

Dartmoor Farming in Protected Landscapes

Local Assessment Panel

Wednesday 16th August 2023, 11:00-14:00, Parke

Attending:

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

Dartmoor staff attending:

Richard Drysdale, Bea Dunscombe

Apologies:

Dan Alford, Eamon Crowe, Will Dracup, John Howell, Layland Branfield (Ann attending as substitute), James Sharpe (Richard attending as substitute)

Applications under £5k

This application was presented because the Panel deferred some elements of the original submission last summer. At the time, the applicant had already received one grant (Challacombe 1), and the Panel were keen to give other applicants a chance to apply for funding. The reduced application has now been completed (Challacombe 2), and we therefore wanted to present this <£5k application to the Panel again.

Challacombe 3

Presented by Bea Dunscombe

Summary of application:

Four projects at Challacombe Farm, including wood valley creation, orchard creation, public access improvements and planting of wood pasture.

Declarations of interest:

Richard Drysdale and Peter Harper declared a conflict of interest because the applicant is member of the Dartmoor National Park Authority, however it was agreed that all Panel members would still be able to vote.

Discussion points:

- The Panel were happy to see that access was being improved, however, will the bridlegates allow disabled access and be suitable for buggies? Are the pathways easily passable? It was reasoned that we believe the track and path are easily accessible - DNPA will check with our Access team that the surface is suitable.
- The signage being used was questioned; we need to make sure that the signage is clear – what exactly will be written on the finger post? It was clarified that the upkeep and placing of fingerposts and gates are the landowner's responsibility.

- The Panel asked for clarification around double funding, what is our process for this? It was explained that we run applications through RPA to check for double funding.
- Query around why the applicant is not going to Countryside Stewardship for their tree planting and fencing, it was confirmed that these activities don't meet the threshold for CS. It was therefore suggested that the FiPL team feed this back to Defra and explain the differences and problems between CS and FiPL. People are choosing to go for FiPL because it is less complicated, flexible, and quicker – but it means that we received a high number of applications that are eligible for and more suited to CS.
- The Panel requested a follow up report for the cactus guards – they would like to see how the trees are developing and growing. It was agreed that it would be good to see results of natural regeneration.
- Clarity around where the trees and guards will go exactly as no maps were provided for projects 3 and 4.
- Query about the stone post - it was then clarified that it is just being moved 4m over, and that this has been looked at and signed off by DNPA archaeologists.
- It was requested that the applicant should pick appropriate species that are local to their area (For example, Oak, Birch, and other native broadleaf species). It's important to make sure that what is planted, wants to be planted there. It is expected that the applicant will plant trees that will survive and replace any that die.
- The Panel questioned why the applicant is putting a plastic tube inside the cactus guard? With the cactus guard, do they need to use tubes at all? And if so, could biodegradable tubes be used instead?

Conditions:

- The applicant should take advice from an appropriate body for the tree planting to ensure that the species is appropriate for their area.
- The applicant should feedback the results of the use of cactus guards so that we can learn from this project.
- The applicant should plant something more mature than a single whip, which will have a good chance of survival.
- If possible, can the applicant explore other options for cactus tubes, such as biodegradable tubes, as this would be preferred.

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%	10	2
Sustainability / legacy of projects - 20%	8	1.6
Value for Money - 20%	10	2
Total	36	8.8

Decision:

Based on the above conditions

In favour: **6**

Against: **0**

Approve subject to the above conditions.

Applications over 10k

Mardon Common

Presented by Bea Dunscombe

Summary of application:

The purchase of a flail mower to be used for scrub management on Mardon Common, at a 50% intervention rate for sole use.

Declarations of interest:

Peter Harper declared a conflict of interest; the applicant is his contractor, but he has no financial gain from this application. The Panel agreed that he could remain present but would not be able to vote.

Discussion points:

- The Panel requested confirmation about the strength of this machine – would it damage archaeological features? Should we seek archaeological approval?
- It was confirmed that this would not break through granite but could potentially roll some granite rocks. Therefore, it was suggested that we need an agreement from the applicant to say that they will not damage any areas of archaeological significance.
- It was commented that it was a shame this was not a collaborative application. Could it have been submitted by a farmer group? A collaborative application would have been mutually beneficial, and the applicant could have received an 80% intervention rate for shared use.
- However, it was confirmed that the applicant would be the sole user of the flail mower, and they will use the item on a contracted basis to create fire breaks not only in an area that has had fires in the past, but potentially across Dartmoor.
- It was suggested that the Dartmoor FiPL team confirm that fire breaks are written as an essential element of this project.
- The Panel agreed that the project shows good management of Mardon Common, and that the applicant's ideas are innovative.
- The Panel questioned how the applicant plans to offer his work to other areas across Dartmoor, as this could demonstrate a great example of a mutually beneficial, shared use item being used across the Moor.

Conditions:

- When the flail is used on the Commons, the work must be as per management recommended by Natural England.
- The applicant must obtain two competitive quotes ahead of approval.
- The applicant must ask for endorsement that the work will be carried out on the Common from the Commons Association and from the Common owner.

- Since this is not a collaborative application, the applicant should actively make themselves known to other Commons for contracted work elsewhere.
- The applicant must provide written agreement to say that they will not damage any areas of archaeological significance.
- Fire breaks must be written as an essential element of this 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%	8	1.6
Sustainability / legacy of projects - 20%	8	1.6
Value for Money - 20%	8	1.6
Total	32	8

Decision:

Based on the above conditions

In favour: **5** (Peter Harper did not vote, due to his declaration of interest)

Against: **0**

Approve subject to the above conditions.

Date of next LAP meeting: September 27th, 11am at Parke

AOBs

- It was suggested that the FiPL team should provide a narrative to LAP members regarding speaking to Defra about the differences and problems between CS and FiPL. We could also discuss with other FiPL landscapes to add weight to our concern.
- The Panel queried how we should overcome losing applicants who are unable to get through to the FiPL team. The team agreed to review our pipeline process internally and see how this can be improved. The team also need to make sure that we get back to any applicants that have fallen through the cracks.
- It was suggested that we out-source support, can we employ someone to help write applications for us?
- DNPA gave an update on new and upcoming team changes: new team structure and new contracted staff opportunities.
- It was suggested that we host 2 or 3 applications across Dartmoor to show people what we can do and enable/empower them to fill out the forms themselves.
- Could DNPA hold a FiPL workshop to talk through some ideas with members of the public?
- FiPL team to read out any comments from members who are unable to attend in the Panel meetings.

- FiPL team to clarify the exact reasons why applications can't go under CS schemes. To explicitly explain this when presenting – and to send this to LAP members earlier along with the rest of the papers, so that LAP know ahead of meeting.
- Substitutes are needed for LAP members.
- FiPL team to email the link to the advert for a new LAP member to current LAP members.
- To add to an opportunity to go to Peter's farm to go through tree planting & cactus guards in a future meeting when we do not have a big agenda – we can use the venue nearby for a FiPL LAP meeting. FiPL team to identify a date for this.
- Can we share the FiPL Fortnight newsletter wider? We need to check GDPR. If we check with applicant's first, perhaps we can share photographs/info about their completed work with, e.g. the Hill Farm Project, or wider.