

FARMING IN PROTECTED LANDSCAPES

Summary: To present a summary of progress of year 3 of the Farming in Protected Landscapes programme

Recommendation: That the report is noted

Report by: Mark Connelly, Land Management Lead, Scott Brown, Farm Engagement lead & Caroline Regan, Programme Administrator

INTRODUCTION

1. The Farming in Protected Landscapes (FiPL) programme launched in July 2021. It is part of the Government’s Agricultural Transition Plan. The programme was originally due to finish at the end of March 2024 but due to its success has been extended to March 2025. This represents a total funding increase to the Cotswolds of £2,497,688 (an additional £486,746 for this financial year with the remainder in year 4). Over the four years, the FiPL programme will manage just over £5m of grant from Defra.
2. Between the launch in July 2021 and the end of March 2023 the programme awarded £2m to 81 projects worth over £3.3 million. 48 projects have been completed during years 1 and 2, with the remaining 33 completing during years 3 and 4.
3. To celebrate a successful year two, the National Association for AONBs and National Parks England published a report with national figures and case studies.¹

PROGRESS IN 2023/24

4. The total FiPL budget, project grants, admin and advice, for 2023/24 is £1,369,083. The grant available for projects is £1,183,693 of which £610,633 had already been allocated by the end of year 2, including to multi-year projects. The full list of projects approved during years 1 and 2 is on the CNL website². The remaining grant for allocation during 2023/24 is £572,000.
5. The assessment panel has met three times so far this year:

Total applications considered this FY	Total projects approved	Total grant awarded (multi-annual)	Total project	Total grant awarded (FY23/24)	Remaining grant to be allocated for FY23/24
16 applications assessed 13 assessed by panel (two for panel input only) ³ 3 (under £10k) assessed by Land Management Lead	11 approved by panel 3 approved by Land Man. Lead	£502,422	£816,765	£361,945 (was £425k)	£210,239 ⁴

¹ https://www.nationalparksengland.org.uk/data/assets/pdf_file/0024/475080/0345-NPE-FiPL-report-2023-A4-WEB.pdf

² https://www.cotswoldsaonb.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2023/08/CNL_FiPL-Projects-supported-to-Mar-23_Final.pdf

³ Both projects are expected to formally apply, which will be a £34k grant for FY23/24 and £170k for FY24/25.

⁴ One project approved for a grant of £63k for FY23/24 has deferred to FY24/25, increasing grant for this FY.

The Panel next meets on 12 September to consider two applications. This unusually low number of applications was not wholly unexpected due to impact of summer holidays, harvest, Countryside Stewardship applications etc.

6. The project pipeline is still strong and the panel meeting to be held on 19 October is very likely to receive several applications including 2-3 requesting close to the maximum grant award of £250,000.
7. Due to the extension of the programme, the sizeable allocated budget for year 4 and the increase in this year's budget, we have successfully recruited an additional Farm Engagement Officer, Olivia Blackwell, who will join us full-time on 9 October. There will also be additional Admin support from the beginning of December with Mandy Pressland being seconded internally to the FiPL team for four days a week until March 2025. This increased capacity is much needed as the team has been very overstretched for several months.
8. Although the pipeline is strong and we are being contacted by new potential applicants, we are in the process of applying to the RPA for Rural Land Registry data for the CNL. If successful, this will enable the FiPL team to undertake some targeting of farmers and land managers who have not contacted us to date. However, access to the RPA data is not guaranteed and we are also looking at other ways to engage new applicants. In any case, we will be much better placed to generate and process new enquires once the team has expanded, as we are currently quite overstretched in this respect.

LOOKING AHEAD TO 2024/25

9. For the extended programme, the CNL Board has a total allocation for year 4 of £2,010,940. The grant available for allocation to projects is £1,766,746. To date £140,467 has already been approved with £1,626,278 remaining. The FiPL team are looking to allocate a significant proportion of the budget for year 4 by the end of March 2024 to ensure the money is fully claimed by the end of March 2025.
10. Defra's vision for Y4 is to deliver more ambitious and innovative projects that demonstrate the way FiPL really can complement and strengthen other schemes. We welcome this but it does bring challenges to delivery in such a short space of time.

Supporting Papers: None

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