

## FARMING IN PROTECTED LANDSCAPES

**Summary:** To present a summary of year 4 (2024/25), an overview of the programme to date and a forward look to year 4 (2024/25)

**Recommendation:** That the report is noted

**Report by:** Mark Connelly, Land Management Lead, Caroline Regan, Programme Administrator, Olivia Blackwell, Farming Engagement Lead, Maria Carter, Communication and Engagement Officer and Ellie Robinson, Administrative Support.

### Introduction

1. This report provides a summary of the Farming in Protected landscapes (FiPL) scheme delivered by the CNL Board during 2024/25, an overview of FiPL since launching in July 2021, and a forward look to year 5 2025/26. 'FiPL at a glance' is attached as Appendix 'A'.

### FiPL year 4 – 2024/25

2. FiPL launched in July 2021 and was intended to be a three-year grant scheme. Due to its success, FiPL was extended for another year to March 2025 and came with an increase in budget. The total allocation for the CNL for 2024/25 was £2,010,940 with £1,766,746 available for allocation to projects and £244,194 for administration and advice and guidance. A total increase of £641,857. An additional £132,607 was successfully applied for from the centrally held Historic Building Restoration Grant.
3. Year 4 was a great success. The Panel had approved £1,153,942 of the year 4 budget prior to 31<sup>st</sup> March 2024, leaving £612,803 for allocation during 2024/25. This was undoubtedly a great help and included two of the largest grants to date; £239,225 towards FIBRA's industrial hemp processor and £250,000 for Jamie's Farm towards adapting a 17<sup>th</sup> century farmhouse for residential visits for vulnerable children and the creation of a kitchen garden and orchard.
4. During 2024/25 the panel met five times allocating £738,645 to 44 projects. In all during the year 86 projects were supported with a total approved grant of £1937,135<sup>1</sup> (of which £1,771,318 was claimed, assessed and approved for reimbursement) and a total project value of at least £4.46m<sup>2</sup>. Three projects had to cancel, including a large project just before Christmas, which meant they returned £63,278 to the grant fund. This was reallocated but other projects underspent or failed to complete some elements of their project resulting in money returning to the grant fund during March and too late to be reallocated. Therefore, after recharging 30% of the Land Management Lead's time to FiPL and making an additional £22,513 contribution to CNL overheads, total underspend for 2024/25 was £17,367, 0.86% of the budget.

<sup>1</sup> Underspend from Admin and Advice a Guidance is moved into the projects budget for allocation.

<sup>2</sup> Total project value is identified where the applicants add in additional funding from themselves or other funders. It does not include any additional costs for items with a Countryside Stewardship rate. Consequently, the Total Project Value figure is undervalued.

5. The FiPL team worked with a total of 86 active projects during the year, all completing by 31<sup>st</sup> March 2025 as this was expected to be the final year of FiPL as a grant scheme. A full list of projects supported during 2024/25 and previous years will soon be on the CNL website.
6. With 83 projects all completing by the end of March, year-end was very busy as all claims have to be checked and approved although payment can be made after 31<sup>st</sup> March. Alongside this, there were comprehensive reports to Defra that needed to be completed and sent by 8<sup>th</sup> April.

### **Communications and engagement**

7. Maria Carter joined the FiPL team at the end of May 2024 as FiPL Communications and Engagement Officer to develop social media communications, particularly for 'FiPL Fridays', organise a series of visits to farms that had received FiPL funding and to develop a legacy including case studies. Maria also led on the development and delivery of the celebration of FiPL in the CNL held at the Royal Agricultural University (RAU) on 5<sup>th</sup> February 2025.
8. Visits to four farms that had received FiPL funding took place between September and January. Each visit had between 10 and 15 attendees including local authority members and Charlie Maynard, MP for Witney.
9. 26 social media posts about FiPL projects have been shared on the CNL's platforms since May 2024. The CNL has 14,600 followers on Instagram and Facebook. The social media posts also supported Defra's 'FiPL Fridays'. Maria is developing a bank of posts that can be used after June focussing on telling stories from FiPL successes with vibrant images or videos.
10. To date three FiPL case studies have been published on the CNL website<sup>3</sup> and more are being developed including a case study on the two large wetland projects supported by FiPL.
11. Originally planned to be a celebration of FiPL at the conclusion of the scheme, an event was held at the RAU on 5<sup>th</sup> February 2025. 117 people attended from a wide variety of partners from across the CNL along with CNL Board members, FiPL Panel members, students from the RAU and the entire Defra FiPL team. The event was a great success.
12. To support the Event at the RAU, a booklet on the success of FiPL in the CNL was produced. The booklet is on the CNL website<sup>4</sup> and includes an overview of the scheme, case studies and trends. The booklet has also been sent to the CNL's MPs and local authority leaders and to Mary Creagh MP, Minister for Nature and Protected Landscapes.

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<sup>3</sup> <https://www.cotswolds-nl.org.uk/our-work/grants-and-funding/farming-in-protected-landscapes/>

<sup>4</sup> FiPL booklet: [https://www.cotswolds-nl.org.uk/wp/wp-content/uploads/2025/02/FiPL-impact-report-for-www\\_Jan2025.pdf](https://www.cotswolds-nl.org.uk/wp/wp-content/uploads/2025/02/FiPL-impact-report-for-www_Jan2025.pdf)

### FiPL extension, year 5 – 2025/26

13. There was a notification from Defra that FiPL was to be extended for a further year at the end of December, however, the formal announcement was not made until 25<sup>th</sup> February and confirmation of budget allocation on 14<sup>th</sup> March. 2024/25 was to be the last year of FiPL as a grant scheme and therefore the messaging to the farming and land managing community was based on the conclusion of FiPL, the project pipeline was being wound down and an end of FiPL celebratory event was being organised for February.
14. The extension of FiPL for a further year is great but we are starting the year from a fairly 'cool start' having prepared to conclude the scheme on 31<sup>st</sup> March. News, however, spread quickly and supported by a FiPL E-Newsletter just after Easter enquiries have quickly picked up, including potential applicants new to FiPL. The Assessment Panel meets on 22<sup>nd</sup> May and is expected to have around 10 applications to consider.
15. The allocation for 2025/26 is:

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

The allocation is less than that for 2024/25 but is equivalent to that for 2023/24. The budget for Admin and Advice and Guidance also remains the same as for 2023/24 making the budget for scheme delivery tight for 2025/26.

### FiPL Team changes

16. Scott Brown, Farming Engagement Lead, left us at Easter for a new role with Future Nature, Berks, Bucks and Oxfordshire Wildlife Trust's consultancy. Olivia Blackwell has moved up into the Farming Engagement Lead role and we are in the process of concluding the recruitment for a Farming Engagement Officer who will hopefully start with us in June. Both roles had previously had funding from Defra extended to March 2027.
17. Funding for FiPL admin had previously been extended to September 2025 but with the additional year as a grant scheme, both Caroline Regan, Programme Administrator and Ellie Robinson, Administrative Support have been extended to March 2026. We have also been able to extend Maria Carter for a further three months to 30<sup>th</sup> June 2025.

### **Supporting paper(s):**

Appendix 'A' - FiPL at a glance.