

Dartmoor Farming in Protected Landscapes

Local Assessment Panel

Thursday 9th November 2022, 11:00 – 15:00, Parke

Attending: Russell Ashford (Chair), Dan Alford, Will Dracup, Peter Harper, Eamon Crowe, Ann Wilcocks, John Howell, James Sharpe

Dartmoor FiPL team members: Kerry Smith, Simon Pryor and Bea Dunscombe

Apologies: Martin Perryman, Sarah Blyth, Layland Branfield (Ann Wilcocks attending on behalf of Dartmoor Commoners Council), Mark Walker

Discussion regarding DHPA letter:

- Response proposed to say conditional grant was debated and carefully considered prior to being offered so will not revisit conditions of offer. However, DNPA (and DaCC) will offer to work with DHPA to explore ways of meeting the conditions which should find deliverable.
- Funding for this year is likely to be fully allocated with more projects awaiting funding. Therefore, we should give a deadline for a decision on whether they will accept or decline the FiPL grant offer not specific to this application, concern also discussed regarding some project timescales slipping).

All panel members present were in favour of this decision.

Applications under £5k

Verbal update

Presented by JS

- Higher Stiniel, tree and hedgerow planting with some species rich grassland.
- Blackhall Farm, small grant requested for hedgerow work

Applications over £5k

Sloncombe Farm

Presented by Simon Pryor

Summary of application:

- To restore Great Sloncombe Farm to a productive and sustainable Dartmoor farm, whilst also conserving and enhancing the wildlife, landscape and heritage.
- Restore 13 gateways and install 10 water troughs to allow a low-input paddock grazing system for beef cattle to be adopted across the central part of the farm.
- Adopt a conservation management regime for the hedges, with restoration of some banks, hedge laying and associated fencing.
- Improve woodland across the farm and create a scrape as wetland habitat and reinstate a traditional cider orchard.

Conflicts of interest:

No member declared any material interest, connection, involvement, or prior knowledge of this proposal.

Discussion points:

- There were a few queries from the panel around Countryside Stewardship – the applicant might be able to get a funding for this work under CS Mid-tier, including both Revenue and Capital payments. They felt the projects would make up an excellent Mid-tier application, and it was very well presented on the FiPL forms, so there should be no problem getting it approved. Perhaps we should direct them to a hedgerow and boundary scheme rather than funding through FiPL. Could the applicant carry out 23k of their work through the hedgerows and boundaries scheme?
- Simon clarified that he had spoken with the applicants about whether CS would be more appropriate, or whether they should wait for ELM Middle Level. And they had felt that a FiPL Scheme was a good ‘stop gap’ which would allow them to get crucial work done and get the farm into a ‘good place’ to apply for ELM. And that he had assured them that this was Aligned with FiPL aims.
- There was further discussion about the correct scheme(s) for this project, and whether to use FiPL funding. This included a question about why annual payments for cattle are being included in a FiPL application, when they could be part of a CS scheme?
- The panel also questioned whether the project will be completed by end of FiPL (March 2024), because of the amount of work to be done. Simon explained that he had talked this through with the applicants, but the partnership with his father’s farm meant that they could bring extra capacity and machinery to ensure the work was done.
- There was also a concern that the applicant would need a felling license to deal with larger trees prior to laying a hedge, which could hold up delivery of this aspect. They might also need a woodland management plan, in which case applying for this could significantly delay the process. The panel agreed that the applicant needs to look at problems like this that would delay start of some aspects of the application.
- The panel debated whether the applicant could reduce the application to be just the elements that could not be funded through CS, - for example the toppler, scrape, water supply and troughs and stone trough – and apply for the woodland, hedges, fences and buildings under a Mid-tier scheme at a later date.
- Should the applicant develop a 5 year CS agreement, which would improve their cashflow, and greater legacy, rather than just getting funding for the remaining 1.5 years we have left of FiPL.
- Debate over whether to remove work that could possibly be funded under the hedgerow and boundaries scheme, and approve the remaining works to be completed by March 2024.
- The panel agreed that Simon Pryor should pull together some revised numbers, setting out a hybrid priority list, and come back to the panel in the afternoon with a revised application.
- The Panel agreed that a Mid-tier Agreement may not actually come into operation until Jan 2024, so there was a good case for providing funding for this next few months, and possibly longer, until a CS scheme could take over.

In conclusion, the Panel were very keen to help the applicants at this beginning of their farming enterprise, and agreed they had proposed an excellent set of projects. But they are bound to follow national guidance that states FiPL should not offer funds if the projects could be funded under CS or other larger Defra scheme (FiPL should compliment other Defra programmes not

undermine or replace). They also felt the applicants might be better off in the longer term under a Mid-tier scheme.

Revised application discussion points:

- Simon presented revised figures which had been adjusted to meet the Panel’s feedback, specifically:
 - To fund with FiPL grant any of the work which couldn’t be funded under Mid-tier, particularly work for which payment would be made on a % basis.
 - To fund all the components of the water supply system under FiPL so that this could be finished and put in place
 - To take out hedge laying, coppicing and earth bank work, and suggest to the applicants that they seek funding for this via an application to the Hedgerow and Boundary Scheme
 - To fund both Capital and Revenue items proposed for this current financial year, as getting a CS Application up and running before March 2023 would not be feasible.
 - Take out of the application all the other projects and payments for 2023/24, and suggest the applicants put these into a Mid-tier application.
- Simon stressed that although he was presenting revised figures, these were provisional, and that he had not been able to speak with the applicant to make sure they were happy with them.
- Simon also agreed to investigate further whether entering into FiPL and/or a Hedgerow and Boundary Grant could prevent the applicants benefitting from a better Mid-tier scheme, and to talk this through with the applicants.

Conditions:

- The provisional revised figures were presented to the Panel in a set of spreadsheets, and these showed the totals for work to be funded under FiPL are as follows:
 - o Approval of £20,220 in 2022/2023
 - o Plus approval of £9,792 in 20223/24
- This leaves work totalling £19,549 of grants which the applicants would seek to get funded under a CS Mid-Tier Scheme
- And hedge and bank work with grants worth £22,351 which it was hoped could be funded via an application to the Hedgerow and Boundary Scheme.
- The Applicants are also advised to see if it would be better to take out some of the Revenue payments (e.g. GS5) and/or Capital items (e.g.fencing) if these would jeopardise a future Mid-Tier Agreement; if this is the case, these figures will need to be adjusted accordingly.

Decision:

- For: All in favour
- Against: 0
- Abstain: 0

Trenchford Valley

Presented by Kerry Smith

Summary of application:

A collaboration between three adjoining land managers running 5 projects consisting of combining strategic woodland management with traditional conservation grazing with Dartmoor ponies, mob grazing with local cattle, restoring an historic stone wall. and coppice regeneration. Local contractors and volunteers will be used and local farmers will provide the grazing livestock. The woodland management work will create areas of more open wood pasture-type habitat by thinning conifers and clearing scrub and brambles which will greatly improve access and biodiversity and provide timber for events and Natural flood management work.

In addition a 2.5 ha Beaver enclosure is proposed, which will add value to an established programme of educational visits, restore the hydrological function of the site, improve biodiversity, carbon storage and drought resilience and contribute to research on the impacts of Beaver in the local Dartmoor context. The project will build upon an existing programme of educational visits, and the engagement of many user groups and volunteers of all backgrounds to learn about forestry, conservation and mob grazing, traditional rural skills such as coppicing, ecology, sustainable land use, climate change adaptation and more.

Conflicts of interest:

No member declared any material interest, connection, involvement, or prior knowledge of this proposal.

Discussion points:

- The panel had an in-depth discussion about the potential escape of the beavers – they are difficult to contain. It was reasoned that the fencing is tried and tested, which is why it's so expensive and that a comprehensive management plan is in place with contingency planning for any unlikely escape. A licence has been granted by NE and DWT are considered to be a competent agent with respect to the Management Plan, so the Panel should consider this matter to have been addressed.
- Query over the purpose of the beavers - is to alter the hydrology of the site and also for educational purposes? It was reasoned that the purpose is both of those things but also for research and to provide evidence of the positive impact that beavers can have in the context of the Dartmoor landscape, and their contribution to drought resilience and Natural flood management.
- The panel commented on the amount of conifers in the woodland, and why they can't be extracted – it was concluded that extracting them is not commercially viable as the timber has little value and the site isn't easily accessible. The panel then questioned whether their plans for educational access would be feasible. However, this was counteracted - the applicant already has an established programme of educational visits and volunteer activities (600 plus visitors per year and 240 volunteers per year), so access is not a problem.
- The panel questioned whether there were any other methods of flood management down stream – are beavers the only option? We don't want to pay to waste a resource.
- Discussions around the existing wildlife on this site that would be impacted by a beaver enclosure. Is this a healthy and correct introduction to the area? We don't want to fence out any other animals. This was reasoned that the habitat created by Beavers will only increase the species carrying capacity of the site. Deer will come and go freely, other smaller species are mobile and will be able to traverse the fenceline.
- The panel noted that there is peer reviewed science to support beaver introduction, the ecological gain would be significantly higher if beavers clear the area. However, this is a

small site, so to achieve value for money the research and educational value of the site is an integral part of this application.

- There was significant concern and discussion surrounding the potential controversy around this project. However, it was reasoned that a comprehensive plan produced by experts (DWT) is in place and that no liability could come back on DNPA or FIPL.
- The panel agreed that they have to look at this as a trial, and as something we could potentially learn from – and the applicant has outlined risk management in their business proposal.
- There was confusion over the applicants claim that the project will help sequester carbon - the beavers will help this, but they also outline thinning trees and stump grinding. All of this machinery would counteract the carbon sequestration. However, it was reasoned that this is a similar situation with many FiPL applications that claim to sequester carbon when in reality it is not a main aim of their project and would be difficult to measure, so we assess projects on their core aims as we should with this project.
- Value for money seems to be the main factor against this project element, the Beaver enclosure is a small area in terms of benefits for nature, though there are considerable ecological benefits offered by the other project proposals.
- A final comment from the panel around the need for a solid management plan/business plan – from the application could be suggested that the project is more of a hobby for owners and volunteers. However, this was counteracted – the applicant does have a business management plan: 1. a forestry management plan, and 2. A beaver management plan. The planned activities are to expand upon a current business that is in need of support, and is not a hobby.

Conditions:

- The applicant should provide some positive evidence/further information about beaver introduction.
- The Panel should take time for a wider review of matters relating to the proposal and supporting information.

Decision:

- For: 2
- Against: 4
- Abstain: 2

Application declined

[Dunstone Farm](#)

Presented by James Sharpe

Summary of application:

Upper Dunstone Farm currently consists of four fields which have until recently served as horse paddocks. The aim of the project is to improve biodiversity, carbon sequestration and productivity of the site. The project aims to install deer and rabbit fencing to protect the upper and lower fields from browsing so that native broadleaf woodland and shelterbelts can be created. They aim to plant hedgerows within the stone wall boundaries between each field.

Other projects which are outside the scope of this funding application include maintaining and improving the wildflower meadow, and the creation of wood pasture, traditional orchards and wildlife ponds.

Conflicts of interest:

No member declared any material interest, connection, involvement, or prior knowledge of this proposal.

Discussion points:

- The panel were impressed with this application and commented on how practical and achievable it sounded.
- The panel questioned whether the deer fencing was valuable for their project it is intermittent and not continuous.
- Confusion around the site boundaries that show on the OS map, archaeologists might question this.
- The panel note that hedgerows should not be permitted alongside a stone wall, because this will alter the landscape.
- Query around whether an orchard would survive and thrive on this site, which might prove costly.

Conditions:

- The applicant should use metal posts for deer fencing to ensure it lasts longer than 10 years (steel fencing has a 30 year guarantee).

Decision:

- For: 8 - all in favour
- Against: 0
- Abstain: 0

[Dartmoor Forest](#)

Presented by James Sharpe

Summary of application:

The Forest of Dartmoor Commoners Association is seeking funding to replace worn-out quad mounted fogging machines which have been successfully deployed by members to extinguish moorland fires alongside the Devon and Somerset Fire and Rescue Service. They are also seeking to purchase a Softrak fitted with a 3 point linkage and flail to enable them to cut strategic firebreaks, and access tracks, in the Molinia on deep peat. This will reduce erosion risk, help maintain open access routes for livestock and people, and enhance opportunities for biodiversity over a substantial area of the high moor.

Conflicts of interest:

The panel accepts that farmers in attendance might have a conflict of interest, as they graze this land. The proposals within this application relate to wider benefit across Dartmoor (wildfires can spread and the Softrak will be made available to home commons), so many Panel members could

have an interest. All attendees were in agreement that they have no monetary gain from their voting decision, and there were no Trustees of the Forest in this LAP meeting.

LAP members with rights on Forest of Dartmoor:

- Russell Ashford
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Discussion points:

- The panel were in agreement that our current methods need to change.
- Query over what exactly will the peripheral commons be charged for the shared use of the Softrack? For example, will there be an hourly rate for usage? In which case, the larger commons might be able to afford access that the smaller commons can't afford. The panel agreed that the project needs to be mutually beneficial.
- Therefore, the panel suggested the need for some clarity over shared common charges for the Softrack.
- The panel were keen to know if the applicant can justify where the money is coming from - is their match funding going to be at the detriment of another financial commitment across the forest?
- There were comments about how timely and impactful this project will realistically be – do we need more machinery and more money for it to actually be effective and impactful.
- The panel commented on how this project was a step in the right direction – do we need to give them a chance to protect the forest.
- Discussions around whether we can ask for additional peatland funding to relieve FiPL – seeing as the fogging machines are there to protect damaged peatland areas.
- It was decided that Eamon would follow up on the possibility of additional funding, outside of FiPL, for this project.
- There was confusion over whether this activity would disturb bird nesting season – it was confirmed that the use of this machinery would be outside of bird nesting season.

Conditions:

- The applicant must publicise so that everyone knows the risks involved in using this machinery.
- Those who own/manage the machines cannot charge the neighbouring common the capital costs, they can only charge for the running costs. Each common must know what reasonable costs will be requested.
- Members of the Dartmoor Forest cannot make profit out of this.
- They must make sure there is an insurance policy that helps the repair and upkeep of the machinery.
- Trained people shouldn't just be contractors - anyone local and interested in helping should be included in the training as they may have specific knowledge of their land
- Any old fogging machines must be moved out to any home commons that don't have one if still viable.
- There should be a prepared maintenance plan for new fogging machines to increase longevity.

Decision:

- For: All in favour
- Against: 0

- Abstain: 0

Farm2City

Presented by James Sharpe

Summary of application:

This project will deliver a programme of activities to connect and engage communities living in Wandsworth, London with farming and conservation communities on Dartmoor. The project will take the Dartmoor Farm to central London.

There are four stages of engagement with the local community:

1. Initial outreach and engagement with local schools and community groups to introduce Dartmoor and promote the Pop-Up Farm event.
2. Pop Up Farm Event: a five-day event based at Providence House (located in a busy area of London near Clapham Junction). Twenty-five schools/youth or community groups will be given the opportunity to bring young people to this event whereby a range of small group, hands on activities will be provided (see below).
3. Post event follow up with schools/youth and community groups and development of on-going connections through social media channels sharing life on the farm through the seasons and bringing the farm into the community. (The virtual farm).
4. Train the leader weekend hosted at East Shallowford. This subsidised weekend will allow teachers and youth/community leaders to see first-hand what is on offer and inspire them to bring children and young people to Dartmoor in the future.

Conflicts of interest:

- 1 – Will Dracup acts as Farm Manager for the Shallowford Trust and left the meeting.

Discussion points:

- The panel questioned the legacy of this project – what exactly are the benefits to Dartmoor and its people.
- A discussion around whether FiPL should be paying for farming related activity outside of the protected landscape (this is allowed where the benefit clearly relates to the PL).
- Questions around whether FiPL logos will be included on their promotional materials, or will it solely be Shallowford's logo?
- Although Shallowford have a good track record for this – FiPL's contributions should be acknowledged to the public seeing as it would be FiPL funding.
- The panel were in agreement that this project would remind people about Dartmoor, and show them how much more there is to it – it may cost FiPL more, but it will have a more pertinent message.
- The panel questioned how success would be measured for this project.
- Confusion over the outcomes stated in the application – it only covers People, and not Climate, Nature and Place. However, very few other applications cover People, which is a national trend for FiPL – so, although the FiPL outcomes met are narrow, perhaps this is a project worth supporting.
- Concern over how the ethos of FiPL is to help on the ground on Dartmoor, and not help people in London – it doesn't seem to fit the environmental support for Dartmoor.

- The panel questioned whether FiPL could fund a local event that brings children to Dartmoor, rather than paying for the event in London. It was concluded that the event in London would be needed to encourage sign-up and to spread the word and gather interest in school visits back to Dartmoor.
- Emphasis was placed on the fact that if a charity (like Shallowford) has its money, then it should be used for its charitable objectives.
- The panel agreed that they must be mindful that Shallowford are a charity.
- The Panel recognise the value in this project, but given it only meets 'People' outcomes we should not be the sole funder.

Conditions:

- Further match funding from an outside source if possible.
- FiPL offer £6,715 in their first year guaranteed, to help get them started – and then An offer of 50% of their second year of funding.
- DNP & FIPL need good exposure at the event in London.

Decision:

- For: All in favour
- Against: 0
- Abstain: 0

[Postbridge Farmer Cluster](#)

Presented by James Sharpe

Summary of application:

The Postbridge Cluster Group is a collaborative group of Dartmoor farmers covering 10 holdings (approx. 4,300 acres of in-bye land) at the heart of Dartmoor National Park. They are now working closely together to look at how to go beyond existing agri-environment schemes to deliver positive changes on a landscape scale.

This project wants to improve the development and coordination of Farm Natural Capital Plans, measure and improve soil health, share knowledge, provide outdoor emergency training and install bird boxes.

Conflicts of interest:

1 – Will Dracup's farm is part of the Cluster Group. Will had already left the meeting prior to the previous item and did not return.

Discussion points:

- The panel questioned the project coordinator meetings and the costs this will include. How does this fit with current facilitation funding? There is specific funding available for this.
- The panel also questioned the use of a drone – will they be setting a precedent for this when drones aren't permitted over the DNP (Commons).
- The panel flagged that there is nothing in the application that mentions changing management relating to compaction. Is the plan to aerate every year without addressing the underlying management practice?

- Query over which farms are in this catchment - how will aerators be distributed within the catchment area.
- Should members carry out a soil compaction test first, and then return when/if they know they require an aerator?
- It was mentioned that Dartmoor farmers have a lot to learn from this project. However, we need to be careful about general house-keeping – can owners be responsible for their own soil samples/checks?
- The panel discussed whether the money spent on the drone would be better spent on getting a professional specialist company in to use their own drone and provide the information, rather than investing in the drone itself. Do we need an expert contractor?
- There were continuous comments about the use of a drone – the panel were uncertain about this.
- The panel commented on the number of bird boxes and wanted justification on this. It was concluded that this number of bird boxes makes sense given the large area they're covering.

Conditions:

- Does the applicant need specific drone consent?
- Check no double funding with Facilitation Fund.
- Could Upstream Thinking provide an aerator, soil compaction tests and soil sampling?
- Confirm group have the technical skills for mapping with drone and knowledge that can be shared.
- Can we come back to this in the next meeting when they have established CIC and know about paying VAT?

Decision:

- To confirm approval at next meeting or by correspondence, subject to questions being satisfactorily answered.
- For: All
- Against: 0
- Abstain: 0

Date of next meeting:

Wednesday 14th December. Several Panel members shared concern over other commitments on that day, so we may postpone or hold a shorter afternoon meeting. **TBC**