

MIDDLE MARCHES

COMMUNITY LAND TRUST

View from the Chair

As I write this, Spring has finally got going with some warmer days and the countryside is fast greening up.

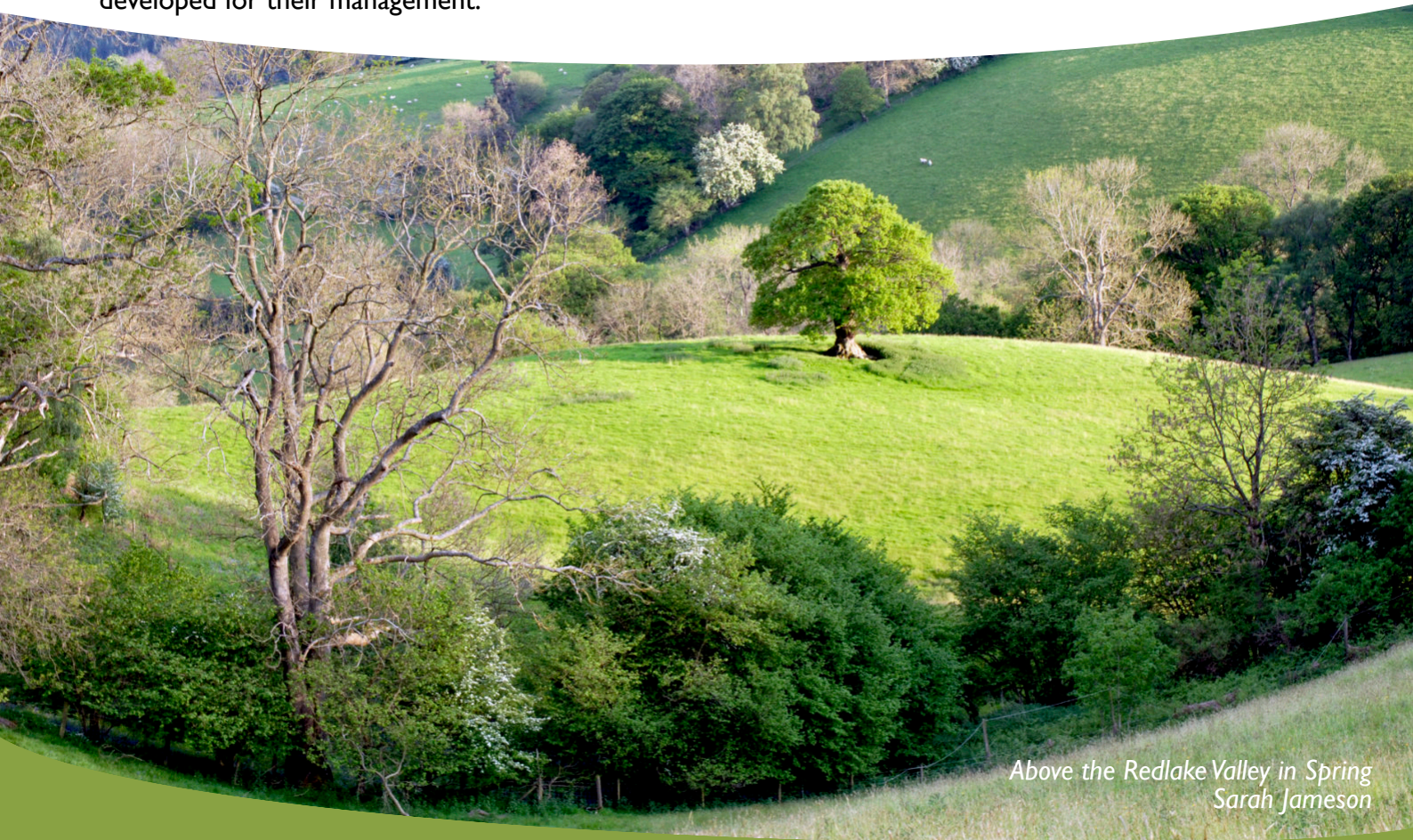
This Spring Newsletter has a range of exciting news in it, including announcing the purchase of High Leasowes Meadows in Church Stretton together with the 'Friends of High Leasowes Group', who in a phenomenal effort raised over £400,000 in ten days to buy the three meadows, totalling 16 acres.

A Management Group comprised of local people has been established and a baseline survey of the meadows has been commissioned, to establish what species are present before plans are developed for their management.

Our Events Coordinator, Janet Cobb has been working hard to pull together a full events programme for the year which will I am sure provide something of interest to most people.

The first of these events was our conference held on 12th May: 'Creating Stepping Stones for Nature across the Shropshire Hills AONB'. This was organised jointly with Shropshire Hills AONB and was fully booked with 120 delegates.

The feedback received (conference report to follow soon) indicates that the conference was much appreciated. To receive updates on our events programme, join our mailing list [here](#).



*Above the Redlake Valley in Spring
Sarah Jameson*

On 24th June we are being hosted by Sir Edward Tate at the Isle Estate for a **Walk, Talk and Picnic** to look at the ways in which the Estate is diversifying its operations and adopting regenerative practices.

Thereafter we have a range of smaller group visits to various sites under different ownerships to look at land management in practice, including the land that we own.

Our final event will be at Fitz Village Hall, '**Creating Stepping Stones for Nature Recovery across Bomere Heath, Fitz and the wider area**', date to be confirmed, and Parish Councils in and around Bomere Heath will each receive a personal invitation to attend.

We still need to find a Treasurer and Secretary for the Board so if you feel you can help please get in touch.

Finally to note that we have passed a significant milestone as we now have more than 200 shareholder members!

I do hope that you will be able to get out and enjoy our glorious countryside and its amazing wildlife this Spring and perhaps I will meet you at one of our events.

Richard Keymer
Chairman
Middle Marches Community Land Trust

**** Book your place for any of our events by emailing: conference@middlemarchescommunitylandtrust.org.uk***

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**The Middle Marches Land Trust needs
A Treasurer and a Secretary
Can you help?**



Events

EVENTS PROGRAMME 2023

Donations of £20 per person requested for all events

Book your place now for any of the MMCLT events (other than for Pams Pools) by emailing: conference@middlemarchescommunitylandtrust.org.uk

Sunday 21st May, 10am - 2pm

Visit to Pam's Pools, Bridgnorth - wildlife/permaculture reserve open days

See pamspools.co.uk / Book your place at ticketsource.co.uk/shropshire-wildlife-trust-pams-pools

Monday 12th June, 10am-1pm

Visit to Sarah Jameson's field project (New Invention)

Walk, Talk & Picnic (provided). Limited places. See sarahnewinvention.wixsite.com/we-bought-a-field

Saturday 24th June, 10am - 3pm

Visit to the Isle Estate Farm, Bicton, Shrewsbury

Walk, Talk & Picnic (provided). Donations of £20 per person requested.

Sunday 25th June, 10am - 2pm

Visit to Pam's Pools, Bridgnorth - wildlife/permaculture reserve open days

See pamspools.co.uk / Book your place at ticketsource.co.uk/shropshire-wildlife-trust-pams-pools

Thursday 13th July

Visit to Little Stretton: Cudwell Meadow & Church Stretton: High Leasowes

Walk, Talk & Picnic (provided)

Sunday 30th July, 10am - 2pm

Visit to Pam's Pools, Bridgnorth - wildlife/permaculture reserve open days

See pamspools.co.uk / Book your place via MMCLT (email above).

Saturday 12th August 12th

Visit to Norbury Hill

Walk, Talk & Picnic (provided).

RSVP Conference date & venue TBC

Hedges, Verges and Ditches and their importance in the Shropshire Landscape

MMCLT Conference date & venue TBC

Creating Stepping Stones for Nature Recovery



Background note: High Leasowes is a 'stepping stone' grassland site in Church Stretton between Caer Caradoc and Helmeth Wood to the east and the Long Mynd to the west; it is also adjacent to Coppice Leasowes Nature Reserve. It was acquired by the Middle Marches Community Land Trust in Spring 2023 after a major fund raising appeal.

News from High Leasowes

Residents of the Strettons and surrounding area are celebrating good news as the community-funded purchase of three fields adjacent to the town finally became the property of Middle Marches Community Land Trust (MMCLT) in April 2023.

The 6.5 hectare (16 acres) site adjacent to Coppice Leasowes Nature Reserve was advertised for sale in September and, fearing that the fields would be bought by developers, local residents Sandra and Peter Whitlock launched an appeal via MMCLT to raise funds to buy them.

The fields known as 'High Leasowes' will now be owned by MMCLT and managed by the High Leasowes Management Committee, with an agreed management plan informed by an ecological evaluation. This will ensure that we maintain and increase the biodiversity of the meadows and protect them in perpetuity.

The aim of the High Leasowes Management Committee, which will organise the practical management of the site, is to create a patchwork of rich habitats that provide shelter, nesting and feeding

opportunities for a great variety of wildlife, with space for people to walk and enjoy the area and for the community to participate in its care. Anyone who would like to help with the project is invited to email the committee (email below).

Dr. Richard Keymer, Chairman of MMCLT said: *"MMCLT are delighted to have been able to help the people of Church Stretton secure the future of High Leasowes meadows. They form part of a valuable network of wildlife sites located through and around the Town. We urgently need to maintain such areas if we are reverse the dramatic decline in our wildlife and we look forward to working with local people to achieve this"*.

Sandra Whitlock,
Chair, High Leasowes Management Committee
highleasowes@gmail.com

"The response from the local community was phenomenal, with a huge sum of money being raised from 240 donors in the space of just eight days. It shows how much people value this site and want to see it protected and managed for nature"

[See the High Leasowes page on the MMCLT website for more information](#)



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.

Norbury Hill: Early May diary

WANTED!

Volunteers to help with practical work on Norbury Hill: Fencing, erecting signs and bracken control

If you can help, contact Rob:
rob@robrowe.co.uk
Tel: 01588 640174

[More on Norbury Hill on the MMCLT website](#)

The effects of two years of bracken rolling (see Autumn 22 newsletter) are already very apparent with grass re-establishing itself over quite large areas and good patches of greater stitchwort and bluebells.

The sight of a lizard sent us all scuttling for our cameras and phones and for once it was quite obliging.

An ongoing bird survey this year is showing at least seven pairs of skylark and many displaying meadow pipits on the hill top. Also wheatear, stonechat a few linnets and lots of willow warblers singing down in the valley bottom.

We found a good few Marsh violets - In the areas where we had planted out our grown on cuttings some were struggling but others doing fine and one was in flower!

We also saw that Marsh valerian (which has separate male and female plants) was in flower. The little clusters of pale pink flowers are larger in the male (5mm) than the female (3mm).

Rob Rowe



Norbury Hill

Poised as a giant stepping stone
between the Mynd and Stiperstones
It stands aloft, grassy-soft and proud
along the ancient track
Where hawthorns laid in centuries back
succumb to the winds of change

This lush pasture and yarrow like stars
seem good enough to nourish a suckling herd
But now only rabbits dart into the gorse
with their burrows honeycombing the summit

We come at rising full moon, first of the autumn month
a whisper after Michaelmas
As the bell of St Michael's church chimes the hour
ringing in the new guardianship

Low stones hint at mysteries and messages long buried
awaiting the next human dispensation?
Below the huge brackenside merges into reeds
where butterfly and reptiles have their freedom

The land folds and pleats down with the water-flow Onnywards
and up towards the noble Linley Beeches.....
Who knows what this hill has to offer – and we can only ask
how can we sustain and honour this special place?

Rosa James

(written before the acquisition of Norbury Hill by MMCLT)

Background note: Cudwell Meadow, a three acre site south of Church Stretton, was acquired in 2020. A collaborative venture between the Stretton Wetlands Interest Group and MMCLT, this site is a mix of rough grassland with rushes and swampy areas. The meadow and adjoining wetlands are home to water voles, visiting otters, invertebrates and amphibians.

An update from Cudwell Meadow

The plan is to manage the field as a wetland meadow. We are collaborating with a local farmer who takes a crop of hay in late July, and then grazes sheep on the aftermath until about November, returning stock again in the spring until the field is 'closed' in late April to allow for hay growth.

For several decades the field has been managed as pasture; treating it as a hay meadow is a significant change in management. So we need to monitor change over the next few years to be certain this is the right management approach.

The meadow will be hosting 'open Sundays' from **Sunday 28th May until harvest time at the beginning of August** and will be open from 10 am onwards for visitors to enjoy the wild flowers and wildlife on site.

Please note this is a 'no dogs' site - for the sake of the small mammals and nesting birds (with the exception of guide dogs on leads).

[More on Cudwell Meadow on the MMCLT website](#)

Volunteer Work Parties

These continue on the 1st Thursday of each month 1.30 to 3.30. All welcome.

Upcoming dates of interest at Cudwell Meadow:

Thursday 29 June: Bioblitz, from 10am+

All are welcome to come along to Cudwell Meadow and enjoy surveying flora, invertebrates, birds, mammals.

Sunday 16 July: Spider Survey

Shropshire Spider group are surveying areas of the Stretton wetlands. If interested in joining them please email: shropshire.spiders@gmail.com

Various activities are also in the planning for **'Nature Week'** in the week before the town's Fun Day on 1st July.

For updates do look at the [Nature in the Strettons](#) website - which has helpful information and links.

Isabel Carter

WELCOME TO Cudwell Meadow

Cudwell Meadow is a small, species-rich wetland meadow within the Stretton Wetlands. It was bought in January 2021 through public donations and is now owned and managed by Middle Marches Community Land Trust in partnership with the Strettons Area Community Wildlife Group (SACWG).

It is named after the water source from the nearby Allen Coppice which flows into the Quinny Brook. The meadow floods for several months of the year resulting in an unusual mosaic of habitats, rich in flora and fauna.

Cudwell Meadow is one small part of the wider Stretton Wetlands. Detailed surveying in 2016 led to part of the wetlands becoming designated as a Local Wildlife Site.



Dragonflies, Damselflies and MMCLT

In 2021 the British Dragonfly Society published a report 'State of Dragonflies in Britain and Ireland' which analysed the changes in 'occupancy' (based on the number of 1km x 1km squares across Britain and Ireland) of 43 Dragonfly and Damselfly species. The good news is that 33 species have increased their occupancy, although some by only a little.

However, of the ten species that were declining, five are found in the area covered by MMCLT, including the four species that are declining most: Golden-ringed Dragonfly, Common Hawker, Black Darter and Emerald Damselfly. Golden-ringed Dragonfly and Common Hawker were previously widespread, but Black Darter and Emerald Damselfly have always had scattered records in the area. These species have specialist, usually upland, habitat requirements such as boggy pools or streams on moorland, which means that in the face of climate change they will have to retreat to higher altitudes to find the environmental conditions to which they are adapted.

This suggested that local naturalists could have an important role in monitoring the local populations of these species, and members of the Upper Onny Wildlife Group put forward the idea. In 2022 Charlie Bell of Stepping Stones organised three sessions on identification and recording led by Sue Rees-Evans, the Shropshire county recorder for Odonata. After two identification sessions in summer 2022, the third session explored how records could be submitted and the options for monitoring, from simple *ad hoc* observations to more rigorous monitoring regimes. Several Community Wildlife Groups (CWGs) were represented by the 14 attendees, and it is hoped these representatives will be able to encourage other members of their CWG to undertake monitoring.

It would be useful to establish where these declining species are located within our area and perhaps to follow this up with habitat management that will improve their chances of survival. MMCLT can have a role in the conservation of dragon-



and damsel-flies as Cudwell Meadow is part of the Stretton Wetlands where at least four species have been recorded (see table below) and the new scrape at Cudwell may attract more species. Last year's ecological survey of Norbury Hill identified nine species, including Golden-ringed Dragonfly and Common Hawker.

As sympathetic management progresses both sites have potential to increase the number of species supported and the population size of those species. On Norbury Hill, owners of land adjacent to MMCLT's have created four new pools over the past year, and these may attract further species that can use the hill for hunting if not for breeding. High Leasowes also has a large pool nearby, and may in time provide the good quality terrestrial habitat many dragon- and damsel-flies need.

Although Cudwell Meadow is well-served by local naturalists, Norbury Hill could do with more monitoring and I hope to make several visits over the summer. I would welcome company!

Richard Small

| Scientific Name | Common Name | S | N |
|-------------------------------|-------------------------|---|---|
| <i>Aeshna cyanea</i> | Southern Hawker | X | X |
| <i>Aeshna grandis</i> | Brown Hawker | | X |
| <i>Aeshna juncea</i> | Common Hawker | | X |
| <i>Calopteryx virgo</i> | Beautiful Demoiselle | X | X |
| <i>Coenagrion puella</i> | Azure Damselfly | X | X |
| <i>Cordulegaster boltonii</i> | Golden-ringed Dragonfly | | X |
| <i>Enallagma cyathigerum</i> | Common Blue Damselfly | | X |
| <i>Pyrrhosoma nymphula</i> | Large Red Damselfly | X | X |
| <i>Sympetrum striolatum</i> | Common Darter | | X |

(S= Stretton Wetlands; N= Norbury Hill)



Photos:

- Overleaf: Common Darter (Sarah Jameson)
- Top: Large Red (Richard Small)
- Middle: Beautiful Demoiselle (Richard Small)
- Bottom: Black Darter (John Martin)

Shropshire verges and their importance in our landscape

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.

What's not to like?

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 and creating long linear meadows.

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. 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.

To raise awareness and help people understand why adopted verges that are being restored 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.

Changing the management contract from just cutting and leaving the arisings, sometimes too early for wild flower seeds to drop, to a contract that reflects

1. Cut
2. Collect arisings (grass clippings)
3. Start restoration work

Would potentially transform Shropshire's verges back to lovely wild flower corridors AND save millions of pounds for Shropshire Local Authority

Follow Restoring Shropshire's Verges Project on Twitter and Facebook @ShropVerge

Anyone interested in starting a verge project contact janet@jan-net.co.uk

Janet Cobb, Restoring Shropshire's Verges Project (RSVP)

[More on RSVP on the MMCLT website](#)





Pentwyn: restoring land for Nature and for people

With another hat on (Hon Treasurer, Radnorshire Wildlife Trust, RWT) I was lucky enough to spend an evening and a day with the Environmental Funders Network, a group of successful individuals who dedicate their time and money to supporting environmental and wildlife projects nationally and internationally.

We were hosting members of the network as a huge thank you for very generous loans made which enabled RWT to buy Pentwyn, a former livestock farm. It will be restored to nature, and following the sale of the farmhouse, and renting out the smaller property with some land as part of our purchase, we will provide homes for two new families, and a brand-new food production enterprise on the site too. As the bar staff said - that's four more for lunch.

RWT is the smallest wildlife trust in the UK - frankly if RWT can do it any Wildlife Trust can. Unlike some counties, Radnorshire certainly doesn't have a large wealthy population of potential donors to draw upon, but we do have the backing of the Wildlife Trust's HQ team and are well on our way to repaying the loan in less time than we thought we would.

What I learned was just how much enthusiasm and interest there is for lending and donating to

charities and community benefit societies for buying land, avoiding large scale land consolidation as smaller parcels come on to the market. And some parcels of land aren't so small either - elsewhere in the UK lenders have helped save some large holdings and return them to nature and local enterprise, increasing jobs and re peopling - as well as rewilding - the countryside. Incidentally, if you're rewilding without re peopling (creating jobs and land based livelihoods) then you've probably misunderstood rewilding.

“If you're rewilding without re peopling (creating jobs and land based livelihoods) then you've probably misunderstood rewilding”

We have Belted Galloways courtesy of our fab local grazier, and will be getting other animals in to lightly graze, browse, and rootle in the soil soon. Personally I'm looking forward to the produce from them too.

The philanthropists also donate to and fully fund other ground-breaking work - one was funding the community-led restoration of mangroves around an East African island, work initiated and developed some years before by another one of the gathered philanthropists. It was lovely to see them meet up in the middle of Radnorshire, not on some sunkissed Indian Ocean shore!

Some were primarily there to learn what it might take to return land to its healthy wild self, others were keen to soak it all up and reflect on what they might do next. Lots of follow up conversations which I truly hope other Wildlife Trusts can capitalise on.

I came away very optimistic that these philanthropists really understand the value of restoring land to nature, rewilding, and re-peopling the countryside. They weren't dabbling, they weren't trying to make themselves feel better, and they weren't careless - lenders expect to get their money back promptly and they expect to see measurable

differences made as a result of their generosity and trust. Working with them is a professional contract to be valued and respected.

Conservation on a landscape scale is ever more urgent and the role of voluntary and community groups in achieving it with new sources of funding and partnership can't be overstated. More power to innovators and disrupters.

Rosie Wood

Links of interest to re-wilding projects

www.wildlifebcn.org/news/exciting-opportunities-strawberry-hill

<https://theconversation.com/monks-wood-wilderness-60-years-ago-scientists-let-a-farm-field-rewild-heres-what-happened-163406>

Shropshire Wildlife Trust's "Thirty Days Wild" runs throughout June with activities and ideas - [more here](#).

[Pentwyn: A vision for the Future](#) (Radnorshire Wildlife Trust - includes link to the appeal)

The Pentwyn 30 year vision

Artwork by Jeroen Helmer - Ark Nature

In 30 Years...



“We bought a Field”

One of the MMCLT’s summer events this year is a visit to the field project that my husband and I manage near Knighton.

We bought the 11 acre field (which is next to our house) at public auction in September 2018 and, as beginners to land management, we have been on something of a vertical learning curve ever since.

With much help and lots of advice from local experts, ecologists and funders such as the Shropshire Hills AONB and Shropshire Wildlife Trust we have been able to achieve quite a lot in the first few years: new woodland (1000 trees), new wetland (deculverting a large land drain), new ponds and scrapes and the repair of the old ruined field barn using traditional building techniques and materials.

We are also slowly trying to enhance the hay meadow through annual mowing, winter grazing and an initial sowing of Yellow Rattle, now running gaily (and slightly alarmingly) rampant.

The anthilly tumps have proved trickier to manage without cattle but we are experimenting with scything in late summer/early autumn and putting sheep on after - and certainly this spring they look quite good with their mini gardens of spring ephemerals such as Parsley Piert and Birdsfoot.

I keep a blog about the field and our learning journey with it (link below) - sign up for updates if you are interested!

Sarah Jameson
images@sarahjameson.co.uk
We Bought a Field



CPRE Shropshire's Hedgerow Project - update

We are delighted to announced that CPRE Shropshire has been awarded a third year of funding for the Hedgerow Project!

We will be organising more hedge creation, hedge laying training and hedgerow surveying training in the next 12 months.

In addition to boots on the ground actions, we will run four seasonal hedgerow walks with printmaking/sketching and create a video on the day in the life of a hedgelayer. We look forward very much to working with project partners once more and our fantastic volunteers who put in so much hard work and enthusiasm last season planting nearly 6km of new, species-rich hedgerow on 26 sites in the county from churchyards to allotments and smallholdings in the hills to arable farms on the outskirts of Telford.

Anyone in the Middle Marches (Shropshire) area who has land (not private gardens) and is interested in having a native, mixed hedge planted this winter, let us know. Likewise get in touch if you have an easy native hedge we might use for hedgelaying training (criteria apply)!

Sarah Jameson
Branch Manager, CPRE Shropshire &
Hedgerow project co-ordinator
admin@cpreshropshire.org.uk

[CPRE Shropshire Hedgrow Project website](#)

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

Contact:
info@middlemarchescommunitylandtrust.org.uk



Hedgelaying training session, Admaston (c) Sarah Jameson