



<u>Committee and Date</u> Shropshire Hills AONB Partnership 19 th October 2021	<u>Item</u> 5
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UPDATE ON FARMING IN PROTECTED LANDSCAPES PROGRAMME AND DEVELOPMENT OF ENVIRONMENTAL LAND MANAGEMENT (ELM)

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Summary

This paper updates members on progress with the Farming in Protected Landscapes programme in the Shropshire Hills AONB.

Recommendation

The Partnership is recommended to note progress with the programme and consider how they as members and their organisations can help support good uptake and applications.

Background

The Farming in Protected Landscapes programme was launched nationally on 1st July 2021. The programme is now well under way in the Shropshire Hills with 4 project grants approved.

Alison Jones is our Farming in Protected Landscapes Adviser post, and will be the main point of contact and case officer for most applicants/projects. Other team members will support the programme, in line with their normal roles:

- Mike Kelly, Cath Landles & Nigel McDonald – advice and input, 'case officer' for particular relevant projects, pro-active engagement where possible
- Alison Kay – admin and finance
- Joy Howells – programme management
- Steph Hayes – promotion
- Phil Holden – management, support, delegated decisions and Panel membership

A Local Assessment Panel was appointed with the required range of representation, including a good number of farmers:

Dave Cragg - Natural England

Cath Edwards - Shropshire Wildlife Trust

James Evans - farmer, Partridge Farm, Linley Estate and other interests

Phil Holden - Shropshire Hills AONB Partnership team

Lizzie Hulton-Harrop - farmer, Pollardine Farm, Gatten and other interests

Graham Price - farmer, Bockleton House, Stoke St Milborough

Matt Sankey - farmer, Upper Stitt, Ratlinghope

Kathryn Williams - farmer, upper Clun valley and land agent

Fiona Williams - family farm in upper Clun valley and lecturer at University of Chester

James Williamson - Shropshire Hills AONB Partnership Chair (elected Chair of Panel)

These members will be joined where necessary for considering particular applications by:
Pete Banford - Shropshire Council Outdoor Partnerships (recreation and 'people' theme)
Reps of Environment Agency, Historic England and Forestry Commission England.

The Panel held an induction/briefing meeting on 9th August and the first decision making meeting on 5th October.

Two webinars have been held for potential applicants in the Shropshire Hills – on 10th August for farmers and on 24th August for agents. The first was attended by 34 farmers, and the second by 25 people.

We are working with existing farmer clusters and groups, such as the Upper Clun Facilitation Fund group and the Upper Onny Farmers group. We will endeavour over the life of the programme to work proactively to encourage applications in under-represented areas both in terms of the themes of the programme and the geography of the AONB.

The grants awarded so far are:

Pollardine Farm: Training courses for transition to regenerative agriculture

The objective of this project is training to enable the landowners to transition to a system of Holistic Management, enabling the owners to regenerate soil and increase biodiversity, while improving profitability and quality of life; to learn how to use livestock to achieve environmental objectives and be equipped to share this knowledge with other farmers/landowners. Grant £2,509.50 (at 70%).

The Graig Farm for work at The Maice:

The objective of the project is to divide a 15ha field to better enable managed rotational grazing and to enable better grazing management and extension of two Local Wildlife Sites. This project will rejuvenate and restore 440m of currently unfenced ancient hedgerow through coppicing, gapping up, hedgerow tree planting and fencing as well as new stock fencing to encourage expansion of species-rich Local Wildlife sites. Grant £18,961.80 (at 100%, of current Countryside Stewardship rates).

Powkesmore Farm Soil Improvement Project:

The objective of the project is to purchase a direct drill in order to improve the overall soil health across the farm. This will deliver a number of benefits including improved soil structure and health, improved infiltration and drainage, increase in beneficial invertebrates and earthworms, increased soil organic matter, reduced soil erosion and improved carbon sequestration. Grant £18,840 (at 40%).

Blackhurst Farm for Blackhurst Highland Beef project:

The objective of this project is to develop and expand the applicant's Highland/Shorthorn Beef business, selling meat from animals reared on the Lawley hill and surrounds, carrying out a conservation grazing function on this wildlife-rich iconic local hill which is part Local Wildlife Site. The work includes alterations to an existing farm building - to house cold store, sorting area and customer facing area for collection of beef boxes; purchase and installation of cold store, kitchen facilities, display refrigerator etc; and purchase of refrigerated trailer – to enable safe transport of meat to and from farm, abattoir, butcher, farmers' markets. Grant £24,241 (at 60%).

Around 80 enquiries have been made from potential applicants, and a number of projects are now developing applications.

We are requesting Defra to reprofile a large proportion of the Year 1 allocation into years 2 and 3.

Phil Holden is sitting as the national AONB representative on Defra's Steering Group for the programme evaluation.

Environmental Land Management schemes

The Farming in Protected Landscapes programme is not part of ELM, but sits alongside it. The transition to ELM is however a key part of the context of the programme and its rationale. Some members of the Partnership will be closely involved with ELM development, and others not. Some slides will be talked through briefly at the meeting. Background information is available at <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/environmental-land-management-schemes-overview/environmental-land-management-scheme-overview>.

List of Background Papers Update to informal AONB Partnership meeting 14 th July 2021, agenda item 3 Guidance for Applicants, Local Priorities and sample application form at https://www.shropshirehillsaonb.co.uk/help-to-look-after/farming-in-protected-landscapes .
Human Rights Act Appraisal The information in this report is compatible with the Human Rights Act 1998.
Environmental Appraisal The recommendation in this paper will contribute to the conservation of protected landscapes.
Risk Management Appraisal Risk management has been appraised as part of the considerations of this report.
Community / Consultations Appraisal The topics raised in this paper have been the subject of earlier consultations with Partnership members.
Appendices None