

# MIDDLE MARCHES

## COMMUNITY LAND TRUST

### View from the Chair

I hope that everyone had a peaceful Christmas and wish you all healthy and happy New Year in what are challenging times.

Our November conference (following on from the May Regenerative Farming conference) focused on 'Verges, Ditches and Hedges'. We had a range of speakers and again the event was a sell out! We had a team of volunteers helping, led by our conference organiser, Janet Cobb. Please keep an eye on our website for details of forthcoming events!

Maintaining Norbury Hill was a difficult task last summer during the exceptionally hot weather, however the rains did eventually come and come .....! A lot of bracken has been rolled and cut, wet flushes cleared of invasive rushes and fences repaired. We also started investigating whether we could provide a reliable source of water on the hill for the stock that graze it.

We recently heard that our application for Norbury Hill to Defra's Countryside

Stewardship Scheme has been successful. This will provide additional money to assist with the management of the site, providing we meet certain standards of management.

We, like all other land managers, are still waiting to hear from Defra details regarding their new Environmental Land Management Schemes and what the payments will be. These Schemes are crucial, as they will play a major role in shaping the whole fabric of our countryside.

Looking forwards, we need to recruit more people to our Management Board, especially with experience of business and financial skills but also including law, marketing, fundraising, and business administration.

In particular, we are seeking a new Treasurer and a new Secretary. If you are interested, please get in touch (more info inside this newsletter). We also have a range of other volunteer opportunities available!

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



# WE NEED TO RECRUIT NEW TRUSTEES

## CAN YOU HELP?

### Treasurer

The Treasurer's key task is to

- Help guide the financial decisions of the Board
- Act as a voice of expertise
- Bring a level of financial experience and know-how to the running of the Trust.

The role involves:

- Running the bank account (mainly online)
- Providing monthly figures for board meetings & annual accounts
- Claiming gift aid
- Monitoring the use of grant money.

The Treasurer will be co-opted as a member of the Board of Trustees (Directors).

The Trust is formally incorporated as a community benefit society, regulated by the Financial Conduct Authority and is recognised as a charity for the purposes of Gift Aid.

For more information, contact Louise Robbins (Treasurer, Middle Marches Community Land Trust) on [louise.robbins@btinternet.com](mailto:louise.robbins@btinternet.com) or on 07940808610.

**Louise Robbins, Treasurer**  
**Middle Marches Community Land Trust**

### Secretary

This role involves:

- Being an active member of the Board
- Looking after small amounts of correspondence
- Helping us to keep records
- Working closely with the other officers of the Board.

So, it suits someone who likes to be organised, proactive, and participate in organising group activities.

If this appeals to you or to someone you know, please get in touch via

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

We'd love to hear from you!



*You are warmly invited to:*

**Middle Marches Community Land Trust**

# AGM

Saturday 18th February from 1pm  
Church Barn, Bishops Castle



**Keynote speaker: Pete Carty will talk on  
“Landscape Scale Conservation in Shropshire”**

**Followed by Q&A and presentations on Cudwell Meadow,  
& Norbury Hill & AGM business**

**Refreshments**

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



# VERGES, DITCHES AND HEDGES

## THEIR IMPORTANCE IN OUR SHROPSHIRE LANDSCAPE

### Verges, Ditches and Hedges conference, Norbury, 18 November 2022

The Middle Marches Community Land Trust brought together delegates from across a diverse community across Shropshire and beyond from as far away as Transport for London last November for its Verges, Ditches and Hedges conference.

Participants included large estate owners, woodland managers, small holders and farmers all able to network with environmentalists, conservationists, wildlife experts and ecologists.

We were delighted that the conference attracted 120 delegates and was oversubscribed, all indicating the high level of interest and expertise available across Shropshire and beyond.

Delegate feedback was very positive see link below.

Thanks to Charlie Bell, National Trust, for her independent analysis of feedback forms post conference. Comments are still welcome to help us plan for future events email. These can be sent to: [info@middlemarchescommunitylandtrust.org.uk](mailto:info@middlemarchescommunitylandtrust.org.uk)

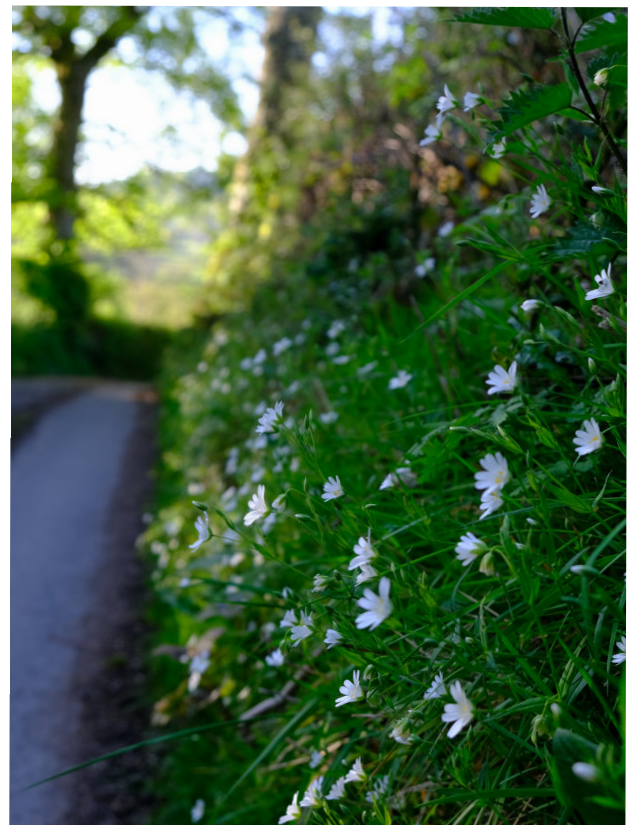
[Link to conference feedback here.](#)

[Programme and speaker biographies here.](#)

Website information here:  
<https://middlemarchescommunitylandtrust.org.uk/verges-ditches-hedges-conference/>

The Trust would like to thank the conference sponsors: Green Recovery Challenge Fund, Restoring Shropshire Verges Project, Stepping Stones project (National Trust), Shropshire Hills AONB Partnership, CPRE Shropshire, the countryside charity and Natural England

**Janet Cobb**



## Update from Norbury Hill

Last year the Stepping Stones lottery project funded fencing and bracken control on Norbury hill and (as part of a separate Stepping Stones project) some management for the benefit of the Small pearl bordered fritillary butterfly. The initial bracken rolling with a horse and roller took place in July and August 2022 (see previous newsletter).

In September and October more areas were cut with tractor and topper and with the Robocut (radio controlled machine) on the steeper banks. These areas were mapped by ecologist Caroline Uff and we intend to monitor the difference between rolling and cutting in years to come.

The MMCLT land is divided in half by a fence. To the east of the fence is the relatively flat hilltop where most of the Skylark and Meadow Pipits breed and to the west there is a fairly steep bracken dominated slope which has not been grazed for around 20 years. For the first time with the aid of electric fencing we were able to allow cattle on to some of this land this autumn.

At the same time some of the (usually) wet rush areas in the valley were cut and at the end of October a gang of volunteers came out to rake up the rushes. The intention is to open up more of the areas that are dominated by the rushes to enable the more interesting wetland plants to thrive,

especially the Marsh violet which is the food plant of the Small pearl bordered fritillary. At present the fritillary breeds in the land just to the north of us and flies very close and we are trying to entice it further south.

This butterfly is now locally scarce and is known locally in a few sites from Norbury hill northwards to the east side of the Stiperstones ridge. This year volunteers grew Marsh violets from cuttings and some of these were planted out in the Norbury wet flushes. We hope to build on this in future years.

### Rob Rowe



*Marsh violets in pots ready to plant (Rob Rowe)*



*Volunteers raking up rush prior to planting Marsh violets (Rob Rowe)*

## Shropshire Hills Hay Meadow Festival 2023

Planning is underway for the fourth Shropshire Hills Hay Meadow Festival. The date will be Saturday 15<sup>th</sup> July at the Discovery Centre, Craven Arms, which was the site for the successful 2021 Festival.

If you haven't been to previous Hay Meadow Festivals it's a great day out with competitions (including some for children), advice on making species-rich meadows of all sizes, sales of meadow related items such as scythes, opportunities to talk to various local community groups and (almost) all the fun of the fair!

The Hay Meadow Festival is supported by Natural England, Grow, Cook, Learn, the Shropshire Hills AONB and Marches Meadow Group. Other organisations that are likely to be present are Middle Marches Community Land Trust, CPRE Shropshire, the countryside charity and the Shropshire Wildlife Trust.

If you are a member of any other group that would like a stand at the Festival, or if you have suggestions for making the event even better, please contact Richard Small on [mmsgmembership@gmail.com](mailto:mmsgmembership@gmail.com) or 01743 791476.

*Photos: below: (top) artwork for the previous Hay Meadow Festival by David Hand; (below) the Hay Rick Race at the 2018 Hay Meadow Festival (c) Richard Small*



**Save the Date!**  
**Hay Meadow Festival**  
**Onny Meadows, Craven Arms**  
**Saturday 15<sup>th</sup> July 2023**

## So, what is a community land trust?

Starting in the USA, Community Land Trusts have a long and successful history in the UK, many were established as charities, others as Friendly Societies, and some like ours have taken advantage of the 2014 legislation in place to create a modern vehicle.

But they are all still community land trusts - organisations whose primary aim is to buy, lease and or manage and develop land for the benefit of a community. That's it. Nothing more complicated than that.

The majority were established so that affordable homes could be built for rent or sale - crucial in areas where privately built property is simply too expensive for even regular working families to afford it. But they can be used for all sorts of purposes - community pubs, play centres, shops, shared workspaces, energy schemes, sports, and arts facilities, and - in our case - landscapes for conservation.

They are all non-profit organisations (shareholders never get paid dividends) and they are run democratically (one shareholder, one vote). CLTs exist to protect assets for the community forever, they are required to be real long-term stewards.

Increasing interest in local food and renewable energy co-operatives has seen an increase in CLTs being set up to acquire land for just these purposes. Many deprived areas in major cities are recognised as 'food deserts' - places where buying good quality, affordable fresh produce is all but impossible. This pushes families towards buying over processed

*“there's a sense of empowerment which comes from working with others to secure the future of a piece of land, restoring it to the natural world”*

foods with all the attendant health problems they risk like obesity and type-2 diabetes. In these cases, land providing space for local communities to grow fruit and vegetables would give people access to affordable good quality food, the chance to learn new skills, make new friendships, reduce social isolation, and generate a real sense of resilience and pride. And I know these are the benefits of such projects because waaaaaayyyyy back in the 1980s, I developed a network for the then DoE including one in central Birmingham which continues to run a neighbourhood composting scheme called Run-A-Muck (it was coming up with the names I enjoyed most: ask me about the Brewers' Group one day).



Summer event at Cudwell Meadow (c) Isabel Carter

Today, there are CLTs owning land for both community food and energy production - imagine that. No more trying to persuade or beg a local authority to get its act together on either issue: club together, buy the land, deliver the food and energy.

MMCLT took a similar view of the need to create much more space for nature too - every member of the Board still lobbies hard for government to pull its weight and for industry to do far more, but there's a sense of empowerment which comes from working with others to secure the future of a piece of land, restoring it to the natural world. Doing our little bit.

Other communities have taken a similar view - it's currently more common in Scotland to find CLTs raising money to buy land for the purposes of conservation. Very large-scale community buy-outs of huge estates are no longer rare.

Back down here in Shropshire, community buy outs of land are still extremely rare - but interest is building.

If and when there is any clarity about future land management payments, it will make it easier for everyone concerned to make decisions about whether to buy and what to buy. With clarity and certainty about future credits for creating fresh water systems, rebuilding biodiversity, as well as carbon credits, might come new income streams for land purchase for MMCLT or other CLTs dedicated to protecting land for the benefit of the community and nature conservation in perpetuity.

**Rosie Wood**

Further information on establishing a Community Land Trust can be found at [www.communitylandtrusts.org.uk](http://www.communitylandtrusts.org.uk)





## CPRE Shropshire Hedgerow Project in full swing

CPRE Shropshire's Hedgerow Project is nearing the final two months of phase 2 with half of the 20+ hedgerow sites now planted up with new native species-rich hedges.

We will plant 5.5km or 5,500 metres of new hedgerow altogether this season on a variety of sites from big, flat arable fields in Telford to exposed and hilly sites in South Shropshire.

The project will have engaged with over 250 planting volunteers this year and planted well over 30,000 hedge whips by mid February.

We need help on several sites, still, and you can sign up to come and plant with us via our website.

As well as hedge planting we have organised 7 two-day hedgelaying workshops, 2 day-long hedgerow management workshops and gone into 16 Shropshire primary schools with hedgerow lessons, thanks to teaming up with the Shropshire Wildlife Trust and Shropshire Hills AONB Partnership education officers.

We are delighted to have been able to collaborate with, and receive support from, the National Trust's Stepping Stones project on both hedge creation and hedgelaying training in the south of the county.

We are running one final beginners hedgelaying workshop in mid February near Telford followed by an improvers day.

We will run a Field Names event on 20-21 April in Clunton, led by Dr Jayne Carroll from the Institute for Place Name Studies, University of Nottingham.

For more information on any of the above, or if you would like to volunteer to help plant or to join a future hedgelaying workshop, please visit our website or email Sarah on [admin@cpreshropshire.org.uk](mailto:admin@cpreshropshire.org.uk)

**Sarah Jameson**  
[www.cpresropshire.org.uk/hedgerow-project](http://www.cpresropshire.org.uk/hedgerow-project)



*Beginners hedgelaying workshop, November 2022*



*Hedge planting at Ratlinghope in early January*

## Cudwell Meadow update

Shropshire Mammal Group members and volunteers gathered with local residents in the meadow at the end of October to search for nests of the rare and tiny harvest mouse.

Harvest mice weigh just a few grams, and breed in tennis-ball sized nests woven into the stems of long grass or reeds in cereal crops, wet grasslands and meadows. At the end of the breeding season these nests are abandoned and the mice move to nests at ground level. As the vegetation dies back in autumn so the breeding nests are easier to see.

Searchers were thrilled to find two old breeding nests of harvest mouse in the meadow. This record is the first in the area for many years. There were also nests, droppings and even a sighting of the much more common field vole.

We'll ensure that management of the meadow maintains optimum conditions for possible future generations of harvest mice!

### Work parties

These will resume in the Spring.

**Isabel Carter**

## 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)



Assembling scythes at Cudwell Meadow (c) Isabel Carter