

Farming in Protected Landscapes programme

MALVERN HILLS AONB JOINT ADVISORY COMMITTEE

28 April 2023

FARMING IN PROTECTED LANDSCAPES UPDATE

Recommendation

The Committee is recommended to:

- a) Note the report;
- b) Raise and discuss any issues arising.

Background

1. Defra's Farming in Protected Landscapes (FiPL) programme was launched in early July 2021. The programme forms part of the Agricultural Transition Plan (published on 30 November 2020), with funding available for all National Parks and AONBs across England.
2. On the 31 January 2023, DEFRA announced that the FiPL Scheme will be extended for an additional year, meaning that FiPL now runs until March 2025.

Summary

3. Information on the Farming in Protected Landscapes Programme can be found at: <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/funding-for-farmers-in-protected-landscapes>
4. Guidance for applicants, tailored to the Malvern Hills AONB, can be found at: <https://www.malvernhillsaonb.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2021/10/Annex-F-Guidance-for-Applicants-211011.pdf>
5. Key points and developments regarding Farming in Protected Landscapes in the Malvern Hills AONB are as follows:

Timing

6. March 31 2023 marked the end of the second year of FiPL, with 21 months of the FiPL scheme now completed.

Funding and expenditure 2022/23

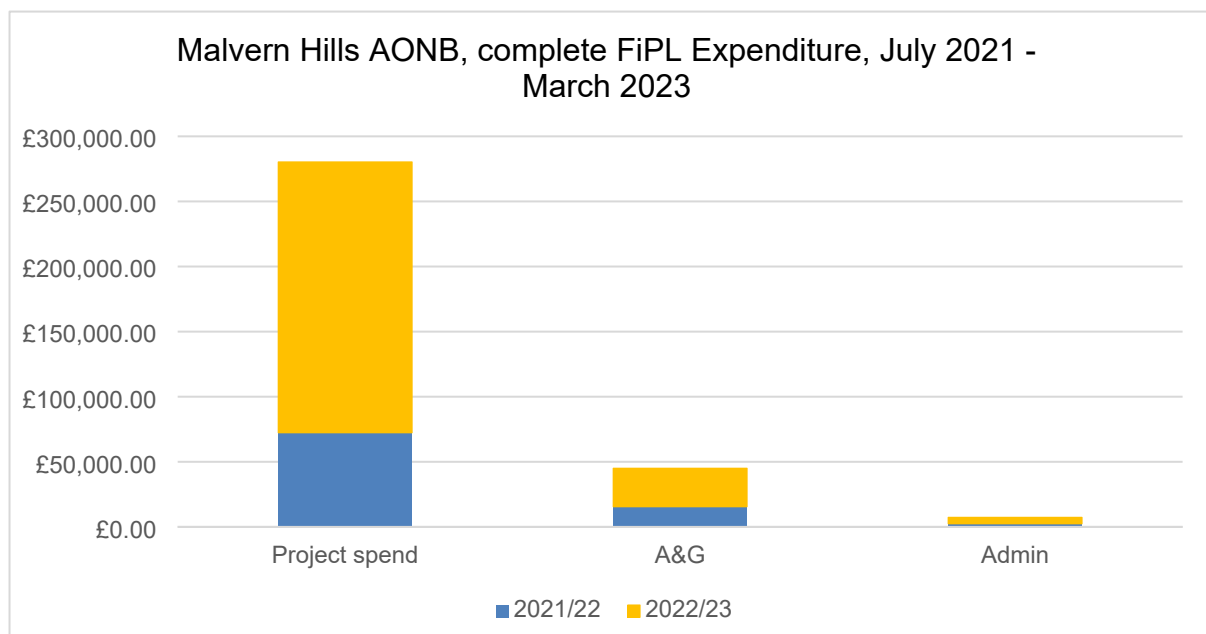
7. Following reprofiling of the FiPL budget in November 2021, the Malvern Hills AONB started the 2022/23 budget year with a budget of £236,538.

8. With FiPL Funding, if there is a Countryside Stewardship rate for a particular item (i.e., sheep fencing [FG2], Native Hedging [BN11]), then that rate must be used in the FiPL scheme. This is to reduce competition between FiPL and the Countryside Stewardship schemes, and to ensure both fairness and value for money.

9. On January 5, 2023, DEFRA announced that it was increasing the capital rates for Countryside Stewardship items and activities (CS rates for revenue items had previously been raised). All live FiPL projects were eligible for the increase in rates *where the items had not been ordered or contractors had not been booked*.

10. For the Malvern Hills AONB, of the 2022/23 projects, 12 projects were eligible for the increase in Stewardship rates for various items, with 2 projects receiving the increased rates in the 2023/24 financial year. The increase in Countryside Stewardship rates took the total budget to £243,739. Defra provided additional funding to meet the shortfall in the agreed budget.

11. At close of play on the 31 of March, a total of £242,878.74 has been spent of the FiPL scheme in the 2022/23 year. Of this, £208,134.33 was spent on projects, £29,680.95 was spent of A&G costs and £5,063 spent on Admin costs, including panel meetings. There was a £860.26 underspend.



Staffing

12. Staffing remains unchanged from that reported at the previous JAC Meeting.

Grant Assessment Panel

13. Emma Hammer (NFU) has replaced Sarah Faulkner (NFU) on the Local Assessment Panel. All other panel members remain the same since the start of the FiPL Scheme.

14. In 2022/23, the Local Assessment Panel met a total of 5 times, approving 10 FiPL projects.

Enquiries

15. There have been many enquires with regards to FiPL. Popularity of the scheme is increasing due to the increase in Countryside Stewardship rates, word of mouth and the fact that the landowner does not need to be registered with the RPA to be eligible for the scheme.

16. The AONB Unit is finding that some people significantly outside the AONB boundary are expressing interest, as are individuals whose potential works fall within domestic curtilage. Regrettably FiPL is not able to support either of these groups.

17. Moving forwards, the AONB Unit would like to target more on-farm applications and landowners and work on projects include Natural Flood Management.

Projects in 2022/23

18. In the 2022/23 Financial Year, a total of 20 projects were approved via either Paul Esrich (application below £5,000) or the Local Assessment Panel (application above £5,000). Of these, 8 projects are “two year” projects, and will be continued in the 2023/24 FY.

19. By March 31 2023, a total of 17 projects were completed, some of which had received project approval in the 2021/22 FY.

20. A summary table of FiPL projects can be found at Appendix 1 to this paper. Key statistics for works completed in the 2022/23 financial year are as follows:

- 0.75 Ha of Native Woodland Creation
- 1.8 Ha of woodland management
- 88 Native Hedgerow and Parkland Trees planted (plus guards)
- 470 Local and Traditional Fruit Trees planted (plus guards)
- 1.42 km of new native hedging planted
- 0.46 km native hedging gapped up/restored

- 0.17 km of hedgerows laid
- 1 pond created
- 4 ponds restored
- 4.45 Ha of Wildflower Meadows created/restored
- 280m of water pipe laid for livestock drinking facilities
- 0.9 Ha of invasive Laurel controlled and removed
- 1 Parkland Management Plan Completed
- 2000 wildflower plug plants sown/grown
- (Contribution to) a disabled toilet block
- (Contribution to) the Malvern Walks app with the addition of the Eastnor Deer Park Route
- (Contribution to) the restoration of the Donkey Shed, including a Bat Hibernaculum
- Used our Brush Seed Harvester to harvest seed from 3 wildflower meadows.
- This work has taken place over a total of 90 Ha
- Engaged with 25 landowners (Projects approved over both years, but completed in 2022/23)
- Supported 15 volunteer opportunities
- Worked with key stakeholders include Herefordshire Country Council, Worcestershire County Council, Malvern Hills Trust, Colwall Orchard Group and Worcestershire Wildlife Trust

Appendix 1 – Table of Farming in Protected Landscapes Table (Website only)

County Council Contact Points

County Council: 01905 763763

Worcestershire Hub: 01905 765765

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Specific Contact Points for this report

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