

# MIDDLE MARCHES

## COMMUNITY LAND TRUST

### View from the Chair

It has certainly been a variable summer with both hot and wet spells which has resulted in the trees and shrubs I planted in March making excellent growth. Butterflies have also done well, with meadow browns and gatekeepers particularly benefiting from us leaving areas of grass to grow tall. Yellow rattle is also beginning to take hold. The recent hot spell was a boon, allowing late grass cutting and removal to take place. Hopefully those of you who are also lucky enough to be able to take action for wildlife will also have seen significant increases in the abundance of species.

As you will see this Newsletter is packed full of information about our activities, from action on our reserves to training opportunities together with details of our ongoing Conference programme.

The upcoming conferences will focus on nature recovery and seek to persuade County and Parish Councils to take action for wildlife.

We are entirely run by volunteers and there are still plenty of opportunities to get involved with us. Anne-Helen Harding has just joined us as our Secretary and we still need to recruit a Treasurer as well as someone to lead our media and communications work. There are also plenty of opportunities for hands-on physical work on the reserves!

The season will soon turn and offer us very different opportunities for enjoying wildlife.

**Richard Keymer**  
**Chairman, Middle Marches Community Land Trust**



*Hedgerow Survey training at High Leasowes with CPRE Shropshire (c) Sarah Jameson*

## MMCLT Autumn Newsletter: Contents

Click directly on the items below to go to the article directly.

1. [View from the Chair](#)
3. [MMCLT AGM notice](#)
4. [Upcoming conferences](#)
5. [MMCLT's events review for 2023](#)
7. [Update from High Leasowes](#)
9. [News from Norbury Hill](#)
10. [An update from Cudwell Meadow](#)
11. [CPRE Shropshire's Hedgerow Project update](#)
12. [Hedgerow Management workshops](#)
13. [Leaving money or land in your Will](#)
13. [About the MMCLT](#)

# MIDDLE MARCHES COMMUNITY LAND TRUST

ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

SATURDAY 7 OCTOBER 2023, 1.45PM

MAYFAIR CENTRE, CHURCH STRETTON SY6 6BL

## Agenda

**2.15: Richard Keymer:**

Welcome & Introductory talk

**2.30: Sue Rees-Evans:** "Shropshire

Dragonflies" - followed by updates on Cudwell Meadow, Norbury Hill and High Leasowes.

**4.05:** Refreshments and break

**4.25:** AGM business session including presentation of annual accounts and elections followed by shareholder Q&A.

**5.00:** Close

*Responding to feedback, this year we will hold a very short AGM business section at the very end of the afternoon, with further refreshments. This is where Shareholders (members) are entitled to cast their votes. Supporters and other members of the public don't need to attend this section of the meeting.*

*Parking available opposite in the council car park and elsewhere in Church Stretton. The Mayfair Centre is fully accessible.*



Let us know if you are attending on  
[info@middlemarchescommunitylandtrust.org.uk](mailto:info@middlemarchescommunitylandtrust.org.uk) and tell us  
about any dietary or other requirements you might have.

# EVENTS:

## Two upcoming conferences

Two upcoming conferences are planned, both aimed at encouraging Town and Parish councils to become more engaged in Nature Recovery across Shropshire, Telford and Wrekin with the ultimate objective being the development of bespoke nature recovery plans for each Town and Parish Council: **Restoring Shropshire's Verges Project conference on Friday 13 October** and **MMCLT's Town and Parish Councils conference on Friday 17 November**.

Shropshire Council has been selected by the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA) to lead a new local nature recovery strategy, working with Telford & Wrekin Council.

A local nature recovery strategy is required by law under the Environment Act and is designed to drive actions to help nature.

Each strategy must set out priorities for protecting and enhancing valuable areas that already exist, as well as creating new habitats and connectivity where wildlife can thrive

Ian Nellins, Shropshire Council's deputy Leader, and Cabinet member for climate change, environment and transport, will be present at the event and said:

*"We are excited to be at the forefront of work to help the recovery of nature across Shropshire, and will make sure that everyone's voice is heard."*

*"A locally-led nature recovery strategy will guide work to protect, sustain and enhance our natural spaces to meet our priorities of a healthy environment and healthy people as part of the Shropshire Plan."*

Find out more about the conferences by clicking on the weblinks below.

To book your place please email [info@middlemarchescommunitylandtrust.org.uk](mailto:info@middlemarchescommunitylandtrust.org.uk)

**Verges, Hedges & Watercourses conference, Friday 13 October, Montford Village Hall (near Shrewsbury)**

**Town & Parish Councils conference, Friday 17 November, Fitz Village Hall (near Shrewsbury)**

*"Shropshire's residents are rightly proud of the county's rich natural heritage, and this is an opportunity to help our landscape to flourish even more."*

Ian Nellins, Deputy Leader, Shropshire Council & Cabinet Member for Climate Change

## MMCLT events review, 2023

Over the Summer, MMCLT organised a series of events and visits. These started with a third conference on 12<sup>th</sup> May in partnership with Shropshire Hills AONB. This attracted 120 delegates, indicating the high level of interest and expertise in the natural world across South Shropshire.

The conference brought together Town and Parish council representatives and individuals owning smaller plots of land with a common desire to improve them for biodiversity through Nature Recovery work.

Speakers presented on a wide range of topics including woodland, ponds and wildflower gardening. A fuller review of the conference (including links to presentations) can be [read here](#).

### Stoney Field Site Visit, New Invention (June)

The conference was followed up with a visit to, and walk around, Sarah & Simon Jameson's Stony Field site, south of Clun in the Redlake Valley.

See Sarah's blog 'We bought a field: the story of an 11.4 acre field in South West Shropshire' for more information - a lovely story of land management for nature and seeing the results over time.



### The Isle Estate, Bicton (June)

A visit to Sir Edward Tate's Isle Estate, near Shrewsbury, c.860 acres of agricultural land, water, woodland and dwellings, with the majority of the farm surrounded by the River Severn. The Estate is on a mission to return the land to a level of health and biodiversity not seen in our lifetimes. More information at [www.the-isle-estate.co.uk/isle-farm](http://www.the-isle-estate.co.uk/isle-farm)

Sir Edward led a walk around the estate explaining the ecological programme and how they are working on cropping techniques and use of livestock in a regenerative arable context. He talked about soil health, farm diversification/access, biodiversity water management and utilisation of urban by-product (green waste) for plant nutrient needs.



## MMCLT events, 2023 (continued)



### Cudwell Meadow and High Leasowes (July)

Two site visits in one day in Church Stretton with a picnic in between.

The morning visit was to Cudwell meadow hosted by Mike and Isabel Carter, helped by Cudwell Meadow management committee member Aiden Foster, followed by an afternoon visit to the newly acquired MMCLT site at High Leasowes hosted by Sandra and Peter Whitlock.

### Pam's Pools (July)

A visit to Pam's Pools permaculture and wildlife site (<https://pamspools.co.uk>) took place at the end of July. The vision at this site is to maintain and enhance the mosaic of existing wildlife habitats over the whole 110 acres of "Pam's Pools" and to increase species diversity by creating new ones through conservation grazing, planting native trees and shrubs and the management of the two wildflower hay meadows, two lakes and three pools.



### Norbury Hill MMCLT Reserve (August)

The final site visit for summer 2023 was a walk and talk hosted by Rob Rowe, MMCLT board member.

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.

**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

The last six months have been very busy for the High Leasowes Management Committee as we set to work, with the help of enthusiastic volunteers, to start managing High Leasowes.

The first step was to protect the site from unwanted vehicle access by installing new vehicle gates at two entrances, with the generous help of local fencer John Ellis. Once this was done, a number of well-attended work parties took place during the summer to control bracken, thistles and dock and to remove ragwort from the areas to be cut for haylage.

During the spring and summer Caroline Uff, a local ecologist, conducted a Baseline Ecological Evaluation (BEE), which enabled us to draw up a draft management plan which is currently being considered by both the High Leasowes Management Committee and MMCLT. Caroline was very impressed by our old hedgerows, many of which are dense and have been well-managed, and

also the southern-most of our meadows, Cwm Leasowes, on which she found a wide range of plants including the lovely little Adder's tongue, a tiny meadow fern which is indicative of ancient meadowland. The meadows, trees and hedgerows also provide homes and feeding opportunities for a wide range of invertebrates including the Bilberry bumble bee, Common darter and Black-and-yellow longhorn. Thirty-three bird species, including

*“The meadows, trees and hedgerows also provide homes and feeding opportunities for a wide range of invertebrates including the bilberry bumble bee, common darter and black-and-yellow longhorn”*

Greenfinch and Song thrush were also recorded at the site.

During these first six months we have had very helpful support from Mr and Mrs Downes, the farmers from whom the land was purchased; from the Parish Paths Partnership who installed or repaired kissing gates; and from countless

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





Photo (c) Sandra Whitlock

volunteers who did everything from yellow rattle seed collecting on a nearby National Trust meadow, to photographing and recording flora and invertebrates, sowing local, native seed to enrich the biodiversity of the meadow flora and pulling up the ever-present creeping thistle. We have also been well supported by iDEA, the architectural consultancy at Longnor, whose staff are keen to get involved in practical activities.



Twenty of our volunteers attended a CPRE Shropshire and MMCLT-run Hedge Surveying course, as part of CPRE's Hedgrow Heroes project now in its third year. The day was led by Megan Gimber, Habitats Officer from the People's Trust for Endangered Species. After some theory, they set to work to survey their allocated sections of the High Leasowes hedgerows to add to the information provided in the B.E.E. Two of our volunteers have signed up for the CPRE hedge management course and a further two will be attending the CPRE hedge-laying course. So before long we will have well-trained volunteers, who can help us to prepare a long-term management plan for the hedgerows and put this into action.

MMCLT organized a field trip to both Cudwell Meadow and High Leasowes as part of the summer Programme of events organized by the Community Land Trust – widening the audience of what is possible when organisations work collaboratively to

the benefit of Nature Conservation and restoration across the County.

We have also carried out two guided walks at High Leasowes, which gave us the opportunity to show 45 people around the fields and to help them to appreciate the very special 'stepping stone' that it is. We are very keen on keeping in touch with our donors and supporters and we issue a regular newsletter. If you would like to sign up for this and to hear about volunteering and other activities please email us at [highleasowes@gmail.com](mailto:highleasowes@gmail.com)

During the coming months we will start working on High Leasowes to improve the biodiversity and to start creating the mosaic of habitats that will enable us to meet our vision of "creating an area rich in wildlife and a place that people can enjoy". More information will be available on the MMCLT website.

**Sandra Whitlock,**  
**Chair, High Leasowes Management Committee**  
[\*\*highleasowes@gmail.com\*\*](mailto:highleasowes@gmail.com)





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

The highlight of the year for me on Norbury in 2023 was seeing our first Small pearl bordered fritillary feeding in the area where we had planted out Marsh violet the previous winter. This may have been pure chance but it did show that we were right in our choice of violet planting site.

An almost equal delight was that after having seen the beautiful Forester moth very close nearby Caroline Uff spotted it on the MMCLT land. This blue iridescent day-flying moth is a quite uncommon and local species.

This year saw the return of Barbara Hadrill and her two horses Molly and Bluebell who worked on bracken rolling for two days with great results. Caradoc Contracting again worked on cutting large areas with the Robocutter and Alpine tractor with topper. Simon Cooter and two apprentice scythers helped cut around the outline of the earthworks of the the ancient rabbit warren,

In all we cleared about 6 hectares which was paid for by the Severn Trent Boost for Biodiversity fund.

It was very heartening this spring to start to see the effect of this management with grass and woodland plants starting to strengthen and expand.

As part of a larger project sponsored by Natural England to help the Small pearl bordered fritillary we are doing more work with rush cutting and removal this autumn.

Marsh violet cuttings that were taken back in August are being grown on for us by Rob Lee Wildflowers Ltd. Norbury will be one of the recipients of the twenty thousand plug plants that are being grown.

Caroline Uff has been working on a Bird report which will be available later in the autumn.

**Rob Rowe**



**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 'Open Sundays' began in June to enable people to enjoy all the flowers and invertebrates. We also have two 'walking for health' groups from Mayfair that enjoy walking around. We welcomed a group from Middle Marches in July for a tour and update on developments.

The June Bioblitz was blessed with perfect weather – sunny all day but not too hot. Lots of folk came to help identify fauna and flora. We were blessed with two spider experts from Shropshire Spiders, Nigel and Jim, complete with their 'Heath Robinson' spider catchers (which also gently scooped up loads of other species too) and Caroline Uff, County Beetle Recorder. 31 species of spiders were identified including the attractive pink Candy Stripe and the bright Cucumber Green spider.

Lots of shield bugs were scooped up by them too, together with plenty of their juvenile stages known as 'instars' which reveal they are happily multiplying in the meadow.

We identified 6 species including the Bishops mitre shield bug not seen there before. There were plenty

of beetles with several new species of ladybird and weevils not found in previous years. Beetles included a splendid large red Hazel leaf roller weevil and the Swollen-thighed beetle.

Nine members of the Strettons botany group came to look at the vegetation and were pleased to identify two new species for the meadow, Ragged robin around the pond and Teasel. However other species may have been lost. The very wet winter and spring meant that no sheep could come in to graze the mostly flooded meadow in the early spring resulting now in an abundance of long grass.

Recent visitors to the meadow have included a quite splendid Bee chafer (see inset photo) in July. These are rare, with around one sighting a year for Shropshire so understandably caused lots of excitement. They breed in old birch trees, of which there are a few nearby so we're hoping it may reappear next year.

Nigel of Shropshire spiders comments; "the site is small but very interesting" and is encouraging other experts to visit!

**Isabel Carter**



## CPRE Shropshire's Hedgerow Project - update

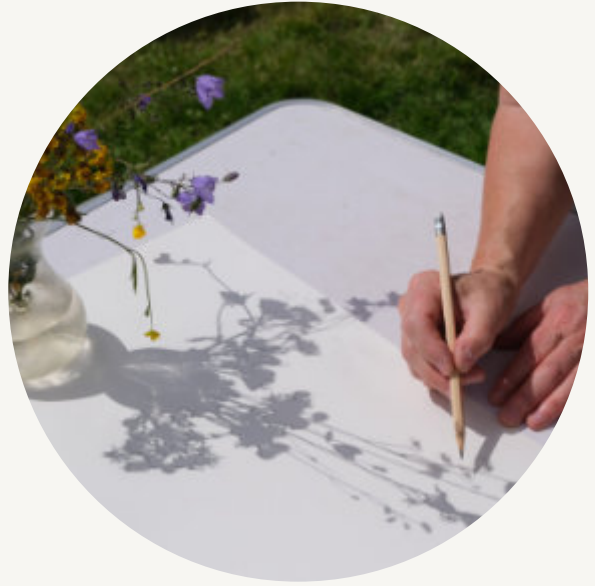
We ran three events over the summer, two on hedgerow surveying with Megan Gimber (see report from [High Leasowes](#) in this newsletter - these workshops were run in collaboration with MMCLT). We also ran the first of our Hedge creativity walks with Andrew Howe, when we made cyanotypes with foraged hedgerow and meadow plants using the power of the sun (which did come out on the day).

Much work has been going on behind the scenes identifying hedge creation sites for the winter and I'm very grateful for the help of Rob Rowe and - now also - Lucy Grove on this. This year, in North Shropshire, CPRE Shropshire will collaborate with the Shropshire Wildlife Trust in creating new hedgerows on farm sites in that part of the county.

Four hedgelaying workshops and two coppicing workshops are lined up for October and November, and are now fully booked. We may be able to run extra workshops if interest and budgets allow so do get in touch if you wish to attend and/or visit our [Eventbrite page here](#).

The second Hedge creativity walk will happen on 19<sup>th</sup> October at Admaston (near Telford) when we will experiment with the wonderful medium of gelli plates to make prints from the hedgerows! Contact Sarah (below) if you are interested in this free workshop.

**Sarah Jameson**  
**Branch Manager, CPRE Shropshire &**  
**Hedgerow project co-ordinator**  
[admin@cpreshropshire.org.uk](mailto:admin@cpreshropshire.org.uk)





The countryside charity  
Shropshire

Free event but  
booking essential

Light refreshments  
included

# Two Hedgerow Management workshops for farmers & land managers

Wednesday 11 October 2023, 10am to 3pm, at Pollardine Farm, Gatten, Pontesbury (kindly hosted by Jane & Lizzie Hulton Harrop)

Thursday 12 October 2023, 10am to 3pm, at Bryncambric, Chapel Lawn, Bucknell (kindly hosted by Bob James)



Hedgerow management on your land plays a crucial part in their long term survival.

How can you get the right balance between maintenance and capital works costs, wildlife habitat and the long-term condition of hedgerows on your land?

If you are in a scheme in which hedges play an important part, you may just feel that your hedges need 'sorting out', that for too long they just get trimmed every year and they are losing condition. What are the advantages of having a hedgerow management plan?

Come on a free practical day workshop led by Nigel Adams to look at hedgerows afresh. There will be an indoor presentation with Q&As in the morning, followed by a free light lunch and then a farm walk looking at a variety of hedgerow types in the afternoon. There will be plenty of time for questions and discussion.

Nigel has a wealth of experience in hedgerow management, so do come and take advantage of this and join us!

Limited places, so booking is essential.

This event is run in collaboration with the Middle Marches Community Land Trust.

Contact & bookings:  
Sarah Jameson, CPRE Shropshire  
01547 528 546 or [admin@cpreshropshire.org.uk](mailto:admin@cpreshropshire.org.uk)





## Leaving money or land in your Will?

*Many of us would like to be certain that after our death, some or all of our money and property can be given to the causes we wish to help. See and download our brand-new [Wills leaflet here](#) and let us know if you have any questions.*

## 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)

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