

MIDDLE MARCHES

COMMUNITY LAND TRUST

Our Regenerative Agriculture conference, 6th May 2022

When Middle Marches Community Land Trust (CLT) was formed as a community-owned organisation a little over two years ago, this was in part to encourage local action for wildlife and greater recognition of the role those natural habitats can play in providing clean water, reducing flooding, locking up carbon and supporting pollinators, sometimes grouped together and termed natural capital.

Such processes can be greatly assisted by the adoption of more sustainable systems of farming, which use less man-made inputs and produce less but higher quality outputs **to improve overall profitability**, sometimes termed 'regenerative agriculture.'

Regenerative agriculture would also contribute to lowering greenhouse gas emissions from agriculture which in 2019 comprised 10% of the national total. Middle Marches CLT also supports 'Marches Grow Local' (further information on our website).

At the same time following Brexit, the Government is changing the way that agriculture is supported financially in the UK and in future

there will be schemes where farmers and landowners receive payments for practices that maintain and support wildlife habitats and natural processes.

This is a significant change for farmers, landowners and local communities which raises many questions which would benefit from informed discussion.

One of the other aims of Middle Marches Community Land Trust was to act as 'a catalyst for change' and it is in this spirit that we are hosting the regenerative agriculture conference on 6th May in Norbury, Shropshire, bringing together a diverse range of delegates including farmers, estate managers, politicians, ecologists and river management specialists providing an opportunity for networking and an exchange of ideas and future support.

Dr R J Keymer
Chair, Middle Marches CLT

More on our conference at:
middlemarchescommunitylandtrust.org.uk/conference



News from Norbury Hill

Right now on the top of Norbury Hill the Skylarks are singing and the Meadow Pipits are displaying and in the much warmer valley below Warblers, Linnets and Stonechats are calling. On the Goat Willow the early bumble bee queens are out feeding on nectar and pollen. Along the top boundary wall Common Whitlow Grass (which is not a grass but a tiny annual - a spring ephemeral of the cabbage family), forms drifts of tiny white flowers on the poor rocky ground and wall tops.

On Norbury this spring we have planted a handful of silver birch, holly, crab apple and hawthorn on a steep south facing slope just below the old rabbit warren where there are already a few trees and shrubs.

This warren (which we are told is a very good example) was surveyed recently as part of the Corndon and Stiperstones landscape scheme. A full and detailed report can be found by following the link below; it is the first article.

<https://bit.ly/3jNDRV6>

This landscape feature is covered, like much of our land on Norbury Hill, in dense bracken so the trees will be marked with tall canes to enable us to find and weed them later in the summer.

Background note:

47 acres (19ha) of Norbury Hill was acquired by the Middle Marches Community Land Trust in May 2021. Situated a mile north of the village of Norbury in south-west Shropshire, Norbury Hill has been described as 'the largest stepping stone' between two important sites of conservation, the Long Mynd and the Stiperstones.

The bracken forms an almost complete monoculture at present, but bramble grows through and occasional patches of Bluebell and Greater Stitchwort survive. Some of the most successful tree planting I ever did was in thick bracken where we planted strong 4 foot tall Oaks. The planting was easy in good deep soil and there was plenty of bracken to mulch with and each was marked with a 6 foot bamboo pole.

The secret was to return in July when the tips of the canes could just be seen and then bash or cut back the tall bracken around each tree. to reduce its vigour. Although the bracken would grow again that year, it would not be enough to smother the growing trees.

Barbara Hadrill works with horses doing work such as logging and bracken rolling. She came recently for a visit to Norbury to check out the site with a view to returning later in the year with her horses to roll the bracken. We will keep people up to date on that. In the meantime, check out her website at:

<http://carnog.co.uk>

Rob Rowe



Photo: Rob Rowe



Photo: Caroline Uff



Rare breed sheep and a novice shepherdess

I have a small flock of Hill Radnor sheep, a rare breed native to ... yup you guessed it Radnor in Shropshire. Last year I didn't lamb, Corona was still around so asking friends to help if needed was an issue. However, as a result my ewes were positively obese so last October I borrowed a tup from a friend.

This is my first time lambing so I sent the ewes a memo warning them that they'd best get on and lamb on their own. Which they did! They popped them out every morning and only the last one had a problem and she waited for the weekend when my step daughter, a vet, was here. They lambed outside and they've all been excellent mothers (if we overlook number 7's tendency to abandon her lambs when I rattle the bucket of sheep nuts).

I suspect I was just lucky but I'd like to think that these older, rarer breeds of sheep are less trouble than the commercial breeds. They all lambed during the day, they all bonded well with their lambs and although they are slower growing than commercials they rarely want any supplementary feed even in winter.

Now lambing is over my job as shepherdess is limited to catching and returning those lambs which despite multiple efforts with the fencing still manage to get through into next doors field. Next job will be shearing.

Louise Robbins



Photo: Louise Robbins



CPRE's Hedgerow Heroes heads into Phase 2

Last year, CPRE Shropshire dipped its toe gingerly into a new boots-on-the-ground project all about hedgerows. In its 70 year history in the county campaigning to protect the beautiful Shropshire countryside, we had not done anything like this, at least in living memory, our specialism being more in planning matters.

However, lining up some fantastic project partners including Trees for Shropshire, the Stepping Stones Project, Really Rural, Shropshire Hills AONB, and with Rob Rowe as a guide and mentor (himself an MMCLT board member), we succeeded in running 7 hedgelaying workshops for 80 trainees, planting nearly 2km of new hedgerows with volunteers, running 6 hedge walks and 9 online hedge talks on all aspects of hedgerows from foraging to folklore. We also produced a hedge 'kitbag' for use by 20 local Forest Schools which will now be adopted by other CPRE branches around the country.

We were delighted to find out we had been awarded funding for a further year of the project, So, we are now seeking hedge creation sites for the next planting season - and one or two good sites for hedgelaying training. So if you are a farmer, landowner or community group happy to have volunteers planting a new hedge or laying an existing one on your land (both with supervision!), please contact Sarah Jameson.

More at www.cpreshropshire.org.uk
Contact: admin@cpreshropshire.org.uk

**Sarah Jameson, CPRE Shropshire
(the Countryside Charity)**

Farming in Protected Landscapes programme - update on grants

The Shropshire Hills AONB are currently one third of the way through delivering the Farming in Protected Landscape (FiPL) programme and have £815K remaining to spend.

Projects can be outside of the AONB area as long as they have a beneficial effect on it (an interactive map can be found on the AONB website here bit.ly/3jRBYGM)

The minimum grant is 3K, maximum is 250K; most range between 5K and 100K. Multiyear grants are also available.

Projects must deliver against one or more outcomes: Climate, Nature, People and Place and must support the local priorities and desired outcomes of the SHAONB Management plan.

Next Local Assessment Panel dates:

Tues 10th May (deadline for applications 25/4)
Tues 5th July (deadline for applications: 20/6)
Tues 16th Aug (deadline for applications 1/8)

Drop in sessions are being arranged for late April/early May in four venues.

More information, guidance and forms can be found here: bit.ly/381IHwt

Contact: Farming in Protected Landscapes Advisor, Alison Jones, Shropshire Hills AONB

Email: alison.m.jones@shropshire.gov.uk
Telephone 01743 254745

A mini makeover for the Middle Marches

You may have noticed we now have a logo of our own and have been refreshing our website with new photographs and updated information. This newsletter is also a new design with less text and more images. We are also updating our member leaflet.



About the Middle Marches Community Land Trust (MMCLT)

The Middle Marches Community Land Trust was formed in 2019. We are a community-led Trust based in the Middle Marches committed to the promotion and development of sustainable and environmentally responsible agriculture that supports a thriving natural world.

Our Vision is to help create an ecologically healthy and sustainable countryside in the hills of the Middle Marches. To do this, the Trust acquires and manages land with current or potential high wildlife value for conservation purposes. We also work with landowners, support local food production, collaborate with other organisations and act as an 'advice hub'.

MMCLT is a Society for the benefit of the community, which you can join by becoming a member from as little as £50. Go to the Membership page of our website for more information and to join, or contact us for more information. You can also check out our web Blog for stories that were too long for this edition of the newsletter.

Web:
www.middlemarchescommunitylandtrust.org.uk

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