



GREEN BUSINESS NETWORK

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investing in the environment

## INNOVATIVE RURAL COMMUNITIES

*...taking an "ecosystems services" approach ...*



**Midgley residents battling to save Twite in the Pennine hills are creating new opportunities for local farmers who also supply the community's own shop, a former Co-operative Society**

### Setting

The South Pennine Moors (an EU Special Protection Area) surround some of the most industrialised towns and cities of northern England. One of the most secluded moorland valleys is Luddenden Dene. Just 3km (2 miles) from the edge of the town, it feels a world apart from urban Halifax in Calderdale.

The area is steeped in fascinating industrial, architectural and social history: at the head of the valley is a landscape of reservoirs and old quarry workings, plus a windfarm operating since 1993. The road ends at the ruins of Castle Carr, a mock Victorian castle surrounded by extensive landscaped gardens with a 100ft high fountain said to be the highest in Europe. The mansion fell into disrepair and was demolished in the '60s. Only traces remain, but the fountain is still turned on for charities such as Midgley.

History aside, the valley provides a largely undeveloped backdrop of steep hillside fields and copses including a SSSI. Farming consists of cattle on the lower slopes, sheep on the upper and the flat moorland expanse of Midgley Moor beyond the valley rim.

In recent years some farms have been combined and surplus farmhouses, together with their adjoining fields, sold to commuters and retirees. Fortunately there has been no removal of dry stone walls to accommodate modern agricultural methods.

### Midgley Matters

Local residents participate actively in the thriving community of Midgley Village: the last remaining shop and Post Office closed down in 2003, but in an astonishing burst of creative energy, villagers re-launched a shop housed in a barn and run entirely by volunteers (at a time when village shops were closing down all over the country). This event featured in the national press. The villagers went on to publish Midgley's history in 2007.

Through fundraising, grants and a community share issue, the former village Co-op has more recently been purchased (2009) for transformation back into a shop and a new community room. The largest single funder of this 'Midgley Matters' project is the Green Business Network via its **175<sup>th</sup> Project Award** as part of the Landfill Communities Fund, with major support from **Biffaward** (see over).

## Calderdale Seeds Project

Launched in 2006 when it won a **£10,000 Tenth Anniversary Award** from the GBN, as part of the Landfill Communities, this is a partnership between Green Business Network (GBN), the Calderdale Bird Conservation Group, Halifax Scientific Society & Ann Blackburn Consultancy,

Its objective is to involve local residents in enhancing the diversity of grasslands around the Midgley & Luddenden 'fringes' for the benefit of wildlife and the local economy. The project contributes towards national Biodiversity Action Plan targets for unimproved grassland and has a positive impact on the status of priority species such as Twite and Small Copper.

### **Twite (see inset picture above)**

A small, brown finch, the Twite is one of the most critical bird species in England. Dependent on moorland for nesting and moorland fringe habitats for feeding, the Twite is very vulnerable to habitat change. In England, it is **restricted as a breeding species to the upland South Pennines or "Twite Triangle" (the area between Halifax, Huddersfield and Rochdale).**

Twite is one of only two British birds with a diet consisting entirely of seeds. This has been the cause of its demise. As haymeadows, traditional lightly-grazed pastures and unmanaged sites have disappeared in 'favour' of silage, so too has the supply of late summer seeds on which Twite depend.

Formerly widespread across the entire moorland area, a 90% decline since 1990 has been accompanied by a severe range reduction and Twite are now absent and/or virtually extinct with the exception of 19 known colonies. The England population, estimated at just 98 pairs, is the most southerly in Europe.

As well as being of international importance, **the Twite is a barometer of the quality and extent of upland hay meadows and pastures and the future of the two is inextricably linked.** Small Copper a butterfly is in similar decline.



### **2006 – 2009 : success stories**

1. The key contribution was fundraising by the GBN who secured over £68,000 for the various works, including a Twite colour-ringing initiative supported by the Kirklees Environment Grant Scheme.
2. The 'final brick' in the overall fundraising campaign was provided by **Biffaward\*\***, who contributed £50,000 for the purchase of Midgley's former Co-op.  
*\*\*Biffaward is managed by the Royal Society of Wildlife Trusts. One of the most respected Landfill Communities Fund schemes, Biffaward has awarded more than £100M to projects across UK which enhance communities and biodiversity.*
3. Degraded land is 'sown' with local provenance flower-rich seed mixtures harvested from 'donor' meadows: during Phase 1, visits were made to 22 potential 'receptor' sites and enhancements carried out at 8 (11 fields, c.15 hectares). A seed harvester was donated free of charge by the National Trust. Seeding, grazing and haymeadow management creates new income-generation opportunities for local landowners, contractors and farmers, some of whom also supply Midgley community shop with fresh local produce.
4. GBN's Seeds Project features on '**You Tube**' and is now also embraced as part of the major **England Twite Species Recovery Programme** launched in 2008.
5. Access to Midgley/Luddenden is via rail to Mytholmroyd; an exemplar "Walkers Are Welcome" Station Partnership co-funded with GBN landfill tax credits.

