

Dartmoor Farming in Protected Landscapes

Local Assessment Panel

Wednesday 14th December 2022, 14:00 – 16:00, Parke

Attending:

Online:

Russell Ashford (Chair), Eamon Crowe, Sarah Blyth, John Howell, Mark Walker, Ann Wilcocks, James Sharpe

Dartmoor FiPL team members: Simon Pryor, Richard Drysdale and Bea Dunscombe

Apologies: Martin Perryman, Daniel Alford, Peter Harper, Will Dracup, Layland Branfield (Ann Wilcocks attending on behalf of Dartmoor Commoners Council)

Confirm approval of notes from last meeting (circulated for comments previously)

[Applications over £5k](#)

[Holne Moor Trees](#)

Presented by James Sharpe

Summary of application:

This project aims to support Whinchats, Tree Pipits and Cuckoos on Holne Moor, and across Dartmoor.

Across Dartmoor one of the key moorland breeding birds is the Whinchat. A migrant that arrives from Africa each summer. These birds breed in bracken and heather on the ground across the moor, but are closely associated with isolated trees when breeding. These trees are used for males to display and hold territory. However, nationally their numbers have declined by over 50% between 1995-2008 and continue to decline rapidly on Dartmoor.

Therefore, the applicant proposes to plant 100 ecologically appropriate species of tree (Hawthorn and Rowan) on Holne Moor at very low densities over 30+ ha. All trees will be protected with cactus tree guards and supported with a metal rebar.

Conflicts of interest:

- Russell Ashford declared an interest - his common neighbours the area that is planned for this project, but he will gain no financial benefit from it.
- Sarah Blythe declared an interest - she works for the RSPB, who are involved in this project, but she will gain no financial benefit from it.
- John Howell declared an interest – he is deputy chair of Harford and Ugborough Commoners Association, which is involved in the same project (Our Upland Commons) that has a component looking at trees on the commons, but he will gain no financial benefit from it.
- Ann Wilcocks declared an interest – Ann is the facilitator for the Holne Moor HLS agreement.

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

Discussion points:

- Panel members agreed that they support the aims of this project in principle - however there were issues concerning value for money, along with conflicts regarding DNPA's archaeological advice.
- In depth conversation about the recommendation of the DNPA archaeologists, who suggest we defer the application based on the historical interest and archaeology of the area.
- This caused concern regarding Premier Archaeological Landscape (PAL), which led to a discussion about impact on the historical environment in relation to CS rate TE2 which refers to a 2 metre sapling requiring a hole that is dug deep and wide enough to accommodate it. Therefore the project will need 100 holes dug into the landscape, including a bar for each tree, which could have a long term impact to the soils and roots. Furthermore, it was flagged that there could be an erosion risk around single trees, and mature trees would change the visual access to the historical features in the landscape.
- Although this project only aims to plant trees on one area of Holne Moor, there was acknowledgement from the panel that this will undeniably have an impact on Holne Moor as a whole, and therefore will impact neighbouring landowners and commoners.
- The panel had views on the density of trees for the target species. Ideally, the trees would be more widely dispersed. There was significant emphasis placed on the fact that Winchats like sparse, open habitat with trees - rather than 'busy' woodland.
- It was widely agreed that Hawthorn should be planted instead of Rowan, which is preferred by the target species and more favourable for the Dartmoor landscape. Therefore, this would be a more justified investment. Furthermore rowan is more likely to self sow than Hawthorn.
- There was agreed concern regarding the survival rate of the saplings. 50% survival is not acceptable considering the specification suggests 2 metre saplings, which is a more mature tree. The panel discussed whether the applicant could use younger trees, with a higher survival rate, but over a larger area. It was agreed that cactus guards should provide good protection, followed by an extensive discussion around whether the applicant could plant fewer trees at a lower density, but undertake to replace any lost trees and therefore ensure a 100% survival in the first 5 years.
- Members questioned how significant an increase in breeding pairs might be from 30 ha project, will this project have a significant impact on these species.
- The panel also questioned the fact that a FiPL requirement is to maintain capital items for five years - whereas Countryside Stewardship, and potentially other Government schemes, require the replanting and replacing of lost trees in the season following the initial planting.
- There was concern over the use of plastic tree guards, they alter the landscape, may reduce tree strength and resistance in the longer term, and are not sustainable – however, it was reasoned that these guards are effective and can be removed after 2-5 years once the sapling is strong. Furthermore, they're needed in the harsh conditions of Dartmoor to protect against the weather and animals.
- The panel flagged that labour costs may be double-counted under TE2 and the bespoke items in the application. This is something that the applicant needs to provide clarity on.
- There was agreement over the fact that this project would undeniably support the recent spread of Winchats uphill. Furthermore, this seems to be an appropriate place for moorland trees in terms of visual impact on the surrounding landscape.
- Question over ownership - the applicant's ownership of the proposed part of the common was confirmed, but also that AES was agreed at whole common geography.

- Discussion over RSPB volunteer contribution in delivering the project, this could help with costs and increase public benefit. In addition to this, could the applicant look at other cost-saving methods, e.g using sheeps wool to suppress grass and weeds around the saplings which would also be a greener approach compared to plastic guards.
- The panel discussed SSSI consent, and agreed that NE would be likely to support this but they'd need to consult others, including archaeologists, in order to come to a decision on consent. This topic lead to concern regarding timelines, seeking out consent would leave little time in this season for planting. However, it was confirmed that the applicant is happy to take up project in the following year (2023/24).

Conditions:

- Seeing as the applicant is happy to take up this project next year (2023/24), they should revisit the costings, gain necessary consent from NE for work in SSSI and Archaeologists regarding PAL, and consider expanding the project area for the same or less cost.

Decision:

- **For:** 0
- **Against:** All
- **Abstain:** 0

The panel voted unanimously to defer the application due to conflict with PAL, and therefore Dartmoor Partnership Plan, also the high expected failure rate was not compatible with the high value CS rate TE2 and cactus guards.

[Mary Tavy: Permissive Access](#)

Presented by Simon Pryor

Summary of application:

The overall objective of this project is to conserve and interpret this historic site, and improve access so people can appreciate it.

In order to achieve this, the applicant plans to:

1. Improve the track surface and restore the stone wall on Route 27
2. Create a permissive footpath along the historic leat and reservoir, with associated signage, steps and gates

Simon Pryor set the context for this project, which is the first of several mining heritage sites around Mary Tavy that it is hoped will form a Heritage Trail revealing and celebrating the extranoridarily high importance of mines in this landsape. This ex-industrial landscape also demonstrates remarkable nature recovery, and is a great opportunity to improve public understanding of the potential of renewable energy It is one of only a few Dartmoor FiPL projects involving new public access, which would allow some balance across the FiPL outcomes.

Conflicts of interest:

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

James explained that the DNPA will be directly involved in delivering the work. Although SW Water

will hold the Agreement, DNP will act as contractor, overseeing the work and engaging sub-contractors to do the work. However, DNPA will not benefit financially in any way.

Discussion points:

- The panel showed significant concern over funding a big corporation like SWW, members discussed whether FiPL should be funding this project. The Panel were interested to know what proportion of the project cost was being met by SWW, given the level of profit made by the applicant, and whether they have their own allocated budget for provision of public access and interpretation on their sites.
- The panel discussed whether SW Water could apply to FiPL, and whether they were VAT registered and had an SBI Number (Simon confirmed that they have both). FiPL is open to all land managers, this includes SWW and they should have management control of the land and written consent from the tenant. Simon also reminded the Panel that the size of a land holding or profitability of a land based business are not cited in the FiPL National Framework as a relevant factor in determining eligibility and award of funding.
- There was discussion about SW Water contributing to the cost, Simon explained that the use of CS rates (which we meet at 100% in the knowledge these rates are not intended to meet the full cost of work/capital) and only claiming 80% of other costs meant SWW will be contributing at least 20% of the direct costs, plus project management time, and accepting the liability from the permissive path along a working leat.

Specific concerns over the Permissive path along the Leat:

- The Panel welcomed proposals for new Permissive Access and the signage; but there was discussion about whether a fence was necessary or appropriate, given the visual impact. The Panel questioned whether a fence was necessary on safety grounds along the leat, and were concerned whether this was consistent with fencing alongside other water bodies on Dartmoor. It was pointed out that this leat was steep sided and difficult to climb out of, and is the supply to the hydro power plant with a sluice drawing water from the western end.
- One view was that if the embankment needed protection from cattle this should be funded by SW Water, or could be funded by Catchment Sensitive Farming using CS Capital Grants for fences to exclude cattle from watercourses. In which case the fence would be better placed along the foot of the embankment. Simon explained that this would delay the work as this land would need to be taken out of a grazing licence and the farmer would need several months notice.
- The gates and footbridge were considered to be justified, but there was concern that a timber bridge – even if it was oak - would rot, and the panel suggested that a concrete bridge would last longer.

Concerns re the improvements to NCN Route 27:

- There was concern that it was not clear whether SW Water actually owned the retaining wall, and the land immediately above the track. Applicants must have legal management control of the land.
- The Panel asked if DCC's Highways could pay for the NCN work, or draw on the National Cycle Network maintenance funding/Sustrans funding; but SP explained that this had been on DCC's list for many years, but never made it high enough up the prioritisation to be funded.
- It was also suggested that SW Water should pay for this themselves. But Simon explained that ownership was not clear, and SW Water did not have any responsibilities for the track,

but were essentially proposing 'altruistic' action to prevent more serious 'slumping' in the future, that could be v costly and risk pollution incident if it involved contaminated spoil. The Panel felt it was better to let this happen and then determine who was responsible for restoration and liable for any environmental damage. It was also noted that FiPL couldn't support an item where the ownership of that piece of property was in doubt.

- Splitting the retaining wall from the resurfacing was discussed, but not adopted as a proposal.

Recommendations:

- Can the applicant explore installing fencing at the bottom of the verge to stop cattle accessing the leat, rather than along the bank of the leat as this would be less visually intrusive
- The applicant should investigate other materials or method of construction that will extend the life of the foot bridge.

Proposal and Decision:

- 1) Not to fund the resurfacing or restoration of retaining wall along Route 27
- 2) Not to approve the fencing of the leat
- 3) To approve grants sought for the Permissive path agreement and signage (£2600), which equates to an intervention rate of approx 80% of total direct costs
- 4) To approve grants for the two wicket gate and footbridge (£1632), again approx 80% of contractors' costs.

- **For:** All present
- **Against:** None
- **Abstain:** None

[Review of Trenchford Valley application](#)

Presented by James Sharpe

Summary of application:

The initial application included plans for a beaver enclosure, which was declined by the panel. This decision was based on questions over the benefit provided by the enclosed animals, and the value for money for the applicant's plans.

The remaining application is now focussed on deer fencing, hazel coppicing, educational days, volunteer involvement, ecological surveys, powertool purchase and maintenance and stonewall restoration.

Conflicts of interest:

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

Discussion points:

- The panel were in agreement that this reduced version of the application was more appealing and showed more support for FiPL outcomes.

- Panel members discussed whether the applicant could provide evidence that the hazel on this land is actually impacted by deer. There was concern over whether the fencing was definitely necessary. It was agreed that deer are prevalent in the area, and that they can cause damage to Hazel trees & hazel regrowth.
- There was concern over who would be using the powertools outlined in the application, i.e. if they are going to be used by volunteers, can the applicant provide a management plan outlining the up-keep of these items. The application lists an extensive amount of tools, they need to ensure that they are well looked after and maintained responsibly.
- The panel discussed their method of stump removal, and questioned whether this was the most sustainable way of removing stumps. Grinding stumps disturbs the ground, therefore, can we take this out of their requested funding?
- The panel discussed value for money in terms of their planned ecological surveys of vegetation structure and invertebrates species in the area. It was agreed that they've shown good value for money regarding this, especially regarding bat surveys.
- However, it was flagged that although the ecological monitoring seems appropriate, panel members would be happier knowing that plant surveys will include more than just fixed point photography, which although effective, is not sufficient to show increasing diversity.

Conditions:

- Someone must take responsibility for the tools and materials used, can we have a named individual who will maintain them e.g. the applicant.
- FiPL will fund 80% for the handtools.
- We will remove the stump grinder from the application because it was discussed that this isn't a sustainable way of managing woodland.
- Wanted to see clear evidence of deer damage in order to justify the deer fencing.

Decision:

- **For:** All
- **Against:** 0
- **Abstain:** 0

Revised application approved based on the above conditions.

Date of next meeting:

Wednesday 25th January, 11:00-14:00.