

CSM Village Hall Hedge Laying Courses

Ref: CF2223/8

Project Report

The skill of traditional hedge-laying is declining despite the many ecological benefits using it offers. It has declined in recent years due to the decrease in available labour, and increases in hedge cutting machinery and cheaper alternatives such as barbed wire fencing.” (National Trust)

In 2022, we ran 2 hedge laying courses (29/30th Oct and 5/6th November) supported by funding from the AONB Conservation fund.

These courses:

- Offered training to local people that enabled them to manage hedgerows, both on their own land, within the local community and in the AONB
- Restored and managed hedges at the Village Hall
- Fostered community engagement with local environmental projects

Each course was for 2 days, with 6 attendees on one weekend and 7 on the next. There was a gender bias towards male participants (10/13) and the age range was skewed towards older participants (under 25yrs, 15%. 25-40yrs 15%. 41-60yrs – 31%. 60yrs+ 38%). We were pleased to have both women and younger community members involved and if running the course again, would look to see how we could encourage more attendee diversity.

Success criteria

Success criteria	Measured by	Outcomes ✓ Met (✓) Partially met X Not met
Teach a traditional rural skill to local people	Measured by pre and post course questionnaire	✓ Use of tools and knowledge of how to lay hedges were consistently scored highly in questionnaires.
Increase participants' knowledge of the role of hedges in improving biodiversity.	Measured by pre and post course questionnaire	✓ Participants increased their knowledge by between 40 -80%, with an average increase of 49%
Provide local employment and on the job training for assistant trainer	In course evaluation by RR	✓ 3 local craftsmen were employed for a total of 4 days Assistant Trainer learned how to set up and run a course and successfully led the second course
Participants gain new skills	Questionnaire	✓ 50% average increase in using specialised hedge laying tools (range 12 – 49)
Participants use new skills on their own land or as part of community volunteering	Follow up after 6 months	(✓) We weren't able to monitor this extensively. 5 participants came back to do further work on the village hall hedges.
The laid section of hedge is healthier	Thickness of hedge & gaps filled	✓ The laid hedges 9 months on are noticeably thicker with fewer gaps and generally look much healthier.

Increase in biodiversity	Hedge survey ✓ Plant survey – hedge margin ✓ Plant survey –hay meadow, ✓ grass areas (✓) small woodland Animal sightings (✓) Recording by visitors, hall users (including children and young people), volunteers and ADCWG X	(✓) All the surveys on the left that are ticked have been completed for the first year after the course – this will be our baseline. We will continue to monitor biodiversity. We have just installed a trail camera to look for dormouse activity on the site. We have recorded record numbers of certain plant species in the former shadow of the overgrown hedge, particularly celandines and wood anemones. We have seen our first orchid – on the border between the long and short grass areas. We don't currently have a system to enable casual recording by visitors – this is something to develop in the coming year.
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Use of pre and post course questionnaires:

The questionnaires used to measure some of the learning based success criteria would need redesigning if we were to run future courses. For example, it appeared that the skill of using loppers and of using sharpening stones received disappointingly low scores with an average of 12% - but for very different reasons. Using loppers was something that everybody already knew how to do, therefore there was very little learning to be had (=very low increase in score pre and post course). All the tools provided were already sharp, so the sharpening stones didn't see much, if any, use. Therefore, scored low in pre to post course learning.

Attendees' personal learning increase varied from 3% - 40%, with an average of 24%. This seems low, but the average conceals some good successes. For example, the person who evaluated their learning at 3% had a very high starting point right across the board, but still increased their knowledge of how to lay a hedge by 20%

Summary

The course was well received and garnered very positive comments from participants. The course was successful for learning new skills and knowledge but would benefit from more differentiation based on participants pre course skill levels.

Increases in biodiversity on the site have been noted and recorded. With the various surveys having now established a baseline recording, we will be able to monitor the further success of the project in the coming years.

All those involved in the courses, attendees, tutors and supporters – and particularly the Committee at Clew St Margaret Village Hall are grateful for the funding provided by the AONB Conservation Grant, without which this course could not have taken place.



“Brilliant tutors, calm, knowledgeable and encouraging. Nice relaxed atmosphere.”

