



A Review of 2021

A COMMUNITY
BENEFIT SOCIETY

Introduction

The last year has been a strange one, Covid has knocked back many of the things we had expected to be doing, most especially all of our direct contact, events and outreach. However we have managed to make some progress towards our original goals. The space created has allowed us to work on important things we needed in terms of our governance and organisation, and to think about our priorities for the next few years within our first Business Plan

This review summarises progress since our first General Meeting in January 2020.

The background to the establishment of the Trust

There has long been the vision for a connective project between the Stiperstones and the Long Mynd. Five years ago Natural England (NE) and the National Trust (NT) produced a Scoping Study for a 'Stepping Stones Project' to make this a reality. The project envisioned incrementally creating landscape Stepping Stones made up of strategic nodes and corridors for wildlife.

One of the original objectives was to do this in perpetuity, which in effect means acquiring ownership of key areas of land and would require the foundation of a new independent Trust to hold this asset. In 2016 a report was commissioned on 'The creation of a new landowning organisation able to hold land in perpetuity' at the request of NE and NT. Much of the feasibility work was completed by some of the current Middle Marches Community Land Trust (MMCLT) founding Board.

Three years ago an interim Board was established, and in 2020 this morphed and expanded into the current Board

The organisation is constituted as Community Benefit Society, owned and controlled by local shareholders. There are now over 75 shareholders, mostly from the local area, who help shape and steer what MMCLT does.

What we were set up to do

The Middle Marches Community Land Trust (MMCLT) was launched in April 2019, to provide the vehicle for local ownership of land, but also to fulfil a wider agenda. We want to act as a catalyst that helps unlock new ideas and to find practical solutions that can sustain our landscape, its wildlife and our communities into the future. We also see our role as helping develop a dialogue and debate to explore ways to make the transition we need happen, part of this is by developing an information hub. MMCLT is certainly not here to duplicate or repeat the work of others, but to add capacity and value to the existing set of organisations, communities and individuals working across the area.

The Middle Marches is centred on the Shropshire Hills, but extends into Wales and along its borders. Within this area we would like to create a better connected landscape; for wildlife, our communities, for food and farming. In practice this means creating and linking key habitats, provide a haven for wildlife and better connectivity. We also aim to promote regenerative agriculture and stimulate local food and wood production and simple direct supply chains.

What we have achieved this year

Over the last year we have made some progress, most particularly by acquiring two pieces of land. Both of these purchases proved our model in different ways, using community energy and interest to acquire land and then to manage it sympathetically to create a more biodiverse and productive landscape.

Cudwell Meadow

MMCLT has worked with Stretton Wetlands Interest group to buy a three-acre field on the edge of Church Stretton called Cudwell Meadow. A public appeal raised £25,000 in under four months and virtually all the donations were given by local people.

Management carried out involved haymaking followed by grazing and discussions over management of the held with the Environment Agency over management of the watercourse.

Norbury Hill

Norbury Hill, sitting between the Stiperstones and Long Mind, is an important part of the Shropshire Hills landscape. Our bid to buy half of the 94 acres up on Norbury Hill was successful. The purchase eventually was completed in mid 2021.

In 2021 a full ecological survey has been undertaken, and from this a comprehensive management plan is being developed, with a particular target to enable Curlew to breed over the coming years. It is also a stronghold for the Small pearl bordered fritillary butterfly and many unusual wetland plants. Grazing management has been continued, bracken management started, visits for shareholders undertaken

Nind

We had hoped to have obtained a lease on a 10 acre site just north of Bishops Castle, which has not been managed for over 20 years. This should still happen in 2022 subject to a number of conditions being fulfilled.

Marches Grow Local (MGL).

Marches Grow Local (MGL) are still exploring ways to develop a new food project.

Working with our partners

We have been blessed to be at the heart of a strong working network including Stepping Stones Partnership, especially the National Trust and Natural England, the AONB Partnership, Community Wildlife Groups and a number of landowners, farmers and local estates who have been very supportive and constructive

We have been very grateful to receive funding in 2021 from Stepping Stones which will help MMCLT greatly.

Acting as a Hub

Our desire to acting as an information hub is still alive, and after a strong start, Covid intervened, so this has obviously been less face to face and more virtual. This has begun through creating a web based green pages that promotes local skills and businesses, trades and products.

Structure, Governance and Management

The Trust's General Meeting, at which the first formal Board was elected, was held on Thursday the 21st of January 2020.

During the meeting the original interim 5 founding Directors were formally voted in alongside 4 new Directors. A further Director, Louise Robbins was coopted onto the Board during 2021. An original founding Director, Lizzie Hulton Harrup, stood down at the meeting and we thank her for her massive help during the formation of MMCLT.

During Covid the new Board have spent time establishing new systems and making plans for the organisation. This has included writing our first 5 year Business Plan, which gives us much needed direction. Appointing a new Treasurer has improved our financial systems. An acquisition strategy has been written too. All of these things have helped provide us with a firm footing from which launch our work next year and beyond.

Our finances

Since the last annual review we have purchased Norbury Hill and Cudwell Meadow spending much of the revenue that we had at the time. Thanks to the loan we were given for Norbury Hill we are still very much in the black, holding reserves of £22,746.

These have now been assigned as follows:

- * General reserves (including shareholdings) £ 3,173
- * Norbury Hill £14,849
- * Cudwell Meadow £ 2,061
- * Marches Grow local £ 2,663

In terms of the year to date we have income of £7,195 mainly donations and grants and expenditure of £5809 which is split approx 2.2K each for Norbury Hill and Cudwell Meadow plus 1.4K for general expenses (administration, subscriptions, insurance and licence fees).

Looking forward - what we want to do in 2021

Although this year has seen reduced activity, we have much planned for MMCLT. We have produced a first Business Plan which gives us a structure for the next three years. We would recommend that you look at this to get a flavour of what we want to do.

Some key things are;

- * Manage the two sites we have and ensure we access funding from grants and rents to help create income.
- * Sign an agreement at Nind.
- * Start to run events and activities again, including a conference in late 2022.
- * Update and develop our website, although we have found someone willing to undertake the work.
- * Reinstatement of our programme of visits and discussions concerning land management
- * Develop our information hub further.
- * Do more work to create a stable and sustainable organisation via fund raising, income generation and external funding.

Please contact us and get involved

If you would like more information about any of our activities, becoming a shareholder, volunteer or supporter, please email us at info@middlemarchescommunitylandtrust.org.uk or check out our website

You can write to Enterprise House, Station St, Bishops Castle, SY9 5AQ

Thank you

It has been a productive first year for MMCLT. We have made significant progress in a short time, and it gives us great confidence and positivity that there is support for and a place for our organisation in the area.

We thank you hugely for all of your support, and hope we can continue to make positive progress in 2022.

The MMCLT Board

November 2021

The Directors and officers who have served this organisation during this period are as follows;

Richard Keymer - Chair

Rosie Wood - Vice Chair

Tim Selman - Secretary

Louise Robbins - Treasurer

Sara Braune

Jonathan Brown

Janet Cobb

Oliver Goode

Rob Rowe

Richard Small

Mike Watkins - Minute Secretary