

FARMING IN PROTECTED LANDSCAPES

Summary: To present a summary of progress on the FiPL programme year 5 (2025/26)

Recommendation: That the report is noted

Report by: Mark Connelly, Land Management Lead, Olivia Blackwell, Farming Engagement Lead.

Introduction

1. Following a formal announcement by Defra in March this year, The Farming in Protected Landscapes (FiPL) programme has been extended for a further year to March 2026.

2. The allocation for 2025/26 is:

Grant	£1,183,695
Admin and advice and Guidance	£185,389
Total	£1,369,084

Progress to date

3. There are significant challenges to the delivery of FiPL this year (see staff changes below), but the team have risen to the challenge. By the end of August the panel had met three times assessing 24 applications, approving 22 and deferring 2. One application was withdrawn having sought advice from Natural England and is now applying to Countryside Stewardship Higher Tier. Five applications requesting less than £10,000 have been assessed and approved by the Land Management Lead
4. A total of £793,542 has been allocated to 27 projects. The grant budget remaining for allocation is £390,152. The FiPL panel next meets on 17th September and the Executive Committee will be provided with a verbal update.
5. The project pipeline is healthy including enquiries from potential applicants new to FiPL.

Staff changes and recruitment

6. Recruitment following the loss of Scott at Easter ultimately proved unsuccessful. Consideration was given to re-advertising but, assuming success second time around, a new member of the team would probably not be starting until the end of October with five months of FiPL as a grant programme remaining. And whilst the Advice and Guidance roles had been previously extended to March 2027, there is no clarity from Defra as to what the role is expected to be. It was concluded that, due to the time remaining of FiPL as a grant programme and a lack of clarity about the role beyond March 2026, it was not worth re-advertising.

7. To fill the gap in the team on a temporary basis, discussions have taken place with the Farming and Wildlife Advisory Group (FWAG). It has been agreed that the FiPL team will identify 2-3 applicants for FWAG to support in preparing application as a trial with a view to FWAG being allocated further applicants to support. This will be funded from the money saved by not have a second Farming Engagement Officer.
8. In addition, Caroline Regan, Programme Support Officer, is leaving us at the end of September for a role in the newly established Western Forest. This is also a significant loss to the FiPL team and CNL. The Programme Support Officer is a core CNL role mostly supporting FiPL but also involved with supporting the delivery of other programmes such as the National Grid funded Landscape Enhancement Initiative. The job has been revised to that of Finance and Programme Manager and the recruitment process is currently live. The revised role is 60% finance management and 40% FiPL. In addition, Jonathan Rogers, CNL's Management Accountant, will be taking on some of Caroline's role and supporting the FiPL team.

Supporting papers:

There are no supporting papers