

FARMING IN PROTECTED LANDSCAPES

Summary: To present a summary of progress to date of year 4 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, Maria Carter, FiPL Comms and Engagement Officer.

INTRODUCTION

1. The Farming in Protected Landscape programme launched in July 2021 and was scheduled to end in March 2024. The programme has proved so successful that it has been extended for a further year and the budget increased. FiPL will conclude as a grant programme on 31 March 2025.

Year 4 allocation

2. The total year 4 allocation for the CNL has increased by £641,857.00 for 2024/25. The year's allocation breaks down as:

| | Year 4 2024/25 | Year 3 2023/24 (for comparison) |
|-------------------------------------|-------------------|------------------------------------|
| Project grants | £1,766,746 | £1,183,693 |
| Administration, Advice and Guidance | £244,194 | £185,390 |
| TOTAL | £2,010,940 | £1,369,083 |

In addition to the allocations made to each protected landscape, Defra secured additional funding for Historic Building Restoration and for Access. Both funds are held centrally by Defra. We have successfully bid to the Historic Building Restoration Fund securing an additional £137,628.00 for two historic barn restoration projects at Guiting Power and Hidcote. Five proposals were put forward for the access fund but were unsuccessful.

Year 4 – progress to date

3. During the second half 2023/24, year 3, £1,153,942 was approved by the panel for projects during year 4. From 1 April 2024 £612,803 remained available for allocation during 2024/25. The Panel has met twice so far this year assessing 31 projects of which 23 have been approved with a total grant of £500,766 and value of £790,913. The panel next meet on 26 September. There is currently £81,000 remaining for allocation although this figure will vary depending on underspend from other projects or from the Admin and Advice and Guidance budgets.
4. As we move towards the end of the programme, managing the pipeline – particularly the expectations of potential applicants – is a bit more of a balancing act. For example:
 - We cannot forecast or communicate exactly when we will run out of funding.
 - We need to ensure we have a good supply of suitable applications that can utilise our remaining budget in the limited time available.

- We don't want to make things overly competitive or overstate the opportunity to new applicants, to avoid unnecessary frustration or disappointment, and being clear that the programme is now entering the closing stages.

For example, the panel of 3 July was heavily oversubscribed, so we needed to make other potential applicants (both new enquiries and applications already in the pipeline) aware that there may not be a further opportunity to apply. In the event, panel ended with just over £80k still in the pot and £44k has subsequently been returned from another project. Consequently, we needed to re-engage with those applicants 'on-hold' and stimulate some new enquiries to give us confidence in allocating this remaining budget effectively at the next panel meeting on 26 Sept (or beyond). This approach has worked, and we are heading to panel oversubscribed once again.

It's possible that we may approve more projects than we can fund at the next panel. If this scenario transpires, we will have a pipeline of pre-approved project ready to go if any additional funds become available (for example, due to underspends elsewhere, either locally or via the 'National Pot' – see below). However, if panel ends with some budget remaining, we are still confident that we can generate further enquiries and applications as required.

The CNL website has been updated to reflect the current situation and manage the expectations of potential applicants.

5. There is the possibility for seeking additional funding from a National Pot held by Defra. The National Pot is underspend collected from across the protected landscapes. Current guidance from Defra on round 1 limited requests to £20,000 per protected landscape. It is not clear if there will be a round 2 but after the next panel meeting it is likely we will have projects to put forward.

FiPL at a Glance for year 4, 2024/25, as at 5 September.

| | |
|--|-------------------------|
| • Total allocation (project grants, Admin, Advice & Guidance) | £2,010,940 |
| • Total grant available for projects | £1,766,746 |
| • Yr 4 grant already allocated as at 1/4/24 | £1,184,980 ¹ |
| • Grant available for allocation as at 5 Sept 24 | £81,000 |
| • Potential project underspend for reallocation | £44,000 (tbc) |
| • Total projects assessed (excl. Historic Building) | 31 |
| ○ Under £10k (12) | |
| ○ Over £10k (19) | |
| • New projects supported (approved) | 23 |
| ○ Total grant awarded in Y4 | £500,766 |
| ○ Total project value | £790,913 |
| • Total active projects 24/25 | 63 |
| • Total number of applications deferred ² | 3 |
| • Total number of applications rejected | 6 |

Legacy and communications

6. The increased allocation for year 4 included an increase in both the administration and advice and guidance budgets. For some time, there has been the intention to create a legacy for FiPL in the Cotswolds and the increase in the advice and guidance allocation

¹ Figure has increased by £30k since 9 May as it takes into account various approved grant carry forward and other grant adjustments to projects active/approved in Year 3.

² Deferred projects may be resubmitted, and therefore also included in the supported (approved) figure

has enabled us to successfully recruit Maria Carter in May as FiPL Comms and Engagement Officer to lead on case studies, events and communicating successes.

7. FiPL projects have featured on CNL social media channels since August (X, Instagram and Facebook). These will continue every week as content develops to raise the profile of CNL across the Cotswolds and keep Defra updated through hashtag #FiPLFriday/#FIPL. Matt Elliot from Sandy Hill Farm has featured on short video and we intend to feature drone footage from 2022 showing FiPL-funded sites. We will also be uploading FiPL case studies to our website – primarily showcasing them in full after the website refresh (in November) but also using the content for newsletters, Cotswold Lion publication, impact reports, media news and events.
8. A series of 4 – 5 farm walk style site visits are being organised to FiPL-funded projects throughout the Autumn and Winter, organised by Maria Carter. The target audience are farmers and landowners. MPs and some local CNL Board members and relevant stakeholders will also be invited. We will also make sure all employees and key volunteers are aware of these events.
9. An event to mark the end and celebrate FiPL in the CNL is being organised. It will be a half-day event held at the RAU in early February. The event will feature our Board Chair, Brendan McCarthy and Jonty Brunyee, along with short presentation on 3 – 4 FiPL projects – all outlining the benefits and success of the funding for the Cotswolds. We hope to issue relevant news and reports to media around this time.

Programme conclusion and beyond

10. After four very successful years, a total CNL allocation of £4.9million and a grant budget of £4.4million, FIPL is to finish on 31 March 2025. We had gone from an annual Farming Forum to working with hundreds of the farming and land management community, have built a skilled team to work with applicants providing advice and guidance to develop applications and to deliver a programme of significant value. We were also concerned about year-end with reporting that runs well into May/early June. We, along with 43 other protected landscapes and Defra were facing a sudden cliff-edge.
11. Defra was very much aware of the value created by FiPL within Protected Landscapes and in May informed us that funding has been secured to extend Admin for 6 months, to September 2025, and Advice and Guidance for two years to March 2027. The grant element will still stop on March 31 2025.
12. In August we were notified of our FiPL allocations for both financial years, based on the Admin and Advice and Guidance allocations for 2023/24, £152,284 for 2025/26 and £119,170 for 26/27. In their notification Defra said:
 - *FiPL admin and technical adviser roles will initially focus on the post -delivery payments and annual reporting, including overall programme headlines and any further evidence gathering.*
 - *While the technical adviser role expectations are still to be agreed, we expect that they will be supporting wider objectives towards the agricultural transition, optimising the effectiveness of farmer and land manager uptake of ELMS aligned to Protected Landscapes' management plans to meet Farming and Countryside Programme (FCP) objectives and wider Defra targets.*
13. We are currently developing 2-3 scenarios of what is possible.

Supporting papers

There are no supporting papers.