

# Middle Marches Community Land Trust

## External Evaluation: Summary

### Background

The state of nature in the UK is of concern and is reflected in public attitudes towards nature-recovery and conservation. Whilst the government is responding to the nature crisis with Local Nature Recovery Strategies (LNRS) at the County Council level, council finances are under significant pressure and changes to the planning laws raise concerns that nature will not be prioritised over development. Within this context, there is an appetite amongst communities to have more say over how land in their communities is used and to have the opportunity to protect biodiversity and nature that is important to them.

### The Middle Marches Community Land Trust

In response to these challenges and trends, Middle Marches Community Land Trust (MMCLT) was established to empower communities to take ownership and control of land that they considered valuable for nature and protect that land in perpetuity. Adopting a Community Land Trust (CLT) model with crowdfunding campaigns, MMCLT provides residents across The Marches (Shropshire, Herefordshire and

Powys) with an important opportunity to acquire land, complementing other organisations and institutions working on nature-recovery. At the same time, MMCLT has made its mark through events and conferences that convene, co-ordinate and mobilise collective effort to support nature-recovery. This work has been nationally recognised and offers important lessons to others who are looking for ways to promote nature recovery.

### Evaluation Purpose and Approach

This independent evaluation has been delivered by Peace and Planet Ltd. And commissioned by MMCLT with the following objectives: i) to provide accountability to MMCLT shareholders and partners by documenting and verifying (or not) MMCLT's results; ii) to identify where MMCLT has been effective and not so effective and why; iii) to make recommendations for how MMCLT can be strengthened going forward; iv) to learn lessons that can inform others working on nature-recovery.

The evaluation has interviewed 30+ stakeholders across the sector, reviewed 20+ documents, conducted two site visits, attended one MMCLT conference and held three workshops with the MMCLT Board.



## Key Conclusions

**C1:** MMCLT has provided important strategic, nimble and innovative support to nature recovery efforts across the Marches, using its awareness of the local context and relationships to ensure it is complementary to other initiatives whilst operating at pace.

**C2:** The land that MMCLT has acquired is of significant importance for biodiversity which is now protected in perpetuity. However, some organisational weaknesses present a risk that MMCLT may over-reach and struggle to meet its obligations as a land manager as it grows.

**C3:** MMCLT is unique as one of a handful of CLTs focused on nature. It has demonstrated that the CLT model is an important tool in the nature-recovery toolbox, providing an

important opportunity to mobilise community interests to protect land and contribute to large-scale nature-recovery strategies.

**C4:** MMCLT has trialled a variety of land management approaches which have all been successful overall. However, a lack of clarity of what these approaches are and what they entail can lead to challenges for the organisation.

**C5:** MMCLT has had a catalytic effect on nature recovery and provides a model that is excellent value for money. It now has an important role to show how this model can respond to high demand whilst maintaining the unique characteristics that make it successful.

## Key Recommendations

**R1:** Map out MMCLT's existing land assets and management responsibilities into an overarching "terrier" that clearly sets out ongoing liabilities and resourcing required.

**R2:** Informed by a clear understanding of MMCLT liabilities and responsibilities develop a business plan that includes income generation activity to cover MMCLT costs.

**R3:** Review MMCLT's land management models and resolve any outstanding concerns whilst setting out options that can inform acquisitions and management agreements.

**R4:** Develop a plan to augment the social capital of MMCLT in order to safeguard from disruptions that may be caused by changes in Board members or other key associates.

**R5:** Develop a 1-2 year out-reach strategy that is accompanied by a guide and set of criteria to facilitate future management of conferences and events.

**R6:** Work with SALC to develop an action plan for how MMCLT can support 2-3 parish clusters as a proof-of-concept for how local mobilisation can deliver the LNRS.

**R7:** Hold ½ day Board meetings to reflect on progress every 3 months.

**R8:** Identify opportunities to amplify MMCLT's objectives and vision, scaling-up or helping to replicate the MMCLT model.