

# MIDDLE MARCHES COMMUNITY LAND TRUST

## JANUARY 2022 NEWSLETTER

### Excerpts from 'A Review of 2021'

*Tim Selman (Secretary)*

The last year has been a strange one, Covid has knocked back many of the things we had expected to be doing, most especially all of our direct contact, events and outreach. However we have managed to make some progress towards our original goals. The space created has allowed us to work on important things we needed in terms of our governance and organisation, and to think about our priorities for the next few years within our first Business Plan

#### **What we were set up to do**

The *Middle Marches Community Land Trust* (MMCLT) was launched in April 2019, to provide the vehicle for local ownership of land, but also to fulfil a wider agenda. We want to act as a catalyst that helps unlock new ideas and to find practical solutions that can sustain our landscape, its wildlife and our communities into the future. We also see our role as helping develop a dialogue and debate to explore ways to make the transition we need happen, part of this is by developing an information hub. MMCLT is certainly not here to duplicate or repeat the work of others, but to add capacity and value to the existing set of organisations, communities and individuals working across the area. The Middle Marches is centred on the Shropshire Hills, but extends into Wales and along its borders. Within this area we would like to create a better connected landscape; for wildlife, our communities, for food and farming. In practice this means creating and linking key habitats, provide a haven for wildlife and better connectivity. We also aim to promote regenerative agriculture and stimulate local food and wood production and simple direct supply chains.

#### **What we have achieved this year**

Over the last year we have made some progress, most particularly by acquiring two pieces of land. Both of these purchases proved our model in different ways, using community energy and interest to acquire land and then to manage it sympathetically to create a more biodiverse and productive landscape.

Cudwell Meadow: MMCLT has worked with *Stretton Wetlands Interest Group* to buy a three-acre field on the edge of Church Stretton called Cudwell Meadow. A public appeal raised £25,000 in under four months and virtually all the donations were given by local people. Management carried out involved haymaking followed by grazing and discussions over management of the held with the Environment Agency over management of the watercourse.

Norbury Hill: sitting between the Stiperstones and Long Mind, is an important part of the Shropshire Hills landscape. Our bid to buy half of the 94 acres up on Norbury Hill was successful. The purchase eventually was completed in mid-2021. In 2021 a full ecological survey has been undertaken, and from this a comprehensive management plan is being developed, with a particular target to enable Curlew to breed over the coming years. It is also a stronghold for the Small pearl bordered fritillary butterfly and many unusual wetland plants. Grazing management has been continued, bracken management started, visits for shareholders undertaken.

Nind: We had hoped to have obtained a lease on a 10 acre site just north of Bishop's Castle, which has not been managed for over 20 years. This should still happen in 2022 subject to a number of conditions being fulfilled.

Marches Grow Local (MGL): MGL are still exploring ways to develop a new food project. We have been blessed to be at the heart of a strong working network including *Stepping Stones Partnership*,

especially the *National Trust* and *Natural England*, the *AONB Partnership*, *Community Wildlife Groups* and a number of landowners, farmers and local estates who have been very supportive and constructive. We have been very grateful to receive funding in 2021 from *Stepping Stones* which will help MMCLT greatly. Our desire to act as an information hub is still alive, and after a strong start, Covid intervened, so this has obviously been less face to face and more virtual. This has begun through creating a web based green pages that promotes local skills and businesses, trades and products.

### **Looking forward - what we want to do in 2022**

Although this year has seen reduced activity, we have much planned for MMCLT. We have produced a first Business Plan which gives us a structure for the next three years. We would recommend that you look at this to get a flavour of what we want to do. Some key things are:-

- Manage the two sites we have and ensure we access funding from grants and rents to help create income.
- Sign an agreement at Nind.
- Start to run events and activities again, including a conference in late 2022.
- Update and develop our website.
- Reinstatement of our programme of visits and discussions concerning land management
- Develop our information hub further.
- Do more work to create a stable and sustainable organisation via fund raising, income generation and external funding.

### **Thank you !**

It has been a productive first year for MMCLT. We have made significant progress in a short time, and it gives us great confidence and positivity that there is support for and a place for our organisation in the area. We thank you hugely for all of your support, and hope we can continue to make positive progress in 2022.

You can read the full text of Tim's Report here . . <https://middlemarchescommunitylandtrust.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2022/01/The-Middle-Marches-Community-Land-Trust-Annual-Review-2021.pdf>

### **MMCLT'S 2021 AGM**

If you were unable to attend the AGM (on a freezing November day in an unheated 3 Tuns pub) you can read the proceedings now in the warmth of your home . . .

<https://middlemarchescommunitylandtrust.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2022/01/010-MMCLT-AGM-Minutes-27Nov21-v2.docx>

### **Report from our Treasurer**

*Louise Robbins*

First of all apologies that the business plan budget figures ([300921 MMCLT Business Plan \(middlemarchescommunitylandtrust.org.uk\)](https://middlemarchescommunitylandtrust.org.uk)) are not quite right - I'm blaming my 'newby' status. These need to show the income from grazing and land grants set against the site to which they apply. Hopefully the updated figures will be there by the time this goes to press. We have been, and are being, very successful in raising money via grants, etc, for the development of the land, the web page (Hub) and other projects. However, the one area which is a little unloved, is the general pot for admin and all the other less glamorous but necessary parts of running a Trust. Therefore I would like to appeal to our members and supporters to assist us in the following ways:-

### **Easyfundraising**

We have registered on a website called 'easyfundraising', this turns your everyday on-line shopping into **FREE** donations when you use them to shop with over 6,000 retailers such as eBay, John Lewis & Partners, Argos, ASOS and Booking.com. Retailers then make a small donation to say 'thank you' and 'easyfundraising' gives those free funds to our cause.

If you'd like to help in this way then please use the following link: *Middle Marches Community Land Trust Fundraising | Easyfundraising* to set up an account (very quick and easy, they don't ask for much info). Then the easiest way to ensure that the MMCLT benefit from your purchases is to: click on the "Donation Reminder" option - download the extension, and then a little box pops-up whenever you are using a Supplier that will donate to us.

### **Paypal**

For those who use 'paypal' there is an easy way to make a small donation every now and again. Log into your 'paypal' account and on the first page, a little way down on the right, there is the option to "set your favourite charity" and we appear on the list. Select *Middle Marches Community Land Trust* and then, when you make a payment using 'paypal' there will be the option to donate a £1.00. It's optional and please don't feel you need to do it every time. The small print says that 'paypal' covers all fees so we get the full amount (I am currently testing this).

### **Regular donations**

For those who can help by making a small monthly donation this is available on our website. Just click on the *Donate* option on the top menu bar, type in a modest amount and then tick the box to make a monthly donation.

If you require any assistance with any of the above, email me at [louise.robbs@btinternet.com](mailto:louise.robbs@btinternet.com) and I'll do my best to help.

Jonathan and I will be looking at other ways to raise money for our general reserves in the coming months and I shall report back.

The other way to ensure our general reserves stay healthy is to reduce the cost of admin and to facilitate this, the collection of 'giftaid' and the maintenance of our donation accounts through 'Paypal' and 'Stripe' have been brought in-house and will be dealt with by me.



### **HEDGES**

*How sad on this October day  
To see our hedges shorn away.  
Small creatures would have liked to eat,  
The hawthorn berries, rose hips sweet,  
Blackberries and nuts and sloes,  
But through the blades the banquet goes.  
Won't somebody heed our words,  
And leave the berries for the birds.*

Pam Ayres

## **STEPPING STONES FUNDING FOR MMCLT**

by Rob Rowe

Good news for us and others is that the *Stepping Stones* Project has been successful in receiving a substantial sum of money from the *Green Recovery Challenge Fund* for the coming year.

This is DEFRA money that is administered by the *National Lottery Fund*. MMCLT is one of the beneficiaries of this along with other local groups undertaking a wide range of projects.

The funding is for one year and will help us with:-

- Covering our general admin costs and paying towards upkeep of our website;
- Developing our - Hub;
- The practical work of fencing, bracken clearance and an interpretation board on Norbury Hill;
- Management work and an interpretation board at Cudwell Meadow;
- Running a conference for local farmers and landowners.

To those who have not come across it the *Stepping Stones* Project is a programme spearheaded by the *National Trust* in partnership with other local groups.

It has a 50-year vision for natural habitats in the Shropshire Hills to be restored, healthy and connected, and for the people who live, work and play in this remarkable area to understand and support our efforts. It covers a total area of 220km<sup>2</sup> within the *Shropshire Hills Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty* (AONB), and includes two major sites of conservation importance: Long Mynd and the Stiperstones. The aim is to connect wildlife habitats by strengthening or creating 'stepping stones' and corridors. In practice, this means linking areas of heathland, flower-rich grasslands and broad-leaved woodland by a network of wildlife-rich hedgerows, road verges, hillsides and streamside wetlands.

If you would like more information about the *Stepping Stones* Project or would like to receive the newsletter please contact Charlie Bell: [charlie.bell@nationaltrust.org.uk](mailto:charlie.bell@nationaltrust.org.uk)

### **Plantlife**

Janet Cobb

Plantlife is a British conservation charity working nationally and internationally to save threatened wild flowers, plants and fungi. We own nearly 4,500 acres of nature reserve across England, Scotland and Wales. We have 11,000 members and supporters. Our team of dedicated conservation experts work with landowners, businesses, conservation organisations, community groups and governments, pushing boundaries to save our rarest flora and ensure familiar flowers and plants continue to thrive. Lots of events are listed here:-

<https://www.plantlife.org.uk/uk/discover-wild-plants-nature/spring-into-action>

Such as:-

#### **February 2nd**

##### **11:00am-12:00pm: An introduction to plant identification: parts of a plant**

Plant identification can feel tricky. We explore the terminology needed to give us confidence to enjoy observing plants and making identifications.

**6:00pm -7:30pm: From lawns to landscapes** We take 5 wild plants common to our lawns or local green spaces and ask, 'What are their identification features?' We then use those features to identify similar plants, thereby building our identification skills



## Some New Year thoughts to help motivate us and others in 2022 ???

John Bacon

Earth the goldilocks planet - are we and our ecosystems unique in the universe?! So far, no other similar planets have been found, though the hunt is on. Meanwhile should we value it more? The answer from the evidence presented below is a resounding 'yes'. It is a rare planet that has complex life.

This last week we have seen the launch of the James Webb deep space telescope. It is replacing the Hubble telescope that has provided such amazing pictures and insight into our Milky Way Galaxy and the Universe. Hopefully the James Webb telescope will deploy successfully 1.5 million kms from Earth and look further away at light/energy originating nearer 13.8 billion years ago. If you are like me it takes quite a bit to get one's head around that!

So, over the New Year I pulled Michio Kaku's 2005 book 'Parallel World's' off the bookshelf and in Chapter 8, page 246, I came across this statement:-

***“In order to create life, a planet must have been relatively stable for hundreds of millions of years. But a world that is stable for hundreds of millions of years is astonishingly difficult to make.”***

That it has been stable is apparently a very, very, very, very, very, very unlikely combination of physical factors that have combined to warrant the description of our Planet Earth as a 'goldilocks planet', capable of supporting complex life. Take for instance:-

- **Distance from the Sun:** if further away the oceans would freeze, if closer then water would boil away. Water is essential for the creation of life on Earth;
- **Size of the Moon:** our Moon is just the right size to stabilise Earth's orbit. If it were smaller the Earth's spin would accumulate perturbations causing its wobbles to increase and leading to climate extremes that would have made life impossible;
- **The presence of Jupiter:** is fortuitous, as its gravity helps fling asteroids into outer space. Jupiter too is just the right size to do this, and did this in the earlier stages of our galaxy;
- **Size of the Earth:** if Earth was a bit smaller its gravity would be so weak that it could not keep its oxygen. If it was larger it would retain primordial poisonous gasses making life impossible. It is just the right size to keep an atmosphere beneficial for life;
- **Other planetary orbits:** all orbits except for Pluto are nearly circular meaning that planetary impacts are rare. This means that Earth will not come close to any gas giants whose gravity could disrupt Earth's orbit, making life impossible;
- **Milky Way location:** Earth is two-thirds of the way from the centre of our galaxy so we are far enough away from the black-hole at its centre to avoid radiation that would have killed life. If we were too far out there would not be enough higher elements to create life;
- **Other identified goldilocks zones present on Earth:** we have just the right amount of: oceans, plate tectonics, oxygen content, heat content, axis tilt for intelligent life to form.

Sir Martin Rees, Astronomer Royal, had described the following additional, very fundamental, physical factors: (*Paraphrased from very lengthy descriptions and justifications in Kaku's book*):

1. **Hydrogen (EPSILON = a small quantity): 0.007** is the relatively tiny amount of hydrogen which converts to helium via fusion in the 'big bang'. If it was **0.006** this would weaken the nuclear force and protons and neutrons would not bind together; deuterium could not form and the heavier elements would not have been created in the stars; the atoms of our bodies could not have formed and the entire universe would have dissolved into hydrogen. If it was **0.008** fusion

would have been so rapid that no hydrogen would have survived the 'big-bang' and there would be no stars to give energy to the planets. A shift of 4% in the nuclear force would have made the formation of carbon impossible, making 'carbon life' (i.e US) impossible.

2. **Electric Force ÷ by Gravity ( $N = 10^{36}$ ):** this shows how weak gravity is. If it was even weaker stars could not condense and create the enormous temperatures necessary for fusion; hence stars would not shine and the planets would plunge into freezing darkness. If gravity were a bit stronger the stars would heat up too fast and they would burn up their fuel so quickly that life could never get started.
3. **The relative density of the Universe ( $\Omega = 10^{15}$  unity):** if this was too small then the universe would have expanded and cooled too fast. If it was too large then the universe would have collapsed before life could start. At one second after the 'big bang'  $\Omega$  cannot have differed from unity by more than one part in a million billion (one in  $10^{15}$ ) in order that now after 10 billion years the Universe is still expanding.
4. **The cosmological constant – the acceleration of the Universe ( $\Lambda$ ):** if it was just a few times larger the anti-gravity it would create would blow the Universe apart, freeze it and make life impossible. If it was negative the Universe would have contracted violently into a big crunch, too soon for life to form. So, like  $\Omega$  it needed to be in a narrow band of values.
5. **Amplitude of irregularities in the cosmic microwave background ( $Q = 10^5$ ):** if this number was a bit smaller the Universe would be extremely uniform, a lifeless mass of dust and gas, which would never condense into stars and galaxies. It would be dark, uniform and featureless. If  $Q$  was larger then matter would have condensed earlier into huge super-galactic structures. These great blobs of matter would have condensed into huge black holes and planetary systems would have been impossible.
6. **The number of spatial dimensions ( $D = 3$ ):** if space is one dimensional particles cannot stick together so complex organisms cannot form; if space is two-dimensional then 'flat' organisms would probably disintegrate. Intelligence is not thought to exist in fewer than 3 dimensions – our own brain consists of 100 billion neurons with each neuron connected to 10,000 others so needs the space of a third dimension. In four space dimensions planets are not stable in their orbits around their Sun as Newton's inverse square law is replaced by an inverse cube law. So three dimensions is what makes us possible.  
This then leads on to a further discussion of do 'multi-verses' exist where other life can have formed? This is still being debated by some very clever physicists!

So, in the meantime, it is clear that Planet Earth is very unusual and properly represents a 'Goldilocks Planet' which has allowed complex life to develop over a very, very long timescale. It would be such a pity if we further trash it. This all provides me with motivation for action in 2022!

There are several websites that look at 'goldilocks' Earth. This one is pretty good:

<https://www.science.org.au/curious/space-time/goldilocks-planet>

... and this one from NASA looking at the hunt for life on exo-planets similar to Earth.

<https://exoplanets.nasa.gov/resources/323/goldilocks-zone/>

The hunt is on... but for now Earth is the only one we know about supporting complex life!

Our young people are holding placards saying: "There is no Earth 2".

### **Bilberry Bumblebee (*Bombus monticola*) in Shropshire**

Debbie Vivers

The Bilberry bumblebee is particularly attractive, with bright yellow bands on the thorax and a rich orange-red tail covering around two-thirds of the abdomen. Depending on seasonal weather, queens

emerge from hibernation during April, with workers present from mid-May onwards followed by males and new queens from the end of July up until September.

Combined records between 1990 and 2020 from David Williams, the Bumblebees on the Mynd project, and various datasets displayed on the National Biodiversity Network Atlas show the Bilberry bumblebee is present on the Long Mynd and the Stiperstones. In this area it is associated with dwarf shrub heath (65% of records) containing bilberry (*Vaccinium myrtillus*) and heathers (*Calluna vulgaris* and *Erica* spp.) with an optimal altitude zone of 390-500m (Andrew Perry, *Stepping Stones Species Analysis 2021*). This analysis also shows 91% of records are within 300m of heathland, highlighting the importance of having a continuation of nectar sources in the early spring and between spring flowering of the bilberry and late summer flowering of the heathers. Other frequently used nectar sources include willow (*Salix* spp.) and common gorse (*Ulex europaeus*) followed by marsh thistle (*Cirsium palustre*) and bramble (*Rubus fruticosus*) (studies by David Williams on the Long Mynd)

The Bumblebees on the Mynd project set up BeeWalk survey transects (a Bumblebee Conservation Trust, BBCT, monitoring scheme) in 2021 on two flowering meadows adjacent to the Long Mynd. These transects will provide long-term data collection for analysis, but the raw data for 2021 produced 18 individual records of the Bilberry Bumblebee foraging in meadows. The flowers visited included bird's-foot trefoil (*Lotus corniculatus*), red and white clover (*Trifolium pratense* & *T. repens*), lesser trefoil (*Trifolium dubium*), yellow rattle (*Rhinanthus minor*), common cat's-ear (*Hypochaeris radicata*) and thistles. With sufficient volunteers we plan to continue these two meadow transects with the addition of 4 heath transects in 2022.

Worldwide, bumblebee species are centred on the North Temperate Zone, where it is cool enough for bumblebees to fly without overheating. BBCT classify the Bilberry bumblebee as a 'less common species' in Britain because it tends to be more localised, having a limited distribution across the UK but may be quite plentiful in the areas where it is found. This is, in part, due to it having a strong association with the bilberry flower. However, recent changes in the distribution of the Bilberry bumblebee across its range are consistent with a warming climate and the species has been shown to have lower heat tolerance than species that inhabit lower altitudes. In the past it was widespread in north and western Britain, but its population has declined. The main causes of this decline are thought to be related to habitat loss and degradation, both of which reduce or eliminate the flowering plants it relies on. (Natural England publications; Mountain (Bilberry) Bumblebee, 2016)

Pollinating the Peak was an ambitious Bumblebee Conservation Trust natural heritage project running between 2018 and 2021. Based in Derbyshire, the aims were raising awareness of the links between our countryside, food and bumblebees. The Bilberry bumblebee (*Bombus monticola*) is the jewel of the Peak District. By inspiring public action the project is helping to secure the future of the Bilberry bumblebee (a Peak District National Park priority species) and other local bumblebees by improving favourable habitat and monitoring bumblebee populations. In 2021, this project won the National Lottery Project of the Year Award.

Everyone can play a part in the conservation of bumblebees in Shropshire. Get involved with planting and conservation for pollinators via the **Stepping Stones Project**, **Bee kind** or the **Marches Meadow Group**. Start recording the pollinators in your garden for the **UK Pollinator Monitoring Scheme** (POMS FIT count) or find out if your village is on the **Buglife B-lines** and set up your own local project. If you are confident with learning how to identify bees, then research the Bilberry bumblebee with the **Bumblebee Conservation Trust** and check other bumblebees with similar colour markings. You can use the **Blooms for Bees** app or **What's that Bumblebee** app and then add to our knowledge by taking a photograph and placing a record on **iRecord**. If you are willing to undertake training and commit to volunteering for a **BeeWalk** transect, then get in touch with the **Stepping Stones Project** or ask **Shropshire Wildlife Trust** what they are doing in your area. Maybe you could set up your own **BeeWalk** transect? Every action counts, but re-establishing flower rich corridors is the key to supporting all

pollinators, bringing you the joy of watching them and keeping the beautiful Bilberry Bumblebee in Shropshire.

### **Bilberry Bumblebee and other links**

Bumblebee Conservation Trust

<https://www.bumblebeeconservation.org/red-tailed-bumblebees/bilberry-bumblebee/>

Pollinating the Peak (BBCT)

<https://www.bumblebeeconservation.org/pollinating-the-peak/>

Bumblebees on the Mynd 2020 report

<https://jennifer-jones-ecology.blogspot.com/2021/05/bilberry-bumblebees-and-national-trust.html>

Natural England: climate and the bilberry bumblebee

<http://publications.naturalengland.org.uk/file/4849146764984320>

### **A brief explanation of Conservation Covenants and how they are expected to work.**

*John Bacon*

At the MMCLT's AGM in December 2021 brief mention was made of 'Conservation Covenants' (CC's) being applied to land purchases by the CLT for the long-term protection of wildlife, biodiversity and landscape features no matter what happened to the CLT in the future.

The basic idea for CCs are that a landowner may enter into a legally binding agreement with another 'approved body' to give long-term protection to natural heritage and wildlife conservation features of the land. This idea has been around for a very long time. For example The National Trust Act of 1937, Chapter 1 vii, para 8 (\*) enabled the NT to accept such covenants from a landowner. Such covenants can variously be used to protect against specified criteria - e.g. land development, land use change, loss of habitats and biodiversity (\*\*).

For a long time private landowners have sought the ability to offer such legally binding covenants to a greater range of land holding charities, OR, even just to have them legally attached to their land so that in the event of the land ownership being transferred, or upon their death, they are revealed by pre-contract legal searches of the Local Land Charges Register / Land Registry searches. Such covenants become legally binding on any future owner of the land and ensure that specified land management improvements carried out over the years are protected and secured into the future.

At long last, and after much lobbying, the recently enacted 9th November 2021 Environment Act contains a provision for CCs. There are 10 main measures in the Act, CCs are No 7.

1. Local Nature Recovery Strategies (LNRS's)
2. Biodiversity net gain
3. Species conservation and protected site strategies
4. A strengthened biodiversity duty
5. Wildlife licensing
6. Duty to consult - trees.
7. **Conservation covenants**
8. Nature restoration – powers to re-align our nature protection rules with our ambition
9. Strengthening forestry enforcement measures
10. Due diligence



<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/environment-bill-2020/10-march-2020-nature-and-conservation-covenants-parts-6-and-7#further-information>

### **"Measure 7. Conservation covenants:**

*These are voluntary but legally binding agreements between a landowner and a designated 'responsible body' such as a conservation charity, public body or for-profit body to conserve the natural or heritage features of the land.*

*Conservation covenants can contain positive and restrictive obligations to fulfil conservation objectives for the public good. They are a flexible tool – the parties can negotiate the terms (including the duration) of a conservation covenant to suit their circumstances. Generally, they will bind subsequent landowners and therefore have the potential to deliver long-lasting conservation benefits.*

*Conservation covenants can be used to secure the benefits delivered by biodiversity net gain and other measures for the long term."*

The actual sections of the Act are below. By clicking on each line more detail becomes available. Fuller details of how they are expected to work can be found at this website: <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2021/30/contents/enacted>

### **[PART 7 Conservation covenants](#)**

1. [Creation of conservation covenant](#)
  1. [117.Conservation covenant agreements](#)
  2. [118.Conservation covenants](#)
  3. [119.Responsible bodies](#)
2. [Effect of conservation covenant](#)
  1. [120.Local land charge](#)
  2. [121.Duration of obligation under conservation covenant](#)
  3. [122.Benefit and burden of obligation of landowner](#)
  4. [123.Benefit of obligation of responsible body](#)
3. [Breach and enforcement](#)
  1. [124.Breach of obligation](#)
  2. [125.Enforcement of obligation](#)
  3. [126.Defences to breach of obligation](#)
4. [Discharge and modification](#)
  1. [127.Discharge of obligation of landowner by agreement](#)
  2. [128.Discharge of obligation of responsible body by agreement](#)
  3. [129.Modification of obligation by agreement](#)
  4. [130.Discharge or modification of obligation by Upper Tribunal](#)
5. [Replacement etc of responsible body](#)
  1. [131.Power of responsible body to appoint replacement](#)
  2. [132.Body ceasing to be a responsible body](#)
6. [Miscellaneous](#)
  1. [133.Effect of acquisition or disposal of affected land by responsible body](#)
  2. [134.Effect of deemed surrender and re-grant of qualifying estate](#)
  3. [135.Declarations about obligations under conservation covenants](#)
  4. [136.Duty of responsible bodies to make annual return](#)
7. [Supplementary](#)
  1. [137.Crown application](#)
  2. [138.Index of defined terms in Part 7](#)
  3. [139.Consequential amendments relating to Part 7](#)

Many of us had hoped that CCs could be brought in with a minimum of red-tape. Clearly it has not been possible to make a legally binding and water-tight arrangement without some belt-and-braces provisions. However it is great that this provision now exists for a much larger number of organisations and it is hoped that the MMCLT can make good use of it to secure our work into the future.

Best wishes to the MMCLT for 2022.

John Bacon

(\* ) NT Act 1937 Ch 1 vii, Para 8. *"Where any person is willing to agree with the National Trust that any land or any part thereof shall so far as his interest in the land enables him to bind it be made subject either permanently or for a specified period to conditions restricting the planning development or use thereof in any manner the National Trust may if it thinks fit enter into an agreement with him or accept a covenant from him to that effect and shall have power to enforce such agreement or covenant against persons deriving title under him in the like manner and to the like extent as if the National Trust were possessed of or entitled to or interested in adjacent land and as if the agreement or covenant had been and had been expressed to be entered into for the benefit of that adjacent land".*

(\*\*) As the NT's Northumberland Coastal Warden from 1971-5 I frequently used covenants granted to the NT by local landowners to prevent harmful and illegal activities on this stunning biodiverse heritage-coastline of dunes, cliffs and headlands between Amble and Bamburgh. They helped enormously.

## **Meadows could be our secret weapon in the fight against climate change**

*New Scientist*

HUMANITY'S connections to grasslands run deep. Our ideas of the perfect habitat lean heavily on the meadow, brimming with bumblebees and butterflies flitting between wild flowers: the perfect idyll. As the 13th-century Persian poet Rumi wrote: "When the soul lies down in that grass, the world is too full to talk about."

Permanent grasslands hold about a [third of Earth's terrestrial carbon](#), meaning they can't be overlooked when we talk about slowing climate change. More grasslands, and especially more biodiverse ones, means [more natural carbon storage](#). Yet instead of expanding these habitats, we risk losing them entirely.

The past 100 years has seen this terrain destroyed on a terrifying scale. Since the beginning of the 20th century, the UK alone has lost at least [97 per cent of its meadows](#). Tall grass prairie in the US once covered 170 million acres, less than [4 per cent of which survives](#). Pollinators, such as butterflies and bumblebees, that create and depend on these biodiverse environments are also at risk.

Often, grasslands are seen as empty spaces. They are there to be ploughed and sown and built on. Their destruction isn't met with the same angst as deforestation by the public or politicians. While one of the goals of the COP26 climate conference is the halting of deforestation, there is no such stated aim to protect meadows, savannahs and steppes.

That is why my organisation, the Bumblebee Conservation Trust, has joined a group to push the protection and restoration of species-rich grasslands to the top of the global political agenda. The Grasslands+ coalition will be led by UK charities Plantlife, Butterfly Conservation and the trust I head, and together we will advocate for the symbiosis of plants, pollinators and people.

While we are all familiar with the idea of forests as Earth's "lungs", reforestation isn't the sole or simple solution to the problems we face. Mass planting of trees isn't feasible in many human-inhabited areas of the world, and a lot of land that may have had potential for forestry is ultimately lost to grazing and cultivation. On the other hand, even small mown and grazed meadows contain a greater diversity of

flora and fauna than equivalent areas of forest.

At either extreme of grassland management – mown short or left long – there are species that thrive. A mosaic of approaches can aid species in both, as well as those that like something in between. Even long-grass movements such as Plantlife’s “No Mow May” advocate mowing less and at the right time rather than not at all. This means grasslands can provide an ideal environment for us to enjoy as places to eat, work and play in nature, while also providing the essential functions of carbon sequestration and oxygen-releasing photosynthesis.

One recent [study suggests that the cultivation of species-rich grasslands on degraded and deserted farmland](#), of which there are 430 million hectares globally, could “greatly increase carbon capture and storage rates on degraded and abandoned agricultural land”.

It is vital that world leaders at the COP26 summit put international protections for grassland on the agenda, to mitigate the effects of climate change, increase biodiversity and ensure that these areas of natural beauty are preserved for future generations to enjoy. Thousands of our members and supporters are now writing to their elected representatives to demand recognition of these precious places and their essential role in the fight against global warming and biodiversity loss.

It would be tragic if, in the rush for big solutions to our big problems, the power of the modest wild grasses and flowers, with their bumblebees and butterflies, was overlooked.

### **Restore Shropshire’s Verges Project**

*Janet Cobb*

Shropshire’s verges have huge wildlife potential. They could be wonderful linear meadows, providing nectar for pollinators and food and shelter for small mammals, birds and other invertebrates. Sadly, many of them are not managed for wildlife in this way. They are regularly cut, with the cuttings left in situ, which encourages rank vegetation such as nettles, brambles and hogweed to develop. The remaining verges that do still have a diversity of flowering plants are often cut far too early, removing the flowers and preventing them setting seed.

Restoring Shropshire’s Verges Project (RSVP) has been in progress for several years now. Individuals have been busy: campaigning for Shropshire Council to change their verge management policy, taking on the management of various ‘demonstration verges’ in south Shropshire, giving talks to local groups on the importance of verges, and raising awareness of local people.”

Janet will be giving a talk on the RSVP project in the Bishop’s Castle Town Hall at 7 p.m on Thursday, 10<sup>th</sup> February (Entry Free).

You can find some RSVP Case Studies here [Latest News | Middle Marches Community Land Trust](#)

And you might some some Plantlife events of interest here

<https://www.plantlife.org.uk/uk/discover-wild-plants-nature/spring-into-action>

### **MARCHES GROW LOCAL**

You can find MGL’s January Newsletter here <https://www.abbrv.uk/4Ss>

And their ‘Buy Local’ information here: <https://bit.ly/3ofAQq4>