



The countryside charity
Shropshire

Spring Newsletter 2022



Welcome to CPRE Shropshire's Spring newsletter!

In this very full issue we bring you an update on our current hedgerow project, news of our next not-to-be-missed online talk by Sally Green (this time on the Ice Age in Shropshire - book now to avoid disappointment!). Also inside a Shropshire planning update from Charles Green, a short summary of the Glover Review, and - a first for us - two very personal accounts of the challenges of renting and living in social housing in the 21st century.

Do email us with any comments or suggestions for articles in future newsletters - we look forward to hearing from you.

Thank you!

Sarah Jameson
Branch Manager, CPRE Shropshire
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Hedge planting volunteers at Hare Hill Farm near Edgton, Craven Arms on a windy February morning.

Pleaching and the art of beginning

In early November last year I took part in a workshop run by CPRE Shropshire in hedgelaying on the Acton Scott estate. It was a blowy Autumn day and twelve of us gathered around our instructor, Richard Clarke, to learn the basics of pleaching, an ancient rural skill that sadly is dying out on many farms around Shropshire.

As Richard took us through the first things first, health and safety, tools and maintenance and then the dreaded first cut with the billhook, I didn't realise then the impact these two days would have on my life and the community where I live. I do now.

Why did I take the workshop?

Back in October, I stood in our lane with a local farmer who owns most the land around me. He pointed up the hills to Bury Ditches to hedges in decline. Large gaps stood out against the sky in what were once boundaries to the fields. The tips of the hedges had gnarled into knuckles limiting the growth of the trees.

Spindles were thin and sparse and all of this he said had happened in the 40 years since his family gave up managing the hedgerows in favour of annual flailing and stock fencing. He is a lovely man but like many round here scraps a decent living and is no romantic. To him a hedgerow is about penning stock and no more. His memory goes back a long way. He recounts family stories about the hiring fairs. Still today he does what his father did at the end of sheep shearing by taking his men down to the pub to stand them drinks. But these days are gone. Sheep fleeces are worthless and time spent coppicing and cutting stakes is wasted time when other jobs on the farm are more immediate. A hedge is a fence unless there is value in making it more.

I remember flying into England once and looking down over the patchwork quilt of fields that for as long as I remember have defined the landscape for me. There is something utterly unique about that. You don't see it anywhere else. A child's drawing of England would include a cottage, a tractor and the bewildering shapes and forms of fields and hedgerows that are central to any vision of the natural landscape. But this is a romantic view and doesn't help farmers survive in a harsh climate of Brexit, food production and dwindling supply lines.

The reason I took the workshop is because I don't believe this is the whole story. The picture for me is more than a romantic view of the past or the hard headed reality of the present. The picture for me is about the needs of the soil, about ecology and biodiversity, of carbon capture and nature corridors. But most of all it's about community.

I came back from Acton Scott with a clear set of skills and a defined purpose. My first task was to pleach an old hazel that had been flailed every year into an ugly mess. I couldn't have picked a harder first project. The hazel wasn't a

hedge but one tree that had been split asunder and sent two ways along the side of a stream.

Sections were dying and the low growing main trunks hugged the side of the bank then snaked back up the slope. To add to this someone in the past had shoved corrugated sheets along the base of the hedge to cover the gaps and these had become embedded in the twisted undergrowth. And there was a nail dump, which yielded, apart from nails, old stock fencing, broken torpedo shaped mineral bottles, a leaf spring from an old land rover, and bits of assorted metal hinges.

These are ancient farming practices that don't make the best manuals. I had no clue as what to do so I contacted Richard and over the course of a few calls he gave me the kind of advice that comes with experience: to pleach with the direction of the trunks even if the slopes are running slightly the wrong way and to offset the stakes back up the bank of the stream to

“I didn't realise then the impact these two days would have on my life and the community where I live. I do now”

manage the growth of the uprights. I had to take out a lot of brash and break a few of the golden rules of pleaching since John FitzHerbert's "The booke of husbandry", in 1523.

But what I learned is that each hedge is a puzzle, about the direction of lay, of what to cut and what to leave, and how to get the hedge to sit neatly in the stakes to set new growth in the spring, because as one farmer said in passing, 'you're only as good as the spring.'

But what about the community, which is where the true value of this lies? Well that hazel has been the source of much fun and conversation in the pub. The talk now is of hedgerows and the right way to manage them. I haven't made much of a breakthrough with the farmers and I won't as long as grants go other ways, but I've listened to their stories and words of advice and arguments over preferences.

One old chap, still doing it at 83, pleached one side of Oaker Wood before Christmas. He had a lot to say on bindings. He doesn't believe in them. I've also given out leaflets and booklets and had doorstep chats and even tried to get the vicar interested after she raised global warming in a sermon.

In some ways the mood in the village is softening and this is good. One lady wants me to lay the hedges she planted over a decade

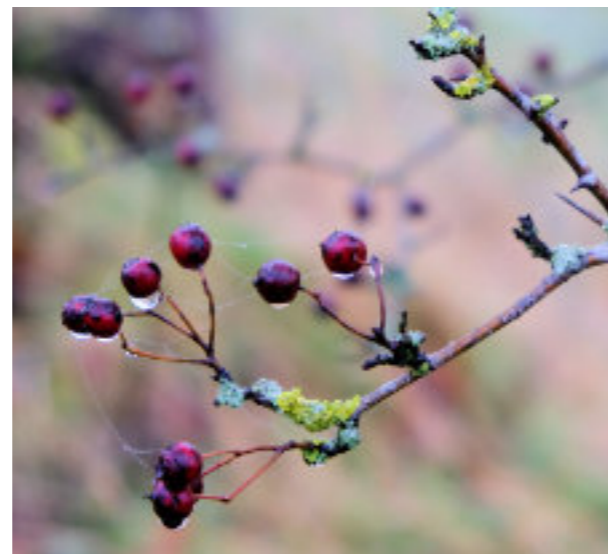
ago around her field and another has asked me to teach her how to pleach so she can tackle the hedges in her orchard. I've just laid a neighbour's hedge and planted about 150 mixed native quicks to bring other areas back to life. It's all small stuff comparatively but the clusters are growing. Each one we talk to talks to someone else and word of mouth is powerful among the land owners around here.

There's is another community too I know the value of. My father is 90. He started work on a farm at the age of 14. Last month he gave me his old billhook. I sharpened it and oiled it and put it on the wall next to mine never to be used. It's a reminder that we are connected across time as much as across the land.

David Booker, Clunton.



CPRE Shropshire's Hedgerow Heroes project gallery



A round up of the Shropshire Hedgerow Heroes project



A young farmer on a one-day hedgelaying workshop in Llanfair Waterdine

Our hedgerow project has been working hard over the winter to deliver on hedgelaying training, hedge planting and continuing with our hedge walks and talks.

By the end of this season we estimate the project will have engaged with over 1200 people and volunteers.

We have created a two and a half minute slideshow summarising the outputs of the project which can be found on our home page at www.cpreshropshire.org.uk

We have also managed to tap into some year end funding from National Office to further extend our hedge creation and hedgelaying activities for this season. This will enable us to plant a further 100m length of new hedge (and fence it) on a farm on the north end of the Long Mynd; complete the laying of the Acton Scott hedge (worked on with 5 of our workshops but not quite finished - it is 180m long); and lay a 100m long hedge in a species rich haymeadow in the Clun Forest. This time, the hedgelaying will be done by Richard Clarke as a contractor (rather than laid by volunteers).

Thank you so much to everyone who has contributed to making this project a success, from landowners to our specialist trainers and advisers and partnership organisations - and last but certainly not least, all our very game and weatherproof volunteers!

There is plenty more information about the project at www.cpreshropshire.org.uk

Sarah Jameson
Branch Manager &
Hedgerow Heroes Project Manager

Photos (this and previous pages):: Sarah Jameson

“... the project will have engaged with over 1200 people and volunteers ...”



A colourful team of hedge layers at Acton Scott on a chilly January day



A winter tree ID walk led by botanist and fungi expert, Rob Rowe in January at the Discovery Centre, Craven Arms

A hedgerow tale with a happy outcome

Running alongside the public footpath from Bank Farm Road, Radbrook, behind the Community Centre, is an old mixed hedgerow, 60 metres long and around 3 metres tall. It is a remnant of the field boundary hedges from when this was farmland; a piece of local history and valuable habitat for birds, insects and mammals in this suburb of Shrewsbury where most people are replacing hedges with concrete fencing.

Towards the end of last year it came to my notice that the Community centre committee had voted to have the hedgerow completely removed due to the ongoing costs of maintenance.

Looking at old maps and using Hooper's Rule*, the hedge appeared to be at least 200 years old. We prepared to mount a vigorous campaign to save it and I sent letters to the committee members to try and persuade them that the hedgerow was a valuable community asset and not an expensive nuisance.

We approach CPRE Shropshire for help in establishing the age and value of the hedge and how we might save it from destruction.

We are now able to say with confidence that the old hedgerow is safe, thanks to our Green councillor, Chris Lemon, who brokered a deal between the Council maintenance team and the Radbrook community hall, whereby they will trim the hedge and charge the hall a reasonable amount, which is much less than they were paying a private contractor. The hedgerow has recently been trimmed and is all set to provide nesting places and berries for the birds for another 100 years!

It is nice to have a little good news in these days of natural destruction in the name of progress.

Alison Collins

*Hoopers Rule: a method, devised in the 1970s, advised that the age of a hedgerow can be estimated by the use of the following formula:
Age = (no of species in a 30 yard stretch) x 110 + 30 years.



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The Ice Age in Shropshire

Wednesday 30th March 2022, 7.30pm
A free online talk by Sally Green

Shropshire stands right at the southern end of the last Ice Age ice cap, which had a profound effect on our landscape.

Find out about the dramatic climatic changes in the last two million years and the effect of ice movement on the formation of our county's topography.

A follow-up evening to Sally's highly popular talk on Shropshire Geology, this is definitely not to be missed!

Limited places available. Book now to save disappointment!

To book your free place, go to our Events page at www.cpreshropshire.org.uk/events and click on the booking link for your free ticket. One per household.

Alternatively, email us on admin@cpreshropshire.org.uk

Tenancy Issues (1) The True Cost of a Section 21 Eviction

A personal account about renting by Rachel Slawson

I'm sat here typing this from a spare room in my parents' house, at 39 years old this isn't a place I thought I'd be living. I moved out of home at 25 and have lived in a few house shares until 2010 when I rented a tiny studio flat in London. Since then, I've lived alone in a variety of different flats.

In March 2021 I received a phone call that would change my whole life, it was the letting agent ringing to inform me that my landlord was selling my home in Newquay, this is the place I'd lived for nearly five

years, the place I had volunteered, the place I had worked and built a life. House prices had shot up during the pandemic as workplaces moved

to remote working, everyone wanted to move to the seaside or the countryside. Unfortunately, it meant people like me had to move, and as a tenant you have very few rights. At the time I was given notice the government had extended the notice period, for section 21 evictions, to 6 months', a luxury, usually it's only two months. It didn't feel like a luxury to me, my dad had been ill, and we were worried he had cancer. Due to the housing shortage in Cornwall, alongside my dad's illness I made the decision to relocate Shropshire, which is where my family live.

Having an eviction hang over your head is so stressful, add to that the rental market was like the wild west, with up to 100 people going after the same property. Letting agents were having to add even more convoluted steps in front of prospective tenants to get the numbers down to do viewings. Getting a viewing on a property felt like winning the lottery.

I managed to see several properties but had to offer a year's rent up front to secure those viewings. One property smelt so badly of cat pee that despite wearing a mask, my eyes watered from the ammonia, but this property would have let me have a dog - a lifelong ambition of mine. I toyed with the idea of taking it, but the tenancy was two years long with no break clause, which meant if they didn't undertake the correct remedial work to get rid of the smell, I would be left living in a building smelling cat pee for two years. This sums up renting for me, you are trusting the landlord to do the right thing, and frequently they don't because they don't want to spend the money, and as a tenant you have next to no recourse.

I ended up moving to Wem in June 2021, and had to pay 6 months' rent up front, plus a deposit to secure the property. It had zero white goods, so I had to buy an oven. Luckily, I had a fridge/freezer and washing machine. Financially the move was crippling. Alongside this I had a fledgling business as a freelance video content producer.

The place I rented had a tiny garden, the first garden I've had with a property, and I loved it,

“I feel as though people who rent their homes are treated like second class citizens, we are looked down on because we can't get a mortgage”

I filled it with pots of luscious plants and even a tiny pond! Whilst living there I suffered with bad anxiety, I think the trauma of the eviction set me on edge, my business was floundering as I tried to make new connections. The first five months in Shropshire were filled with anxiety, struggle, and sleepless nights.

In November 2021, I received a note through my door issuing me my second no fault eviction of the year. I was on the phone to my friend when it came through the door, and as I read the words, I became completely hysterical. My life, yet again, changed at the whim of a landlord, I had zero recourse. No reason for the eviction was ever provided, and the letter contained little information other than an unreasonable request to have a house inspection three days before I was due to move. I rang my parents and drove over to see them, we decided it made sense to move in with them. I was mentally exhausted from moving earlier in the year and I couldn't even bring myself to look for somewhere new. Yet again I had to shoulder the moving costs, I personally I think if it's a section 21 eviction (no fault on behalf of the tenant) the landlord should foot these bills.

In December I moved half my stuff into storage and the other half into my parents' spare room. My beautiful pots are currently sitting in my parents' garden. I can't bear to look at them because it reminds me of what could have been. I may well end up in another flat without access to a garden, so my first garden might be my last. My brand-new oven is currently packed away in a 75 square foot storage unit. I keep having moments where I wake up in a panic



Much-loved possessions in the back of a removal van prior to moving up to Shropshire posted on Instagram by Rachel last year, including her beloved garden pots and plants.

wondering where things are, it's a strange feeling not having all your stuff in one place.

I feel as though people who rent their homes are treated like second class citizens, we are looked down on because we can't get a mortgage. We can't paint our walls or put pictures up, we are given short term tenancies that can be terminated at the whim of a private landlord. This much insecurity is insidious, if something needs fixing you must debate whether approaching the landlord is worth a potential eviction because it can make you look like a difficult tenant.

The two evictions have impacted every single area of my life: it's negatively impacted my finances, my relationships, left my mental health in tatters and ruined my business. I'm currently trying to piece together what is left of the carnage of these evictions. It's shaken my confidence and I'm still so traumatised that I

can't look for somewhere to live. Will I ever find somewhere that feels truly like my home?

Rachel Slawson
www.rachelslawson.co.uk
Instagram - @rachel_slawson



Tenancy issues (2): Poor quality housing

A personal account about social housing accommodation

In May 2014, I signed a tenancy contract and took possession of a one-bedroom bungalow.

Unfortunately, as soon as I moved in, I became aware that the next-door neighbour was disruptive. This neighbour would go out for hours at a time leaving a dog whining and barking continually.

The homes had night storage heaters, the cost of which is exorbitant. This is why I refer to social housing association complexes like this a fuel poverty risk. Most of the residents are elderly, unwell and living on benefit. A neighbouring tenant living on benefit, sometimes had to choose between eating or heating during the winter, as she had an electric meter, which cost far more than paying for the electricity monthly by direct debit.

Once this housing association was taken over by a larger group, the presence of the warden became more distanced. Concern for the tenants went from a part-time warden checking on each tenant, to each tenant calling a company called "OK Each Day" every day by pressing a button.

Another issue was the state of the buildings inside and out. I have included a few photographs of the scheme. To my knowledge, since I left in June 2020, this is still the state of the buildings. There are holes in the roof spaces, the drainpipes are coming off, there is mildew in the houses due to draughts. The draughts are caused by one wall in each unit, that has a window and a door, which is a panel, not a brick wall. Some homes have vents in cupboards and doors, some don't. There are holes in the dividing walls of each loft so that the rats have free rein from one loft to another. In December 2019 I trapped a rat in the loft above my front door, nothing was done about it. It was then I chose to leave.

I understand from many people I have met, who live in similar housing association properties in Shropshire, that the situation I experienced is not a one-off. Older buildings are being neglected and tenants are suffering ill health because of mould, insufficient insulation and outdated heating systems.

As a result of this experience, it is not surprising that I became ill and was treated by a GP for asthma and bronchiectasis. Prior to 2014 I did not have these conditions and, a year after having left the housing association bungalow, a respiratory consultant confirmed that I no longer have those conditions.

Through an online climate action group, I met the Managing Director of Marches Energy Agency who has secured a grant to help people living in

fuel poverty in Shropshire. Gas central heating is now being installed where I used to live.

Susan Lockwood
Acting Chair, Shrewsbury District



Have you been affected by poor quality social housing accommodation or had problems renting in Shropshire? Let us know on admin@cpreshropshire.org.uk

CPRE Shropshire: Planning Update

Shropshire Council Local Plan Review

Planning Policy department has submitted to the Examining Inspectors all the further information they had asked for, amounting to another 900 pages of reading. It is all on the examination website at (<https://www.shropshire.gov.uk/planning-policy/local-planning/local-plan-review/draft-shropshire-local-plan-2016-2038-examination/>). There are 15 new documents, including "topic" papers on housing, employment and Green Belt matters. The all-important hearing sessions are still expected to start in late spring or early summer, as long as a room big enough to be Covid-secure can be booked.

Shropshire Council recently lost an appeal hearing about a development of 150 dwellings at Meole Brace, Shrewsbury. It is a site which is proposed in the Local Plan Review but which the developers had already applied for planning permission on before waiting for adoption of the new plan. Shropshire Council refused it on the grounds that it wasn't in accordance with the current plan; they wanted to show developers that 'early' applications like this would be refused. However, the Inspector has allowed the appeal, partly because the developers are offering 25% affordable housing rather than the policy-compliant 20% (for that part of Shrewsbury). We shall have to wait and see whether there is a subsequent 'viability study' to show they can't afford 25% affordable housing after all – we know that some other developers on some other sites have found even 10% to be more than they can manage. For instance, the latest version of the controversial housing site near Old Oswestry Hillfort is now offering only 8% affordable, compared to the required rate of 10% in the Oswestry area.

Renewables

A recent CPRES Zoom management meeting included a lengthy renewables session attended by the chair and another member of the Shropshire Climate Action Partnership (SCAP), Andrew Wood from national CPRE and Mark Sullivan, CPRE West Midlands regional chair. Some of the discussion centred on the mapping exercise for Shropshire wind and solar potential

carried out for SCAP by outside professionals LUC (which stands for Land Use Consultants). Follow ups have subsequently been sent to SCAP and LUC. The thrust of the comments is that the mapping exercise is not wholly useful in guiding Land Use (for instance it is "blind" to the existence of the AONB or the Green Belt), and is not wholly transparent in its figurework. A recent national CPRE policy statement on solar makes it clear that CPRE is committed to supporting solar energy, but will always oppose harmful developments. Industrial and other roofs (and there are plenty of them), rather than prime countryside, are preferable.

Influencing those in power

Five of us had an instructive meeting with senior Shropshire Council officers Tracy Darke and Eddie West before Christmas and another meeting is scheduled for 21 April 2022. We also had a useful half-hour Zoom meeting with Helen Morgan, the new LibDem MP for North Shropshire, on 11 February, to tell her about CPRE and to bring various concerns to her attention.

Shrewsbury North West Relief Road

This application might now go to committee in Spring this year, once officers have responded to doubts expressed by the Environment Agency and other consultees. Shropshire Council's threatened finances might yet cause the plans to be scuppered. There are now 4,780 objections on the website (compared to 209 in support), largely orchestrated by BeST, the most pro-active and co-ordinated of the campaign groups, to whom we have given some assistance. This is an astonishing level of objection and opposition to the project was largely responsible for toppling Peter Nutting, the previous Leader of the Council from his Shrewsbury seat in the May 2021 elections. Other planning applications are now starting to pop up in the clear expectation that the NWRR will go ahead. The speculative proposal for an old folks' complex at Hencote, above the Old River Bed in Shrewsbury, is one of them.

Charles Green
Planning Spokesperson



Government response to the Glover Review

The Glover Review which was completed in 2019, has finally been commented on by the government following on from the Ministerial Statement in June last year, see the following weblink for more: bit.ly/361d1F1

Julian Glover came to South Shropshire during the review period and spent some time visiting the Shropshire Hills AONB and meeting Philip Dunne MP and Partnership members (see below).

The government in its response, has expressed a wish to strengthen AONBs and to rebrand them as National Landscapes. A National Landscapes Partnership will be put in place which will produce a strategy which will inform Management Plans

Lord Benyon, Parliamentary Under Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs in his Foreword to the Policy Paper said, "Alongside boosting biodiversity, improving public access to our protected landscapes is a priority. Our levelling up agenda is about addressing inequality, and I am determined that our protected landscapes will be accessible to all, improve mental and physical wellbeing and support local economies. We will encourage sustainable tourism and national engagement programmes, supported by expanded ranger services and improved rural transport. Equally, where people don't respect our protected landscapes, we will ensure strengthened enforcement powers address antisocial behaviour and damage."

These are aspirations we can all sign up to, it will remain to be seen how many of them are carried through.

Hilary Claytonsmith
CPRE Shropshire, Southern District



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