

RESTORING SHROPSHIRE'S VERGES: Case Studies

Lyth Bank Verges grid references

Lyth Bank Triangle SJ346141 307148

Opposite Verges SJ346164 307170

Long Verges SJ346748 306919

Establishment of three wildflower verges

Partners: Restoring Shropshire's Verges Project (RSVP), Marches Meadow Group, National Trust April 2024

Costs:

- **Volunteer time** - estimate for number of hours so far: 111
- **Any funding costs** – nil apart from fuel
- **Contributions** - Yellow Rattle seeds – The National Trust Jinlye Meadow (2023 and 2024)
- Betony, Knapweed and Sneezewort seeds, - Robert Lee (spring 2024)
- Plug plants (Oxeye daisy) – RSVP Spring 2024



RESTORING
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VERGES
PROJECT

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Lyth Hill Residents Association

RESTORING SHROPSHIRE'S VERGES PROJECT :

Description of project and how it developed

Background

In spring 2023 Janet Cobb of RSVP was invited to come to meet members of the Lyth Hill Residents Association to explain the benefits of verge restoration. Also, at much the same time, I attended the MMCLT seminar at Fitz Village Hall. As a result, a number of residents living in the Lyth Bank/Lyth Hill area were inspired to get involved in the restoration of the roadside verges in the local area so as to help nature and increase bio-diversity near where they live.

The first two sites to be tackled were the grass triangle at the road junction at Lyth Bank and the verge immediately opposite it. On Sunday 6th August 2023 a party of eleven volunteers met to start work. Both verges were cut using a variety of privately owned mowers and brush cutters and the arisings were raked up, bagged and removed to the Battlefield recycling centre. The surfaces were then raked vigorously to expose bare soil. A quantity of Yellow Rattle seed which had been collected at the National Trust owned Jinlye Meadow on the Long Mynd had been kindly donated to the group. This was spread onto both scarified verges and trodden in. ***(Yellow Rattle is an annual which is semi-parasitic on grasses, attaching itself to grass roots and taking nutrients so reducing the vigor of the grasses and thus allowing other herbaceous plants to compete).***

Also on 6th August 2023, freshly cut green hay from a species rich meadow at Pulverbatch owned by a member of the Marches Meadow Group was collected, bagged and transported to Lyth Bank where it too was spread onto the surfaces and trodden in.

Later in the month, plug plants of Knapweed and Ox-eye daisy sown and grown on by other RSVP groups were donated to our group and planted in the first two verges.

Volunteers working on the triangle and nearby verge on 6th August 2023





Right:

Mechanical scythe used for cutting green hay at Willowfield Pulverbatch



Collecting green hay at Willowfield



May/June 2024

Both verges showed much improved biodiversity with quantities of Yellow Rattle in flower along with Bird's Foot Trefoil, Common Vetch and various new grass species.

Plug plants of Ox Eye Daisy donated by RSVP members were planted on both of the initial two sites.

On 14th May, during a visit to Allbrihtlee Battlefield Shrewsbury, quantities of surplus wildflower seeds (i.e. Knapweed, Betony and Sneezewort) were kindly donated by Robert Lee. These were distributed to around ten households for sowing into seed trays and growing on into plugs.

A further roadside verge – the 'long verge' near Old Coppice - was identified as probably suitable for restoration by the group, further observation showed it to be already quite species rich. The decision was therefore taken to try enhancing it just by planting plugs and scattering yellow rattle seed in bare areas rather than full mowing.

Cutting the triangle again – summer 2024



July 2024

A local farmer is paid by Shropshire Council to mow the verges around Lyth Bank annually.

In July 2024 he delayed mowing until the first half of the month and then only mowed up to one metre from the edges of all verges thus leaving much of the yellow rattle flowers and other wild flowers seed to ripen and fall naturally.

Yellow Rattle seed from the Lyth Bank triangle was manually collected to be spread elsewhere where the coarse grasses still seem to be dominant.

Both verges were cut down in stages with the arisings being raked up and bagged.

It was pleasing to note during cutting that as well as many more and new wild flowers, there were several amphibians (frogs and froglets) and mammals (a field vole) living in the long grass which were carefully removed for their protection.

On 10th July, a further quantity of Yellow Rattle seed was again collected at Jinlye Meadows most of this was spread on the long verge with some adding to that already spread on the triangle.

Volunteers at work on the Lyth Bank grass triangle again during summer 2024



Work also took place on the opposite verge.

This included planting the plug plants we had grown



Above: Planting plug plants and watering them in

Below: Cutting vast quantities on the triangle



August 2024

Many of the plug plants grown from donated seed were deemed large enough to plant out on the grass triangle, the opposite verge and the new long verge.

The plugs planted on the triangle and opposite verge were regularly watered using an extended hose and watering cans.

The long verge was tackled using brush cutters as a mower wasn't available.

Betony and Knapweed plugs were planted in the grassland in the long verge in various bare patches and were kept watered using cans transported to the site

September 2024 (Planned)

More plugs of Knapweed, Betony and Sneezewort are available to plant on the three verges now that the summer drought has broken they will be planted in suitable locations.

Future Management Regime

The vegetation on all three roadside verges will be allowed to grow until at least late July each year. It will then be cut, either as in 2024 using brush cutters first followed by mowers or, hopefully using better equipment available from RSVP. Arisings will be removed. Supplies of other species of wildflower (seeds or plugs) will be sought out and these will be planted when soil conditions allow.

Commentary

All the work has been done by volunteers who are members of the Lyth Hill Residents' Association and who have given their time free of charge and have used their own equipment and tools.

No financial assistance has been sought or given.

Taking account of all the tasks undertaken from managing the group, sowing seeds, growing them on, cutting vegetation, scarifying and spreading green hay and seeds and planting plugs a total of fourteen people have been involved.

Experience so far has shown that leaving verges to grow on until late July/August reaps rewards with much improved displays of wildflowers and no doubt also leads to more invertebrates (and indeed vertebrates).

However there is no doubt that the task of cutting the long vegetation is quite labour intensive so options for borrowing more suitable equipment in 2025 will need to be explored.

There are more verges across Longden parish that could be tackled if more volunteers come forward.