

AONB Conservation Fund 2022/23 Bushmoor Verges Project Final Report

The Bushmoor Verges Project is one of around 40 Restoring Shropshire Verges Project's (RSVP) demonstrating best practice in the management and restoration of wildflower road verges.

The **outputs** stated in the grant offer letter 14 April 2022 were to continue awareness raising activities and ground work on the verges.

The Project's support from the Shropshire Hills AONB Trust Conservation Fund was highlighted in all publicity including our regular activity updates on the RSVP Facebook page: <https://www.facebook.com/ShropsVerge>. We've also continued to work 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.

Our Funding

The Project in 2022/23 was funded through over 130 hours of volunteer time. This is detailed in the attached 'In Kind Record', and valued at over £1500. The Project also benefited from a Shropshire Hills AONB grant for 2022/23 of £1285 and a carry forward of £350 from 2021/22. Total spend this year has been £80 for a botany survey (half the amount budgeted), and one day's cut and collect at £660, rather than the 2 days budgeted for. These under spends, plus those associated with our undelivered plans for ground works, plants not purchased and a self-managed verge walk, mean that we have total under spend of approximately £900. This, the AONBCF have agreed, can be carried forward into 2023/24 on the condition that it is spent by the end of March 2024.

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 and cover an area of approximately 1400 square metres.

Our work in 2022/23 began with verge surveys in May and June, the first with the help of a local botanist, the second group-led. Around 130 species of wildflowers have now been identified and our data was uploaded to the National Biodiversity Network iRecord.

During July pernicious flowering Hog weed was safely dead-headed, collected and removed from the verges and Yellow Rattle harvested. In early August, having agreed with the Council's the Highways Department that the Bushmoor verges did not need a 'safety cut', vegetation from both sides of the verges, from the edge of the hamlet to the Felhampton Bridge, was cut and collected by local contractor Parks & Gardens.

In the early autumn we decided not to scarify the verges, and they were instead seeded with a wildflower mix in November. In March 2023 donated Foxgloves and other wild flowers were planted in the Dingly Dell area, and there was some light pruning of deadwood. A self-managed 'Next Steps' verge walk was carried out in early April.

Our Lessons Learned

Planned verge activities need to be flexible – creating a 'depending on the weather' 'Activities Calendar' is a useful way to keep track of the project plan and monitor progress over the year.

Engaging the local community can be both rewarding and challenging – while the Project has continued to inspire the energy and enthusiasm of the Volunteer Group, it has also evidently provoked some limited opposition. The Group were shocked to have 2 of our RSVP donated 'Late Cut' signs stolen and 2 others dumped in the hedge. We hope that the continuing success of the Project will make it one that people who live in the local area can support.

Budgeting for verge restoration continues to be a challenge – as noted elsewhere in this report, due to factors beyond our control (in the main the dry weather and a 'disappearing' ground work contractor), we have under spent our grant this year. Our plan is to spend the carry forward by the end of March 2024.

Don't underestimate the generosity and talent of volunteers – over the last couple of years the capacity of our volunteers to design and self-manage Project activities continues to provide evidence of their resourcefulness and tenacity.

Mike White
Bushmoor Verges Project
24 April 2023

The Verges Survey in May



The Verges in June



The Verges in July



Cutting and collection in August



Wild flower seeding in November



Snowdrops in February

