



Campaign to Protect  
Rural England  
Shropshire

# WILDFLOWER MEADOWS

## THE CHALLENGE IN SHROPSHIRE

**S**hropshire is a largely rural county. It is known for its tranquillity and its beautiful countryside.

However, that also brings pressure for new housing from local people wishing to stay in the area, but also from people retiring into Shropshire and would-be commuters.

### HUGE CHALLENGE

Currently, Shropshire faces a huge challenge to find the right number of houses and the right kind of houses, without compromising its environment and the setting of its historic market towns, villages and hamlets.

The Campaign to Protect Rural England has argued that the overall amount of housing is too high and that more emphasis should be placed on affordable housing and homes to meet the needs of the aging population.

A new local plan will be prepared for Shropshire over the next two years (up to 2018) which will be based on local evidence about the county's own housing market.

CPRE Shropshire feels it is timely to consider how Shropshire should develop and whether there are reasons to change direction.

We are in the process of putting together a short report setting out the policy background and the key questions CPRE will be asking of planners.

If you would like to know more please leave your contact details with us today.

### DEVELOPMENT IN OPEN COUNTRYSIDE

Shropshire is under threat in many areas from inappropriate housing and commercial developments, many of these planned for open countryside, on the outskirts of our hamlets, villages and towns.

One of the many precious assets that are at risk due to this development and to changing land management are our wildflower meadows.



Campaign to Protect  
Rural England  
Shropshire

# WILDFLOWER MEADOWS

## WHAT ARE WILDFLOWER MEADOWS?

**M**eadows filled with wild flowers are actually actively managed grasslands. Unimproved by fertilisers, lowland meadows and pastures may be cut for hay in late June to early July after the summer profusion of colourful flowers.

The flowering plants set seed before the hay is cut and the meadow is grazed in autumn. Found on neutral, mainly clay or loam soils, lowland meadows provide rich wildlife habitat and are treasured components of our pastoral and historical landscapes.

## WHERE ARE THEY FOUND?

Less than 15,000 hectares of unimproved neutral grassland remains in the UK – an area roughly the size of Bristol. Most sites are relatively small and fragmented, but major concentrations can be found in places such as Worcestershire, the Somerset Levels, parts of Wales and the Western Isles in Scotland.

## WHY ARE THEY IMPORTANT?

Each part of the UK boasts its own specialities, but the one characteristic shared by traditionally managed lowland meadows is the high number of herbs and grasses – they can frequently boast up to 30 grasses and 100 or more wildflower species.

Grasses include quaking-grass, sweet vernal-grass, crested dog's-tail and red fescue, while flowers include devil's-bit scabious, pepper saxifrage, green-winged orchid, snake's-head fritillary and adder's-tongue fern. In damper areas, cuckooflower, ragged-Robin and yellow iris can be found, as well as rarer species like narrow-leaved water dropwort.

Bees and butterflies, such as meadow brown, common blue and the rare marsh fritillary, are among the hundreds of insects which probe the grassland flowers for nectar. In turn, these attract rare horseshoe bats and many declining farmland birds, including skylark, whose numbers have more than halved over the last 25 years.



# WILDFLOWER MEADOWS

## THE THREAT TO OUR MEADOWS

**B**efore the Second World War, meadows dripping with wildflowers and humming with insects would have been a familiar sight across lowland UK.

**But in recent years, over 95% of our lowland meadows have disappeared.**

Without care meadows become rank, as vigorous grasses shade out delicate wild flowers and brambles take over.

Once the most common type of wildlife habitat in the UK lowlands, species-rich meadows are now few and far between. Intensively managed perennial ryegrass-dominated fields have replaced traditionally-managed neutral grassland and do little to attract birds or bees.

Across the UK, groups such as the Wildlife Trust and National Trust are working to prevent further loss of our lowland meadows by looking after many neutral grasslands as nature reserves. They use traditional management techniques, such as hay-cutting, reseeding and grazing.

Advice and guidance is also provided for landowners and farmers on wildlife-friendly practices.

CPRE actively campaigns across England to protect existing wildflower meadows. A notable success being in Cherkley, Surrey where an application to put an exclusive golf course on wonderful countryside on the edge of London which would have irreversibly suburbanised and damaged an area of high quality wildflower meadows and farmland was eventually quashed in the High Court.



Photo © Shropshire Hills AONB Partnership

## 12 REASONS TO CARE ABOUT MEADOWS

1. They are beautiful – and the seasonal, ephemeral nature of their beauty makes them even more special.

2. They are part of our cultural heritage and history (some as old as medieval cathedrals).

3. They are threatened in many ways and often not protected, either from development or change in land-use.

4. They harbour rare plants, scarce invertebrates and declining bird species.

5. They are difficult to replace or restore once lost.

6. They are places which bring rest, joy and spiritual refreshment.

7. They provide sustenance for pollinators and other insects beneficial to farming.

8. They are good at storing carbon – better than improved pastures.

9. They act as water filters, removing pollutants, and also water sponges, delaying run off and reducing flooding.

10. They produce “local food” with low food miles and sustain healthier cattle and sheep which produce tastier meat and milk.

11. They are a precious genetic resource and source of products as diverse as hay and honey.

12. They have been part of distinctive cultural landscapes with associated vernacular architecture, local traditions and shared memories.



Campaign to Protect  
Rural England  
Shropshire

# WILDFLOWER MEADOWS

## WHAT CAN YOU DO TO HELP?

- Volunteer with local wildlife conservation groups and help your local grassland wildlife; you could be involved in everything from scrub cutting to wildflower surveying.
- Support wildlife-friendly, traditionally managed farms by purchasing direct from local farms.
- In your garden, save on mowing the grass. Set aside a sunny patch of lawn, 'say no to the mow' and create your own mini meadow.

### THE 'NO-MOW' GARDEN

Your No-Mow Zone can be any size or shape, however for best results try and make it at least 2 x 2 metres.

If you can place your No-Mow Zone away from flower beds this will mean garden plants are less likely to invade.

*More detailed information about creating wildflower meadows is available from your local Wildlife Trust, or online.*

### WILDFLOWER SEEDS

Some seedsmen supply wild flower seeds labelled 'local provenance' which means the seeds were collected in Britain from British plants. These may be hard to find, but they are less damaging than imported seed.

If you want to enrich the wild flowers in a small area, it is much better to collect wild flower seeds from your local area.

**Remember**, that weeds are wild plants too. Some of them are very pretty, or even need conserving!

If the area is overgrown, you will need extensive clearance work, and perhaps nutrient-stripping before you can plant anything else.

Remember – never, ever, apply any kind of fertiliser (chemical or manure!) or herbicide!





## WILDFLOWER MEADOWS

### A SOUTH SHROPSHIRE MEADOW

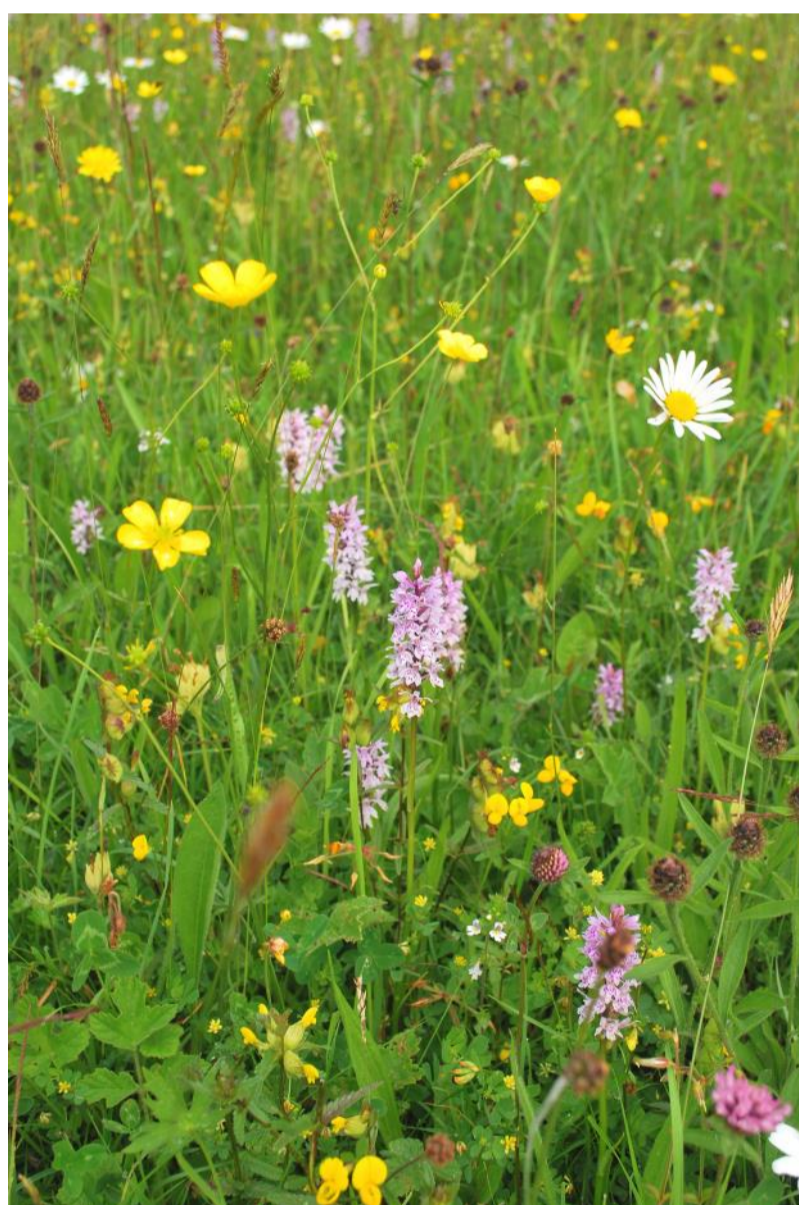
**T**hese meadows which are on limestone with very little topsoil are managed as near as possible to traditional farming methods of 100 years ago.

They are cut for hay as late as mid August to allow seeds to ripen and drop.

Ideally they should be grazed in the autumn to keep the grass short over winter. Animal hooves help to tread in the seed.

The creation of a new meadow requires very poor soil. Grass can be reduced by introducing yellow rattle, a parasite on grass. In subsequent years other species of wildflowers can be encouraged by spreading hay from existing meadows. Suitable wildflower seed mixes can also be purchased.

The predominant flower species are oxeye daisies, vetches, common spotted orchids, knapweed, dyers green weed and cowslips in the spring.



Left: knapweed  
Right: yellow rattle