

FARMING IN PROTECTED LANDSCAPES

Summary: To update the Executive Committee on progress to date

Recommendation: That the report is noted

Report by: Mark Connelly (Land Management Lead) Caroline Regan (Programme Administrator) Scott Brown (Farm Engagement Lead)

INTRODUCTION

1. The Farming in Protected Landscapes (FiPL) programme launched on 1 July. It is part of the Government's Agricultural Transition Plan, sitting alongside other programmes and schemes such as the Environmental Land Management (ELM) Scheme pilots, Tree Health pilot and Farming Investment Fund. FiPL runs until March 2024 when the full ELM scheme is due to start.
2. To deliver the programme in the CNL the Board has appointed three part-time Farm Engagement Officers; Scott Brown, Heidi Gibbs and Iris McCormick and Programme Administrator, Caroline Regan. To assess applications an Assessment Panel has been established, chaired by Board member, Nick Bumford.
3. For further background please refer to the update for the Executive meeting on 14 September 2021 <https://www.cotswoldsaonb.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2021/09/Item-6-Farming-in-Protected-Landscapes.pdf> and FiPL webpage: <https://www.cotswoldsaonb.org.uk/looking-after/farming-in-protected-landscapes/>

Progress to date

4. Defra have agreed to re-profiling the three-year FiPL budget for the CNL. Originally the largest sum was for year 1 which launched in July 2021 and ends March 2022. The revised budget for the three years is:

	Yr 1 2021/22	Yr 2 2022/23	Yr 3 2023/24	Total
Admin	£41,873.22	£41,873.22	£41,873.22	£125,619.66
Advice/guidance	£75,371.79	£75,371.79	£75,371.79	£226,115.37
Grants	£543,419.75	£852,663.09	£764,575.08	£2,160,657.92
Total	£660,664.76	£969,908.10	£881,820.09	£2,512,392.95

5. Since launching FiPL in July over 100 enquiries have been received. The Farm Engagement Officers discuss enquiries and ideas with potential applicants and advise whether the proposal is eligible for FiPL or not. This 'triage' approach promotes good project ideas and applications to FiPL and saves time in avoiding applications for weak or ineligible proposals. It also provides the opportunity to help applicants develop their ideas further to deliver more outcomes for FiPL and their business. The result of this approach is 31 applications being developed and assessed. Two projects under £5,000 have been assessed and approved by the Land Management Lead and 29 applications considered by the Assessment Panel. The panel has met

three times to date approving 28 applications and deferring one. A list of all applications approved by 12 January 2022 is attached as Appendix 'A'.

6. Not all the approved grant is for spend in 2021/22 as a number of projects will deliver over the FiPL programme. The grant commitment breakdown across the programme is currently:

Yr 1 2021/22	Yr2 2022/23	Yr3 2023/24
£519,420	£239,127	£72,532

7. There remains £23,753 for allocation from the grant budget for spend this financial year. In addition, underspend from the administration budget can be added to the grant budget. The pipeline for applications is very strong with around 40 proposals in development and priority is being given to applications that can deliver before the end of March 2022. The Assessment Panel is to meet at the end of January/early February.
8. The current application window closes on 31 January 2022 and Defra have yet to confirm the date of the next application window.
9. The reporting system to Defra is fairly onerous with complex monthly returns required within a few days of month end, plus quarterly and annual reports. Double funding checks with the RPA are also required which are particularly time consuming when dealing with collaborative projects across several farm holdings. For the RPA check every single field parcel number where activity is proposed has to be listed along with the item to be funded.
10. FiPL has to work alongside and not compete with other Defra programmes which can create complexity at times. FiPL has to use Countryside Stewardship rates where they apply and this can be restrictive and prevent good applications where the payment rates available are far too low, e.g. dry stone wall restoration and pond creation. Adjustments also have to be made when new programmes start such as the Farming Investment Fund which launched in November.
11. The application process is 'light touch' compared to other programmes such as LEADER, but there is a lot of hidden complexity in the process and level of information required. Defra has worked with the Protected Landscapes since July to identify issues and some improvements have been made to the application form, guidance to applicants and the reporting system but there is scope for more, particularly with the application form.
12. Even with the above challenges, FiPL has provided the opportunity to greatly increase our engagement and build stronger relationships with the farming community across the CNL.
13. Between now and the end of March the FiPL team will be ensuring the grant for 2021/22 is fully spent and claimed by:
- Closely monitoring the progress of projects and works programmed for completion by the end of March 2022. This will involve site visits to confirm completion;

- Developing the last batch of projects for assessment by the panel at their next meeting prioritising those that can complete by the end of the financial year;
 - Lining up a few applications that can pick up any underspend from projects already being delivered;
 - Processing grant claims and passing for payment. As long as the project is confirmed as completed before the end of March, some payments can be made in April.
14. The team also plan to review the applications approved and, in the pipeline, to identify gaps in applicant type and delivery of FiPL outcomes and management plan priorities. The results of the review will be used for targeted communications to encourage a wider range of innovative applications.

Supporting Document:

Appendix 'A' - list of approved FiPL applications

JANUARY 2022