

## Dartmoor Farming in Protected Landscapes

### Local Assessment Panel

Wednesday 12<sup>th</sup> April 2023, 11:00-14:00, Parke

#### Attending:

Russell Ashford (Chair), Alison Clish-Green, Ann Willcocks, John Howell, Richard Drysdale, Peter Harper

#### Dartmoor staff attending:

Simon Pryor, Bea Dunscombe

#### Apologies:

Layland Branfield (Ann Willcocks attending as substitute), James Sharpe (Richard Drysdale attending as substitute), Mark Walker (Alison attending as substitute), Dan Alford (attempted via Teams but unfortunately connection failed), Sarah Blyth, Eamon Crowe, Will Dracup

### Applications over £5k

#### Frenchbeer Farm

Presented by Simon Pryor

#### Summary of application:

A trial of No Fence Grazing collars to enhance moorland habitat diversity and allow tree regeneration at Cherrybrook and Longaford Newtakes using controlled cattle grazing in the vicinity of Wistman's Wood as part of a landscape enhancement scheme working in conjunction with the Duchy of Cornwall as owner.

#### Declarations of interest:

- *Russell declared a possible conflict of interest: he currently has a FiPL application being processed which involves No Fence Grazing collars, but he has no personal connection to this application. The Panel agreed this was not an issue and that he should continue chairing and be able to vote.*

#### Discussion points:

The Panel were concerned at the price of the software subscription. It was confirmed that this is an annual subscription. There was a query as to whether this is good value for money. It was reasoned that the collars have a four year warranty, and this particular brand is the only supplier in the UK. It was suggested that this should be investigated with Defra, as surely this is a struggle across all protected landscapes in the UK.

The Panel discussed whether fencing might be a cheaper option and may be more long lasting than collars. However, it was reasoned that although fencing might be feasible here, given it is not common land, the collars have the potential to be better and it is very good opportunity to test them.

The Panel unanimously agreed that this application was an exciting opportunity to trial controlled cattle grazing. However, there was concern around the damage that other livestock may have on oak seedlings and regeneration or expansion of Wistman's Wood. The applicant confirmed that there were no sheep grazing in the area and the boundaries of the new take are stock-proof. But given the lightly grazed area will be a draw to any adjoining sheep the applicant will need to maintain these field boundaries.

The Panel recognise the advantages of 'mixed grazing' but were concerned about damage to tree seedlings from ponies. There was a discussion around ways in which the applicant might be able to use cactus guards alongside the collars. It was proposed that the applicant be encouraged to submit a second FiPL application for tree guards if needed to help protect the seedling trees.

There were access concerns around the interactions of cattle and people in the area. Wistman's Wood is very popular, and the Panel debated the use of signage. It was explained that there is already signage in this area about safety around stock. It was agreed that the applicant will need to follow Defra guidelines around signage. There was a discussion around whether QR codes could be used on gateways to explain the collars to the public. It was suggested that DNPA should ask Defra or other Protected Landscapes what level of 'information' is needed and what approaches have been most effective.

The Panel explored ways in which visitor behaviour could be monitored in the area. It was concluded that DNPA would investigate how their Engagement Volunteers could get involved and help with ensuring responsible behaviour around Wistman's Wood.

It was emphasised that this project is well worth supporting, and an interesting trial that we could learn from. The Panel is therefore keen to be kept informed on progress and for results and experience to be shared.

There was discussion about the Duchy's proposal to use Biodiversity Net Gain methodology, and whether more detailed monitoring of very small tree seedlings would be needed to ensure new inconspicuous seedlings were germinating and then be browsed. The question was also raised as to whether the Duchy was now – or in the future – going to use Biodiversity Net Gain as a means of securing 'match funding'.

The Panel were also reminded that the FiPL Team would need to have confirmation there was no overlap or conflict with existing HLS or CS agreements on the land. The FiPL Team will check this and advice from the RPA may need to be sought.

### **Conditions:**

- The applicant must actively maintain their boundary and ensure that 'straying' sheep or ponies are kept out of the area. The applicant should keep a close eye on the grazing and browsing by ponies and consider removing them if need be.
- The applicant should share an annual report of their experience and findings with the Panel. They are also encouraged to share information showing their progress and findings with NE, DNPA, farmers and other interested parties.
- Signage must be installed, to comply with the Defra guidelines, but kept as low key as possible. The applicant is also encouraged to collaborate with DNPA Access and Engagement Team to ensure signage is appropriate and visitor behaviour and reactions are monitored and any problems addressed quickly.
- The applicant should provide a map of the area where controlled grazing is planned.
- The applicant must provide written confirmation from Natural England to show that they support the project.

- The applicant must clarify that this project is compatible with any existing agri-environment scheme (HLS or ES) on the land.
- The applicant must commit to complying with the [advice from Defra's Animal Welfare Committee](#) on grazing using virtual fences
- The DNPA FiPL team would encourage a second application submission from the applicant for protective cactus guards, if results of cattle grazing in this area show damage to young trees.

### Scoring:

The scoring recommended by the FiPL Team was confirmed:

	Score	Score after weighting
Project outcomes (Climate, Nature, People and Place) – 40%	10	2
Ability to deliver - 20%	8	1.6
Sustainability / legacy of projects - 20%	6	1.2
Value for Money - 20%	8	1.6
<b>Total</b>	<b>32</b>	<b>6.4</b>

### Decision:

*Based on the above conditions*

In favour: **6**

Against: **0**

## Chagford Regenerative Farming Association

*Presented by Simon Pryor*

### Summary of application:

A two year project aiming to help a number of farms to come together in collaboration and adopt more efficient and sustainable pasture management. The project is anticipated to impact over 100ha across 10 farms of varying size. The farmers involved will aim to improve health and vitality of the River Teign catchment area through regenerative farming principles; closely allied to the improvement in farming profitability and protection of the environment.

### Declarations of interest:

- *Peter Harper declared a possible conflict of interest: he is the Deputy Chair of the Soil Association, but he has no personal connection to this application.*
- *Ann Willcocks declared a conflict of interest: she is the Secretary of the Chagford Commoners Association, but she has no personal connection to this application.*

### Discussion points:

The Panel had an in-depth conversation around the formal collaboration of the farmers involved in the application. They questioned whether there was a legally binding document between all parties involved.

There was also concern around VAT registration, and who exactly would be claiming for each item/activity. Furthermore, there was concern regarding the make up of the group – is it open-ended? How many more farmers can join? The Panel requested more clarity in terms of farmer contribution, and for more detailed information on the nature of the agreement that will bind all stakeholders together.

There was a discussion around the intervention rate of the requested machinery (Uni-Drill). It was confirmed that FiPL can only offer 50% for farm machinery, or 80% for shared use of farm machinery. The Panel is also keen to avoid grant aiding the VAT element of this piece of equipment, if there is an opportunity for an individual to buy the item and claim the VAT themselves it would be better value for money.

It was also flagged that we need to be careful about double funding regarding the purchase and distribution of seed. The Panel were concerned that if members of the group had benefitted from this FiPL grant then they would not be eligible for annual payments under CS (GS4) which pays £382 per ha pa (and this would be substantially more favourable to members).

Whether their application would be better under Stewardship was discussed - there was concern regarding the different schemes that parties might already be in, and how it might create more complication. It was suggested that we should flag to the applicant that there is potential for this project to fit into another stewardship scheme if they'd prefer it. However, given that there is no specific mention of work that includes the drilling of herbal leys (GS4) in this application, it was emphasised that this should not be a factor that restricts their bid. Therefore, it was thought that providing specific field numbers for planned work would not be necessary as there is nothing to state that this item will be used to drill specific GS4 activity.

The Panel unanimously supported their ambition, but need more formality about what exactly their arrangements are for managing the group, the funding and the operations. A discussion regarding whether the parties involved could form a facilitation group or a CIC instead? It was concluded that the FiPL team should work with the applicant and help them refine their structures and processes.

The Panel requested more clarification around the demonstration days – what will these involve?

There was concern around the lack of maps – the Panel requested a map of the area of the catchment that would benefit from the project. What is the water quality? The applicant provided parcel numbers and post codes, but we need more detail of the exact fields and areas that will be converted to herbal leys in order to gauge impact. These will also need to be checked with RPA.

The Panel questioned whether the application could be separated into two, with one covering the machinery purchase and one for the 'collaboration and sharing of advice'. This could also help with the issue of VAT registration. It was also mean there would be one 'owner' of the machine, who was directly responsible for it and provided a chargeable service to members of the 'association'.

**Conditions:**

*The Panel support the ambition of the application, and therefore the applicant will be given two options to choose from:*

- A. The Panel could approve the funding for purchase of the Uni-Drill by one individual farmer at 50% (excluding VAT). Plus a separate application from the Association for a grant of £600 for the legal fees to set up the Association. The applicants can come back at a later date with a more refined application for the other areas.

**OR**

- B. The DNPA FiPL team will need to be satisfied that there is a formal, legally binding agreement in place for the collaboration of the group. And a CIC is the recommended structure for this, or a Facilitation Fund Collaboration, as per Defra guidelines. Once this is in place, the Panel will approve the funding for the Uni-Drill at 80%, since it will be used on a shared basis, and this price may need to include VAT.

*Further overarching conditions:*

- The Uni-Drill will be funded at 80%, on the understanding that the machine is used on a shared basis and will benefit a specified list of farms.
- The legally binding document needs to be flexible in case other farms wish to join in the future.
- The applicant must provide a map of the planned area.
- In terms of VAT, we need to know specifically who is buying the Uni-Drill, and what their business name is.
- The DNPA will need to declare this collaboration and funding to the RPA to highlight that this piece of equipment has been funded, and will carry out the relevant RPA checks ahead of obtaining a signed Agreement.

### **Scoring**

	<b>Score</b>	<b>Score after weighting</b>
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%	6	1.2
<b>Total</b>	<b>26</b>	<b>6.8</b>

### **Decision:**

*Current form*

In favour: **0**

*Based on the above two options and conditions*

In favour: **6**

Against: **0**

### **AOBs**

- The DNPA FiPL team will write to all FiPL LAP members and check that they are happy to continue being on the Panel – including our RPA representative.
- The DNPA FiPL team will circulate the Defra guidelines regarding new Panel members and how we should fill empty roles. The Panel agreed that the group size goes up to 13.
- The DNPA FiPL team will check on those who applied for the Panel last time, and consider reaching out to them about reapplying
- Once the new roles are filled, appropriate training will be carried out for new members as to the expectations of the role, and critically how to read and critique an application.
- Russell requested that we hold a vote about re-electing the chairman – this will be minuted, and most likely take place in June.

**Date of next LAP meeting: Wednesday May 24<sup>th</sup>, 11am, Parke.**