

Shropshire Hills AONB Trust Conservation Fund Award CF/1718/26

The Marches Meadow Group (MMG) thanks the Shropshire Hills AONB Trust for the award of £500.00 from the AONB Conservation Fund. The award enabled the purchase of a Siromer small-round bale wrapper and ten rolls of bale-wrap.

MMG has just completed the third hay-making season after its foundation in spring 2015 using equipment purchased through the Stiperstones and Corndon Hill Country Landscape Partnership Scheme (SCHCLPS). Two of those hay-making seasons, in 2015 and 2017, were hampered by poor weather that delayed or prevented the making of traditional hay on some sites. Any grass eventually cut became a waste product requiring composting, burning or dumping around the edges of the fields. Under these circumstances an option is to bale the cut grass before it is fully dry and then exclude oxygen by wrapping the bales tightly in an air-proof plastic wrap to prevent the growth of spoilage micro-organisms.

Although some traditional hay was made in 2016 not all sites could be cut during suitable spells of good weather; MMG managed to borrow a bale-wrapper that demonstrated that a usable product could be obtained even from fields cut late in the season in less than optimal weather conditions. In reviewing its future machinery needs MMG therefore placed a high priority on obtaining its own bale-wrapper that would be available whenever needed. SCHCLPS agreed to use most of its remaining equipment budget to part-fund a wrapper, but MMG applied to the AONB Conservation Fund for the remainder and was awarded a grant of £500.00.

MMG's estimate of the cost of a wrapper was initially £2,600 plus £200 for an estimated two years' supply of the wrap. However, the SCHCLPS officer, John Brayford, managed to strike a particularly favourable deal with the machinery dealer that secured the wrapper plus ten rolls of wrap for a total of £2,100. The AONB's grant therefore represented almost 24% of the cost, with SCHCLPS (and ultimately HLF) funding 76%.

Although MMG would prefer to make traditional hay whenever conditions allow, the wrapper will enable all MMG members' fields to produce a product with some value as a livestock feed. If markets can be found then members will recoup some (although probably not all) of the costs of the MMG's hay-making services. This will encourage those meadow owners to remain MMG members and hence help to maintain the financial viability of the MMG project.

The ultimate beneficiaries of the AONB Conservation Fund award will be the flower-rich meadows, their associated species and the landscape of the AONB that can be enjoyed by both residents and visitors.

Marches Meadow Group

23rd October 2017



Stock photograph of bale-wrapper from Siromer dealer website



The product - wrapped bales that protect the hay from spoilage and allow storage throughout winter.