

Dartmoor Farming in Protected Landscapes

Local Assessment Panel

Wednesday 31st January 2024, Ullacombe Farm Barn

Attending: Will Dracup (*Will chaired the meeting in Russell's absence*), Layland Branfield, Peter Harper, Eamon Crowe, Laurie Phippen, Sarah Blyth, Dan Alford, Alison Clish-Green, John Howell, Christine Malseed, James Sharpe, (*Russell Ashford attended from the 3rd application – Forest of Dartmoor Molinia Trials*)

Dartmoor staff attending:

Simon Pryor, Rachel Cooper, Bea Dunscombe

Apologies:

Ann Willcocks, Shirley Mudge, (*Russell Ashford attended from the 3rd application – Forest of Dartmoor Molinia Trials*)

Applications over 10k

Bowden Farm Access

Presented by Bea Dunscombe

Summary of application:

The diversion of a bridleway and footpath to allow public access through a safer and more appealing woodland route.

Declarations of interest:

None.

Discussion points:

- The Panel requested for signage along the route to include the FiPL logo. The FiPL team should investigate this with input and advice from the Access and Recreation team.
- There was concern about a section of the new route that involves fencing a bridleway along a hedgerow – could this set a precedent for future applications regarding fencing to separate people from cattle? It was reasoned that this work has been approved by the Access and Recreation team at a 3m wide distance, which is wider than the original route and is the legal minimum width for public bridleways.
- The Panel flagged that this could encourage more enquiries about footpath/bridleway diversions. It was reasoned that this application already has a Diversion Order approved, so any future applicants would need to go through the formal consultation process to be issued with a Diversion Order, ahead of applying to FiPL.
- It was mentioned that new CSS Agreements might include work like this, so in the future this might not be possible through FiPL. Therefore, this project should perhaps be approved through FiPL in the interim.

- The Panel acknowledged that bridleways and footpaths are historic, and supporting their diversion is important if there is evidence of public benefit - we should be able to adjust routes and work together with farmers.

Scoring:

The scoring recommended by the FiPL team was confirmed:

	Score	Score after weighting
Project outcomes (Climate, Nature, People and Place) – 40%	6	2.4
Ability to deliver - 20%	8	1.6
Sustainability / legacy of projects - 20%	8	1.6
Value for Money - 20%	6	1.2
Total	28	6.8

Decision:

To approve this project subject to meeting the below conditions.

Condition(s):

- Signage being used on the new route should include the FiPL logo.
- The hedgerow that is being planted along the newly excavated route must be ‘above and beyond’ in terms of species used, i.e more than the specification for hedgerow planting (BN11) through CS.

For: 9

Against: 1

Abstained: 0

Farm Wilder

Presented by Simon Pryor

Summary of application:

Expansion of the Farm Wilder producer group to include an additional 6-10 farms. The project includes the development of Farm Regenerative Plans and the creation of a high-quality film promoting the environmental benefits that farmers bring to Dartmoor.

Declarations of interest:

Christine Malseed declared a conflict of interest - their farm has been in discussion in the past with Farm Wilder about marketing their produce through them. It was agreed that, because Christine is not currently committed or signed up to Farm Wilder, she had no commercial or direct interest so it was decided that she could participate in the discussion.

Discussion points:

- The Panel wanted clarification regarding the farmer’s that have expressed their ‘potential’ support, we need to make sure that these relationships are solidified.

- The Panel questioned how many farmers included on their list are grass fed? And how many are prepared to be grass fed from that list. What is the criteria for this?
- There was a query about the outcomes of this project – have these improvements been evidenced over the last 5 years? Is there tangible evidence from past work? It was confirmed that all farmers involved can back this up over the last 5 years with help from Natural England.
- There was a query regarding the Farm Wilder’s site map, which shows three Protected Landscapes, and not just Dartmoor. Why is the applicant coming to Dartmoor alone and not consulting other PLs? It was confirmed that this project is just for the Farm Wilder work on Dartmoor. This work is also linked to protected species on priority landscapes, and therefore this project will focus solely on Dartmoor. In turn, the film will focus on Dartmoor too.
- The Panel wanted assurance that habitat will at least be maintained, and preferably improved. It was confirmed that the plan involved habitat assessments, including monitoring biodiversity through passive sound calling, and more hands-on surveys too. In depth surveys will be included in this project, in order to establish added benefit.
- It was emphasised that surveys should be carried out beyond the next 5 years because we need to see 5 year improvements. The application needs to include this information, which it currently does not. More than just baseline surveys should be a requirement.
- The Panel endorsed the ambition of this project, but acknowledged that it will be a big step.
- Farm Wilder should inform Dartmoor farmers about the project and explain that it is in different areas across Dartmoor, full transparency is needed with Farmer’s who might be onboarded onto this project.

Scoring:

The scoring recommended by the FiPL team was confirmed:

	Score	Score after weighting
Project outcomes (Climate, Nature, People and Place) – 40%	6	2.4
Ability to deliver - 20%	8	1.6
Sustainability / legacy of projects - 20%	8	1.6
Value for Money - 20%	6	1.2
Total	28	6.8

Decision:

To approve this project subject to meeting the below conditions.

Condition(s):

- A 5 year assessment is required beyond the baseline survey, so that we can see evidence of the impact on wildlife and biodiversity.
- Clarification is required as to how standards are applied to farmers who are involved.
- Farm Wilder must approach other PLs, so that if they’re promoting as a wider scheme, they should also get other PLs involved.
- Dartmoor National Park must have access to the video when it’s finished, and this video needs to acknowledge FiPL’s contribution.
- A progress report must be produced, demonstrating how they’re getting on throughout the project timeline.

For: 8

Against: 1

Abstained: 1

Forest of Dartmoor Molinia Trials

Presented by Rachel Cooper

Summary of application:

A project working with the Forest of Dartmoor (FDCA) Commoners Association and Harford and Ugborough (HUG) Commoners Association, who are aiming to test and assess methods of controlling Molinia to increase biodiversity and carbon sequestration and reduce the risk of wildfires on Dartmoor Commons including SSSI's.

Declarations of interest:

John Howell declared a conflict of interest as he is the Deputy Chair of Harford and Ugborough Commoners Association

Discussion points:

- The Panel questioned dual funding with this project and were concerned about the compliance issues that need addressing. They explained that the commons will be receiving funding for this work through HLS, and therefore we need to be extremely cautious with this.
- The Panel felt strongly that an 80% intervention rate should be the maximum for this project. They requested that the FiPL team will need to check the dual funding issue – and explore more of a contribution from the commons involved.
- It was reasoned that this project is seen as capital works, which the commons haven't had access to in a long time. This project is trying out a new method, it has been trialled on a smaller scale and this project is a bigger scale - therefore it's not appropriate to ask commoners to contribute money to this trial at this stage.
- The Panel discussed how much Molinia a Soft Trak could feasibly cut? It was confirmed that based on past information it is possible to cover 3 ha a day. This is based on different treatments. E.g rolling Molinia requires 2-3 runs. Harrowing/flailing requires 1 run. These differences are all costed in the application.
- There was a discussion about the length of the project - will this 1 year trial be beneficial if we don't have assurance/commitment that it will be continued? What happens if the Molinia doesn't improve? Therefore, the Panel discussed the possibility of a 5 year plan, rather than a 1 year plan.
- The Panel were supportive of the proposal, and it was acknowledged that this was a positive starting point. But it was seen as a small part of a much wider issue.
- The Panel flagged an issue with these plans regarding bird nesting season - the work might not be able to start until September. Therefore, the applicant will be looking at starting in October, not March.
- It was emphasised that the sites need to be cut at the same time in order to have an even trial. It was agreed that the Ecologists should lead on this.
- The Panel felt that the Ecologists must design the monitoring methodology for this project before the work starts, and this can be used as baseline data. The FiPL team must see

evidence of this plan before work commences. This methodology will allow a fair comparison in the future.

(John Howell left the meeting for the vote)

Scoring:

The scoring recommended by the FiPL team was confirmed:

	Score	Score after weighting
Project outcomes (Climate, Nature, People and Place) – 40%	8	3.2
Ability to deliver - 20%	6	1.2
Sustainability / legacy of projects - 20%	8	1.6
Value for Money - 20%	8	1.6
Total		7.6

Decision:

To approve this project subject to meeting the below conditions.

Condition(s):

- This project should be funded at an 80% intervention rate
- The applicant must feedback on years 1, 3 and 5 years to show the long-term impact. It was recommended that the Dartmoor Hill Farm Project should run these so that the farming community are involved.
- The Ecologists must design the monitoring methodology for this project before the work starts. The FiPL team must see evidence of this plan before work commences.

For: 10

Against: 0

Abstained: 1

Forest of Dartmoor NoFence

Presented by Rachel Cooper

Summary of application:

Trialling No-Fence Collars for Molinia Management on North Dartmoor SSSI.

Declarations of interest:

None.

Discussion points:

- The Panel queried whether there is currently other cattle up there on the site? If the collars are used to exclude one farmers cattle, will another farmers cattle wander in? It was confirmed that this isn't a location that cattle want to be in due to the dense molinia, so other cattle straying into the site wouldn't be in issue.

- The Panel agreed that this could be a good opportunity for the applicant to continue maintain this remote, inhospitable, area of Dartmoor the traditional way. Without these farmers these commons would go to ruin. Therefore, shouldn't we endorse this trial?
- We need to explore past virtual fencing projects we've approved and ensure that there are no double trials. It was emphasised that the virtual fencing projects we've funded in the past are varied and different, we felt confident that we wouldn't be duplicating research.
- The Panel discussed the required demonstration days for virtual fencing applications, it was agreed that we need to ensure knowledge is exchanged at these events. Therefore, could we change this requirement to a 'Knowledge Exchange Group', where the FiPL team creates a group for all applicants who have received funding for Nofence collars through the programme, so that they can meet and share learnings informally. Any applicants with newly approved Nofence projects should be part of this group to promote peer-to-peer learning. Therefore, Educational Visits (ED1) should be removed from this application and replaced with the requirement for applicant participation in the 'Knowledge Exchange group'.

Scoring:

The scoring recommended by the FiPL team was confirmed:

FiPL team present: James, Rachel, Bea - 17.01.2024	Score	Score after weighting
Project outcomes (Climate, Nature, People and Place) – 40%	8	3.2
Ability to deliver - 20%	8	1.6
Sustainability / legacy of projects - 20%	8	1.6
Value for Money - 20%	8	1.6
Total		8

Decision:

To approve this project subject to meeting the below conditions.

Condition(s):

- Educational Visits (ED1) should be removed from this application and replaced with the requirement for applicant participation in the 'Knowledge Exchange group'.
- Applicant must store Nofence collars in a house and not a shed, seeing as this is a high value item.

For: 11

Against: 0

Abstained: 0

AOBs:

- ***Weigh bar:*** The FiPL team to sort out a page of guidelines so that we have an offer for this item - 50% (sole use) and 80% (shared use).
- ***Virtual Fencing intervention table discussion:*** The Panel discussed replacing 'Virtual Fencing demonstration days' with a 'Knowledge Exchange Group', where all applicants who have had Nofence projects approved through the FiPL programme should instead join the Group so that applicants can meet and learn from their experiences of using Virtual Fencing on

different locations across Dartmoor. Therefore, Bea should set this up – this can be something that applicants are added to in the future.

- **Great Gnats Head:** Discussion about Great Gnats Head in relation to the Virtual Fencing intervention table. FiPL team to encourage the applicant to re-apply in relation to this table to be transparent and consistent. Bea to update the table with the comments from LAP, send the final copy to them for sign off, then send to the applicant for Great Gnats Head.
- **Enquiry into a Host Farm FiPL application:** Discussion about a FiPL enquiry regarding a knowledge exchange event at a group of host farms on Dartmoor for educational purposes – FiPL team encouraged an application.

Date of next LAP meeting: Wednesday 13th March, Parke