

Shropshire Hills AONB Conservation Fund Report

Norbury hill survey and bracken control

The Middle Marches Community Land Trust finally took possession of our 47 acres of Norbury hill in May 2021 having raised £45,000 from donations and with an interest free loan from another member to make up the balance.

Norbury Hill has been described as ‘the largest stepping stone’ between two important sites of conservation, the Long Mynd and the Stiperstones. Across the Hill, there are good examples of wetland plant communities, which flourish next to several small streams running down off the steep high ground. It also hosts a once common, but now endangered insect, the small pearl-bordered fritillary butterfly. It supports many breeding meadow pipits and is a feeding ground for Kestrel, Curlew and Snipe.

The eastern half is upland semi-improved grassland with some rushy areas divided by a north/south fence from the extensive bracken area which slopes down to the valley bottom. The northern boundary of our 47-acre site runs near to the Shropshire Way and there is a bridleway along the eastern edge.



One of our first thoughts was to do an extensive ecological survey of both ours and our neighbours land which will help to guide the future management plan. We were fortunate in securing funds from the Stepping Stones project to survey our part of the hill and are very grateful to the AONB Conservation Fund for the funding to survey the neighbouring Brow Farm with whom we are working closely.

One of the main interests of the site is the presence of the Small pearl bordered fritillary butterfly which is largely on Brow farmland. We are working to provide corridors to extend its range. Also snipe and curlew feed here and skylark and meadow pipits nest.

Caroline Uff was engaged to do the ecological consultancy work and has given unstintingly of her time and expertise. Work started in April and carried on till the end of September 2021.

The ecological report is supplied separately and provides a base for our management plan.

We had 2 workdays to cut bracken, one with volunteers from the National Trust Stepping Stones project and one with Norbury hill volunteers. These took place in July and August respectively.

The bracken is extensive on the hill. It is very thick in some areas with no grass underneath while some other areas have less thick bracken and still retain the heathy acid grassland vegetation such as Wavy hair grass, tormentil and heath bedstraw.

We concentrated on these latter areas to try and halt the thickening of bracken. It is certainly hard hot work! In total about half an acre was cleared.



We also hired a remote controlled Robocut with a contractor for the day which cleared about 3 acres of thick bracken. This has given us a base line of work required and going forward we would try and use a machine for the thicker areas and volunteers working by hand for the more sensitive spots.

Rob Rowe, October 2021