

# Our Common Cause: Our Upland Commons

Enabling a  
shared future  
for all

## Our Upland commons in the Shropshire Hills – nearly two years in

### 1. Introduction

The Our Upland Commons (OUC) project is a three year, £3M, 25 partner project helping to secure the future of upland commons on Dartmoor, in the Lake District, the Yorkshire Dales and the Shropshire Hills. It is led by the Foundation for Common Land.

This project follows on from the Our Common Cause (OCC) development project which ran just prior to the Covid pandemic which then caused a slight delay in the start of this, its delivery phase, but it finally got underway in February 2021.

The project has been made possible through funding from National Lottery players, grants from Esmée Fairbairn and Garfield Weston Foundations and the Shropshire based Millichope Foundation. The project also benefits from contributions from partners, in the form of time and expertise in kind, as well as direct financial support. Specific partners relevant to the Shropshire Hills include Shropshire Wildlife Trust, the National Trust and Shropshire Hills AONB Partnership.

#### 1.1. Participating commons in the Shropshire Hills

Each of the four project areas has three main commons project delivery is centered around. In the Shropshire Hills these are Clee Liberty, Longmynd and Stiperstones.

The number of grazing commoners varies on these three commons, but all have active commoners associations.

### 2. Project delivery – four themes

All project activity is centered around four main themes:

- Collaboration
- Resilience
- Commons for all
- Commons for tomorrow

The first two elements are mainly aimed at supporting commoners, both as land managers but also in their wider business model, as commoning has an integral connection with the rest of the agricultural operations on their in-by-land.

## **2.1. Collaboration**

*'Secure and support collaborative management of common land'.*

Examples of activities are shared learning visits (through my eyes), the Stiperstones shepherding service, shared infrastructure purchases, the Longmynd interpretation and facilitation project and activity relating to the visions that were drafted for each common during the development phase.

This project strand also aims to ensure that the role of commoners as land managers is fully acknowledged and the value of commoning as an agricultural land management system is safeguarded and widely known about and commoners are equipped and supported to partake in current and future management discussions and decision making on their commons.

## **2.2. Resilience**

*'Ensure that the health of commons is secured by supporting resilient commoning in a fast changing world'.*

These are turbulent and uncertain times for upland farmers with the future of upland farming as a whole under threat as we are going through BPS withdrawal transitions, development of new environmental schemes, a cost of living and food shortage crisis and the aftermath of a global pandemic. Activity relating to this project strand is largely driven by the pace at which the government is handling the transition and the uncertainty about what comes next and has centered around knowledge sharing with commoners.

The Foundation for Common Land has recently been awarded funding from Defra to carry out a Test & Trial project around the new Sustainable Farming Incentive (SFI) and commoners (through their commoner's associations) from Longmynd, Brant Fell in the Yorkshire Dales and Peter Tavy common on Dartmoor have been invited to take part in a fully funded and facilitated early trial. This work will produce much needed clarity, practical advice, templates, and other toolkit elements that will then be shared with commoners elsewhere.

## **2.3. Commons for all**

*'Reconnect the public with the natural and cultural heritage of common land'.*

A variety of activities around enjoying, learning and doing. This includes our events programme, where we raise the profile of commoning at local events and shows with our showstand and information and next year we hope to be expanding this further with our 'Take the Common to Town' initiative and other pop-up events.

Our work around a commons-based John Muir Award supports young people to learn more about commons and commoning and further an understanding at an early age.

## **2.4. Commons for tomorrow**

*'Enhance the environmental and ecological benefits offered by common land'.*

Activity under this theme includes historic environment projects on all three commons which an aerial LIDAR survey, community excavations, geophysical surveys, condition monitoring and wider talks on the features these undisturbed upland areas have protected for so many hundreds of years. Lots of opportunity for public participation and volunteering.

Our biodiversity and habitat work also part of this strand is helping us to further understand the threats and opportunities for certain key upland species.

The flagship whinchat project, through nest finding and chick ringing, has another year to run but already there is better knowledge why these migrant birds now only nest on the Longmynd, what habitat and other conditions they need to be successful and how joint management strategies by commoners and land owners working together can safeguard their survival.

Our butterfly and moth projects also help map and monitor key species. For instance, on Longmynd, prior to our project there was no knowledge (records) of small pearl-bordered fritillary, a butterfly on the UK red list and considered to be 'near threatened'. But this year we have found them and we are developing legacy plans to ensure management trials and volunteer effort can carry on after OUC finishes.

### **3. Acknowledgements**

Thanks go to the commoning community, our volunteers, contractors, project partners and landowners without whom this programme would pack a lot less of a punch. This programme aims to protect the centuries old farming practice of commoning, under threat but as relevant as ever, but it can only succeed as a collaborative effort.

For further information about the Our Upland Commons programme see [Our Upland Commons — Foundation for Common Land](#) (sign up for our mailing list!) and for anything Shropshire Hills specific email [renee@foundationforcommonland.org.uk](mailto:renee@foundationforcommonland.org.uk)

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