

Dartmoor Farming in Protected Landscapes

Local Assessment Panel

Wednesday 5th July 2023, 11:00-14:30, Ullacombe Farm

Attending:

Russell Ashford (Chair), Alison Clish-Green, Layland Branfield, Dan Alford, Peter Harper, James Sharpe

Sarah Blyth contributed remotely.

Dartmoor staff attending:

Simon Pryor, Bea Dunscombe

Apologies:

Sarah Blyth, Eamon Crowe, Will Dracup, John Howell

The meeting proceeded one member short of quorate, the Panel agreed to review the applications and record their recommendations. It was agreed that if there was consensus in the meeting, the Panel's recommendation would be ratified by an absent Panel member, and an online meeting would follow asap. If there were differing views on assessment by those at the meeting, these applications would be revisited by the wider Panel at the next scheduled meeting. Sarah Blyth had reviewed the application papers ahead of the meeting and provided written response.

Election of Chair and Vice Chair

Nominations were invited for Chair. LB nominated existing Chair and Vice Chair, all present supported this, and RA is willing to continue for another 12 months. Officers to seek views of Panel members not at the meeting and willingness of Vice Chair to undertake another 12 months.

Applications over £10k

Langaford 2

Presented by Simon Pryor

Summary of application:

Maintaining and improving rhos pasture and species rich hay meadows, particularly for marsh fritillaries. Enhancing Langaford Trust's role in education by continuing to run day courses based on study of nature environment, with a special focus on soils, butterflies, breeding birds and meadow management.

Declarations of interest:

- No Panel members had any declarations of interest.

Discussion points:

- The Panel acknowledged that the applicant has done well to reach out and engage to such a diverse audience and were happy with what they've achieved for nature in their earlier project. It was mentioned that the applicant's work so far is impressive,

and they are keen to continue to support this 'little island' of high cultural and natural heritage importance.

- Clarification was requested regarding the distribution of funds over years 1 and 2 of the project, it was confirmed that approximately 2/3rds would be allocated to year 1, and 1/3rd would be allocated to year 2.
- There was concern as to why this is not able to qualify for CS higher tier. The Panel were in support of the applicant's plans and aims, but why is the applicant seeking funding through FiPL? A longer-term AES agreement should provide more funding.
- The Panel discussed the extent of the applicant's hedgerow and boundary work and the funding they've requested for this, and whether this should instead be funded through a hedgerows and boundaries scheme. There was unanimous agreement amongst the Panel that this was the main issue with the application, and it was suggested that the applicant should explore funding for this element of their application within the other schemes available. Furthermore, FiPL is more flexible – which would work well for this project. This could be a perfect example of how FiPL can act as a steppingstone for the applicant into other schemes.
- The Panel requested clarity around the fencing work from NE and the RPA because there was confusion about what could be funded elsewhere; however, it was reasoned that the applicant would not be able to gain funding for this work in full on another scheme, FiPL could provide funding for the work in its entirety.
- The Panel agreed that they could give a recommendation to the applicant to explore hedgerows and fencing in another scheme down the line.
- There were questions around the applicant's educational visits, and what exactly the requested equipment included. The equipment is itemised in the Application Form, and includes microscopes, soil testing kits, field guides and art supplies.
- The Panel expressed surprise at the price of the bird hide (funded under the previous Agreement) , however, it was reasoned that this was not only used as a bird hide, but as a meeting room, safe room, and counselling room for those visiting – it has multiple functions and was procured as pre-fabricated with minimal labour to construct, Langaford have very few practical staff (often one). However, it was flagged that this is quite expensive for a bird hide.
- There was a query over the fact that the applicant is not VAT registered, and therefore 20% of FiPL grants claimed for items purchased will go on paying VAT. This will affect the "value for money" criteria.
- A discussion ensued regarding the option to support their first year, and then before we approve the second year, the applicant must explore VAT registration and look into funding from other schemes.
- The Panel suggested that the applicant reads the SFI handbook that is being published in August, as SFI can be stacked on top of CS, but if there is FiPL funding in place this could be seen as double funding.
- The Panel discussed the NE priority habitat on the site, and the accuracy of the Rural Land Registry maps – the current Inventory is not accurate and is outdated, and therefore does not align.

Conditions:

- Hedgerows, fencing and gateway work to be removed from the Application, and the Applicant to try to get this funded through CS Capital Grants for 'Hedgerows and Boundaries'. If they find some work can't be funded through CS the Panel are prepared for it to be added back in as an Amendment to this FiPL Agreement.
- Applicant to be awarded their first year of funding anyway, given how close we are to the CS Mid-tier deadline.

- Applicant to explore whether they can become VAT Registered thus avoiding FiPL having to cover the additional 20% VAT on capital items.
- Applicant to explore their second year of funding through SFI combined with CS+ as it might be of greater advantage to the applicant.
- After we've received confirmation that the Applicant has explored VAT registration, alternative funding options, and their eligibility for a hedgerows and boundaries scheme, their second year of funding could be reassessed.

Scoring:

The scoring recommended by the FiPL Team was confirmed:

	Score	Score after weighting
Project outcomes (Climate, Nature, People and Place) – 40%	10	4
Ability to deliver - 20%	10	2
Sustainability / legacy of projects - 20%	8	1.6
Value for Money - 20%	8	1.6
Total	36	9.2

Decision (formal recommendation):

Based on the above conditions:

In favour: 6

Against: 0

All in favour, decision subject to ratification.

Hapstead Farm

Presented by Simon Pryor

Summary of application:

A continuation to the applicant's first project, which aims to protect existing hedgerows and facilitate mob grazing and movement of livestock in order to improve the biodiversity on the farm.

Declarations of interest:

- Russell declared a potential conflict of interest, as he is acquainted with the Farmer at Hapstead Farm, but only through being a near neighbour.

Discussion points:

- The Panel were keen to make sure that there were no overlaps with funding for this project. Again, a lot of this work is available through CS schemes, e.g hedgerows, fencing, gates and water supply. There was confusion about why the applicant hasn't explored this instead of FiPL.

- The Panel also discussed consent needed from the landlord of the Camphill Trust, for example, if the farm tenancy ends, would the project be continued? It was confirmed that in the FiPL application for the applicant must confirm that they have management control of the land for at least five years from applying or have the agreement of the landlord.
- Furthermore, should we request for a contribution from the landlord, seeing as this is a tenanted farm? The Panel requested to see Camphill supporting and preferably contributing to this project, which could also help from a VAT perspective too. Are we clear about any funding for hedges under his existing CS Agreement?
- The Panel flagged that they haven't yet seen a tenancy agreement from the applicant - it was confirmed that we have previously received a letter of support from Camphill.
- The Panel requested that where it's possible, the applicant should leave some mature trees in the hedge being laid, to ensure a good balance of trees in the hedgerows.
- There was concern around the extent of the hedgerows that are being cut back – will there be any shelter left for livestock? This can lead to welfare issues down the line when mob grazing is being introduced.
- It was mentioned that the farm Innovation grant is available for mob grazing equipment at 33%, and the applicant is asking for 80% from FiPL. It was agreed that we can't undermine alternative Defra schemes, and therefore the applicant should look at other possible funding options.
- The Panel had a discussion regarding the re-erection of granite gate posts, and the high amount that the applicant will be paid for this. However, it was explained that this is the CS rate that has been set by Defra, and we cannot pay a different amount if this activity meets the specification.
- The Panel commented on the positives of the application, and commended the access that has been provided for groups to experience this environment.
- There was a discussion around the applicant's Mid-Tier options, and what they could do alongside his Mid-Tier Organic conversion rate. Furthermore, the hedgerow work could be accepted under a CS Capital ('Hedgerows and Boundaries') scheme, which might be more suitable.
- It was concluded that the application needs more solidity, and a more detailed plan. Will this funding be going to the Camphill Trust, via the rent paid, or will it benefit the applicant? The money must go on what is agreed to.

Conditions:

- Defer this application until the next meeting, subject to obtaining the below:
- If possible, confirmation of the length of the tenancy Agreement.
- A letter of support from the Landlord, and if possible, a commitment to maintain the fences and benefits-beyond the existing tenancy term}
- Further details of their Mid-Tier stewardship agreement.
- Exploration of Farm Innovation Grant for electric fencer
- VAT registration situation, to see if this can be avoided possibly by involving the Camphill Trust.

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%	6	1.2
Total		6.8

Decision (formal recommendation):

Defer the application and ask the Applicant to address the above conditions before re-applying:

In favour: 6

Against: 0

All in favour, decision subject to ratification.

Heatree

Presented by Simon Pryor

Summary of application:

To improve the management and increase the biodiversity in the rhos pasture and to restore semi-natural grassland fields to a traditional hay meadow.

Declarations of interest:

- Layland declared an interest, albeit a small one – his children have previously visited to Heatree. The Panel noted that their children/grandchildren may well visit Heatree.

Discussion points:

- The Panel questioned whether the applicant has a formal management plan, or a farm adviser or ecologist who can help monitor progress? How much of the project is an intention, and how much is already set up to start once approved?
- There was agreement that the application is positive, and there are clearly good intentions, but we need more clarity around their reasoning and the actual impact that their actions will have on the surrounding environment.
- It was commented that it's nice to see that the applicant feels responsible for the land and the nature of the area. However, we are in a similar position as the two earlier applications regarding their hedgerow and boundary work – could this be completed through another scheme?

- This application clearly ticks a lot of boxes, but we need to see a solid plan with clear aims and goals – otherwise we have no assurance that the applicant is ready to deliver the work.
- The Panel questioned why the applicant hasn't started this work yet? How can we get assurance that they will achieve what they set out to do with optimum results from land management?
- It was mentioned that we clearly have a big audience with this project - how will Heatree present information and learning to them, will they be learning about Dartmoor and taking home information about landscape heritage from their visit?
- There was a query about the cost of their rhes pasture payment. However, it was confirmed that this is based on the CS rate that is set by Defra, and this activity meets the specification for this activity (the payment places a detailed requirement on the applicant over the timing and nature of grazing).
- There was confusion around the applicant's plans for grazing and rewetting the same plots of land, the Panel felt that this seemed counter intuitive. It was suggested that we go back to the applicant and get more information about this.
- The panel were concerned about the cost of the project and the land holding size, and whether this is good value for money. For example, how much grazing is going to be carried out on 3 acres?
- There was a discussion around whether this application is actually helping a business thrive, rather than actually supporting a farmer and landowner with their land. It was agreed that we can certainly help this education facility, however, it needs to be from a farming point of view.
- It was explained that the rhes pasture is a very small part of the farm, and the large majority of the land is permanent pasture and will be farmed fairly conventionally as hay meadow and grazing, with the FiPL funding helping the applicant to improve its value for wildlife and make it more accessible for the school children.
- The Panel questioned whether the applicant could use electric fencing instead of permanent post and wire fencing? It was agreed that the applicant would need more knowledge from the grazier – and therefore, clarity about the applicant's grazier was requested.

Conditions:

- Defer, until we have received the following:
 - More information about the grazier, livestock and how the land will be grazed.
 - Input from an ecologist or farm adviser on grazing needed to deliver these outcomes.
 - A formal management plan in place.

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		8

Decision (formal recommendation):

Based on the above conditions

In favour: 6

Against: 0

All in favour, subject to ratification.

Pipeline projects: Avon Valley Rhododendrons

Presented by Simon Pryor

Discussion:

- Have we got commoners' permission? We need to be sure there has been input from all Commoners' who have rights to graze there, as some are not members of the Association, so not represented by the Secretary.
- Is the landowner legally obliged to remove these species? DNPA to check.
- Advised that you should try not to leave any debris behind, any debris needs to be burnt/chipped, or it will take root.
- You'll need to cut the stump and chemically treat it immediately after cutting while it's still green (48hrs of cutting), rather than remove the stump itself. Because otherwise it will just re-shoot.
- The site will need to be monitored to make sure there is no regrowth.
- Try to get support from the Forestry Commission, or a funding contribution. The ideal would be a "3-way" funding package, with contributions from SW Water, FC grants and FiPL.
- A 'collaborative agreement' should be explored, with SWLT as Lead Applicant, holding the budget, but with other landowners and if possible, Commoners being part of the 'collaborative group'.
- Assurances that other funding will be available to continue the work after March 2025 should be secured.
- Question raised about whether we can put a Condition in the Agreement, similar to the clause requiring Applicants to maintain machinery for 5 years, to say the Applicant must continue the control for 5 years or risk a reclaim.
- We would also encourage the applicant to use local contractors for the work.

AOB

- Advertise for new LAP members through the NFU/Duchy/DCC - mention that it's paid.
- Ask representative members of committees such as DCC, DCOA and NE to nominate a second to avoid low member attendance at meetings, while accepting that independent farmer members attend in their own right, so should not be expected to deputise. Officers to investigate ability of DNPA Members to substitute as they have also been elected by Authority on an individual basis.
- Put an annual Chair election meeting in the diary, Russell confirmed that he is happy to continue as Chair for one more year - subject to the approval of the rest of the Panel. The next election should be within the next 12 months.

- The Panel was informed that one of our schemes, David Sadler's hydraulic pump and wood pasture system at Butterbrook, is featured as a Case Study in the "2nd Annual Report on FiPL" recently published by National Parks England.

Date of next LAP meeting: August 16th, 11am, Parke.