



# MIDDLE MARCHES

## COMMUNITY LAND TRUST

# Annual General Meeting 2023

Activity update - September 2023

Annual Report on Finance and Governance 2022-2023

## Introduction

You will all be aware that the challenges to our natural environment continue to increase and this demands that we all take whatever action we can to move to a situation where wildlife habitats, species and natural processes can prosper, for our own long-term benefit.

The aim of this short Annual Report is to let you know what difference your support to Middle Marches Community Land Trust has made since we last met in February 2023, and to give you our formal statements on our financial position at the end of the financial year 2022-2023. We are required to submit annual returns to our regulator, the Financial Conduct Authority (FCA), and you will find our final accounts and our FCA report posted on our website annually. The AGM is an opportunity for shareholders (i.e. members) to vote for and ask questions of the Board.

With your support and encouragement, we are very pleased to have been able to continue our efforts to protect and restore nature.

At MMCLT, we do things a little differently – we acquire and help others to acquire parcels of land, protecting them in perpetuity from the damage development and other sources of harm. While a major review was right in recommending that nature does need more, bigger, better, and more joined up spaces for nature; communities and nature also need local sites which communities can nurture, learn about and in which next door wildlife can really thrive. Some of our sites might be small – but make no mistake, they can still be mighty.

We also work to inform and network together with other people so they can take their ideas back into their communities and start the processes of change and renewal in whatever context makes sense for them.

Sadly, we have had to say a final goodbye to one of our much-loved founder members, Tim Selman, who passed away earlier this year after a long illness. Tim was a force of nature and a true force for nature, founding and driving MMCLT with passion, vision, love, and lots of practical expertise. We will continue to miss him very much.

Tim would be pleased to see what you have enabled us to achieve this year, and the continued support of our volunteers, constructive engagement of other conservation bodies, the desire of landowners and estates to engage and work with us, and by the very positive feedback we have received from the many participants at our events.

To recap, we exist to deliver on our three key Objectives, summarised as:

- **The encouragement of community involvement in sustaining and enhancing landscapes**
- **Promoting the biodiversity of the land through its sustainable management and habitat re-creation**
- **The sharing of information, advice skills and expertise for those seeking to conserve land.**

## Activity Update September 2023

Thanks to shareholders and donors, we now own three sites, and at the AGM presentations will be given outlining the work underway to ensure their protection and help realise their biodiversity potential.

During the AGM, attendees will have the chance to hear about our sites first hand, below are some updates about each of the sites covering activity during the spring and summer of 2023.

Subscribing to our newsletters is a great way to keep upto date with all our site news, buying shares makes you a member of MMCLT and automatically signs you up for newsletters and updates.

### Cudwell Meadow update – spring and summer 2023

The ‘Open Sundays’ began in June to enable people to enjoy all the flowers and invertebrates. We also have two ‘walking for health’ groups from Mayfair that enjoy walking around. We welcomed a group from Middle Marches in July for a tour and update on developments.

The June Bioblitz was blessed with perfect weather – sunny all day but not too hot. Lots of folk came to help identify fauna and flora. We were blessed with two spider experts from Shropshire Spiders, Nigel and Jim, complete with their ‘Heath Robinson’ spider catchers (which also gently scooped up loads of other species too) and Caroline Uff, County Beetle Recorder. 31 species of spiders were identified including the attractive pink Candy Stripe and the bright Cucumber Green spider.

Lots of shield bugs were scooped up by them too, together with plenty of their juvenile stages known as ‘instars’ which reveal they are happily multiplying in the meadow. We identified 6 species including the Bishop’s mitre shield bug not seen there before. An update from Cudwell Meadow of beetles with several new species of ladybird and weevils not found in previous years reported. Beetles included a splendid large red Hazel leaf roller weevil and the Swollen-thighed beetle.

Nine members of the Strettons botany group came to look at the vegetation and were pleased to identify two new species for the meadow, Ragged robin around the pond and Teasel. However other species may have been lost. The very wet winter and spring meant that no sheep could come in to graze the mostly flooded meadow in the early spring resulting now in an abundance of long grass.

Recent visitors to the meadow have included a quite splendid Bee chafer (see inset photo) in July. These are rare, with around one sighting a year for

Shropshire so understandably caused lots of excitement. They breed in old birch trees, of which there are a few nearby so we’re hoping it may reappear next year.

Nigel of Shropshire Spiders comments: “the site is small but very interesting” and is encouraging other experts to visit!

## Norbury Hill update - spring and summer 2023

The highlight of the year for me on Norbury in 2023 was seeing our first Small Pearl Bordered Fritillary feeding in the area where we had planted out Marsh violet the previous winter. This may have been pure chance but it did show that we were right in our choice of violet planting site.

An almost equal delight was that after having seen the beautiful Forester moth very close nearby Caroline Uff spotted it on the MMCLT land. This blue iridescent day-flying moth is a quite uncommon and local species.

This year saw the return of Barbara Hadrill and her two horses Molly and Bluebell who worked on bracken rolling for two days with great results. Caradoc Contracting again worked on cutting large areas with the Robocutter and Alpine tractor with topper. Simon Cooter and two apprentice scythers helped cut around the outline of the earthworks of the ancient rabbit warren, In all we cleared about 6 hectares which was paid for by the Severn Trent Boost for Biodiversity fund.

It was very heartening this spring to start to see the effect of this management with grass and woodland plants starting to strengthen and expand.

As part of a larger project sponsored by Natural England to help the Small Pearl Bordered Fritillary we are doing more work with rush cutting and removal this autumn.

Marsh violet cuttings that were taken back in August are being grown on for us by Rob Lee Wildflowers Ltd. Norbury will be one of the recipients of the twenty thousand plug plants that are being grown.

Caroline Uff has been working on a Bird report which will be available later in the autumn.

## High Leasowes update - late spring and summer 2023

The contract to purchase the meadows was exchanged on 18th April 2023.

The time since then has been very busy for the High Leasowes Management Committee (HLMC) as they

set to work, with the help of enthusiastic volunteers, to start managing High Leasowes. The first step was to protect the site from unwanted vehicle access by installing new vehicle gates at two entrances, with the generous help of local fencer John Ellis.

Once this was done, a number of well-attended work parties took place during the summer to control bracken, thistles and dock and to remove ragwort from the areas to be cut for haylage.

During the spring and summer Caroline Uff, a local ecologist, conducted a Baseline Ecological Evaluation (BEE), which enabled HLMC to draw up a management plan which has been approved by HLMC and is currently being considered by MMCLT. Caroline was very impressed by our old hedgerows, many of which are dense and have been well-managed, and also the southern-most of our meadows, Cwm Leasowes, on which she found a wide range of plants including the lovely little Adder's tongue, a tiny meadow fern which is indicative of ancient meadowland. The meadows, trees and hedgerows also provide homes and feeding opportunities for over a hundred species of invertebrates including the bilberry bumble bee, common darter and black-and-yellow longhorn. Thirty-three bird species, including greenfinch and song thrush were also recorded at the site.

During these first six months HLMC had very helpful support from Mr and Mrs Downes, the farmers from whom the land was purchased; from the Parish Paths Partnership who installed or repaired kissing gates; from Stepping Stones and from countless volunteers. We have also been well supported by iDEA, the architectural consultancy at Longnor, whose staff are keen to get involved in practical activities.

Twenty of our volunteers attended a CPRE Shropshire and MMCLT-run Hedge Surveying course, as part of CPRE's Hedgerow Heroes project now in its third year. All the hedges on High Leasowes have now been surveyed and two of the volunteers will be helping us to prepare a long-term management plan for the hedgerows and to put this into action.

Volunteers from HLMC have conducted four guided walks around the fields with a total of 65 supporters and were pleased to also conduct a guided tour with a group from MMCLT who were visiting as part of a MMCLT-organized field trip to both Cudwell Meadow and High Leasowes.

During the coming months we will start working on High Leasowes to improve the biodiversity and to start creating the mosaic of habitats that will enable us to meet our vision of "creating an area rich in wildlife and a place that people can enjoy". More information will be available on the MMCLT website

or by signing up for our newsletter at: [highleasowes@gmail.com](mailto:highleasowes@gmail.com)

## Events update – spring and summer 2023

Events are one of the main areas of activity that we have developed this year. They are an enjoyable and effective way of exchanging information and engaging with people. We have met many interesting people and developed new partnerships as a consequence of our hosting activities.

All our events have been fully booked and the feedback we have received has been consistently positive.

In May 2023, we ran a conference jointly with the Shropshire Hills Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty Partnership.

The theme was to help and provide guidance for small landowners wanting to enhance their landholdings for nature, and for Town and Parish Councils who were interested in developing nature recovery plans.

In all 120 delegates were welcomed including representatives from 10 parish councils.

This first event was followed up with 5 site visits and picnics - see MMCLT website events page for full report

In July 2023, we held two hedgerow survey workshops in collaboration with CPRE on 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> July at High Leasowes and at Stoney Field, in New Invention.

Two further conferences are now planned as a follow up to the May 2023 conference – these conferences have been devised to engage town and parish councils across Shropshire, Telford & Wrekin in Nature Recovery with the ambition to urge Town and Parish Councils to develop bespoke Nature Recovery Plans for their areas.

At the time of writing there is a healthy take up of places by Town and Parish Councils at the first event and the support of Shropshire Association of Local Councils (SALC) and the leader at Shropshire Council Lezley Picton as the opening speaker has encouraged engagement.

The second event has the support of Baroness Bennet, Vice chair of the National Association of Parish Councils (NALC)

Details available below if you would like to book a place for October and November 2023.

See links below – note we are using two different venues and places are being taken up fast for the October Conference

- **October 13<sup>th</sup> RSVP conference**

**MONTFORD VILLAGE HALL**

<https://middlemarchescommunitylandtrust.org.uk/verges-hedges-watercourses-conference-13-10-23/>

- **November 17<sup>th</sup> MMCLT Conference**

**FITZ VILLAGE HALL**

<https://middlemarchescommunitylandtrust.org.uk/town-parish-councils-conference-17-11-23/>

To book email: [conference@middlemarchescommunitylandtrust.org.uk](mailto:conference@middlemarchescommunitylandtrust.org.uk)

We will continue gathering ideas and planning further events into 2024, and 2024-2025, so if you have a site visit to offer or have in mind a topic which justifies a conference or a seminar, let us know.

## **Annual Report 2022-2023**

### **Financial Summary**

A copy of the full accounts is available on our website.

A modest level of income (£2037) from technical support and land use was supplemented by £3624 of Government Land Support.

We are grateful for grants awarded from The National Trust (£3000), CPRE (£500) and Stretton Focus (£350) and significant donations from K Evans (£1000), Shropshire Hills AONB (£500) and Restoring Shropshire's Verges (£500).

Other donations amounted to £2238 and consisted of both regular and occasional sums from individuals as well as amounts collected at meetings and conferences.

A big change happened in April 2023, very soon after the end of the financial year, when the purchase of the High Leasowes land, made possible by a very successful quick-fire appeal, was completed.

At this point the bank balance fell from its high point to a more accurate reflection of the funds available for ongoing activity, to be replaced by the £400,000 asset of the land, the overall balance sheet remaining strong.

## **Governance Summary**

Trustees continue to meet formally on a monthly basis, and operates in accordance with standards and policies laid out in our first two years. We are upto date with our submissions to the Financial Conduct Authority and our rules are published on our website as will the proceedings of the AGM.

We are delighted to have recruited a new Secretary, Anne-Helen Harding, from Church Stretton, who has a background in natural sciences and much professional experience in the sorts of structured and organised ways of working that a Trust like ours needs to operate effectively. Welcome to Anne-Helen.

We are still interested in recruiting more people to our Board who have experience of business and financial skills but also including law, marketing, fundraising, and business administration.

Our former Treasurer Louise Robbins completed her term at the end of March 2023. We continue to seek a new Honorary Treasurer, and in have contracted a bookkeeper who stays on top of our finances day to day. The new Hon Treasurer would be a Board member, and would work with our bookkeeper, using the systems we have in place and improving upon them so that we become ever more efficient.

If anyone is interested in getting further involved, then please get in touch with Richard Keymer.

We also have a range of other volunteer opportunities available. If you think you can help – or spot something we haven't and think "wow – they REALLY need help!" please get in touch.

Thanks

We would again like to warmly thank our shareholders, supporters and volunteers, as well as the farmers that graze our land, who all enable us to take forward our mission to help improve the natural environment of the Marches.

We plan to keep on making a difference and keep on making it possible for others to do the same – and with your help, we will.

**MMCLT Board of Trustees,  
September 2023**