

FARMING IN PROTECTED LANDSCAPES

Summary: To present a summary of progress of Year 2 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 and Caroline Regan, Programme Administrator

INTRODUCTION

1. Farming in Protected Landscapes (FiPL) programme launched on 1 July 2021. It is part of the Government's Agricultural Transition Plan, and runs until March 2024 when the full ELM scheme is due to start. Between launch on 1 July 2021 and the end of March 2022 the programme awarded £956,794 to 39 projects worth over £1.6 million. 19 projects completed during year 1 with the remaining 20 completing during years 2 and 3. See Appendix 'A' Part A.

Progress this year, 2022/23

2. The total grant budget for 2022/23 is £857,000 with £316,00 committed during year 1 to the 22 multi-year projects. Therefore, the budget available for grant allocation during 2022/23 is £541,000.
3. The Assessment Panel has met twice so far this year. 15 applications have been received and assessed by the panel of which 11 have been approved with a combined multi-annual grant total of £218,685 and a total project value of £383,045. See Appendix 'A' Part B. The grant available for the remainder of this year, prior to the next panel meeting on 7 September, is £354,642.
4. The panel next meets on 7 September to assess 6 applications with a combined multi-annual grant request of £205,127. One application under £5,000 has also been received and is being assessed by the Land Management Lead.
5. The application pipeline is still strong. Although we had hoped to have allocated a greater proportion of our Y2 budget by now, we are still very confident that most – if not all – of this will have been allocated before Christmas. Consequently, attention is now turning to our Y3 budget and developing the pipeline for this. We are still receiving a good volume of new enquiries, as well as continuing to follow leads that have in some cases been in development for many months.
6. Tasks relating to managing live agreements, administering claims and assessing completed works are now taking up a greater proportion of our time (as expected). So far things are running well with the processes we have put in place and we are meeting Defra's requirements in terms of monitoring and reporting.

7. Our hopes that FiPL would be able to stimulate more activity and new projects in the Upper Windrush are slowly materialising, with at least two significant applications for feasibility studies anticipated in October. These are expected to complement one another, with one looking specifically at floodplain meadow restoration and another concerned with nature recovery more generally.
8. Discussions have started with the Central Cotswolds Deer Management Group and the Forestry Commission about a potential application to support and expand coordinated deer management. This could include establishing a new Deer Management Group around the Birdlip/Cranham/Painswick area incorporating the Cotswolds Commons and Beechwoods National Nature Reserve.
9. People seeking support for environmentally beneficial grazing systems continues to be a strong theme (e.g. mobile handling equipment to enable extensive conservation grazing and regenerative agricultural systems), which is notably well aligned with our grassland objectives for landscape conservation and nature recovery. We plan on developing some content on this theme for our website, as a way of engaging more diverse audiences with FiPL's purpose and achievements, as well as that of the CNL. Similarly, we plan to develop new content on other 'strong' themes.
10. Although we are still generally very happy with levels of engagement and the diversity of applications, we are continuing to monitor areas where we are underdelivering - be that in terms of geography, farm type or outcomes delivered – and considering options to address any issues or opportunities that become apparent. For example, arts, culture and heritage outcomes are currently not very well represented in supported projects or the pipeline. Consequently, we have prioritised some time to consider how we might specifically target engagement and support the development of a project to address this.
11. To mark one year of FiPL, Lord Benyon recently wrote to all MPs with constituencies in Protected Landscapes and shared a publication highlighting the programme's achievements to date. We also circulated a summary of FiPL's impact in the Cotswolds with case studies. The programme is seen as a real success at Ministerial level, buoyed by lots of positive feedback from the farming community, especially regarding the provision of local advisors and the programme's flexible, farmer-led approach.

Supporting documents:

- Appendix 'A' Part A - multi-annual projects continuing in year 2
 Part B - FiPL projects approved to date in year 2.

A full list of year 1 projects is on the CNL website:

https://www.cotswoldsaonb.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2022/04/FiPL-Project-summaries-July-21-to-Mar-22_for-website.pdf