

LIFE ON THE EDGE VERGES PROJECT MARCH 2018 TO MARCH 2019

SUMMARY

This year has been focused more on development and consolidation, than the original proposal suggested. As a result, we are in a far more developed state than we anticipated at the time of our application. The downside of this is that some of the outputs we anticipated have not been achieved in the way we expected them to be.

During the year we have made our links with the Edgton Project (EP) much more robust whilst our partnerships with The National Trust and Natural England have developed as we have become clearer about how the Project should grow. We are now beginning to regard ourselves as a single project with single tier of management. Our connectivity within Shropshire reflects our efforts to engage with both officers and councillors of Shropshire Council in positions and departments likely to connect directly with our activities, environment and highways.

Nationally we are better connected with Projects and organisations that have a broader focus and reach than ourselves. This has given us a better sense of how our project sits within the national picture. We are in contact with our MP who has expressed interest in our ideas and approach and has asked to be kept informed of our progress.

Finally, we are now changing our name following a workshop with partners earlier this year. The new name of the project is

RESTORING SHROPSHIRES VERGES PROJECT.....R.S.V.P

The detail of our year's activity is described below.

- **Volunteer Activity and Training:**

Our loyal local volunteers have continued to promote and engage in the maintenance of verges adjacent to their properties. At the start of the funded year we held two walks for local residents. At these it became clear that we needed to sow and plant more diverse flowers in each Verge. Accordingly, we ordered wild flower seed for use by each volunteer and decided to grow on some for planting in the autumn. These included: yellow rattle, primrose, cowslip, knapweed, vetch and lady's bedstraw.

At each later activity we took advantage of the chance to walk around the area and take note of local changes. We completed four walks and held two specific verge maintenance days across the project area. Volunteers then decided that they would take it upon themselves to care for verges near to their houses in their own time.

Thus far we have not taken the opportunity of bringing more communities into this network, but we anticipate that this will occur as the initiative evolves further this year.

- **Health and Safety Training**

With the help of Shropshire Council's staff, leaders of volunteer groups have been trained in Health and Safety. This has led to greater safety awareness among all volunteers working on the roadside. It was a condition of support from the Council that leaders had to take part in properly accredited training. Later similar training will be offered to volunteers.

- **Mapping**

Our Verges Map is to be located within our former telephone box which is about to be refurbished. It will act as both a map of the village and an opportunity to inform residents and visitors about the project, its scope and development.

The designer of the map is a local resident who is a graphic artist as well as a volunteer for the project. Once the box has been redecorated and refurbished the map will be installed.

- **Developing a Verge Management Partnership**

From the outset of this project it has been clear that the only way to enable it to become sustainable was to build a robust partnership between the various stakeholders. We have spent a considerable time with our partners in this activity. With the Edgton Project (EP), Caring for God's Acre (CfGA) and the National Trust (NT) we have

1. Obtained agreement from Linley Hall Estate that they will compost all biomass collected from local verges.
2. Made contact with the local verge subcontractor who has agreed to adopt a 'cut and collect' regime where we advise him provided we compensate him.
3. Included KEIR and Shropshire Council Highways into our planning partnership.
4. Held one to one meetings with staff from the Wildlife Trust and Plantlife
5. Held one planning workshop and a more formal planning meeting with Shropshire Council Highways (including the lead member Cllr Davenport), the Council Ecology Officer, Plantlife (a National Charity focussed on Verge Maintenance), the AONB, Shropshire Wildlife Trust, CfGA.

We wait to see if this investment will bear fruit in changed Highway Maintenance activity.

- **Learning from Others and Sharing Information**

With EP we have continued to promote the project within the locality. Talks have been given to:

1. Parish Councillors at the Local Joint Committee
2. The Bishops Castle Wildlife Trust
3. Ledbury North Gardening Club Dec 2018
4. Onny Valley WI

As part of our attempt to find out how this issue has been managed elsewhere we have joined Plantlife and our short article has been submitted for their publication. Their national Verge Project Officer has attended one of our meetings. We are also discussing with experts in the field how a cut and collect regime can be implemented in a rural area like ours.

- **Future Funding**

The core partners of this new project, (NT, CfGA, EP, Myndtown CPC, SHAONB) have completed an application for a small grant (£10k) from the National Lottery to Fund a short experimental period of work in south Shropshire to gauge the efficacy of our approach. This will trial three approaches to verge maintenance in locations where drivers and residents will see the transformation and be asked their opinion on the changes they see. We hope this will find favour with the Highways Department as well as Shropshire Tourism.

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