

Stepping Stones Project Community Meetings

Charlie Bell 20/03/20

Introduction

Thanks to support from players of People's Postcode Lottery, three Stepping Stones Project community meetings were held across the project area in late January and early February 2020. These were organised, run and facilitated by Cath Landles (Shropshire Hills AONB) who also acted as the main point of contact for the general public. In total over 160 people attended from a wide variety of backgrounds. The aims of these meetings were:

- To bring together residents, farmers, landowners, community wildlife groups, statutory organisations and conservation groups, introduce them to each other and to the background, aims and objectives of the Stepping Stones project.
- Hear from local community wildlife groups and volunteers about the work they are currently doing, their planned activities for the coming year using the Stepping Stones project funding, and how people can get involved.
- To ask attendees two questions:
 1. What interests you/what's important to you?
 2. What would you like to get involved with?

All three meetings were facilitated by Cath Landles. Presentations were given by Andrew Hearle, Stepping Stones Project Manager (National Trust), and Peter Carty, Countryside Manager (National Trust), which introduced the project and gave some background information. Then several local wildlife groups gave short presentations on their work and what they hope to achieve over the coming year with the Stepping Stones project funding. After a short break, table groups addressed the two questions above before feeding back key points to the whole room. Attendees were then invited on the upcoming field visits and given the chance to sign up to the project newsletter.

Key themes

Several **key themes** common to all meetings emerged:

Verges – advice on creation and management, lobbying authorities to change verge management;

Meadows - advice on creation and management, opportunities to help with practical work;

Hedgerows – training on how to plant and lay hedges, advice on species selection, opportunities to help;

Species recording – training on identification and monitoring techniques, opportunities to get involved;

Communications – the need for regular updates and an online hub where people can find out what's going on and how to get involved;

Bigger picture – a desire to understand how individual activities fit into the wider vision for the landscape;

Education – the need to educate and engage the wider public and especially younger people.

Feedback

Here are some quotes taken directly from the flipcharts where groups recorded the answers to the questions ‘*what interests you/what’s important to you?*’ and ‘*what would you like to get involved with?*’

“We need an opportunity map to help concentrate efforts in the right places”

- Norbury 30/01/20

“We would like some training workshops on how to turn lawns into wildflower meadows, and how to manage local road verges”

- Pontesbury 10/02/20

“Funding for groups is critical, there is a need for continuity to ensure projects have a continued legacy”

- Pontesbury 10/02/20

“I’m interested in monitoring and identifying nesting locations of breeding birds like curlews”

- Carding Mill Valley 13/02/20

“You need to link the verge project with hedgerow management for wildlife. They are interconnected, hedges run alongside verges and both habitats need managing together”

- Norbury 30/01/20

“Photography could be used to raise awareness and interest, and to monitor progress and success”

- Norbury 30/01/20

“Communication needs to use local newsletters e.g. Stretton Focus to reach a wider audience”

- Carding Mill Valley 13/01/20

“We need support for individuals who want to drive small projects e.g. legal advice and other expertise”

- Carding Mill Valley 13/01/20

“We need to coordinate the management of small blocks of woodland that are sold off as separate plots, to ensure they act as one larger habitat area”

- Pontesbury 10/02/20

Word clouds were created from the feedback from Questions 1 and 2. Word clouds look at the most commonly used words within a piece of text and reflect the frequency the words are used by the size of the font: the larger the font, the more frequently the word was used.

| | What's important/interesting to you? | How would you like to get involved? |
|---|--------------------------------------|-------------------------------------|
| <p>Norbury 30th Jan 2020</p> <p>45 attendees, 5 presenters: RSVP SDG CVCWG UOCWG BC See p4 for key to group names)</p> | | |
| <p>Pontesbury 10th Feb 2020</p> <p>37 attendees, 4 presenters: RSVP MMG RVCWG SDG See p4 for key to group names)</p> | | |
| <p>Carding Mill Valley 13th Feb 2020</p> <p>65 attendees, 4 presenters: MMG RSVP SACWG SDG See p4 for key to group names)</p> | | |

Communications

Many people expressed a wish to be kept up to date with the Stepping Stones project and the activities of the local community wildlife groups and other organisations who presented at the workshops.

A project e-newsletter is being set up, using those email addresses from the contact forms filled in during the workshops.

Events are being added to the [Event Hub on the Middle Marches website](#) – plans are being developed to have a dedicated Stepping Stones project area online.

External links

Below are links to all the groups who presented at the community meetings, plus others operating in the Stepping Stones areas.

| | |
|---|---|
| Shropshire Dormouse Group (SDG) | Contact shropshiredormouse@gmail.com |
| Marches Meadow Group (MMG) | Contact Richard Small richard.w.small@gmail.com |
| Restoring Shropshire's Verges Project (RSVP) | Contact Janet Cobb janet@jan-net.co.uk |
| Butterfly Conservation West Midlands | Contact Stephen Lewis phwarden@sky.com |
| Upper Onny Community Wildlife Group (UOCWG) | Contact details on webpage |
| Camlad Valley Community Wildlife Group (CVCWG) | Contact details on webpage |
| Rea Valley Community Wildlife Group (RVCWG) | Contact details on webpage |
| Strettons Area Community Wildlife Group (SACWG) | Contact details on webpage |
| Bumblebees on the Mynd Project | Contact Debbie Viviers bumblebeesonthemynd@gmail.com |
| Curlew and Red Grouse surveys | Contact Leo Smith leo@leosmith.org.uk |

Field visit 8th March 2020

The first of three planned field visits around the Stepping Stones Project Area took place on 8th March with around 25 attendees. The group were hosted by the Marches Meadow Group and Butterfly Conservation near the Bog visitor centre at the Stiperstones. After lunch they travelled to Hope Valley Wildlife Trust reserve to meet the Shropshire Dormouse Group and the Rea Valley Community Wildlife group, and learn about their nestbox schemes, dormouse monitoring and bird surveys.



Unfortunately the remaining fieldtrips have been postponed due to the current Covid-19 pandemic.