echo what Adam is saying - appealing to a wider audience has been such a big part of the success of MUD. All of the things that come with buying food - festivals, social events, bringing people together - it gives the opportunity to find people who care and to tell them about what you are doing and it pull them in. We're also working with the UoM at the moment and have found that collaborating with other, well-established organisations can gets the ear of the councils. So think about how you can use the influence of other interested parties.

**Nick:** It's important for us at the council to really see the wider impact. A good business case is important to help with credibility but then to have that in combination with the passion from the local community is a real multiplier.

**Q4: To Mike, can you tell us more about the “no dig” theory?**

It is what is says on the tin - no digging into the soil that you have but instead building the soil on top. There are various methods, but we follow teachings of Charles Dowden. Part of the reason for doing this is because of what we started with on the bowling green. The man-made green had only about 1ft of topsoil with compacted grass and sand underneath. It's all still there in place but we have instead built topsoil.

First, we laid a mulch of cardboard to kill off the grass, then built up on top with a series of soil, woodchip, and leaves from the park. Soil rotations and cover crops are an important part of building the soil health year on year and means we don't have to plough and destroy the important networks within the soil. It's a great technique because it makes for healthier soil and less work for us too!

**Q5: What techniques does the panel find are best for getting people involved and engaged? Is it word of mouth, social media etc. How do people know where to go?**

**Kell:** For us it has been very local. We rely on other groups and connectivity in the community. A social media presence e.g., Instagram is helpful - that's how I found MUD.

**Mike:** Feed people! We have a community lunch on a Friday for anyone and it's free. People love endless cups of tea!

**Adam:** For us, most of our volunteers are already interested. We have a strong interest from a certain demographic - often middle aged, middle class - but we're looking at how to extend. A big part of this is letting people do what they care about. We let them lead but give advice that they can use and help them build momentum in their own projects. Think about what your volunteer wants from you, not just what you want from your volunteer.

**Q6: What role is played by our larger land-owning institutions? I'm concerned about the frequency at which are grasslands are mowed and cleared. Do you think the damage done to our pollinators can be reversed without council and landowner support?**

**Adam:** We work closely with Cheshire East council. They're working hard to meet carbon neutrality objectives and we have found they want to plant trees and use the offset approach. They are passionate and have reached out to us for support in running community days so we're looking at how we can go back up the biodiversity hierarchy and help educate them. We are looking at trialing “no mow” policies and looking at how to restore wildflower meadows and grasslands in parks and on verges and they're now aiming for a coverage of 10 hectares. Change is happening and people are getting clued up. We're finding that we are knocking on open doors so there is positivity and momentum however the speed is the challenge. It's hard to steer a tanker but it's starting!

We don't think it's possible to do it without local authorities. Local authorities have a massive opportunity in influencing communities and that's where we need their support most.

**Nick:** Council are large and complex organisations with a lot of sometimes conflicting priorities. We have to look at it holistically - health and safety, costs, and many other considerations but at the same time, the urgency is recognised. We need to build awareness internally of how important it is and build momentum with neighbouring councils to get past those tipping points.

**Q7: Adam, what stage are we at with the development in Macclesfield on building on the peat bog?**

As a bit of context, Danes Moss is the largest lowland bog in Cheshire with huge peat storage and lots of biodiversity. The plans are to build 900 homes, shops and schools on this area and so there is a lot of opposition. Save Dane Moss are doing an incredible campaign – they even got a local brewery to make a beer and donate 10p per pint! <https://savedanesmoss.com/>

There is a policy set out by the council to say that is 5000 people signed a petition, then it would be debated with the council. We had 7000 signatories on a petition to scrap the development. It was handed in 2 weeks ago so Cheshire East will verify the signatures and the next step is in the chambers having a discussion and debate.

We feel quite positive as there is a large amount of community pressure. Of a population of 30,000 people it's a huge proportion of the electorate that care - so watch this space.

**Q8: Please can I have some advice on what I can do on how to encourage pollinators and make the most of my terrace garden/yard?**

**Kell:** You can do so much with a yard! Look up straw bale planting – this is a great option for small spaces.

**Damson:** Diversity is key for pollinators. If you have plants that flower all year, your garden will be alive with pollinators so think about how you can introduce them into the space. Don't worry about weeds too! They can be a great support for lots of pollinators.

**Mike:** Don't do any weeding! I go for a “manicured weeds” look. Also, provide a source of water - lots of insects, birds, bees are looking for a drink so you can help them out that way too.

**Adam:** I agree with Mike and would recommend mini ponds. Really easy to do - get an old washing up bowl, add some stones and water and let the insects enjoy it. It's also important to think about moths and butterflies and think about the start of their lifecycle too. You need to recruit caterpillars this year for butterflies next year so always good to have a think about how to support them too.

In addition to advice on pollinators, Rewilding Stockport has resources on hedgehog highways, wildflower seed packs and swift boxes and how to make the most of your space, no matter the size - visit <https://www.cheshirewildlifetrust.org.uk/take-action/rewildingstockport> for all the info!