

FARMING IN PROTECTED LANDSCAPES

Summary: To present a summary of progress of year 3 of the Farming in Protected Landscapes programme and provide an update on year 4 (2024/25)

Recommendation: That the report is noted

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

INTRODUCTION

1. 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.

YEAR 3 PROGRESS TO DATE

2. Progress during year 3 has been good with most of the grant budget allocated by the Assessment Panel. With the last quarter to go, there is around £22,000 remaining to allocate to projects for spend before the end of March 2024. We have applications in development that will utilise this. Underspend from the Advice and Guidance and Admin budgets can be moved into projects so the amount for allocation during the remainder of 2023/24 will change.
3. The KPI figures for FiPL will be showing as red. This is due to a number of projects having completed but yet to make their claim which is overdue. They are being chased.
4. Due to the increase in this year’s FiPL allocation and the addition of year 4 with a large grant budget, Eleanor Robinson has joined the team as FiPL Admin Support. Eleanor will be mostly working with Caroline Regan, Programme Support Officer. Eleanor is part time, initially four days a week, going down to two days from the end of January to July and back up to four days until March 2025. This is to work around Eleanor studying for two days a week at Kew between January and July.
5. The assessment panel has met five times so far this year. The table below provides information based on applications considered this financial year only.

Total applications considered this FY	Total projects approved this FY	Total grant awarded (multi-annual)	Total project	Total grant awarded for FY23/24	Remaining grant to be allocated for FY23/24
41 applications assessed 30 assessed by panel 11 (under £10k) assessed by Land Management Lead	28 approved by panel (2 rejected) 10 approved by Land Man. Lead (1 project pending)	£1,527,137	£3,286,267	£542,179 (overall total including previous awards is £1,161,844)	£22,260 ¹

¹ Any underspend from the CNL FiPL Advice & Guidance, and Admin budgets can be move to project spend.

The Assessment Panel next meets on 5 February.

6. There has been an increase in applications seeking less than £10,000. These do not go to the panel but are assessed and approved, or otherwise, by the Land Management Lead.
7. We are satisfied that our approach to engagement is working well, supporting a steady and manageable flow of enquiries that lead to good quality applications representing a diverse range of project outcomes, locations and values, capable of utilising our full programme budget without overwhelming the team.

Locally, our main engagement activities and strategies have involved:

- Mailouts to our dedicated farmers in the CNL mailing list (500+ contacts);
- Notices in partner org newsletters (e.g. NFU, CLA);
- Routine engagement with NGOs and other orgs that work with farmers and land managers (e.g. NE, EA, CSFOs, FWAG, Wildlife Trusts, Rivers Trusts);
- Attending farming and land management events (e.g. cluster group meetings, workshops, Moreton Show);
- Hosting webinars and events (e.g. Cotswolds Farming Forum);
- Peer to peer word of mouth – probably the most effective tool of all, which works well as FiPL is very well regarded among the farming community, both locally and nationally.

Nationally, engagement activities have included:

- Defra national comms campaigns - updates and info on their blog, gov.uk webpage, social media, videos, etc;
- Articles in the farming press and other media;
- Various farming events and conferences attended by Defra team;
- Letters to MPs.

To date, we estimate that we have directly engaged with several hundred potential applicants, plus many other stakeholders. As far as our capacity allows, we will continue to review engagement and target new efforts, where necessary, to address any imbalances in delivery, such as in the spread of beneficiary locations or thematic outcomes. Currently, we believe there are some inevitable gaps but overall, the range and levels of engagement have been - and continue to be – very satisfactory overall.

8. The project pipeline remains strong with new enquiries daily, including applicants new to FiPL. We have 50+ potential applications currently logged as in development. We will, however, be embarking on a big push for the final year which will include ramping up communications and exploring other ways of reaching our target audience.
9. During this financial year, a total of 69 projects are being managed by the team, with many of these expected to submit claims in Q4. This includes projects approved in previous years, as well as projects approved this year.
10. The FiPL team has grown over the past few months but the programme remains challenging with juggling new enquiries and applications with managing live agreements, making growing monthly returns to Defra, submitting checks to the RPA, etc. The next 3-4 months will be particularly busy as we head towards the financial year end. Our objective is to maximise the grant spend, using underspend from the advice and guidance and admin budgets and returning as little money as we can to Defra. There will also be year-end reports for Defra

Year 4, 2024/25

11. 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 £989,385 has already been approved (includes two projects totalling £265k that are awaiting necessary permissions before we can issue agreements) with £777,361 remaining. This includes two approved applications, each close to the maximum grant of £250,000. More information can be provided once the forward agreement has been signed. We are still 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.
12. To ensure we fully use our FiPL allocation for year four and to create a legacy, we are planning to recruit another Farm Engagement role with a focus on producing case studies, creating a library of photographs and possibly film, organise events etc.

Supporting papers

- None

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