

Dartmoor Farming in Protected Landscapes

Local Assessment Panel

Wednesday 8th October 2025 - Parke

Attending: Russell Ashford, Alison Clish-Green, John Howell, Shirley Mudge, James Wright, Ann Willcocks (*attending as the designated representative for the DCC*), Edward O'Connor (*attending as Katie Wynter's substitute, on behalf of Natural England*), Will Dracup (*attending virtually for parts of the meeting as listed below*)

Note:

- John Howell was not present for the first ½ hour of the meeting but joined for the second application presentation and voting onwards.
- Will Dracup was present virtually for the first and third application presentations and voting.

Dartmoor staff attending: Bea Dunscombe, Kaitlin Perryman

Apologies: Katie Wynter, Dan Alford, Christine Malseed, Sarah Blyth, Mark Williams, John Howell (not present for the first ½ hour), Will Dracup (only present for the first and third applications and voting)

Introductions:

- Edward O'Connor was introduced as the representative from Natural England for this meeting

Finance Update:

- FiPL team gave an update as to the programme's current grant allocation, expected grant allocation after today's meeting if all projects are successful, as well as information regarding application pipeline.
- Panel asked for reassurance regarding the team's allocation and sufficient utilisation of the two different pots of funds (capital and revenue). The team confirmed that DEFRA have reiterated the definitions and eligibility of capital vs revenue costs for the programme.

Applications

Shorts Down and Middlemoor - Flood Risk Mitigation

(Presented by Bea Dunscombe)

Summary of application:

To extend an existing attenuation pond to increase its floodwater storage capacity and create a series of additional scrapes, ponds and channels to slow down and capture excess water that runs off Shorts Down Common, channelling it into the nearby Tiddy Brook.

Declarations of interest:

No declarations of interest.

Discussion points:

- The Panel asked for confirmation as to who designed and constructed the original ponds, as it appears the original pond is not achieving its intended purpose. Does this work highlight missed opportunities within the first project.
- Members asked for confirmation as to whether the ponds on site are actually attenuation ponds (with seasonal variation), or whether they are full of water all year round.
- There was widespread support for the concept of the project, however there was uncertainty over the design of the ponds and further scrapes which members felt needed more consideration and expert input.
- Members raised whether more work was needed to understand the wider catchment area and what was causing such considerable surface water and run off.
- It was asked whether the DNPA Headwaters team had commented on the project proposal and plan? Members asked the FiPL team to request that the applicant reaches to other specialists, and consult with the DNPA Headwaters team, over design and best practice. This further research will help to understand what the issues are in this area and why/where they are occurring, to then be able to treat the cause rather than the symptoms.
- Are there any historic leats or cross drains that could be utilised to reduce the flood risk? It was concluded there weren't any that they were aware of in that area that could be used.
- It was requested that the FiPL team recommend the applicant seeks advice from the local Catchment Sensitive Farming Officer.
- Panel reiterated that they support the scheme but would like further consideration and assurance over the plan and design.

Scoring

The scoring 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%	6	1.2
Total	26	6.8

Decision:

The panel voted to defer the application, to give the applicant more time to consider the design of the ponds and to seek further advice from specialists to ensure their suitability for the site.

The panel confirmed the application could be represented either at the next panel meeting at the end of November or via an online meeting should the information be available sooner.

For: 7

Against: 0

Abstained: 0

Affinity Drone – Deer Management

(Presented by Bea Dunscombe)

NB: Will Dracup was offline for this project presentation and therefore did not vote. John Howell joined for this project presentation and voting onwards.

Summary of application:

To improve annual surveying and monitoring of wild deer at landscape-scale using the latest drone thermography to map and record herd structure data including species, age and sex. This data will inform evidence-led deer management on Dartmoor.

Declarations of interest:

No declarations of interests.

Discussion points:

- The panel were keen to fully understand the level of support from the listed partner organisations the applicant works closely with.
- Members agreed that any concerns over setting a precedent regarding future FiPL enquiries about supporting thermal drones should not be significant as each project application is considered in its own right.

- Members were supportive of the project but expressed concerns over the tangible outcome of drone work as it does not directly achieve higher cull numbers.
- It was noted that this item was a necessary piece of equipment with the ability to deliver an informed approach to deer management, specifically related to tracking the movements of herds and their different grazing patterns. For example, members had found that this year’s acorn abundance has meant that more deer are in the woodlands rather than out in the fields.
- Concern was raised that the application made no mention of animal welfare, which could be a considerable benefit to wider deer management as a result of thermal drone work. The Panel requested assurance that the kit will be used from an animal health approach to identify sick and diseased deer/herds and their movements.
- Members questioned how this project relates to the previous FiPL bids within the same area on Dartmoor and the wider deer management approach from the TVFF.
- Panel requested whether the applicant could supply feedback as to their link with TVFF’s work.

Scoring

The scoring by the FiPL team was confirmed:

	Score	Score after weighting
Project outcomes (Climate, Nature, People and Place) – 40%	6	2.4
Ability to deliver - 20%	10	2
Sustainability / legacy of projects - 20%	8	1.6
Value for Money - 20%	8	1.6
Total	32	7.6

Decision:

To approve subject to meeting the below conditions:

1. The applicant is to consider and make comment on how the thermal drone could be used to spot, track and monitor deer health. They must provide information on whether this is possible, and how this data could have a positive impact in terms of managing deer numbers for conservation efforts on Dartmoor.
2. The applicant must confirm the link between this project and the Teign Valley Facilitation Fund’s work and their funded FiPL projects, to understand how these projects complement each other.

For: 7

Against: 0

Abstained: 0

Common Focus - Harford Ugborough Commoners Association App Creation

(Presented by Bea Dunscombe)

Summary of application:

An innovative App based assessment of soils, habitat and site condition building on the structure of MOR1 (SFI). The design, field testing and evaluation of an intuitive and bespoke App, designed for Dartmoor's soils and habitats. This will identify the attributes at multiple sample points and build a detailed picture of resource type, condition and management options. The project will provide a localised assessment tool to support land managers at a spatial level.

Declarations of interest:

- Ann Wilcocks declared a conflict of interest because she is the Secretary of Harford & Ugborough Commoners Association, and is the applicant.
- John Howell declared a conflict of interest because he is Chair of Harford & Ugborough Commoners Association and a beneficiary as a specialist who will advise on the project.

Ann and John were present for the presentation but left for voting.

Discussion points:

- Members commented that the current app used to map and survey moorland to fulfil the MOR1 survey work is designed for a generic upland environment and is not specific enough to understand what is actually on the ground on Dartmoor.
- The project ties in very well to the Dartmoor Land Management Group's work as well as the Dartmoor Hill Farm Projects work with AIFA and then HSA through the mapping of resource through soil and vegetation data as well as likely tick index.
- Members expressed considerable support for the project as the potential benefit to Dartmoor, specifically relating to informed, considered and specific land management practices was clear.
- A query was raised over the costings – what was the justification for the steering group meetings at £250pd rather than £200pd, as per the standard rate FiPL has funded previously. It was confirmed that due to the level of facilitation involved in a steering group meeting rather than standard workshops, an additional cost was appropriate.
- There was discussion over the suitability of naming the time contributed by the common's association as an 'in-kind donation'. It was confirmed this had been included to demonstrate the collaborative approach, highlighting the additional time and work that would go into the project beyond what is being requested for grant funding.

- The Panel discussed whether the applicant had fully considered the use of a plate meter to measure sward height, as it was highlighted that their accuracy on a moorland landscape was less consistent than on typical grasslands.
- Members questioned as to whether the applicants could consider an alternative approach alongside the plate meter to ensure the recordings are accurate. They gave advice on other techniques available and recommended that more time and consideration should be given regarding the use of a plate meter.
- Members who have used the current app for mapping MOR1 reiterated that they felt it is not fit for purpose on Dartmoor as it is ineffective and inefficient relating to its mapping capabilities. Members showed considerable support for this project.
- How did the applicant decide on the app builder and provider, COREO? It was confirmed that COREO had been used by DNPA Hill Farming Team for the Boundary Boost and Curlew monitoring projects respectively. It was felt that their tech was simple to use and that the level of understanding between the app developers and the Dartmoor community offered significant reassurance of their ability to deliver and a good working relationship.
- Panel members asked what was the long-term vision for this app? Could it be used nationally? Or is it intended just for Dartmoor use? It was discussed that fundamentally the app is intended to support Dartmoor as a unique landscape and is not aiming to be used nationally. The intention would be to integrate the use of the app/software to support wider aims for Dartmoor, rather than for a wider area across the UK.
- It was commented that there was an incentive for land managers to have this app and utilise its data as it could be used to access future funding. Members commented that recommendations from the Fursdon Review highlight the need for more locally specific and considered knowledge and information, and that fundamentally that data needs to be collected somewhere and somehow. This project looks to start this process.
- Members agreed that this project should inspire commoners to go out onto their common and survey the land and take responsibility and ownership for it.
- It was questioned by members whether this work could be used in the future to support with the surveying of SSSI's?
- Who will be responsible for the maintenance of the app, relating to software updates as they can become out of date and need new versions? Can the applicants ask COREO as the app developers what maintenance costs are anticipated? And are the applicants certain that any future costs will be able to be covered out of the common's association budget?

- Concerns were expressed over the high intervention rate with no financial contribution from the applicants. Members requested that a small contribution should be made by the association to show their commitment to the project.
- Had any time been considered relating to the reading and processing of the data collected by the app and how was this going to be covered in the future after FiPL?

The scoring 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:

The Panel voted to approve this project subject to meeting the below conditions:

1. The funding towards 'Project Management time' should be reduced to 90% to demonstrate commitment and financial contribution from the applicant towards the project.
2. Mention of the match funding contribution should be removed if it is an in-kind donation, but it should remain clear that this is still a collaborative project.
3. The applicant must confirm their commitment to funding the ongoing maintenance of the app as required to ensure its legacy for the 5-year FiPL maintenance period as required.
4. The Panel encouraged additional consideration to establish which method of data collection relating to recording sward height was to be the most accurate and effective.

For: 6

Against: 0

Abstained: 0

Sortridge & Grimstone Leat Repairs

(Presented by Kaitlin Perryman)

Summary of application:

This project looks to repair and conserve the historically significant Sortridge and Grimstone Leat. A series of repairs are required to the leat to preserve its historic features and the flow of water. This project aims to map and understand where water is being lost within the leat system and how to address this moving forwards.

Declarations of interest:

No declarations of interest.

Discussion points:

- Members raised that the application references the fact that the leat has been there for 500 years, and it's always functioned in that time. Therefore, has the hydrology of the Walkham Valley changed to cause this failure of the leat? Or is it due to a lack of maintenance of the leat over many years?
- Seeing as the CIC have taken on this project, how much confidence do we have that the ongoing maintenance will be carried on? How can we get assurance of their commitment to this.
- Concerns were raised over the lack of legal standing or entitlement the leat users have over the leat, with their being no licences or documents.
- Members discussed the timeframe available to complete the proposed works and noted that they felt it was going to be a push to complete. They specifically mentioned that it is a lot of repairs and when looking at the water loss, is there a risk that this will highlight larger problems after the repairs have been carried out? What if the hydrologist highlights bigger problems after it's been repaired?
- It was confirmed that the leat did originally have a sub-leat committee from within the Whitchurch commoners, but that during COVID the association was less active and the leat committee struggled to agree on a way of progressing forward. During the less active phase of the committee, any further erosion was then exacerbated by independent reactive repairs in sections. The CIC has been established to ensure there is no financial gain to repairing or managing the leat.
- Members again commented that there seems to be a lack of responsibility over maintenance of the leat due to its pre-dating such legal requirements.
- Members questioned the timescale for the hydrologist's work – shouldn't this work happen before the repairs? FIPL team confirmed that the intention is to start all works asap and have them working alongside each other. It was also confirmed that the hydrologist's work is intended to feed into future plans around managing the leat, once these emergency repairs have taken place.
- Members questioned if the CIC were responsible for the leat maintenance? FIPL Team confirmed that legal obligation is unclear or unknown due to the history of the leat but noted that with over 40% of the leat flowing over Whitchurch Common, that historically they have taken on the responsibility, but not legally. Therefore, the CIC wanted to formalise this and have named a chairman who will liaise with the other stakeholders.
- The panel asked if the Ox-eye stones were scheduled ancient monuments. FIPL team confirmed there are not.

- Do the owners of the land have a right to provide water? How does the CIC have the right to repair a leat that isn't on their land? Do they have the power to control this? Members asked who would be responsible for the ongoing maintenance? This would solidify legacy of the project.
- Would it be appropriate to offer costs so that the CIC could investigate the legality of leat ownership? Could we offer £3,000 legal support so a lawyer could look at the legal position of the CIC and advise on how to formalise this? This was discussed at length but ultimately decided that this addition would be outside of the scope of the FiPL programme, we wouldn't be able to fund legal work.
- The panel asked for confirmation as to whether all of the people along the length signed up to this work and supportive? Team confirmed that all those who would be impacted by these repairs were in support of the project, which included all of the private farms along the Sortridge section of the leat. It was confirmed that this project did not include any repairs which would directly impact those on the Grimstone section and that they were not on the leat committee within the CIC.
- Confirmed that this project looks at just the emergency repairs and is phase one of a long-term project to conserve the leat.
- The panel again raised concern about timeframe for delivery as we go into winter.
- Members questioned the use of Baro-divers and how they work? FiPL team confirmed that they are suspended in the water and work with GPS and work alongside the optical reader to send data which is then downloaded.
- The panel asked whether it would be more appropriate to fully fund the Project Manager Time, rather than accept it a donation from the CIC. FiPL team confirmed this had been discussed internally and with the applicant but that they were happy for this to be voluntary contribution.
- There was concern over the expense of the ground protection mats, which had increased in price from the initial application costings sent. It was confirmed that the variation in costs relate to the different specification of mats and their installation costs depending on their specialty. FiPL team will continue liaising with SWPP for advice over the specification needed as this is specialist work and is essential for a contractor to do it safely and without unnecessary damage.
- Members referenced climate resilience, asking how will the leat look and operate in the future and how can we future proof this work? It was confirmed that this work is intended to be covered in a phase 2 or phase 3 project in the future. This first phase will inform a second phase and beyond. It was emphasised that modern adaptations might be required going forward.
- If we strip it back to the aim and objective of this project and focus on just this phase, could we just focus on these repairs? Or do we need to go into the details of legality? At the heart of all of this it's a heritage restoration project.

- It was proposed that the applicant’s contribution of £3,500 could be removed and that we request they use these funds to cover the legal fees to look into legality and ownership of the leat/the right to provide water, if it was felt this would provide assurance of legacy for the project. This was not approved.
- The panel asked if it would be appropriate for the applicants to create a management and maintenance plan for the leat for 5 years minimum beyond FiPL, with all of the leat beneficiaries and land-owners supportive, offered as evidence of their final claim in March. This was discussed, along with a ‘Statement of Intent’ around maintaining the FiPL funded works and ultimately the panel formalised a condition; that the applicant must create a memorandum of understanding around the maintenance of the leat and FiPL funded works, to be signed by the landowners and leat beneficiaries.
- The panel asked what about non signatories and what this would mean. The panel discussed asking the applicant to produce a risk assessment for non-signatures in terms of the impact this would have on maintaining the restored sections.
- Will the applicant be able to cover the costs up front before the claims process? FIPL team confirmed this had been discussed with the applicant and will be carefully managed to protect cash flow.

Scoring

The scoring 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%	6	1.2
Total	26	6.8

Decision:

To approve subject to meeting the below condition:

1. The applicant must create a memorandum of understanding, agreed and signed by all the leat beneficiaries and landowners included within this project, which states their commitment to maintaining the repairs for the full 5-year FiPL maintenance period. The memorandum will support the grant conditions that require a minimum maintenance period of 5 years following works funded through FiPL.

For: 7

Against: 0

Abstained: 0

Lydford Railway SSSI Pond Restoration

(Presented by Bea Dunscombe)

Summary of application:

To restore a badly damaged dam at the Lydford Railway Ponds SSSI. This will enable the pond to be watertight again and protect the habitat and species that can be found there.

To install two interpretation boards on the site to support future educational visits for local school children.

Declarations of interest:

No declarations of interest.

Discussion points:

- Members requested that the reference to ponds being 'attenuation ponds' is removed as it seems they are not. They are instead wildlife ponds. This is to be edited in the application papers.
- What are their commitments to the on-going maintenance and how come the site has become damaged and degraded? FiPL team confirmed this damage happened in 2023 and that the applicants have been looking to secure funding to restore them for the last 2 years.
- Members commented that it is a high-cost application for a small area of benefit.
- Members also concerned that there it is also a high cost with only 1 contractor and no comparative costs. FiPL team confirmed that no other contractors have been willing to quote given the short timeframe for project completion in relation to the SSSI consent obtained. It was also confirmed that this is specialist work, and the chosen contractor specialises in SSSIs.
- Is there a reason this isn't being done through the CES process - It's a SSSI and generally SSSIs that fall outside AES funding can access the CES pot. Members asked the FiPL team/applicant to investigate this in the first instance.
- Questions around how the vegetation removed was going to be managed. Given the SSSI designation is for dragonflies and damselflies, the panel requested that the applicants agree to pile the vegetation pulled from the pond adjacent to it for a couple of days to allow any aquatic inverts to return to the water, and then after a couple of days they can then remove the vegetation. This should preserve wildlife within the site.
- The Panel asked if there was sufficient health and safety considerations on the site if there are school children up on the site, for example, should there be life buoys with ponds that deep? FiPL team confirmed that the provision of such equipment or risk assessments falls within the applicants/landowner's legal responsibility relating to Health and Safety regulations. It was also

highlighted that schools will be responsible for their own risk assessments ahead of visiting.

- Members again raised concerns over the impact of the works would have in the short and medium term to the wildlife and species present. Is there a plan to protect the invertebrates whilst they pull the vegetation and drain the water? Will they keep any of the water nearby on site? Can we recommend that they make provision of small temporary water storage to protect the species that rely on them?
- Members requested that the contractor is not to fully drain the pond and must leave a portion of it semi wet and marshy area during the restoration works. They should review the SSSI consent and see if there is a methodology for how to undertake the works to preserve these habitats.
- Recommendation to the applicant could host an open day event for increased public benefit.
- Members asked how often the school visits are and if we have the data on this? It was also discussed as to the suitability of interpretation boards for school children to read, would they note prefer other resources?

Scoring

The scoring 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:

To approve subject to meeting the below conditions:

1. Bea must approach Natural England and get written confirmation that this project is not eligible for funding through the Conservation Enhancement Scheme, instead of through FiPL.
2. The Panel emphasised that the reservoir pond should not be fully drained, a level of wet or marshy assemblage should be left to ensure that any aquatic vegetation or species are not disturbed or removed.
3. The applicant must provide some more detailed information regarding the educational offer being provided to local schools, for example – anticipated number of visits, number of children, topics covered, anticipated agenda/structure etc
4. The applicant must be responsible for carrying out an appropriate risk and safety assessment of the site going forward, to ensure any schools children visiting the site are safe.

For: 7

Against: 0

Abstained: 0

AOB:

- FiPL team raised concerns over Panel member attendance and the impact this has on meetings.
- Panel raised the motion to look to inviting a second for the farming representation member(s). The FiPL team to investigate this in line with the LAP terms of reference.

Date of next meeting:

Wednesday 26th November, Parke.