

Farming in Protected Landscapes Programme Case Study: North Hole Farm

An overview of the project

A brief background to the farm: the farmers are an organic dairy farm with over 103 hectares of farmland with additional tenanted field parcels located close to their holding.

Background about the project: the farmers were at a bit of a crossroads in their decision-making processes and asked the Farming in Protected Landscapes Programme for some assistance. The farmers were interested in advice on farm infrastructure, drainage & attenuation ponds alongside providing habitat for hares and skylarks through grassland and soils management. The North Devon AONB FiPL Officer identified the opportunity to create ponds, assist in water quality improvements through key farm infrastructure and fencing back from the watercourses to create rough ground for skylarks and nesting birds alongside pollinators. The North Devon AONB knew that the area was a desirable location to support unimproved grassland habitat.

Facts on funding the project: The Farming in Protected Landscapes Grant awarded: £19,311.56 in year 2 (2022/23) and £6,932.81 in year 3 (2023/24). Other sources of funding: landowners own match for items of which their actual costs were above the awarded Countryside Stewardship rate amount and also towards those items which required quotations and were awarded a percentage funding contribution towards the works.

Objectives

The project seeks to fulfil various objectives over two years of the programme.

- **Year 2:** to take a small area of land out of management to increase rough grassland abundance on farm for skylarks and pollinators; erect fencing with wooden field gates to protect new trees and the watercourse from livestock ingress and possible poaching; install troughs and water pipework to provide alternative cattle drinking access, rather than drinking from the stream and reducing pollutants with the assistance of two solar pumps, providing sustainable and reliable drinking water. Yard/track works which involve: the installation of cross drains, a baffle ditch system accompanied by concrete rings, underground pipework in the yard connecting to a bespoke sediment tank and soakaway, surrounded by a concreted apron within the yard, to slow the flow and improve local water quality by separating clean and dirty waters from mixing within the yard. The planting of a hedgerow would increase the connectivity of the landscape for both cultural value and biodiversity benefits, carbon capture and also support reductions in flood risk to downstream local communities and local bathing water.
- **Year 3:** to create an offline attenuation system with scrape for wildlife and flood mitigation benefits, water quality and wider catchment drought resilience. Planting trees with suitable protection and installing leaky woody dams to sequester carbon, provide flood, water quality and wildlife benefits respectively.

Activities

The activities undertaken under this project and funded by FiPL were:

- **Year 2 (22/23)** RP5: Cross drains x 5, Baffle ditch x 1, Concrete rings x 2, RP13: Yard underground drainage pipework x 13m, Bespoke sediment tank x 1, Soakaway x 1, RP15: Concrete yard renewal x 95m², FG2: Sheep netting x 337m, FG12: Wooden field gate x 5, GS1: Take small areas out of management x 0.28ha, LV7: Livestock troughs x 3, LV8: Pipework associated with Livestock Troughs x 101m, Solar Pump x 2, BN11: Planting new hedges x 115m.
- **Year 3 (23/24)** Offline Attenuation System, with inlet and outlet swales and leaky outlet with associated pipework and scrape. TE4: Supply and plant tree x 20, TE5: Supplementary use of individual tree guards x 20, RP32: Small leaky woody dam x 6

How the activities were delivered: resulting from a one-to-one site visit with the FiPL Officer and in receipt of a detailed farm advisory report alongside follow up supporting conversations, the farmer was in the position to be able to either obtain quotations or undertake the works themselves where required. The farmer spent time working with the Protected Landscapes Officer to understand their habitats on their farm and how they may be enhanced for the themes Nature, Climate and Place.

Outcomes

The land is continuing to be grazed with conservation in mind with support from the new water supplies, hedgerow and linking of riparian corridors, protected from stock not being permitted into the watercourse. The yard/ track measures are continuing to function as they were intended with minimal maintenance, to mitigate against surface water contamination to the nearby watercourse and the cross drains continue to slow/divert track runoff into the baffle ditch before it enters the yard. At the end of year three, it is proposed that wildlife will colonise the offline attenuation system with scrape as a refugia and facilitating the temporary storage of river flows in times of flood, mitigating the effects of flooding to the downstream communities. The leaky log dams would also be active in times of high flow events and allow for floodplain reconnection, providing its own wet habitat environment.

The landowners are continuing to work with nature on farm by looking into a new Countryside Stewardship application and towards the new ELMS opportunities.

Learnings

Be conscious of possible alterations to costings for larger infrastructure / yard works between time of application submission and award of grant funds due to materials price rises.

Partnership working with the local Catchment Sensitive Farming Officer, compiling a new mid-tier application for the farm, and also alongside Bumblebee Conservation Trust, with relation to species rich grassland creation, enabled the FiPL project to bring together multiple elements for the farms benefit and delivery to run smoothly alongside the landowners existing Countryside Stewardship agreement too and compounding biodiversity benefits.

As the tenanted land was under different ownership, the landowner's permissions and agreement to the erection of fencing, gateway and tree planting on their property needed to be sort to accompany their FiPL application.

Full planning permission for the creation of the attenuation pond needed to be sort from North Devon Council prior to implementation, as this work was not considered to be agricultural works under Annex E or sit under permitted development. This requirement caused delays to the project and led to the transference of the capital works to be completed in FiPL year 2023 – 2024, instead of year 2022 – 2023. Additional costs to the landowner were incurred as the FiPL Programme was not in the position to assist financially with the cost of either the pre-application or the full application.

Photos

Watercourse Fencing



Hedgerow

