

Dartmoor Farming in Protected Landscapes

Local Assessment Panel

Wednesday 8th November 2023, 11:00am, Ullacombe Farm Barn

Attending:

Russell Ashford (Chair), John Howell, Eamon Crowe, James Sharpe, Shirley Mudge (attending in Christine's absence), Sarah Blyth, Alison Clish-Green, Peter Harper, Will Dracup (*Will attended part of the meeting for Lower Hapstead 2, Great Gnats Head, Huccaby and the beginning of Dartmoor Farmer's Association*).

Dartmoor staff attending:

Simon Pryor, Rachel Cooper, Bea Dunscombe

Apologies:

Layland Branfield, Ann Willcocks, Dan Alford, Christine Malseed

Applications over 10k

Runnage 2 - revised

Presented by James Sharpe

Summary of application:

This project aims to fence and plant up areas of new and existing hedging and woodland. The applicant plans to diversify, and gap fill existing hedgerows, using a native mix of plants. They also plan to create two small copses of native broadleaf and fruiting trees. These features together will form a series of shelterbelts and windbreaks across the farm.

Declarations of interest:

Members of the Panel flagged that they know this applicant because they are a farmer on Dartmoor, the applicant is also a part of the Central Dartmoor Farmers Cluster CIC. However, it was decided that this would not need to be declared as a conflict of interest.

Discussion points:

- The Panel questioned the CS elements of this project. It was confirmed that the Duchy is match funding, which make the funding total less than what is eligible through CS. It was reasoned that the applicant is keen to carry out work this winter, and the Panel pointed out that Hedgerows and Boundaries is open all year round.
- Query regarding the precedent being set if we let this application come through FiPL, will we then receive more CS applications?
- The Panel suggested that we approve subject to obtaining the exact meterage for the hedgerows.

- The Panel felt strongly that if we approve boundary work, the applicant must make sure that they are a step above CS. They need to ensure that they are adding value by planting species rich hedgerows (i.e. choosing tree species that enhance biodiversity). This would help justify funding through FiPL and not through CS. If this is not possible then the applicant should apply for CS.

Scoring:

The scoring recommended 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%	8	1.6
Total	32	8

Decision:

Condition(s):

1. To obtain a justified reason as to why the applicant is not applying for CS.
2. The applicant must provide evidence of added value by planting species rich hedgerows, this needs to be over and above what is required for CS.
3. To obtain accurate meterage of each hedgerow and boundary involved in the project.

For: 8

Against: 0

Abstained: 0

To approve subject to meeting the above three conditions.

Higher Hurston - revised

Presented by Simon Pryor

Summary of application:

Restoration of the historic boundary comprising a corn ditch and stone-faced bank where Higher Hurston Farm meets Chagford Common, and protection of, and improved connectivity between, existing and newly created Marsh Fritillary wetland habitat.

The Panel asked for further information and clarification of many points when this was first considered at the September meeting. These have now been investigated and Simon presented evidence and photos to confirm that all the issues had been satisfactorily addressed and resolved. So, it is now being re-presented with a Recommendation for approval.

Declarations of interest:

None.

Discussion points:

- The Panel requested clarification regarding the exact line and length of the bank against the common. It was confirmed that, after carrying out a site visit, and creating a new map the full length is slightly higher than what was initially presented.
- The Panel were impressed by the past restoration of the stone-faced bank, but questioned whether we should use FiPL funds to pay for the corn ditch, and asked why this can't be funded through CS. Simon explained that the online guidance for CS Capital Grants and for Mid-Tier state that boundaries on common land cannot be funded.
- Question about where the applicant was in relation to their other CS schemes. It was confirmed that most of their land was in Mid-tier, and they have plans to go into SFI in the next year or so. FiPL would help tide him over and get him up to standard for a couple of years before he can go into Countryside Stewardship plus.
- It was suggested that the applicant applies for the CS elements through CS, and then goes through FiPL for the non-CS elements?
- The Panel flagged that there could be Adders nesting in the corn ditch, we don't want to restore this and ruin their habitat. Has an Adder survey been carried out? If Adders are present, these stretches could be left intact, and new hibernacula could be created thereby adding value to the project.

Scoring:

The scoring recommended 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%	6	1.2
Sustainability / legacy of projects - 20%	8	1.6
Value for Money - 20%	8	1.6
Total	30	7.6

Decision:

Condition(s):

1. The applicant should apply for CS Capital funding for as much of the earth bank restoration as they can (although this may only be up to the £20k maximum allowed under Mid-Tier). If this is approved, the applicant should rely on funding through CS for this component of the project, and FiPL will fund the rest. If CS funding is not available, then FiPL will fund the full package of work, up to the maximum of £60, 872.
2. An Adder survey for the corn ditch is required ahead of the work on the corn ditch starting; and any stretches that look likely to host an adder hibernacula should be protected.

For: 8

Against: 0

Abstained: 0

To approve subject to meeting the above two conditions.

Lower Hapstead 2 - revised

Presented by Simon Pryor

Summary of application:

This is the applicant's follow-on application from an initial Agreement in 2022 and was presented to the Panel in July 2023. The Panel approved the fencing and water troughs in the application but declined the Rare Breeds Supplement. The Applicant has come back with new information and evidence to substantiate their case for qualifying for this Supplement. This will facilitate mob grazing of rare breed cattle which will improve the quality and biodiversity of the fields.

Declarations of interest:

Russell Ashford declared a conflict of interest; he is a neighbouring farmer and so abstained from discussions and voting. Will Dracup substituted Russell as chair for the duration of this application.

Discussion points:

- The Panel questioned what proportion of the grazing was done by the rare breed cattle v. the sheep. Simon explained that using standard values for cattle and sheep, 24 out of the total 28 Livestock Units were cattle. An argument could be made to reduce the Rare Breeds Supplement pro rata.
- The Panel discussed the specification for the rare breeds supplement, and they were satisfied that the applicant has provided evidence that he has met the criteria.
- A query about support from the landlord – it was confirmed that we have already obtained their written support for his previous FiPL Agreement.
- The Panel suggested a proper vegetation survey would be useful. to reveal how species rich/diverse the fields are. It was confirmed that, after carrying out a site visit, there was certainly an above average range of grasses and herbs in most fields– and there have been no fertilisers on the land for approx. 20yrs. The fields were sufficiently diverse to qualify for 'restoration to species rich grassland' although the applicant has not sought this.
- It was reasoned that FiPL looks for nature outcomes, which is supported by this grazing regime. It was added that the applicant is not applicable for higher tier, as far as we know.
- The Panel expressed concern around the precedent being set with this application, but it was reasoned that similar projects have been approved in the past. And that Rare Breeds Supplement is not available on Common land, which would limit any risk of large-scale applications being made.

Scoring:

The scoring recommended 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%	6	1.2
Sustainability / legacy of projects - 20%	6	1.2
Value for Money - 20%	8	1.6
Total	32	8

Decision:

Condition(s):

1. The applicant must carry out a survey of the species composition of their pasture, both now and at the end of their FiPL Agreement. This way, we can see evidence of whether the mob grazing with rare breeds has helped to diversify pasture.
2. The applicant must obtain some ongoing advice and support from someone with knowledge and experience in mob grazing, to ensure that they are getting the most from this system and from the combination of Shetland sheep and Devon Red cattle.

For: 8

Against: 0

Abstained: 1

To approve subject to meeting the above two conditions.

Great Gnats Head

Presented by Bea Dunscombe.

Summary of application:

No-fence grazing technology for cattle grazing at Great Gnats Head. This project aims to control where 90 cows graze, partly to help with peat restoration work in this area of the common, with support from the local grazier.

Declarations of interest:

Members of the Panel flagged that they know the grazier involved in this application because they are a farmer on Dartmoor. However, no-one had any commercial or direct interest so it was decided that this would not need to be declared as a conflict of interest.

Eamon Crowe declared a conflict of interest; he is currently carrying out work on this area and is therefore involved with the graziers who have rights on the common.

Discussion points:

- The Panel questioned what would happen if the collars ended up not being used on Dartmoor. It was confirmed that it is set out in the Agreement that the funds must be paid back in full if the applicant does not meet required conditions.
- The Panel felt strongly that the applicant needs to have full management control of the animals and of the collars.
- The Panel requested confirmation from the applicant about their rights on the common. We must make sure that they have the rights for these cattle, and that they stay within their rights (this needs to be in balance with their grazing rights on the Forest). We need to be sure that other graziers are not at a disadvantage.
- We need clarification around the VAT included in their Annex A – the National Trust should be VAT registered.

- There was a query over the amount of man days for training cattle, and whether it should take as long as they have stated in their application.
- There was a discussion around whether other graziers on this common are using collars – we need to make sure that other graziers aren't disadvantaged by this application. It was suggested that it might be possible for technical glitches to occur if two or more herds with collars are grazing in close proximity.
- The Panel also queried cattle that are un-collared, and whether they might stray into excluded zones.
- It was suggested that demonstration days could be collaborative with other Nofence collar projects approved by FiPL on Dartmoor.
- The Panel asked for FiPL to check other Nofence collar projects to check the intervention rates issued for collaborative use.

Scoring:

The scoring recommended 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%	8	1.6
Total	32	8

Decision:

Condition(s):

1. This project should be approved if the applicant has full ownership of the collars. We fund the collars at 80% intervention rate, the project can be match funded by the NT for the remaining 20%. The National Trust can then have their own Agreement with the applicant.
2. We need to make sure that the applicant has the rights for these cattle on the common and that they stay within their rights (in balance with their grazing rights on the Forest). A letter from the applicant explaining their rights on the common through the course of the year must be obtained.
3. If the applicant has rights for only 20 grazing cattle on the common, why are 90 collars being used for this project and not 20? We need to clarify this with the applicant to make sure that there is no double funding with the applicants HLS agreement on the forest.
4. The demonstration days must be collaborative with other Nofence collar projects approved by FiPL on Dartmoor.
5. The applicant must let other commoners know where collared stock will be on the common out of courtesy. Even if it is on their lea.
6. To clarify VAT registration.
7. To confirm that no other graziers have Nofence collars on this common.
8. The applicant must produce a report at the end of FiPL to show the impact that the collars have had on this common and its peatland. They are also encouraged to share information showing their progress and findings with NE, DNPA, farmers and other interested parties.

9. If applicant stops using the collars, the NT must produce a report at the end of FiPL showing that the collars were used elsewhere on Dartmoor. They are also encouraged to share information showing their progress and findings with NE, DNPA, farmers and other interested parties.
10. The applicant must commit to complying with the [advice from Defra's Animal Welfare Committee](#) on grazing using virtual fences.

For: 9

Against: 0

Abstained: 0

To approve subject to meeting the above nine conditions.

Huccaby

Presented by James Sharpe. Shirley Mudge responded to some initial questions from members of the panel and then left the meeting.

Summary of application:

This project aims to recreate 420m of historic hedge bank, in addition to fencing and planting a native hedgerow to link areas of existing wood pasture to a copse of established trees. The applicant also aims to test the efficiency of locally derived wool matting as mulch, both to retain water and as a deterrent against herbivorous rodents.

Declarations of interest:

Shirley Mudge declared a conflict of interest; she is the applicant for this project, and she therefore left the meeting room after responding to some initial questions.

Discussion points:

- The Panel questioned the trees in the hedgerows, and asked if any trees would be left to fully mature. It was confirmed that trees would be left to mature, the applicant is planning to leave the hedgerow for 10 years, which will also allow shelter for livestock.
- The applicant confirmed that the interpretation board will be installed alongside their footpath for the public to interpret.
- The Panel discussed the windbreaker for the hedge, and the applicant said they would be using tree guards and fencing.
- It was confirmed that the wool mulch will be a wool felt matting and this has been trialled ahead of applying for this project on a smaller scale - the mulch eventually rots down to nothing.
- The Panel merited this project for emphasising the innovative elements of the project, rather than focussing just on CS elements. It was commended that the applicant is open to being experimental with this project.
- The Panel questioned whether stock fencing will remain alongside the hedgerow once it has been established. It was also flagged that tree guards need to be fully considered – are they needed if the applicant has fencing? It was clarified that Blackthorn would be planted without tree guards. The Panel therefore suggested that the applicant uses fencing to keep

deer and rabbits out to give the hedgerow a chance to survive, instead of using plastic tree guards.

- The Panel were concerned that the applicant had undercharged for their project because they had based elements of their project on CS rates. Therefore, it was advised that the applicant makes sure that all costs are covered for organising this experiment - even if it is volunteer led. (E.g. management time for volunteers and labour). The FiPL team were to advise the applicant to add in some labour days to supplement this.

Scoring:

The scoring recommended 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%	8	1.6
Total	32	8

Decision:

Condition(s):

- This project should be enhanced so that it is more of an experiment.
- The applicant must share knowledge, successes, and learnings before, during and after the project via photographs, maps, and a report.
- The FiPL team should advise the applicant to add extra days for labour and for their time in organising labour.

For: 8

Against: 0

Abstained: 1

To approve subject to meeting the above three conditions.

Dartmoor Farmer's Association

Presented by James Sharpe. Will Dracup responded to some initial questions from members of the panel and then left the meeting.

Summary of application:

This new partnership project will be led by Dartmoor Farmers Association and delivered in collaboration with Shallowford Farm Trust and Dartmoor Hill Farm Project. The Project seeks to link food eaten at schools and/or at home with farming and conservation on Dartmoor by promoting, organising, and delivering 25 farm visits involving up to 10 different farms and over 500 children.

Declarations of interest:

Russell Ashford, Shirley Mudge and Will Dracup declared a conflict of interest. Will answered some initial questions from members of the Panel, and then Will, Russell and Shirley left the meeting room for the duration of the discussion.

Discussion points:

- The Panel queried whether specific age groups were being targeted. It was confirmed that Shallowford work with all age groups, and it depends on the farm. Therefore, this project would involve matching the right school to the right farmer. At this pilot stage the applicant will be looking for any age group and will be initially looking for schools that are interested. They then might be able to look at more targeted work.
- The Panel queried the cost of transport for children and were concerned about how much it costs to get one bus to a farm site within school times.
- The Panel discussed how Shallowford will be able to maintain the relationship with these schools - does Shallowford have capacity to maintain them? It was explained that this is a legacy project and a pilot scheme. The ambition is that the relationships will be maintained beyond FiPL.
- It was mentioned that a database will need to be established, and the Engagement Officer role outlined in the application should be considered in terms of legacy.
- The Panel asked about whether there is a link to the commons for this project, to show that this goes beyond the farm? It was confirmed that this is the ambition - it is flexible and mobile for educating children.
- Clarification was needed around why the cheapest quote was not chosen for the toilets. It was reasoned that the applicant went for a local company that was more suitable to the project, rather than the cheapest.
- It was confirmed that this project is completely bespoke to every farm on Dartmoor. Once these relationships have been secured, they can be used as a template for additional DFA farms. The ambition is that this will go beyond DFA.
- It was emphasised that whoever oversees creating the teacher's packs should get input from teachers so that they are linked to the curriculum.
- The Panel queried the cost for farmers time, has this been underestimated? Farmers time needs to be accurate and realistic so that they are not being undercharged for their labour.

Scoring:

The scoring recommended 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%	6	1.2
Sustainability / legacy of projects - 20%	8	1.6
Value for Money - 20%	6	1.2
Total	28	7.2

Decision:

Condition(s):

- The applicant must produce a report showing the effectiveness of the project, so that we can learn from the outcomes.

- The FiPL team must make sure that farmers time for facilitation is estimated accurately.

For: 6

Against: 0

Abstained: 3

To approve subject to meeting the above two conditions.

AOBs

- Confirm 80% intervention rate for Nofence collars for non-collaborative applications going forward. FiPL team to check past Nofence agreements.
- Reminder: LAP member workshops, hosted by Defra on Teams. 13th & 22nd Nov. FiPL to send link to Shirley Mudge.
- For future applications, FiPL team to go back to the RPA and get advice on where we stand with CS. Can an RPA representative come to a Panel meeting?
- Bea to change next FiPL meeting to Dec 20th & circulate 2024 LAP meetings.

Date of next LAP meeting: December 20th, 11am.