

AONB Conservation Fund 2021/22 Bushmoor Verges Project Final Report

The Bushmoor Verges Project is one of the growing number of Restoring Shropshire Verges Project's (RSVP) and is the subject of a Plantlife Case Study which demonstrates best practice in the management and restoration of wildflower road verges.

The **outputs** stated in the grant offer were:

- To survey the verges and agree a verges restoration plan
- To carry out any necessary ground works
- To engage with the local community, including Wistanstow Primary School, to raise awareness of the project and encourage support.

And the **special conditions** were:

- To continue to work with RSVP – Restoring Shropshire's Verges Project and Shropshire Council highway Department to ensure ongoing sustainable management of the verges
- To acknowledge the support of the AONB Conservation Fund, and Shropshire Hills AONB Trust in any promotional material you produce for the project, press releases and at events run as part of your project.

The Project's support from the Shropshire Hills AONB Trust Conservation Fund was highlighted in all publicity including the RSVP Conference in November 2021, and our regular activity updates on their Facebook page: <https://www.facebook.com/ShropsVerge>. We've also worked in partnership with the National Trust, Stepping Stones Project, Shropshire Council Highways Department, and a local botanist and verges contractor.

The Project's work is related to the Shropshire Hills AONB **conservation priorities** through its alignment with the statutory purpose of AONB's to conserve and enhance natural beauty. This is being achieved via: improvement in the local biodiversity of native wildflowers, plantlife, and habitat for small mammals and insects; enhancement of the scenic quality and tranquility of the area for residents and visitors; encouraging local residents to engage with the natural environment; and by contributing to the development and sharing of best practice with partners and key stakeholders.

The Project has been funded through over 200 hours of volunteer time, valued at nearly £2500 and a Shropshire Hills AONB grant of £275 for a botany survey, purchase of 'in the green' snowdrop bulbs, and a next steps verge assessment. All **costs** are detailed in the 'In Kind Record' and 'Claim for Final Payment of Grant' which accompany this report.

Our Achievements

The Bushmoor Verges Project began in early 2021 with the formation of our enthusiastic Volunteer Group made up of around a dozen local residents. Our verges are approximately three quarters of a mile in length. To make the project manageable, we started small, and in May & June, with the help of a local botanist, surveyed the verges. We were amazed to identify around 100 varieties of wildflowers!

During July and August pernicious flowering Hogweed was safely dead-headed, collected and removed from the verges. Then in the autumn of 2021, and with an emerging partnership with the local National Trust Stepping Stones Project, a 150m stretch of the verges was cut and the arisings hay raked into composting piles. Building on our partnership with the National Trust in November, we engaged the services of a local contractor to cut, collect and scarify our the verges on both sides of the Bushmoor Road from the edge of the hamlet all the way down to the Felhampton Bridge.

In early 2022 the verges were seeded with a wildflower mix, 'in the green' snowdrops bulbs were planted in an identified wooded area, and bracken was cleared from the 'in situ' snowdrops which were later divided and replanted. A 'Next Steps' verge assessment was carried out in early April.

Our Lessons Learned

Planning verge restoration needs to be organic – while creating a detailed restoration plan was useful, the organic nature of our work meant that we found it of limited practical value. For 2022/23 we have created a calendar of awareness raising and ground work activities.

Engaging the local community can be both rewarding and challenging – while the Project has sparked the invaluable energy and enthusiasm of the local residents (including one young person) who form the Volunteer Group, it has also failed to ignite any interest from the parents of children in the local community and school. We hope that promoting the location of our work and the continuing success of the Project will make it attractive to adults, and children and young people who live in the neighbourhood.

Budgeting for verge restoration can be a challenge – a disappointing response to an 'in principle' request for cash match funding from Wistanstow Parish Council, and changes to our ground works plan required a rethink on the budget and the re-profiling of the AONBCF grant, We have built our learning into our bid for a grant for 2022/23.

Don't underestimate the generosity and value of 'In Kind' contributions – our estimate of around 70 hours valued £735, became over 200 hours valued in excess of £2000. Again, we have built our learning into our bid for a grant for 2022/23.

The Verges Survey in May & June



Pernicious flowering Hogweed in July



Hay raking cut arisings in the autumn



Cutting and collection in November



Planting 'in the green' snowdrops in February

