

Dartmoor Farming in Protected Landscapes

Local Assessment Panel

Wednesday 16th of July 2025 – DNPA Princetown Office

Attending: Russell Ashford, Peter Harper, Katie Wynter, Sarah Blyth, Alison Clish-Green, John Howell, Christine Malseed, Shirley Mudge, James Wright

Dartmoor staff attending: Bea Dunscombe, Kaitlin Perryman, Columb Hauge, Richard Drysdale

Apologies: Will Dracup, Dan Alford, Layland Branfield (*Ann Willcocks was also unable to attend as Layland's substitute*)

Introduction:

- Chair suggested a new method for structuring today's meeting. Members will be invited to raise two points each in response to the presentations to facilitate a more timely meeting, with further discussions allowed as needed. This proposal was agreed by all.
- A welcome to James Wright to the FiPL team, coming from the Access & Recreation team at the DNPA. JW will be the FiPL manager two days a week, alongside his core responsibilities within A&R. RD also confirmed that BD & KP's roles have been enhanced and they will continue delivering FiPL this year. Also reiterated that CH is part funded through FiPL and is therefore available for consultation and advice for farmers looking to access FiPL funding.

Finance Update

- FiPL team fed back updates to the financial position of the programme on Dartmoor to date.
- At the request of the Panel in the previous meeting, the team relayed topline information of the projects approved internally by the team under £10,000 in grant value.

Applications

Dartmoor Farmers Association – Educational Access (Phase Two)

(Presented by Bea Dunscombe)

Summary of application:

Building on a very successful pilot from 2024/25, this project aims to deliver a further 25 bespoke educational school visits to DFA member farms. Providing a unique opportunity for school children to visit and experience a day on a Dartmoor farm. The DFA is made up of over 100 farming members and is an opportunity for members to work together and build on each other's experiences and learnings.

Declarations of interest:

- Shirley Mudge – Shirley is a member of the DFA and took part in the Educational Visits last year within the previous DFA FiPL scheme. It was decided that Shirley could listen to the presentation but would not be able to vote on this application.
- Russell Ashford – is also a member of the DFA and took part in the Educational Visits last year within the previous DFA FiPL scheme. It was decided that Russell could listen to the presentation but would not be able to vote on this application.

Discussion points:

- Panel members were highly supportive of this project and were glad to see its second iteration. The legacy of it however was raised as a concern as it is not yet clear how educational visits of this scope could be incorporated into a long-term scheme due to the limitations of available funding.
- Panel members brought up the Countryside Code and whether teachings within the CC could be incorporated into this project? FiPL team confirmed that the DFA already include educating students about the Countryside Code as part of their educational visits.
- The Panel asked about the applicant's first FiPL project and in what way this proposal was different in size and grant value from the first. BD confirmed that this year's grant request was less due to there being less time between now and the end of the programme (March 2026) to complete the work, and therefore the revenue costs relating to delivering the scheme were lower.
- The Panel questioned the applicant's methodology for getting in touch with prospective schools as it was raised that in the report produced by the DFA last year, the main reference was to schools in Plymouth. BD confirmed that the DFA's Engagement Officer is responsible for proactively seeking out the schools and that the FiPL team have encouraged the applicants to access schools from a wider area for maximum benefit this year, such as from Torquay + Newton Abbot.
- It was noted that this scheme could also be one way of approaching the topic of childhood obesity as educating children around where their food comes from and of healthier, local choice should be a priority.
- Could something like Junior Life Skills be dove tailed into a scheme like this?
- Members were supportive of the application but it was again raised that the main area of concern around was the legacy of it as a project. Members would not want to see it come to an end when FiPL comes to an end. The Panel recommended that the applicants search for further funding and or sponsorships as many organisations or charities would likely be very interested.
- Could issue of legacy be included as a section in this years' final evaluation report?
- The panel raised that they would interested to know how many of the schools are being supplied by Goosemoor and therefore making that 'Educating' link as described.
- The Panel were pleased to see a future proofing element considered in relationship to the clothing being stored & potentially used in the future by Shallowford Farm.
- It was considered that the 'Farmer Steering Group' aspect was well considered and an important and useful part of the project for the farmers involved.

- Who is the newsletter being sent out to? Could all DFA members be emailed a copy? And what about schools that haven't yet taken part? The Panel felt that the newsletter should be proactively sent out beyond the farmers and schools who have already been involved with the scheme, for maximum reach and impact.
- Can the content of the school visits be explicitly linked to the National Curriculum? As this could allow the DFA to be more successful in securing future funding and sponsorship opportunities.
- Panel members to keep their ears to the ground for the Food & Farming Awards 2025 as this scheme should be nominated.

The scoring by the FiPL team was confirmed:

	Score	Score after weighting
Project outcomes (Climate, Nature, People and Place) – 40%	8	3.2
Ability to deliver - 20%	8	1.6
Sustainability / legacy of projects - 20%	6	1.2
Value for Money - 20%	8	1.6
Total	30	7.6

Decision:

Panel voted to approve this project subject to the applicant meeting the below 2 conditions:

1. The content of the school visits must be aligned with the National Curriculum for Key stages 2 & 3. This would in turn support the DFA in attracting future funding and sponsorships.
2. For the DFA to be proactive in inviting a wider range of schools, based on location and those which have not yet been engaged, to participate in the school visits.

The Panel also made the below recommendations:

- If available, for the applicant to report back to the FiPL team as to how many schools are being supplied by Goosemoor as part of the 'Educatering' aspect of the previous project. If this information is not available then for this to be included in the final report this year, 2025-26.
- For the DFA newsletter to be emailed to all DFA members for maximum benefit and knowledge sharing.

For: 7

Against: 0

Abstained: 2

Padley Common – Boardwalks and Interpretation

(Presented by Bea Dunscombe)

Summary of application:

The creation of 6 wooden boardwalks over fragile marshy areas of Padley Common, allowing easier and safer access around the common for the public. The project also includes the installation of 1 interpretation board, which will inform the public about the importance of livestock grazing and the existing habitats found on Padley common.

The FiPL team made recommendations to the Panel during the presentation of an altered intervention rate, boardwalk construction specification and approval subject to evidence of collaborative support from the graziers and Parish Council to be considered in response to the application.

Declarations of interest:

- Christine Malseed declared a conflict of interest as she is a Chagford Commoner & on the Parish Council who are landowners/applicant(s). It was therefore decided that Christine could not vote on this application.

Discussion points:

- The Panel expressed considerable support for this application in principle due to the significant public benefit and good it would deliver. It was noted that data from Strava would be able to support the claim that the routes around the common are used regularly.
- It was raised that that use of plastic posts should not be supported due to their potential to erode and degrade into the environment. It was asked whether another more sustainable material could be used to replace the plastic posts and railway sleepers (on advice from DNPA Ranger Pete Rich), such as Larch or Sweet Chestnut. If this resulted in increased costs, then would the panel approval additional costs?
- Query as to whether the chosen quote and contractor was the cheapest one. BD confirmed yes.
- Panel felt this application scored highly on the additional criteria of 'time sensitive' given the degrading habitats and population of the Marsh Fritillary butterfly.
- It was raised that in some locations, recycled plastic posts apparently have longevity and that when they are constructed from high grade composite plastic, then they need not leach into the environment.
- BD to check that all the river crossing areas have been considered within the application (between boardwalks marked 5 & 6).
- Would the addition of boardwalks encourage more footfall to the area as a result of the improved access and therefore be to detriment of the precious marshy habitats? It was discussed that the projects' purpose is to intentionally direct the public away from the sensitive areas and create suitable walkways above particularly wet and fragile locations. In turn, this would allow deviated routes through sensitive habitats to reestablish as the public no longer need to avoid the wet inaccessible areas.
- There was consideration of the intervention rate, with some members expressing their approval at offering an 100% intervention rate in line with the delivery of public good, whilst others were happy with the 80/20 split as applied. It was concluded that the applicant's contribution could remain the same, the 20% of the original costs applied for, but that the FiPL grant could cover the additional costs that will likely be incurred through the revised specification and construction materials required.
- Members approved the condition to prohibit the use of any chemically treated wood due to the significant risk of it leaching into the sensitive habitats the project wishes to protect.
- Concerns were raised over the limited access onto the common due to the pedestrian kissing gate(s) upon entry. The FiPL team confirmed that the adjacent stock gate is always left

unlocked, but as this is still not accessible for all, members requested the applicant works with the DNPA Access team to enquire as to best practice and appropriate gates/handles to use in this case, for example the addition of a trombone handle.

- Panel requested that appropriate routes and maps are included on the interpretation board as to the various routes and their degree of accessibility around the common, in addition to the information about habitats and common management. It was also confirmed that the interpretation boards would need to gain Planning consent.
- The panel discussed 'floating boardwalks' as these have been used in other National Parks and can move with the changing water levels.
- Panel asked to see an updated specification to be presented and offered back once discussions with the Ranger & Access have confirmed the appropriate materials and construction design. Happy to cover additional costs that this might incur, but for the applicant's contribution to remain at the proposed 20% portion of £3,269.60. No upper limit for the revised costs if reasonable.
- Confirmation from members that grips strips should be used, not weld mesh or chicken wire as these are both inefficient and dangerous if not maintained adequately.

The scoring by the FiPL team was confirmed:

	Score	Score after weighting
Project outcomes (Climate, Nature, People and Place) – 40%	6	2.4
Ability to deliver - 20%	8	1.6
Sustainability / legacy of projects - 20%	6	1.2
Value for Money - 20%	6	1.2
Total	26	6.4

Decision:

Pending approval subject to confirming the below specifications and conditions, to then be reviewed & confirmed by the panel via further emails or additional Teams meeting:

1. For the final application to be presented and approved by the Parish Council & Chagford commoners, and for the FiPL team to see meeting minutes.
2. Approval for the signboard component subject to Planning Permission being granted.
3. For the available routes to be mapped on the interpretation board & the FiPL team to have sign off on these.
4. To prohibit the use of any chemically treated timber.
5. To consult DNPA access team to establish the most suitable type of accessible gate for the 2 access points onto the Common. Panel agreed to cover additional costs.
6. FiPL team to work with the applicant to check for any additional river crossing locations.
7. To work in tandem with DNPA Access & Ranger teams on the boardwalk's specification and for the updated specification to be relayed back to the Panel, once the most appropriate materials and construction design has been confirmed. The panel confirmed they are happy to cover additional costs that this might incur, but for the applicant's contribution to remain at the proposed 20% portion of £3,269.60. No upper limit for the revised costs if reasonable.

For: 8

Against: 0

Abstained: 1

Twoool - Sea Wool Rock Bags

(Presented by Bea Dunscombe)

Summary of application:

To produce a Sea Wool Rock Bag prototype using fully biodegradable Dartmoor Whiteface Sheep's wool. Supporting the production stage of a long-term project that aims to create and test a new, sustainable wool net that will not only create an alternative product for subsea operations but will also provide more of a route to market for Dartmoor farmers' wool.

Declarations of interest:

None.

Discussion points:

- Support for this project was generally very high, and Panel members thought it was an extremely interesting project with lots of environmental benefits and impacts.
- Panel expressed disappointment that there is nowhere locally that the wool can be processed, meaning the largest portion (about 90%) of the project funding will be delivered outside of Dartmoor, but members discussed that there are no other options at present.
- Will this new product be financially viable for the wind turbine companies to use instead of the current plastic ones? A request to see these comparative costings. BD confirmed that the retrieval cost of the current plastic ones is currently over £1 million per turbine, but that additional information can be requested on this.
- Members discussed what the long-term effect this project could have on the wool market on Dartmoor? Could Dartmoor's Whiteface Sheep be under-cut by other sheep breeds if it was found other breed wool had similar properties? What if this could be replicated elsewhere and detract from the Dartmoor benefit?
- How viable is this? Members reflected that we won't know until after this prototype trial.
- The Panel approved the match funding from Seaway 7, which demonstrates their interest and commitment to this project. BD confirmed a future funding commitment from Seaway 7 of £100,000 if this trial stage is successful.
- What will be the likely annual tonnage of wool from Dartmoor be if the prototype proves to be highly viable? Can the applicant provide the prospective tonnage of Dartmoor Whiteface Sheep's Wool that will be required if this trail proves viable as we need to assess whether this would be sustainable.
- The panel discussed the option, suggested by FIPL team, of lowering the intervention rate for item 1, the purchase of the Whiteface wool due to the commercial gain longer term to the applicant. All panel members were happy to maintain the 100% intervention rate for item 1 as it is this costs that will benefit Dartmoor directly in the short term and hopefully beyond.
- Members noted that a project like this is the ideal use of FiPL funding, as seed money for longer term opportunities.

- Would there be any issue with the longer-term plan for patenting this product as a result of trials funded through the FiPL programme? The FiPL team to confirm on this with DEFRA.

The scoring by the FiPL team was confirmed:

	Score	Score after weighting
Project outcomes (Climate, Nature, People and Place) – 40%	8	3.2
Ability to deliver - 20%	8	1.6
Sustainability / legacy of projects - 20%	8	1.6
Value for Money - 20%	6	1.2
Total	30	7.6

Decision:

To approved in full, subject to meeting the below 2 conditions:

1. For the applicant to provide figures demonstrating the costs that will be saved if the Sea Wool rock bags prove to be viable and a cheaper alternative compared to plastic netting.
2. For the prospective tonnage of Dartmoor Whiteface Sheep's Wool that will be required from farmers if this proves to be viable to be relayed to the Panel to demonstrate the long-term effects to Dartmoor, and this will be at a level that can be sustained on Dartmoor.

For: 9

Against: 0

Abstained: 0

DaCC - Strategic Wildfire Plan: Phase 3

(Presented by Bea Dunscombe)

Summary of application:

Building on work that has been completed in phase 2, this project aims to finalise the Dartmoor-wide Strategic Fire Plan to help reduce the risk of wildfires on our commons and improve our response when they do happen. This includes both practical work and mapping work, prioritising commons that didn't take part in phase 2 of this project.

Declarations of interest:

- Russell Ashford is a member of the Dartmoor Commoners Council, but it was confirmed that he would not benefit directly from the funding in this application. It was therefore decided that Russell could remain and vote on this application.

Discussion points:

- Members raised concern over the accessibility and availability of the data and updated maps to all relevant parties on Dartmoor. Members considered it is essential that all involved are privy to the updated maps and records of fire breaks to ensure it is accurate and can be used whenever necessary.

- Does there need to be a formal agreement in place to understand and honour who has access to the updating of maps and permissions? Who will the map permissions of QFIELD sit with? If the application is coming from the DCC, could the access sit with the office of the DCC?
- In reference to the maintenance of the fire breaks cut within this phase and previous ones, DCC must go back to the Commons Associations who have had work completed and gain written confirmation of their commitment to maintenance of the fire breaks in the future.
- The panel expressed strong support for funding towards the time spent training in the use of the mapping software as its use and benefit to the commoners is highly significant and impactful.
- The wider public benefit of the fire breaks being cut was noted and supported, principally the increased public access and enjoyment of the moor, which was commented to be reason enough to warrant public funding.
- The panel raised that any fire breaks should not be cut straight down hills as this will increase any surface water run-off, and that the applicant should be encouraged to avoid this wherever possible.
- Members discussed the recent wildfire on Cut Hill in which collaboration between commoners, Devon Fire & Rescue and the DNPA was fundamental in dealing with the fire. It was noted that the commoners had the essential knowledge of the landscape to respond to the fire.

The scoring by the FiPL team was confirmed:

	Score	Score after weighting
Project outcomes (Climate, Nature, People and Place) – 40%	8	3.2
Ability to deliver - 20%	8	1.6
Sustainability / legacy of projects - 20%	8	1.6
Value for Money - 20%	6	1.2
Total	30	7.6

Decision:

To approve subject to meeting the below 4 conditions:

1. The applicant must provide explicit information on how they will be working with the Peatland Partnership going forward, to ensure that all plans are appropriately mapped and communicated.
2. All tracks cut in this phase must follow appropriate lines and not go straight down any hills.
3. There needs to be a formal process in place for the transfer of data into mapping, explaining who will have ownership and how this process will be managed and kept up to date going forward.
4. The Dartmoor Commoners Council must contact all Associations included in the Strategic Fire Plan, to gain written confirmation that they will respectively maintain the practical work delivered on their common through this project. These should then be shared with the FiPL team.

***Note – conditions 2 & 4 for this project have been amended since the date of approval. These amendments have been formally approved by our Panel.**

Amended conditions:

1. The applicant must provide explicit information on how they will be working with the Peatland Partnership going forward, to ensure that all mapping plans are appropriately communicated.
2. Where feasible fire breaks should be cut diagonally, instead of straight down a hill. All fire breaks should be monitored for signs of increased erosion through surface water and diverted, if necessary, especially those fire breaks that are unavoidably cut down a hill.
3. There needs to be a formal place in place for the transferral of data into mapping, explaining who will have ownership and how this process will be managed going forward.
4. The work being carried out in this project must be appropriately maintained for a minimum of 5 years beyond the date of completion, with the understanding that each Commons Association involved in the project takes individual ownership for the upkeep and maintenance of completed work either through their existing HLS Agreement or through Defra's alternative funding schemes.

For: 8

Against: 0

Abstained: 0

**Peter Harper left before voting.*

AOB:

RD requested Panel's steer on DNPA submitting bids as a FiPL applicant for future projects.

- It was agreed that that DNPA can bid as long as they are meeting FiPL outcomes and the funding is not replacing core funding or statutory duties.
- Additionally, in the interest of good governance, applications of any size coming from DNPA should be presented to the Panel for consideration regardless of grant value.

Date of next meeting: 3rd September 2025 – Parke, Bovey Tracey.