



Business Plan 2025-2027

CONTENTS

Background

Middle Marches Community Land Trust (MMCLT) had its origins in work to develop the Stepping Stones Project for Natural England and the National Trust. It was recognised that the wildlife of the Long Mynd and the Stiperstones was declining and that part of the solution was to have bigger sites, better managed and connected by wildlife corridors or via "stepping stones" of wildlife habitat. It was also considered that such actions benefit by being permanent, in that any land secured should be used in perpetuity for nature conservation.

In order to prompt action a small group got together and decided to set up MMCLT in 2019. Despite the disruption of Covid, our progress has been rapid. There are many well-established environmental organisations but we differ in being locally-owned, free from bureaucracy and run by experienced volunteer Board Members. We are not seeking to replicate what larger organisations already do well but will act swiftly to provide a "safety net" for wildlife by acquiring land and by assisting existing land-owners big and small to better manage their land in the long-term interests of nature and wildlife.

1. Chairman's Introduction
2. About MMCLT
3. Our Vision
4. Our Mission
5. Our Organisational Objectives
6. Our Operating Model
7. What We Have Achieved So Far
8. What We Want to do Next
9. Income and Expenditure
10. Our Relationships With Other Organisations
11. Our Legal Incorporation
12. Officers and Trustees

1. Chairman's Introduction

- 1.1. The scale of the climate emergency and of the huge loss of wildlife that we are seeing demands action and we hope to play a part in procuring workable, sustainable land management outcomes that help restore nature, whilst also producing high quality food for people in the Middle Marches. Please join us and help put these ideas into practice.

Richard Keymer, Chairman

2. About MMCLT

- 2.1. The Middle Marches (Shropshire, Herefordshire and Powys) are a very special place. They span the border between England and Wales and have a strong sense of place and identity, with many areas remote with a scattering of small market towns. The dominant geographical structure of lines of green hills skirted by woodland is beautiful, but it is largely a pastoral landscape that has big challenges for its wildlife with many species declining.
- 2.2. The Middle Marches Community Land Trust (MMCLT) was established in 2019 to help solve these problems. It is not our intention to repeat or duplicate the work of other organisations, but to work in the space between them, to find new dialogues and practical solutions that help sustain our landscapes, to host conversations and build understanding between those working, living and managing our countryside.
- 2.3. The idea that wildlife can be conserved only by creating more nature reserves is outdated but has been the main way of saving our best remaining reservoirs of biodiversity. MMCLT's main focus is, however, building habitat connectivity across the wider countryside to join these nodes together and securing key pieces of land through purchase or management agreements. At this time when so much of our wildlife is being lost, and our land and soils increasingly denuded, there is a need for a clear shared solution that not only protects our rural and farming economy, but also moves our landscape to a much richer, more climate resilient and ecologically rich place.

3. Our Vision

- 3.1. We have a vision for an ecologically rich and resilient landscape across the Middle Marches, supporting and working in partnership with local communities and landowners big and small that inspires residents and visitors alike.
- 3.2. The Middle Marches are a magical borderland, a landscape with time depth, full of history and beauty. It is a wonderful place to live and work, with great community. However, it has also seen huge shifts in its land use and catastrophic losses in its wildlife over the last few decades.

- 3.3. Our vision is all about helping to shape a rich future for this special place, not that harks back to a mythical past, but that looks forward and is fit for our future needs. We see a resilient future landscape containing a rich wildlife full of pollinators, supporting good rich soils, holding more water, being more wooded and wild, but symbiotically growing quality food and timber alongside this.
- 3.4. We want to help create a better connected, more diverse landscape holding more wildlife. We believe that a healthy biome is at the heart of sustaining our food production, supporting our communities, and a strong local economy with many more good livelihoods and products.

4. Our Mission

4.1. MMCLT's mission is to:

- Acquire and manage land for Nature Recovery
- Work with and support landowners, farmers and occupiers large and small
- Work with organisations, communities and individuals
- Act as an Advice Hub

5. Our Organisational Objectives

5.1. We will achieve our mission in the following ways:

1. Working with partners and stakeholders, who share our objectives to identify, acquire, lease or manage land in the MMCLT area.
2. Fostering relationships with local community groups to assist in the day-to-day management of land through a hub-and-spoke model.
3. Leveraging our local knowledge and networks to reach out to local landowners, including town and parish councils, with practical solutions for better managing land for nature, including the creative use of 'conservation covenants' to secure long-term, inter-generational protection of land.
4. Building local and national commitment to our mission, through sale of shares, good quality communications and engagement with existing and new partners.
5. Shaping, championing and test-bedding innovative responses to local environmental challenges with local partners, stakeholders and landowners.
6. Sharing the skills and knowledge of our members and stakeholders in a range of conferences, events and courses, researching and promoting good practice from other areas, promoting information exchange and debate, building consensus.

7. Exchanging information widely across the area through a variety of virtual and actual tools such as the Advice Hub and Newsletter.
8. Celebrating the distinctiveness of our place, its products and people, helping to create more direct links and supply chains between the land and local communities.
9. Actively work with the County Local Nature Recovery Strategy to ensure implementation.

6. Our Operating Model

- 6.1. From its inception MMCLT has been rooted in the community, established as a Community Benefit Society, and set within the family of community land trusts across the UK. It is owned, funded by and takes its direction from local people. This is fundamental to ensuring that it adopts an agenda that is really useful, locally focused, and that the organisation is transparent, trusted and fully accountable to its members who are its shareholders.
- 6.2. Our aim is to create a strong balance sheet and a properly managed sustainable organisation that can deliver our objectives. We are fully accountable but we do not waste resources creating large bureaucratic processes or structures. There is an urgency about our tasks, and we want to concentrate on making practical headway. We have built MMCLT around an operating model that is flexible and able to react quickly to seize opportunities as and when they arise.
- 6.3. So far we have worked with a voluntary Board, with few overheads, no staff, no payments to Trustees, and minimal specialist support.
- 6.4. We want to get to a point where we can expand, but still maintain a very light organisation, which uses its resources almost entirely on delivery. We feel that we have reached that point now. There is significant political and social momentum both nationally and internationally to effect change for nature, most notably in the form of the 30 X 30 initiative embodied in the CBD's Global Biodiversity

Framework and the Bern Convention's 'Roadmap to 2030'. There is also an increasing number of funding opportunities linked, for example, to the Local Nature Recovery Strategy (LNRS), Sustainable Farming Incentives (SFI), and Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG).

7. What We Have Achieved So Far

- 7.1. In the last five years MMCLT has evolved from an idea into reality.
- 7.2. Establishment and Recognition
 - 7.2.1. The organisation has been legally incorporated as a Community Benefit Society and since its launch has attracted over 150 shareholders, doubling the number in the last 2 years, mostly from the local area. The shareholders/ members all have a financial stake in the organisation and therefore the land it purchases.
 - 7.2.2. A founding Board was established to create the organisation, and after a recruitment process, this has now evolved into a formally incorporated Board, including the principal officer posts required, to develop the Trust through its next phases.
 - 7.2.3. In 2024, we won the Community Land Trust Award for "showcasing how CLTs can protect and manage land for nature and local community wellbeing."
- 7.3. Land Acquisition

7.3.1. During this first phase MMCLT has acquired four areas of land.

7.3.2. Cudwell Meadow – working with Stretton Wetlands Interest Group in 2020, we ran an appeal to purchase a 3-acre site south of Church Stretton. We were delighted to hit our £25,000 target and complete the purchase in early 2021.

7.3.3. Norbury Hill – this has rightly been described as “the largest stepping stone” between two important sites of conservation, the Long Mynd and the Stiperstones; the appeal raised £100,000 to purchase around 50 acres of the site in May 2021.

7.3.4. High Leasowes – in partnership with the local community in Church Stretton and our existing supporters we raised £400,000 in just 10 days to purchase this 16.2 acres of organic grassland site in April 2023 on the eastern edge of Church Stretton beneath Caer Caradoc.

7.3.5. Minsterley Meadows – in partnership with Marches Meadow group we raised over £400,000, including National Lottery Heritage Funding, to acquire and manage these 13.5 acres of flower-rich meadows in October 2024 supporting the largest colony of green-

winged orchids (5000) in Shropshire. The site is designated as a Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) and is of national importance.

7.3.6 The funds for these land purchases have been raised mostly through public donations ranging from a few pounds to tens of thousands, demonstrating that there is public appetite for this kind of local approach.

7.3.7. We have successfully partnered with local community groups who share our values and objectives to manage these sites on a day-to-day basis with the support of the local community. One of our Trustees usually forms part of the management board of such local community groups. Local farmers also help us to manage our sites.

7.4. Working with landowners

7.4.1. At all our sites we work with local farmers to assist with the management, such as grazing (Norbury Hill and Cudwell) and haymaking (High Leasowes and Minsterley Meadows). We envisage that this would be normal practice for the future.

7.5. Information Sharing and Advice

7.5.1. Our aims around sharing information, advice, skills, expertise and education have been met by establishing both on-line and in person communications via conferences and field events.

7.5.2. We have organised 9 conferences in two years (including a national meadows conference) and intentionally established working in partnership with colleagues in:

- Marches Meadow Group (MMG)
- Restoring Shropshire’s Verges Project (RSVP)
- Shropshire Hills National Landscape Trust
- Shropshire Association of Local Councils (SALC)
- Stepping Stones Project
- Shropshire Wildlife Trust

7.5.3. On top of conferences, we have organised field trips focussed on examples such as hedges, bird spotting, regenerative farming, meadow restoration and permaculture – more information can be

found on our website.

7.5.4. Conferences and events have opened us and partner organisations up to new audiences, in particular town and parish councils, subsequently boosting mailing lists and shareholdings as well as providing an important source of income from donations.

7.5.5. We have developed an Advice Hub with support information on farming for nature, Species Action Plans (SAPs) and a directory.

8. What We Want to do Next

8.1. This Section summarises what we plan to do to meet our objectives over the next three years (consistent with our Land Management and Acquisition Strategy). As with any Business Plan, it is a framework to show what we seek to achieve and how to direct our resources – it isn't set in stone. If opportunities arise which fit with our objectives, which we can afford and deliver responsibly, then we will consider those opportunities on a case-by-case basis.

8.2. It is the Board's duty to ensure that the foundations and systems are in place to create an organisation that is strong, sustainable and accountable. We have big nature recovery ambitions for the future and have been working in partnership on the development of our local nature recovery strategy (LNRS), in particular focusing on support with town and parish councils, the ambition being to support the development of bespoke nature recovery plans in every town and parish council. All Board members feel that there is a pressing need to move things on, but also to be realistic in terms of creating the capacity to do things properly and methodically, while not losing our energy and passion for our mission.

8.3. We feel that now is the time to leverage our existing track-record and network of contacts and be more ambitious. There is a growing

sense of urgency – nationally and internationally at both the political and social level – to protect land for nature, as exemplified by the 30 X 30 initiative enshrined in the CBD's Global Biodiversity Framework and the Bern Convention's 'Roadmap to 2030'. There is also an increasing number of funding opportunities underpinning this global movement linked, for example, to the Local Nature Recovery Strategy (LNRS), Sustainable Farming Incentives (SFI), and Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG).

8.4. In summary, our 3-year plan is as follows:

8.4.1. To establish, and maintain proactively on a rolling basis, a database of target land in the MMCLT area for Nature Recovery.

8.4.2. To acquire at least 1 large parcel of land (100 acres+) and 1-3 smaller parcels of land per year for Nature Recovery and to enter into management agreements with local community groups to perform the day-to-day management of these sites on our behalf.

8.4.3. To procure, over the 3-year period, the conclusion of 30 'conservation covenants' by existing land-owners to protect land for nature for the long term. With the benefit of the database of target land (see 8.4.1 above), we can also reach out (e.g., via estate agents) to potential future purchasers (as well as the existing owners) of any such land that comes on the market to encourage them to contact us to discuss the possibility of entering into a 'conservation covenant' with a 'responsible body' (which we can apply to become) to conserve and protect the land for the long term (without our having to acquire it ourselves). Any land secured by a 'conservation covenant' can be registered as a 'biodiversity gain site' on which developers can then fund 'habitat enhancement works' in fulfilment of their offsite Biodiversity Net Gain obligations under Schedule 7A of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 (as inserted by Schedule 14 of the Environment Act 2021).

8.4.4. To organise 3 events/workshops per year on nature recovery issues, including the use of 'conservation covenants' to secure the long-term protection of land for nature. This latter topic will provide an opportunity to network not only with existing and potential future land-owners in the MMCLT area (see 8.4.3 above) but also with developers interested in identifying land for offsite Biodiversity Net Gain (see 8.4.3 above). Notably, the register of 'biodiversity gain sites' does not contain contact details of available gain sites (i.e., it is not a 'matchmaking' service connecting developers with land-owners), so these events/workshops – as well as our database of target land (see 8.4.1 above) – will help connect developers to the owners of land most in need of financing for nature recovery work.

9. Income and Costs

- 9.1. Our historic income and costs for the past five years (divided into Acquisitions, Operations and Conferences) are set out in Annex 1.
- 9.2. Our projected income and costs for the next 3 years are set out in Annex 2. The major anticipated cost item is the £1.5m per annum on land acquisition for each of the 3 years of this business plan (i.e., roughly £750,000 for the 100 acre+ parcel of land plus £750,000 for the 1-3 smaller parcels of land, as per section 8.4.2 above). The anticipated income from grants and government payments for Operations is conservative because it does not take into account the likely income that we will derive from the new land acquired during the 3-year period.
- 9.3. We intend to create a Nature Recovery Fund with a fund-raising target of £5m to cover the above anticipated land acquisition (plus margin).

10. Our Relationships With Other Organisations

- 10.1. MMCLT was initially set up with the mission of acting as a "purchaser of last resort" if land of value for wildlife came on the market and none of the established conservation charities or statutory agencies was able to act to secure its future.
- 10.2. Increasingly the big wildlife charities operate at a landscape scale and therefore focus on a few very large projects for which they can secure major funding. MMCLT's mission came out of work to develop the Stepping Stones Project, which means that land might also be of interest if it happens to be in the right geographical location to act as a buffer or stepping stone between important wildlife sites. It may be that the intrinsic interest of the land concerned may have diminished or indeed disappeared altogether which means that restoration ecology is likely to score highly on our register of interests.
- 10.3. MMCLT will not confine itself to working within a rigid long-term programme of land acquisition or management so that it can act as quickly as resources allow when opportunities present themselves.
- 10.4. It follows therefore that while MMCLT needs to maintain good relationships with a wide range of stakeholders, but it also needs to remain free of as many binding obligations to other organisations as is practical. In addition, we need to work effectively with a wide network of grant funding organisations.
- 10.5. MMCLT is not a single issue lobbying organisation, preferring to leave this approach to others, while we seek to lead by example, either working on our own or with partners.
- 10.6. To summarise, our independence is paramount: however, we are keen to work with a wide range of partner organisations to achieve better outcomes for wildlife on land in the Middle Marches.

11. Our Legal Incorporation

- 11.1. MMCLT is incorporated as a Community Benefit Society (CBS), and are regulated by the Financial Conduct Authority (we are registered on the Mutuals Public Register and our registration number is 8143).
- 11.2. We are also recognised as a charity for the purposes of GiftAid on donations.
- 11.3. MMCLT like all CBSs is run as a democratic organisation – one member (shareholder) one vote.
- 11.4. CBSs are limited liability organisations, shareholders are not held liable for the actions of occupiers or tenants of any land we hold or any debts run up. Shareholders do not earn dividends on shares held, and shares do not increase in value – nor do they fall in value.

12. Officers and Trustees

- 12.1. When first established, our Board of Trustees consisted of 6 Members. We have since expanded to 9 Members with wide-ranging expertise in the fields of nature and wildlife conservation, land management, and law.
- 12.2. Our current Board of Trustees (January 2025) comprises –

Chair: Richard Keymer

Trustees: Sara Braune
Jonathan Brown
Janet Cobb
Rob Rowe
Richard Small
Nigel Jackson
Anne-Helen Harding
Zannis Mavrogordato

- 12.3. The Board is very grateful to the many volunteers and supporters who have helped us, but especially to the following people: Mike Watkins for admin support, Lizzie Hulton Harrop for IT and website support, Sarah Jameson for logo design and website support, Sally Currin for business support, John Higson for accountancy.

13. Contacts

- 13.1. Our postal address is: Enterprise House, Station St, Bishops Castle SY9 5AQ, Phone: 01588 638038

ANNEX 1 – HISTORIC INCOME AND COSTS

			2020/21	2021/22	2022/23	2023/24	2024/25
Acquisitions	Income	Donations/Appeals	60986		412249		159436
		Grants					127593
		Gift Aid	10956			28940	30314
		Loans		80000			
		71942	80000	412249		317343	
	Cost						
		Purchase	29500	92000		400000	190000
		Legal Fees		6367		3635	4890
		29500	98367	0	403635	194890	
	Net		42442	(18367)	412249	(403635)	122453

Operations (non-acquisition)						
Income	Donations	344	2554		5241	2712
	Grants	1500	20510		6150	3328
	Government Payments			5301	7294	5782
	Gift Aid			644		
	Other	6	4941		2389	1263
	Interest				929	2027
		1850	28005	5945	22003	15113
Costs		7850	8003	17288	29730	29730
Net		(6000)	20002	(11343)	(7727)	(14617)

Conferences	Income	Donations & Grants		8088	7342	6805
	Costs	Venue, food and other		5895	5863	1805
	Net			2193	1479	5000

ANNEX 2 – PROJECTED INCOME AND COSTS

			2025	2026	2027
Acquisitions	Income	Nature Recovery Fund	1666666	1666666	1666666
		Grants			
		Gift Aid			
		Loans			
	Cost	Purchase	1500000	1500000	1500000
		Legal Fees	10000	10000	10000
	Net		156,666	156,666	156,666

Operations (non-acquisition)					
	Income	Donations	2500	2575	2652
		Grants	6000	6180	6365
		Government Payments	6000	6180	6365
		Gift Aid	625	644	663
		Other	1500	1545	1591
		Interest	2000	2060	2122
			18625	19184	19759
	Costs		20000	20000	20000
	Net		(1375)	(816)	(241)

Conferences	Income	Donations & Grants	7000	7000	7000
	Costs	Venue, food and other	3000	3000	3000
	Net		4000	4000	4000