

# RESTORING SHROPSHIRE'S VERGES: Case Studies

## Clun Memorial Hall Field Margin Project

grid reference SO303812

### Partners/Funders:

- Restoring Shropshire's Verges Project (RSVP)
- Clun RSVP
- Clun Climate and Environment Group
- Shropshire Hills AONB Trust Conservation Fund
- National Grid Community Matters Fund

### Costs:

- Volunteer time 300 hours
- £4000 funding received in total
- Donations of plants and seeds from local community and Cyril Bason Craven Arms



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## RESTORING SHROPSHIRE'S VERGES PROJECT :

The aim of this project was to enhance the field margin of our Memorial Hall playing field, for wildlife, for the local community and for visitors. We hoped to improve the biodiversity, building on previous work by the Clun Space AONB project of 2018-19, and to involve the community as much as possible in creating this new environment.

Within this overall vision, the project involved several different aspects:

- The creation of a wildflower area replacing the monoculture of nettles at one corner of the site
- Design and installation of an irrigation system using an existing borehole
- Clearing of further areas around the field margin and planting of a wider variety of trees and shrubs, specifically with wildlife benefits in mind
- The establishment of a woodland footpath for local residents and visitors, through the new margin area
- The installation of birdboxes and batboxes
- A new noticeboard explaining the project
- The planting of a community orchard



All of the above aspects were achieved and are described below. Several parts of the margin of the Clun Memorial Hall playing field have been transformed into attractive areas with increased biodiversity, involving a wider range of plants, shrubs, trees, birdboxes and batboxes and a new woodland footpath. This has encouraged more local residents and visitors to enjoy these areas on foot as well as the enhanced view from the hall itself. The three “Community Days”, publicised primarily through a wide mailing list to local groups, have been very successful in raising awareness and involved many local residents in contributing to the creation of the areas and taking ownership of our shared environment.

### **Wildflower area:**

We met at the start of the project with experts from the Middle Marches Community Land Trust and Restoring Shropshire’s Verges Project to discuss the best area to use and to take advice on steps needed and suitable plants. Having then cleared the chosen site we planned a Community Planting Day and started asking for donations of relevant plants. We were overwhelmed by the support and received over 300 plants and seeds at no cost, from local residents and outlets. On Sunday 23<sup>rd</sup> April 2023 over 25 volunteers from the local community helped to plant the area – see photos below of the planting day and the area later in the summer:



Following the planting, it became clear that very frequent pulling of nettles was required, in order to prevent them from overwhelming the area again. Particularly during May, daily sessions were needed and a vast amount of nettle roots were removed. As the summer progressed, the weeding became less onerous and a great deal of positive comments were received regarding the wildflowers that had now covered the site. These comments came from the many regular local dogwalkers on the field, as well as users of the Memorial Hall, with the colourful view clear from across the field. Above all, those members of the community who helped in planting the area enjoyed the benefits of seeing the beautiful results of their efforts. An increase in invertebrates was noted informally, with the wide variety of flowers attracting pollinators and a consequent increase in visits from birds. The plants included: foxgloves, primroses, purple toadflax, ox-eye daisies, yellow rattle, evening primrose, scabious, bladder campion, red campion, cranesbill, knapweed, celandine, Leontodon/hawkbit, Pilosella/fox and cubs among others.

In late October we cut down and raked the area, removing the arisings to keep the soil poor with the aim of deterring nettle growth and allowing the seeds left by these wildflowers to grow next Spring.



## **Irrigation system**

The problem of watering the site became apparent early in the project, requiring frequent trips across the field with buckets and watering cans, involving huge daily commitment from volunteers. To ameliorate this we were able to make use of an existing borehole and pump near the hall. We designed and installed a system of pipes around the edge of the field and a water tank within the project site. This allowed the watering of the wildflower area as well as the new shrubs and trees to continue throughout the summer and an extension tank and pipes to cover the community orchard were added in October. This irrigation system will now be of future benefit for further planting initiatives around the margins of the field.

## **Further clearing and planting of trees and shrubs**

Our trees and shrubs were chosen to benefit wildlife as well as providing an attractive woodland area for the community. We aimed to provide a rich source of food and shelter for birds, mammals and invertebrates, winter protection for birds and leaf litter offering hibernation for hedgehogs.

We planted:

- 5 Holly trees – a favourite for the Holly Blue butterfly and many moths.
- One Juniper - loved by rare birds like goldcrest, firecrest and excellent food for moths and caterpillars.
- 3 Yews – leaves are eaten by caterpillars of the satin beauty moth.
- 3 Rowans – a key species for wildlife attracting over 40 different moths, key food source for bats, a rich source of pollen and nectar for invertebrates, followed by abundance of berries loved by approximately 60 species of birds including blackbirds and thrush family, Redstarts and Waxwings. Several mammals also feed on the fruits including dormice, foxes and badgers.
- 3 Crab Apples – rich source of pollen and nectar in spring for invertebrates particularly beneficial to bees and moths such as Greenpug, Chinese Character and Pale Tussuck moth. Then followed by fruits source of food for mammals and birds such as overwintering redwings and fieldfare, blackbirds and thrushes, foxes, badgers and field mice.
- 6 Viburnum - The flowers are an excellent source of nectar and pollen for beneficial invertebrates such as hoverflies. Key species for phyllonorycter lantanella moth. Berries source of food for the Thrush family, waxwings, bullfinches and blackbirds. The tender leaves are a food source for moth and butterflies caterpillars. Rich source of food and shelter for dormice and wood mice.
- 3 Honeysuckle - many species of insects feed on honeysuckle, ten of which feed exclusively. The flowers attract many invertebrates including the hummingbird hawk moth. Dormice strip the bark for nest building. The berries attract warblers and the thrush family. The tangle of branches provides good nest sites for birds. Bats feed on the flying insects attracted to the plant.

A great number of residents have expressed their appreciation of these trees, with their autumnal colours of leaves and berries currently brightening up the field for all.

## **Woodland footpath**

To allow greater public access to this far side of the field, wending its way between the existing and new trees is the newly created “Wallace Walk”. Named after a local resident who led a planting group many years ago, this new route has proved very popular. Carefully designed and initially cleared by volunteers, we then ran a 2<sup>nd</sup> Community Day on 21<sup>st</sup> May 2023 to lay the woodchips along its length.







### **Birdboxes and Batboxes**

Following advice from the Shropshire Bat Group we purchased 3 Kent batboxes and installed them as advised, positioned high and with open approach flight paths. After taking further expert advice we bought and installed 3 Woodstone birdboxes, and in addition created a trail of 15 more birdboxes, built and installed by a local birdringer for the British Trust for Ornithology.

### **A new noticeboard**

By recycling existing wooden structures and with the help of a local woodcarver, we were able to design and produce a large wooden noticeboard for the Memorial Hall car park at only a small cost. To illustrate and explain the project we have displayed on the noticeboard a large A1 poster that we produced in the summer for the Clun Climate and Environment stall at the Clun Show, describing the project and showing photographs of the Community Days. In this way the local community is reminded of the joint effort made in creating this new vista and support for wildlife, and visitors are encouraged to explore it with the knowledge of how and why it was created.

### **Community Orchard**

The 3<sup>rd</sup> and final Community Day was the Orchard Planting Day on October 22<sup>nd</sup> 2023. Over 20 local residents came to plant our 14 fruit trees: three Plums (Victoria, Blue Tit, River Early), one Damson and 10 Apples (Cox's Orange Pippin x 3, Discovery, Bramley, Braeburn, Worcester Pearmain, James Grieve, Egremont Russet, Golden Delicious). We chose the site to be close to the Memorial Hall and the car park, to enable the community to have easy access for fruit picking and maximum enjoyment of the blossom.

