

AM 599-21

NEW FOREST NATIONAL PARK AUTHORITY

AUTHORITY MEETING – 1 July 2021

Farming in Protected Landscapes Programme

Report by: Paul Walton, Head of Environment and Rural Economy

Summary:

The Farming in Protected Landscapes Programme is part of the England Agricultural Transition Plan 2021 to 2024. The Defra funded programme is a specific and time limited package to help farmers adapt during the transition. It aims to support farmers and land managers in England's Protected Landscapes – National Parks and AONBs – to deliver environmental outcomes, lay the groundwork for the Environmental Land Management scheme, and contribute towards the delivery of recommendations in the Glover Review of National Landscapes.

The programme will be open to all farmers, land managers and other organisations applying in collaboration with one or more farmers/land managers, whose land is within the National Park boundary. All applicants will need to demonstrate that they will meet the objectives of the programme and the objectives of the consultation draft of the New Forest National Park Partnership Plan.

The programme is due to launch on 1st July 2021, with the application window open until 31st January 2022. The programme falls within the 'Nature Recovery – Net Zero with Nature' section of the NPA's work programme as part of the transition to Environmental Land Management.

1. The Farming in Protected Landscapes Programme

The programme has been developed by Defra and the final details of the programme are yet to be published. It will run from 2021 to 2024 and aims to help Protected Landscapes teams work with farmers and land managers to deliver more for:

- Climate – supporting the delivery of net zero through nature and nature-based solutions to help communities mitigate and adapt to climate change
- Nature – supporting their leading role in the delivery of the Nature Recovery Network and achieving the Government's commitment to protect 30% of land by 2030
- People – providing a natural health service that will improve the nation's public health and wellbeing through increased access to nature across all parts of society, as part of our green recovery

- Place – supporting these landscapes as centres of excellence and green innovation that are flourishing places to live and work, each with a strong identity and cultural heritage, and high recognition as attractive visitor destinations.

It will work alongside existing schemes such as Higher Level Stewardship and Countryside Stewardship. In the longer term the Environmental Land Management programme will be the main vehicle through which this work is delivered.

Funding allocation

There will be approximately £50m of funding overall over the three years and specific amounts have been allocated to each Protected Landscape, based on a set formula.

The provisional allocation for the New Forest National Park across the three year period is £621,273, with £259,685 for Yr1, 2021/22. Of this amount, in Year 1 we will be able to spend a maximum of £20,709 on “administration” and a maximum of £35,205 on “advice and guidance”.

The working principle is that we will receive our allocation quarterly in advance, but in 21/22 the budget will be paid in thirds in July, October, and January.

Programme delivery

Advice and guidance

We anticipate at this stage it will not be necessary to recruit additional advisers as the Land Advice team has the capacity to manage this programme and are known and trusted by many of the landowners and commoners. The funding support available will help secure their roles for the 3 years of the programme.

Administration

We are currently assessing whether we need to recruit additional administrative support. We have significant experience from running the Sustainable Development Fund and OPOF Landscape Partnership Scheme and will review the resource requirement after the first six months of the programme.

We will have to report on progress to Defra at the following intervals:

- Monthly: On finance and project tracking.
- Quarterly: Providing a narrative case study and forward look.
- Annually: A ‘Lessons Identified’ process, to help improve the programme year-on-year.

Local Assessment Panel

It is anticipated on the basis of the information received from Defra to date that applications to the programme for a value above £5000 will be considered by a Local Assessment Panel, of 6-8 people who will meet at least every 8 weeks to consider batches of applications (with applications below £5000 to be determined by officers according to the scheme of delegation, against the criteria of the programme, and to be reported to the Panel).

The current Defra guidance indicates that the panel should consist of representatives from:

- the National Park Authority
- Natural England
- the farming and land management community (several members)
- organisations with a focus on nature recovery, rural development, public access/engagement and existing agri-environment support and provision.

Panel members will also be required to adhere to the Nolan Principles of conduct in public office.

It should be noted that further clarification is needed from Defra as to the appointment and role of this Panel. The Panel cannot itself be a decision making body in accordance with local government law because of its membership makeup, and it seems likely therefore that the intention will be for the panel to scrutinise applications and make recommendations to the Authority's officers, who will make the final decisions on applications. Members are accordingly asked to delegate the decision making authority on applications under £5000 to the Chief Executive, together with the authority to make decisions on applications with a greater value taking into account the views of the Local Assessment Panel.

The authority to select and appoint the Local Assessment Panel cannot be delegated to officers and members are therefore asked to consider and agree at the meeting which individuals and organisations should be on the Local Assessment Panel.

Recommendation:

That:

- (i) members affirm the Authority's support for the Farming in Protected Landscapes programme; and**
- (ii) authority be delegated to the Chief Executive to take all action as necessary to implement the scheme in line with the criteria to be issued by Defra; and**
- (iii) that members approve the make up of the Local Assessment Panel for recruitment, with appointments to be ratified at the Authority meeting on 19 August; and**
- (iv) authority be delegated to the Chief Executive to make decisions on applications received under the programme, having regard to the recommendations of the Local Assessment Panel where necessary under the final rules of the programme (which is anticipated to apply to applications above £5000).**

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