

SHROPSHIRE HILLS AONB CONSERVATION FUND 2015-16
FINAL PROJECT REPORT
APRIL 2016

Name of project: Developing a vision for Rectory Wood and Field
Applicant: Church Stretton Town Council
Project Reference: CF/1516/6

BACKGROUND TO THE PROJECT

The aims of our project were to:-

- Encourage a wide cross section of people to learn more about Rectory Wood and Field, connect with the landscape, and identify what is special about the site.
- Facilitate discussion and creative writing to summarise the connection that people feel with the landscape
- Use this work to create a shared vision for the future management of Rectory Wood and Field. In time this vision will be used as the basis of the site's conservation management plan for the next 5 years.
- Encourage a wider range of people to get involved in volunteering connected to the site, particularly young people and families

The project comes at a particularly important time for Rectory Wood & Field as ownership and operational management is transferred to Church Stretton Town Council from Shropshire Council. Community involvement and an active volunteer programme are critical to the future sustainability of the site.

GUIDED WALKS, WORKSHOPS AND SURVEY ACTIVITIES

We decided to introduce more people to the site through a series of guided walks, workshops and survey activities. These were assembled under a collective label of 'A Spirit of Place' for Rectory Wood and Field, and the programme is outlined below:-



A Spirit of Place for Rectory Wood and Field

Are you inspired by wildlife and beautiful places? Would you like to play a part in the future management of historic Rectory Wood and Field? A new project will give a unique opportunity for people to learn and discover the fascinating secrets of the site with local experts.

A new model for the management of the site involves a partnership between Church Stretton Town Council, Shropshire Council, the National Trust and Rectory Wood and Field Interest Group (a community group made up of local volunteers and interested parties).

A series of events and surveys will enable people to help document the importance of the site and work on designing a shared vision for future management. **All events are free to attend. Pre-booking is only required for the creative writing workshops.**

Saturday 18th July, 2-4pm:

The Wildflowers of Rectory Wood and Field: Join a guided walk with an expert botanist looking at the plant life of Rectory Wood and Field. Meet at the gate by the Scout Hut.

Saturday 25th July, 10am onwards:

Wildlife Discovery Day: Come and join members of the Community Wildlife Group (SACWG) and local experts to discover the fascinating wildlife that lives on Rectory Wood and Field. We shall look for and try to identify anything growing, flying or crawling. Look out for us waving our nets!

Saturday 15th August, 2-4pm:

The Invertebrates of Rectory Wood and Field: Join a guided walk looking at the hidden world of invertebrates living on Rectory Wood and Field. Meet at the gate by the Scout Hut.

Saturday 29th August, 10am-3pm:

Creative writing workshop with Paul Evans. A rare opportunity to join a guided walk and creative writing workshop with local author Paul Evans. Paul writes for the Guardian Country Diary and has published several books showcasing his beautiful nature writing. To book a place, please contact Rachel at Church Stretton Town Council on 01694 722113 or reception@churchstretton-tc.gov.uk

Saturday 5th September, 10am onwards:

Wildlife Discovery Day: Come and join members of the Community Wildlife Group (SACWG) and local experts to discover the fascinating wildlife that lives on Rectory Wood and Field. We shall look for and try to identify anything growing, flying or crawling. Look out for us waving our nets!

Saturday 3rd October, 10-12:

Rectory Wood and Field Fungus Foray: Join John Hughes (Shropshire Wildlife Trust) to learn about the incredible fungi that make their home in Rectory Wood and Field. Meet at the gate by the Scout Hut.

Saturday 17th October, 10am-3pm:

Creative writing workshop with Paul Evans. A rare opportunity to join a guided walk and creative writing workshop with local author Paul Evans. Paul writes for the Guardian Country Diary and has published several books showcasing his beautiful nature writing. To book a place, please contact Rachel at Church Stretton Town Council on 01694 722113 or reception@churchstretton-tc.gov.uk.



This project has received funding from the Shropshire Hills AONB Conservation Fund

All events were free to attend, and attracted moderate to good attendance (depending on the weather!). We were lucky enough to secure the services of Paul Evans to facilitate the creative writing workshops. Paul has been writing a seasonal wildlife diary from Wenlock Edge for the Guardian newspaper, and his trip to Church Stretton even earned an honourable mention in one of his Guardian reports.



Publicity for the programme of events was generated from a number of articles in local press and community information bulletins.



All the information and data compiled through the workshops is being utilised to update the existing conservation management plan for the field and wood, providing a baseline for future measurement where appropriate.

OUTSTANDING OUTPUTS

The project has two remaining outstanding outputs which could not be fully realised before the end of March cut off point.

1. A practical session with a local primary school group doing nature-based activities on site - plans are now in hand
2. A session with local young people doing some practical conservation work on site – arrangements have now been made

PROJECT LINKS WITH SHROPSHIRE HILLS AONB CONSERVATION PRIORITIES

We believe the project has delivered well against the conservation priorities of the AONB, particularly in relation to:-

Priority 1 – Conserving and enhancing the natural beauty, landscape, wildlife or heritage of the Shropshire Hills AONB

The project's aim was to see more local people become 'invested' in the future of Rectory Wood and Field and to translate that interest into practical offers of help through volunteering, whether that be working on the site or tapping into the considerable wealth of expertise in the local community.

Over 70 people of all different ages and backgrounds attended the various workshops and events on site, some of whom had never walked the site before, even though they live locally.

Priority 2 – Educational and awareness raising activities relating to the AONB and its conservation, especially involving young people.

The Wildlife Discovery Days in particular were aimed at families with children and encouraged a 'hands on' engagement with practical ways of monitoring for wildlife activity.

All of the workshops offered the opportunity to learn more about species identification, habitat and conservation techniques.

M Giles/Ed Andrews
April 2016