

THE LIVING ON THE EDGE PROJECT

A Report For

Shropshire Hills AONB Conservation Fund 2017-18

Summary

The project has been overseen by a project group involving Myndtown Combined Parish Council, the Stiperstones and Corndon Hill Country Landscape Partnership Scheme, the National Trust and Natural England. The AONB team have assisted throughout the year with advice and suggestions. The Project team have met regularly over the year to shape the work programme.

Developing a project of this kind requires a significant investment in local discussion and consultation to ensure local interests are heard and any misgivings addressed. Despite our efforts, misgivings remain in some areas although we have convinced similar Councils to our own, and Bishops Castle Town Council to adopt our approach, these are significant achievements in our first year. Nevertheless we need to invest further in consultation in coming years to explain both our approach and its' benefits to local people, as well as improving the level of co-operation between the Shropshire Council's Verge Maintenance contractor and ourselves to ensure our efforts are not subverted by theirs.

As a result of our discussions with residents and national experts, we have outlined an experimental Verge management approach to Shropshire Council, which we could implement in the coming year. This suggests that we manage three areas in our Parish using different techniques, recording the undergrowth cut from each area and photographing each area at monthly intervals to assess the impact and cost of different management regimes. We have had positive discussions with them and will develop the work programme in the coming months.

Consultations and Database Development

Outputs

1. Consultations

We have held four formal consultations:

- With residents from Norbury, Wentnor and Ratlinghope involving 53 people
- With the Annual Meeting of the Upper Onny Community Wildlife Group involving 27 people

We have in addition informally consulted with a further 175 people at:

- The Woodland Fair in Chapel Lawn
- The Hay Meadow Festival at the Bog
- The Annual Meeting of the Rea Valley Community Wildlife Group

We have held meetings with statutory organisations to promote Living on the Edge and its approach to Verge Management:

- Edgton Community Hall; with Shropshire Councillors and Highways Maintenance Team
- Bishops Castle Town Council;
- South West Shropshire Local Joint Committee. Two meetings of representatives of all Parish Councils in the Clun, Bishops Castle and Chirbury areas.

As a result of these consultations, we have a database of local interested individuals who are informed of our work at key points during the year.

2. Information Development

Outputs

We have produced two leaflets both of which identify the support of the AONB Conservation Fund. Each leaflet has been distributed to individuals on our database and those attending events and activities detailed above. These are attached.

- Leaflet 1 - A leaflet describing the project, its aims, objectives and vision. Distributed to 250 individuals
- Leaflet 2 - An A4 tri-folded leaflet containing pictures and a description of the flowers likely to be found in local verges. This has been distributed to local volunteers and to those organisations likely to want to be engaged in the development of the Life on the Edge approach. 150 distributed.

3. Contacts with Shropshire based organisations

We have made direct contact with local statutory bodies:

- Head of Highways Shropshire Council and local Highways staff
- Outdoor Partnerships team, Shropshire Council

4. Contacts established with national organisations

We have made direct contact with projects and organisations in the following areas to discuss their approach to Verge Maintenance and Care

- Powys
- Lincolnshire
- Telford
- AONB national network throughout the UK.

Verge Management and Wildflower Identification

Summary

A crucial part of the work of this first year was to develop the information base available within the project area and enhance the knowledge of local people interested in Life on the Edge. To this end, we have held identification walks in local areas, which have helped to sharpen the information about the Verges visited and at the same time, help volunteers to recognise signature flowers and plants.

These events, most of which have taken place in the early evening or at weekends, have proved successful and enjoyable to participants. We aim to increase these in coming years, to widen our knowledge base and increase the accuracy of our information about key Verges.

The mapping and identification already available at the start of this project was invaluable to indicate those locations where work could be most fruitful. We have started a more detailed mapping activity in one of the villages so that we can demonstrate change over time. This will be a key element of work in the future.

Outputs

1. Identification Walks.

We have held five identification walks involving 26 individuals in three different localities in the project area.

2. Mapping.

At this stage, we are developing a 'Village Verge' map covering the village of Norbury. This will be completed during 2018/19 and is to be a live map showing the state of verges surrounding the village. It will be updated each year by a new survey, identifying any changes that have occurred since the previous map. Residents are maintaining and enhancing verges adjoining their properties, according to a plan agreed collectively. Each year we will assess work undertaken during the year by residents while we survey the verges.

3. Verge Maintenance Days

We have undertaken six half-day Verge management sessions involving 52 people. These have proved enjoyable and a chance for local people to work collectively. We have cut and raked in three locations and in a further location raked and then laid wild flower meadow hay on a Verge; returning to turn the hay and then remove it once the flower seeds have fallen to the ground.

Plans for the Year 2018/19

Consultations and Information Development

- We will continue our programme of consultations, informing residents and seeking to recruit more volunteer
- We will continue to print our identification leaflet, adapt as necessary and distribute it locally
- We will produce the Norbury Verge Map, identifying what species are present in each verge and wildflower meadow locally, making copies available in the new Information Hub (telephone kiosk) when it is complete in the summer

Verge Management and Wildflower Identification

- Wildflower walks - We aim to hold six wildflowers walks using them to train volunteers and improve our data on local Verges
- Health and Safety Training - We will hold training days for volunteers on the safety aspects of their work, using Shropshire Council staff.
- Verge Maintenance Days - We hope to hold at least six Verge Maintenance Days
- Testing Verge Maintenance Techniques - Following advice from international and national agencies, we want to implement an experimental pilot scheme in three kilometre stretches of Verge. With Shropshire Council, we will maintain three experimental sites seeking to demonstrate the safety, biodiversity and financial benefits of low maintenance options, including: 1. Seeding with yellow rattle rich grasses; 2. Sowing with meadow grass and 3. Making no change. We will measure the biomass extracted from each site and photograph the site monthly to monitor growth. The full detail of this programme will be finalised based on advice from national bodies in the coming months with local partners

Oliver Goode

Chair Myndtown Parish Council and the Living on the Edge Project

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