

# MIDDLE MARCHES

## COMMUNITY LAND TRUST

### View from the Chair

I hope that you have been able to enjoy the sunny weather, even though its broader implications are worrying and pose many challenges, not least to the countryside. I doubt that Norbury Hill has ever been drier and we are investigating how we can get more water available there for grazing animals (see page 2 for more on Norbury Hill).

There was a scare at Cudwell Meadow as an electricity cable caused a small fire which quick action by local people extinguished. Happily there was no major damage and the local farmer has now cut and baled the hay. The formal opening of Cudwell Meadow was delayed due to Covid but took place to coincide with the Jubilee celebrations on a damp June evening with around 60 people present. The past and present Mayors of Church Stretton carried out the formal opening (see page 6).

At present our efforts are mainly directed at spending the £18,000 grant that we secured

from the National Trust's Stepping Stones Project which is contributing to the full spectrum of our work this year. This includes the Conference on 'Regenerative Agriculture' (page 3) at Norbury Village Hall which we focused on in the last Newsletter and about which we received very positive feedback. We are planning to hold another Conference at Norbury on 'Hedges, Verges and Ditches and their importance in our landscape' on Friday 18<sup>th</sup> November, more details to follow.

We also continue to give advice to other groups in Shropshire as to how they can establish Community Land Trusts to protect their open spaces.

**Dr R J Keymer**  
**Chair, Middle Marches CLT**

*Information and downloads from the presentations at the Regenerative Farming conference can be found [here](#).*



*Corndon Hill from the Stiperstones (c) Sarah Jameson*



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.

## News from Norbury Hill

On 2nd and 3rd August 2022, Barbara Hadrill and her horse Molly travelled from mid Wales and spent 2 days on Norbury hill rolling several acres of bracken. Bracken is a problem on the hill with about half our land (or 20 acres) dominated by it (some 2m tall). We never expect to eradicate it but to reduce it in order to produce more of a mosaic of habitats.

It is important to get the bracken at its point of maximum growth when all of its energy will have gone into growing and a minimum amount returned to the rhizomes

The roller flattens and bruises the bracken at the same time. Hopefully the hot weather forecast for this week will further kill it.

This activity is part of a long term strategy to gradually reduce the bracken and allow grass and herbs to re establish. In some areas there are remnants of acid grassland with plants such as Wavy hair grass, Tormentil, Harebell and Heath bedstraw which we hope will gradually come back.

Thank you to the people who came on site to be near Barbara when she was working in an isolated spot, to Paul and Pat for hosting Barbara and Molly, to the Stepping Stones project and Green Recovery Challenge Fund for financing it.

### Rob Rowe





## LAND CARE: DOING THE GROUNDWORK

"REGENERATIVE AGRICULTURE"  
WHAT IS IT AND HOW TO DO IT

FRIDAY 6 MAY 2022, 9.30-4  
NORBURY VILLAGE HALL, SY9 5DX

### Regenerative Farming conference Friday 6<sup>th</sup> May 2022: Report

The Middle Marches Community Land Trust's Regenerative Farming conference held at Norbury Village Hall on 6<sup>th</sup> May was attended by around 100 delegates.

The intention was to bring together the farming and landholding communities with environmentalists from across the county to discuss the environmental challenges we face and the economic pressures confronting farmers at a very difficult time.

We were delighted that the conference attracted a broad range of delegates and indeed was oversubscribed indicating the interest there is in Regenerative Farming

The report (with links) on the Conference can be found on the MCLT website [here](#).



## Save the Date!

**The next conference: Hedges, Verges & Ditches: their importance in the Shropshire landscape - Friday 18<sup>th</sup> November, Norbury Village Hall**

The next Middle Marches Community Land Trust Conference is planned for Friday 18<sup>th</sup> November.

The day will run from 10am to 4pm and will be a free event funded from Green Recovery Challenge fund, Restoring Shropshire's Verges Project and CPRE Shropshire.

The themes of the day will be Hedges, Verges and Ditches.

More information to follow – to log your interest now please email us on:  
[info@middlemarchescommunitylandtrust.org.uk](mailto:info@middlemarchescommunitylandtrust.org.uk)

## Shropshire road verges - a haven for wildlife?

Shropshire's country lanes with their verges and hedgerows are a delight to walk, cycle and drive through. Managed correctly they could also provide a vital wildlife corridor and habitat for insects, bees, butterflies and small mammals as well as a space for common – and not so common – wild flowers.

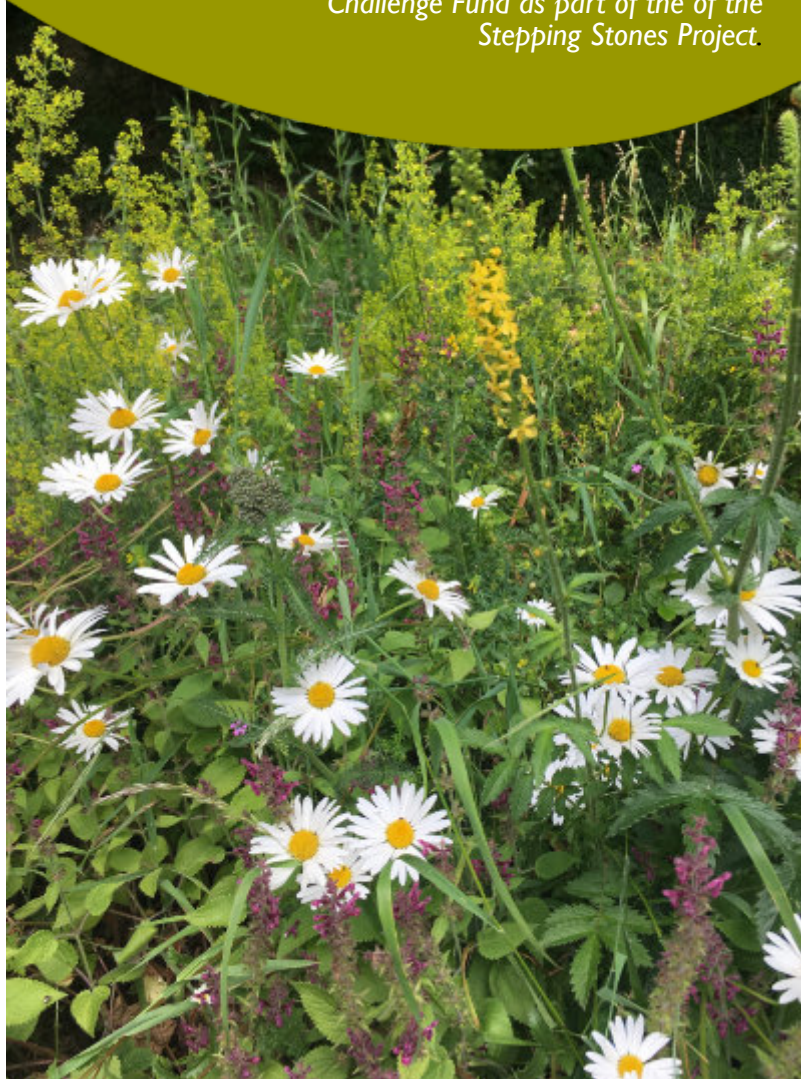
A group of conservation volunteers in Shropshire is leading the campaign to restore wildlife-rich roadside verges in Shropshire. Restoring Shropshire Verges Project (RSVP) volunteers have been working to re-instate some of the damaged verges across the county. With the help of Shropshire Council Highways department, Plantlife, the National Trust, Caring for Gods Acre and Shropshire Hills AONB, RSVP volunteers have been 'adopting' verges across Shropshire, leaving them to grow wild until late summer and sowing or planting wildflowers.

Once the flowers are over in later summer the verges will be cut and the cuttings removed. To raise awareness and help people understand why these verges are being left to grow, volunteers have put up signs that say: 'Don't mow - late cut planned. These verges are being managed for wildlife.' You may spot these eye-catching yellow signs as you're out and about in Shropshire.

The Stepping Stones Project, a National-Trust led partnership which aims to create corridors of habitat for wildlife between the Long Mynd, Stretton Hills and the Stiperstones, has generated funding for the verges project this year. Charlie Bell, Stepping Stones Project Officer, said: "Hay meadows are one of the UK's most threatened habitats. Managed well, our roadside verges could become long, linear wildflower meadows which act as habitat in their own right, as well as linking other patches of habitats together. This would provide food and places to live for animals, insects and birds and help them move freely through the landscape."

Peter Carty, chair of RSVP, said, "As has been shown elsewhere in the country, such as Dorset and Lincolnshire, reducing the frequency of verge cutting not only helps wildlife but has the potential to save taxpayers' money on fuel and labour too, and reduce pollution and carbon emissions.

I would like to acknowledge the excellent progress we have made to date, working with Shropshire Council to re-think the long-term management of verges in the county. The Highways department



Wildflower verge at Edgton (c) Janet Cobb

have been very supportive and have recently submitted a bid to deliver 50km of flower-rich road verge, which if successful would be fantastic for the county's verges."

Janet Cobb from RSVP and MMCLT says: "The great thing about road verge work is that everyone can contribute – every metre counts! There are lots of ways you can get involved and support our work. Have a go at planting wildflowers in your garden. Dog Daisy, Knapweed, Betony and Cowslip are all good species to grow. If you want help to turn your local verge into a haven for wildlife, get in touch with the RSVP. In the meantime, download '[The Good Verge Guide](#)' from Plantlife for some initial inspiration."

Follow Restoring Shropshire Verges Project Twitter and Facebook @ShropsVerge

**Janet Cobb**





## Pleasant Surprises

Like many people Alyson and I thought that owning some woodland would be fun; fortunately we were able to afford a small area even at the inflated prices charged for non-commercial woodland. We looked at several sites up to 50 km away, but then found 2 ha within fifteen minutes' walk from home.

It consisted of poorly managed conifer woodland, probably planted in the 1960s judging from old maps and satellite images. Most of the area had been clear-felled about 30 years later and either replanted or left to regenerate naturally, mainly with Corsican Pine. However, a block of Sitka Spruce had been left uncut, and when we bought the wood these were mature and very stately – a friend described the interior of the block as cathedral-like.

Our intention was to fell perhaps one tree a year for firewood – wood-burners were then considered 'green' – and replant with broad-leaved trees. For the first few years we concentrated on using the already fallen Sitka Spruce, but it soon became apparent that trees were blowing over more quickly than we could use them. We therefore applied for a felling licence for the 120 Sitka Spruce, and the timber was harvested in 2020. We opted to have the brash left in piles rather than burnt as we could extract the larger branches for firewood and, in the meantime, the piles would provide habitat for birds, small mammals and Common Lizard.

We had noticed that the bottom of the site was wet enough to support *Sphagnum* and at least two local place names suggested the area had been a marsh or bog. Prior to afforestation, OS maps showed the area as rough grazing. I reverted to childhood and

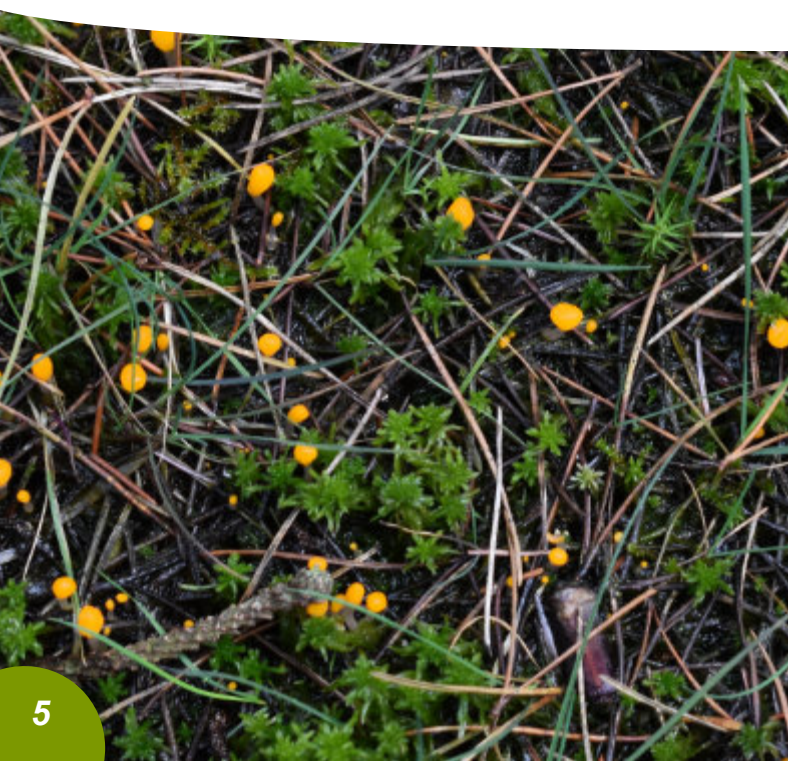
started creating dams to slow the flow of water into the drains that had been created by the foresters. This led to the first pleasant surprise when a small, bright orange fungus appeared in the shallow pools, later identified as the Bog Beacon (*Mitrula paludosa*). This is a scarce species in England, but is known from a few Shropshire sites. The pools are also used by breeding frogs and Large Red Damselfly.

At the end of 2021 the site was visited by, amongst others, a Natural England wetland specialist. Instead of our generic *Sphagnum*, he identified six (possibly seven) *Sphagnum* species in as many minutes! These, and the Green-ribbed Sedge and Hairy Wood-rush found on site, are all axiophytes (indicators of good quality habitat) for Shropshire.

The final pleasant surprise resulted from installation of camera traps in December 2021 which, within a few weeks, revealed the presence of Pine Marten. Several video clips have now been collected, and at least two individuals are using the wood. The cameras also showed Fox, Roe and Muntjac deer and Wood Mice.

Our patch of conifer woodland has demonstrated that there may be wildlife value in even the most unprepossessing of sites, and that it may not be too late to recover something of what had appeared lost.

**Richard Small**



Photos: Richard Small



## Drama at Cudwell Meadow!

During the heatwave in July, the powerline in the meadow exploded due a cable melting. It began sending sparks down onto the tinder dry grass in the tree enclosure by the road which caught fire.

Neighbours in the cottage opposite heard the bang, smelled the fire and rushed down: Andrew with fire extinguisher in hand, vaulted the fence (where the post unfortunately collapsed under him!) and helped control the fire, while Wendy phoned 999. Others followed with leaky buckets and bowls. The fire engine was on site in minutes.

The hole in the meadow and the replacement gubbins are sobering indeed.

It is a complete miracle that the meadow didn't go up in flames and possibly the bank too. Thanks to the fast actions of Andrew and Wendy (we took them a bottle of wine), the rapid arrival of fire engine and the fact that Mike had strimmed the grass around the trees a couple of weeks back. Phew!

Apparently there was a great neighbourhood party once the fire was out. The explosion took out half the town's power.

All we have lost is one incinerated hawthorn tree - as long as Western Power rebuild the fence and fill in the big hole!

Isobel Carter

*Photo below: the official opening of Cudwell Meadow in cooler times, June 2022*

*(c) Richard Keymer*

## 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.

**Web:**

[www.middlemarchescommunitylandtrust.org.uk](http://www.middlemarchescommunitylandtrust.org.uk)

**Contact:**

[info@middlemarchescommunitylandtrust.org.uk](mailto:info@middlemarchescommunitylandtrust.org.uk)



### Background note:

Cudwell Meadow in Church Stretton is a collaborative venture between the Stretton Wetlands Interest Group and Middle Marches Community Land Trust. We now hold the three-acre site in trust. It is presently a mix of rough grassland with rushes and swampy areas, now being managed for wildlife. More about Cudwell Meadow [here](#).