

Shropshire Hills National Landscape Forum

Wednesday 29th April 2026

Post-event report



The Forum was attended by 85 people, including 12 from the National Landscape team.



Speakers and interactive activities:

Alex Carson-Taylor, Chair – welcome

Alex welcomed those present and introduced the three themes of the day:

- The new 5 year Plan for the Shropshire Hills 'Thriving in Balance with Nature'
- 10 years of community conservation through the Shropshire Hills Landscape Trust
- The Clun Catchment.

He introduced the approach of the Forum, which aims to break out of some traditional meeting patterns in order to be more inclusive and participative.

Phil Holden, Team Manager – introductions and a bit about the Shropshire Hills National Landscape

After getting those present to introduce each other in twos or threes, Phil talked briefly through some aspects of the National Landscape:

- The landscape itself and its special qualities
- The designation of the Shropshire Hills, dating from 1958, now known as 'National Landscape'
- The new 5 year Plan <https://www.shropshirehills-nl.org.uk/a-special-place/management-plan>

Preparing the Plan had required us to face up to some hard truths, including:

- The gap between the ambition for National Landscapes and the scale of what we all collectively can currently deliver for them.
- While there are lots of good things happening, there are negative trends too, sometimes resulting from government policies, or from mainstream activities in our economy.
- Sustainability doesn't work as a 'bolt-on', we have to look deeper.
- Confronting the myth that 'we just have to adapt' to climate change. We can't just 'adapt' to the scale of climate change that is happening. So if we talk of 'resilience' but are still heading to 3 or 4 degrees of warming, we are peddling a dangerous delusion. Yes, we have to adapt and build what resilience we can, but if we don't solve the emissions and stabilise our climate, our adaptations will be overtaken.

[For more info see the expert briefings at [National Emergency Briefing](#)]

"However - what if we're doing collectively in protected landscapes is actually central to the shifts that are needed to address the big global challenges? That our places embody vital things that aren't counted in GDP – ecological health, beauty, wellbeing, community. That our inspirational landscapes are a way that people can reconnect with nature, helping us forge a viable new relationship with our living world. Local networks involving a diverse range of stakeholders (*like the Forum itself and others represented on the day*) are seen as key to driving the kind of systemic change we need (see [UNEP, 2024](#)) "

Phil highlighted that there is no single 'organisation' for the Shropshire Hills National Landscape, but a variety of people and groups with different roles, who were introduced:

- [The staff Team](#) – funded by Defra and the two Councils. Undertake some direct delivery plus important roles to enable and support others.
- [Advisory Committee](#) – new Committee formed following recent change to structure.
- [Key delivery partners](#) – organisations who help deliver the Shropshire Hills Plan, including those with statutory duties.
- [Trustees](#) of the Shropshire Hills Landscape Trust
- [Friends of the Shropshire Hills](#) – who donate money to the Trust

George Chancellor & Janet Cobb, Trustees - Shropshire Hills Landscape Trust – Celebrating a Decade of Community Conservation

George introduced the work of the Trust over 10 years – supporting projects, people and places. See <https://www.shropshirehills-nl.org.uk/help-to-look-after/shropshire-hills-landscape-trust>.

Projects have encompassed an unbelievably broad range of activity – from pine marten monitoring to Young Ranger support, veteran tree care, wildlife surveying and training, wildflower meadow creation and management, heritage building repair, curlew and swift conservation, butterfly recovery, wildlife pond creation, dormouse monitoring and habitat restoration, river habitat improvement, road-side verge restoration and management, whinberry re-establishment and Forest School development amongst many others.



Janet spoke about the work of the Marches Meadows Group, Restoring Shropshire’s Verges Project and the Middle Marches Community Land Trust, all of which had received funding from the Shropshire Hills Landscape Trust.

Some 25 separate ‘ideas’ for project work were left on the Trust whiteboard at the Forum, some with local contacts. Some of these were more general observations about what needs to be done in the National Landscape rather than project thoughts; others gave good ‘direction of travel’ thoughts for future project work; and a few focussed on specific projects currently being thought about, planned or under way.

Brief introduction to Clun catchment theme

Due to the complexity of the issues, limited time and wide range of people present, there was no attempt to go through the technical issues of the Clun catchment. Over a few minutes some angles were explored, to think about rivers and catchments in a slightly different way. Nigel McDonald read the poem ‘Kingfisher’ by Robert Macfarlane.

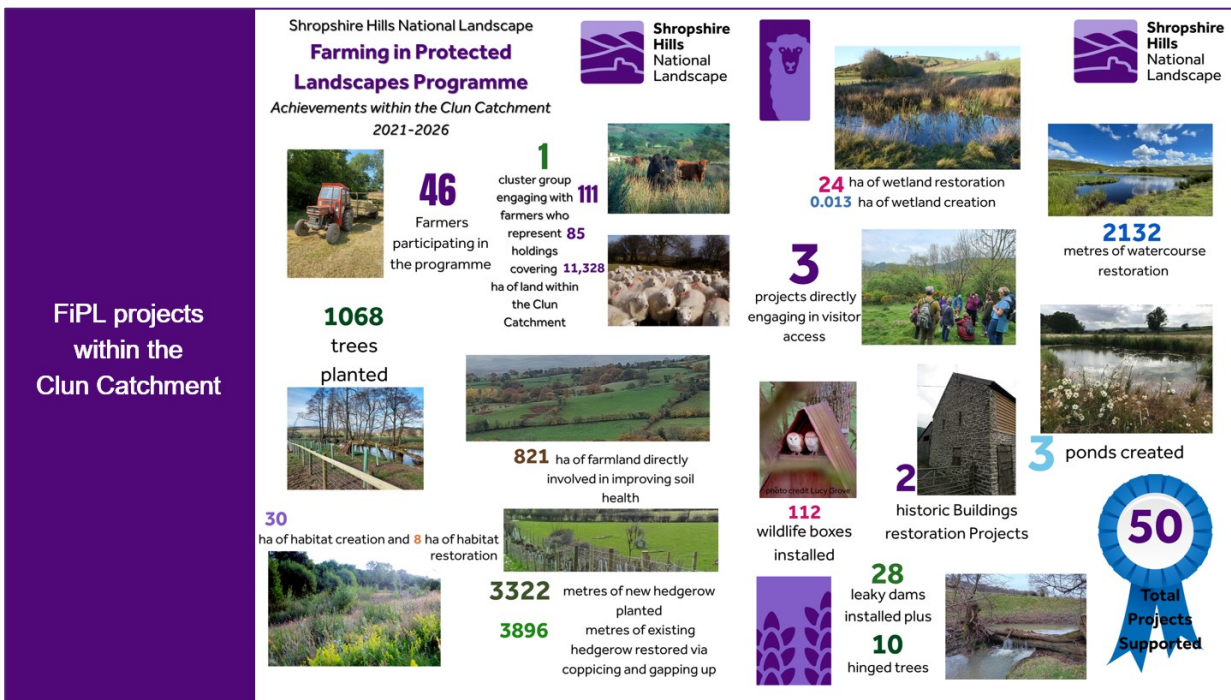
Phil Holden talked briefly about water cycles, the web of river tributaries in a catchment, and posed some questions about the challenge of learning to live well with water, which faces everyone, everywhere.

How much of it, at what times? What quality is it?

How do we meet our needs and leave enough water for other life?

How do we pass on to those downstream of us, water that’s fit for life, that we can be proud of?





Dr Andy Wigley, Policy & Environment Service manager, Shropshire Council - The Clun valley landscape – past and future

Andy talked through the chronology of human settlement in the Clun valley and catchment, from Neolithic finds, through the variety of Bronze and Iron Age hillforts, Roman occupation, early field and settlement patterns, the Norman influence including Clun Castle, through Parliamentary Enclosure, designed landscapes, 20th Century enclosure of the upland plateau through to modern day development including housing and renewable energy.

He touched on current mechanisms including the Local Plan, Local Nature Recovery Strategy, Farming in Protected Landscapes programme and the National Landscape Management Plan.



Clun castle from the air

Stalls and stands and informal networking

As always, the informal networking part of the day is valued and popular as a key part of the programme. Thanks to all those who brought stalls and stands representing the following organisations, groups and projects:

Acton Scott Heritage Farm	director@ashf.org.uk
Bishop's Castle Walking Festival	bcwalkingfest@gmail.com
Caring for God's Acre	info@cfga.org.uk
Clee View Farmers Group	
CPRE Shropshire	admin@cpreshropshire.org.uk
Environment Agency	Martin.Fenn@environment-agency.gov.uk
Farmgate nutrient balancing project	james@sustag.co.uk
Forestry England	kaitlyn.elverson@forestryengland.uk
Marches Meadow Group	richard.w.small@gmail.com
Middle Marches Community Land Trust	info@middlemarchescommunitylandtrust.org.uk
Minsterley Meadows	sarah.minsterleymeadows@gmail.com
Pneuma Affinity - rooted in the principles of Creative Health	roz@pneuma-affinity.co.uk
Rea Valley Community Wildlife Group	Reavalleycwq@gmail.com
River Clun Monitoring Group	dave.lewis54hv@gmail.com
RSPB south Shropshire	carolwood772@outlook.com
Severn Rivers Trust	sophie.bloor@severnriverstrust.com
Shropshire and Telford & Wrekin Local Nature Recovery Strategy	l.parker@shropshire.gov.uk
Shropshire Hills Landscape Trust	info@shropshirehillslandscapetrust.org.uk
State of Mind Consultancy	becky@stateofmindconsultancy.co.uk
The High Leasowes Trust	events.highleasowes@gmail.com

Clun Catchment Visioning Workshop

A 45-minute workshop was held in a side room to the main hall during the informal networking period before lunch. This proved to be rather noisy, but thank you to those who took part for bearing with this. The workshop used a range of tools that have been used in other catchments and areas – starting with people’s earliest or strongest memories of the River Clun, thinking about how the catchment connects to areas around it, and then to imagining what could the Clun catchment look like in 25 years’ time in the best scenario. A flavour of people’s visions for the future are here:

- Strong, helpful community. Kindness. Birds and insects in abundance. Diverse meadows, orchards. Horticulture feeding communities. Community energy. Local water supply. A community that is resilient.
- Thick and dense with wildlife and nature, people’s lives move slower and more locally with every opportunity to travel widely but all their needs met within walking / cycling of home. Clean safe river.
- More biodiversity landscape, no arable on the tops, fewer conifer plantations, more broad leaf trees, local renewable energy networks, connected public transport networks, fewer cars, community housing.
- People thriving and nature thriving, a sustainable population of both, and both less separated and able to benefit from each other.
- Informed communities working collaboratively to restore nature. Political support. Food and energy security. World peace. An end to dictatorships. A more equal society. Less people more natural space.
- Contented communities - connected to thriving nature. Large scale volunteering to improve environment in post-consumerism society.
- It would look very similar to now as far as the landscape, there would be a thriving local community.
- Wildlife-rich, clean.
- Retro fitted housing, fuelled by renewable energy for buildings and transport. Largely locally produced food. Upland water management - no flooding or drought in the Clun river. Pearl mussels thriving! Much increased biodiversity.
- Young people, modern housing, energy saving. Bird song. Lots of birds, insects - grasshoppers in the grass. No mud along the river bank - trees along the bank and no puddling from livestock. Fish of all sizes.
- Looking similar to what we see now, alongside a thriving social and working community.
- A Clun catchment with more river birds, more biodiversity and wildlife generally. More trees along the now shady river, more hedges, less arable on the tops & beside the river. Better public transport, car free villages, and much less flooding. River testing showing improvement in biochemical and biological parameters. A footpath along the length.
- Thriving community - all ages - connected to each other and nature. Flourishing insects, birds, bats etc.

Farm visit to Guilden Down

Helen Oliver and Rachel Glover from the National Landscape Team led the visit of 17 people to Guilden Down Farm, hosted by farmer Shenton Gwilliam. The visit was to see work on the ground to retain and slow water whilst improving water quality and biodiversity, funded by the Farming in Protected Landscapes programme.

The project on the farm was centred around three of the four FiPL themes - Nature, Climate and Place. Elements of the project included: planting a cross-contour hedge and small areas of woodland to act as new wildlife corridors and to slow overland water flow; fencing off two wooded dingles to enable greater plant diversity and prevent livestock access to watercourse, reducing compaction and pollution. In the main wooded dingle, leaky woody debris barriers have been created by woodland engineers as a natural flood management measure, helping to trap debris and sediment and 'slow the flow' of water downstream during flood events.

The group were also joined by Jasper Linley-Adams from Severn Rivers Trust who shared information about their partnership involvement in the farm project, through planting several areas of new trees under the Severn Woodland Scheme and creating new wetlands features (small pools and scrapes) to help retain water in the landscape.

The group asked lots of questions and said how interesting it was to hear about such work and Shenton's interest in undertaking this project to complement the farm business and wider landscape. Shenton and others talked about how the Clun Valley we see today has been shaped, and also the wider past, present and future influences on farming and the environment.



Whinberry Hill visit

Cath Landles and Joy Howells from the National Landscape Team led the visit of 18 people to Black Hill where a community group linked to Clunbury Parish Council have been restoring heathland habitat. Thanks to John and Elly Bibby, David Stafford, Catherine Lishman and Ian Aldred from the group who showed the group around.

The land is owned by the Parish Council and surrounded on three sides by forestry plantation. Though it was formerly wet heathland, the land had deteriorated due to encroachment by bracken and self-set conifers. A grant from the Trust's Conservation Fund had enabled restoration work, including removal of conifers and extraction of some timber by horse.

The group on the trip enjoyed great views and weather, and interesting conversation. Various members of the project group told us about the history of the site, ownership, the project, habitats, and wildlife. Kaitlyn and Harrison from Forestry England (landowners of Black Hill) were present and also spoke about management of their wider woodland site. There were lively discussions about wildlife, management, history, bracken management, funding, and many other topics.

From 'A Summer Holiday at Clun' RH, 1907

*Of many places 'neath the sun
There are but few to equal Clun
So if you want a holiday
Pack up and start without delay*

*Another day we'll climb Black Hill
With wimberries ripe our baskets fill
Where gorse and heather bloom and fade
And changing bracken spreads its shade*



Whinberry Hill visit (Black Hill, Clunbury)

Clun town walk

The Clun Town Walk was hosted by Rowena Bowles and Nigel Kerry from Clun Museum. The walk, lasting around two and a half hours, was attended by 18 people including Joe Penfold and Dougald Purce from the National Landscape Team in support.

Rowena and Nigel gave a fascinating insight into no less than 20 points of interest, delving into local archives to bring local history and heritage to life. Highlights of the walk included:

Clun Castle - originally defensive when built around 1090 and burnt down in 1196, but after being rebuilt in stone in the 13th Century it was used as a grand hunting lodge with pleasure, fishpools and stables for around 160 horses.

The Museum of Clun - established in 1932 and caring for a fabulous collection of historic Clun Valley items, photographs and prehistoric flints, is housed in Clun Town Hall in the Square, which was built in 1780 using stones from the old castle courthouse.

St George's Church - Originally 12th Century, the church stands beside a venerable yew tree, believed to be over 2000 years old, and has many stunning features, including 22 splendid 14th Century carved angels in the North aisle and a beautiful 15th Century wooden canopy over the high altar.

The 'Hospital of the Holy and Undivided Trinity' - was built in 1618 as alms houses for "12 Good Men in the Service of God". These almsmen were often seen around Clun in their Trinity cloaks and hats and were provided with a monthly stipend of thirteen shillings and fourpence, a garden for growing vegetables and two loads of firewood a year.

Clun Lake - an ancient glacial kettle hole lake of 6 acres on the site of the current Clun Memorial Hall and playing fields, was used to drive Clun watermill as well as for fishing, boating and skating, before being accidentally drained and the lining destroyed in 1947.



Image supplied courtesy of © Clun Museum

Interpretation workshop

In the afternoon as an alternative to the field visits, Nigel McDonald, Regenerative Tourism Officer for the Shropshire Hills National Landscape Team, ran a workshop on interpretation.

The focus of the workshop was on accessibility and barriers to access, especially for people with special educational needs and mobility issues but including people on low incomes generally.



The workshop proposed thinking more widely about interpretation in this context, especially in the consideration of the media, its development and purpose. Creative approaches were illustrated with the work the National Landscape Team has done with Roz Donati of Pneuma Affinity CIC on the Open Horizons and Nature Calling arts and access projects, as well as working with murals and audio creatives at Brow Farm, Ratlinghope. There was a suggestion that Brow Farm, Darnford and the Upper Onny would make a good focus for a future event.

The Team's work on the Nature Calling with My Options Telford & Wrekin was seen as important, as was Joe Penfold's work in outreach with new groups.

A suggestion was made that more help be offered to farmers who need support when leading and presenting to others about their work.

The workshop also highlighted the need for external funding to improve and replace media from previous projects.

Reflections on the day

People wrote on cards with feedback and addressing the question:

What do you plan to go home to do new or differently for the Shropshire Hills after today?

Some of the answers to this were:

- Seek more creative health project possibilities in the Wrekin and Ercall area – reach more marginalised communities helping them to connect with the Shropshire Hills
- Two people from Ape Dale talked about the possibility of launching an Ape Dale Wildlife/Nature Group
- Continuing work on verges
- Connect with more people
- Try to work with other organisations, events, volunteering etc
- Don't mow the lawn, maintain contact with the people I have exchanged emails with
- Continue with projects started by Nature Recovery Group in Llanfair Waterdine and do more
- Contact some of the people I have met

One participant, Julia Walling, wrote this as a reflection on the morning plenary session:

Nature Recovery

*Our minds, filled with the vision of a meadow, light our hearts,
for there are seeds in the notion of it thriving
that make us feel a part of something so much richer than ourselves;
something that can hold us and tell us
what we are.*

She said *"The Forum was a real boost of inspiration. It's a great joy to be part of this thriving, positive community and to hear about the wonderful work that is being done here."*



Thank you to everyone who took part in the Forum at Clun. If you'd like to join the Forum as a Member - to show your support and keep in touch about future events, please click the 'join Forum' button at <https://www.shropshirehills-nl.org.uk/our-work/structure/forum> (no cost).

We look forward to seeing you at future Forum events!