

The Dorset Review

Spring 2025 News Issue 124

In this issue

- 'Net Zero Homes. Can Dorset Do It?' Planning Conference
- The Future for Dark Skies in Dorset
- The Great Big Dorset Hedge project – A Positive Outlook
- The Barbara Vance Countryside Prize



The countryside charity
Dorset



- 2–3 Chair's Report
- 3 Nature's Blessings Poem
- 4 Planning Conference 2025
- 5 Barbary Vance Countryside Prize
- 6 North Dorset Group
- 7 Does the Government hate the Countryside?
- 8 Purbeck and Poole Group
- 9 Dorset COP 2024 at Bournemouth University
- 10 West Dorset Group
- 11 How to Respond to Planning Applications Guide
- 11 Litter Campaigns
- 12 Sherborne and District Society
- 13 The Great Big Dorset Hedge – A Positive Outlook
- 14–15 The Future for Dark Skies in Dorset
- 16–17 St Basil's mysterious, extraordinary font
- 18–19 Lyscombe Nature Reserve – Making Space for Nature
- 19 The River Char Charter
- 20–21 CPRE Annual Report & Accounts
- 22 CPRE Recent Publications
- 23 Dorset CPRE Membership
- 24 Contacts

The contents of this publication are intended as guidance and general interest. It does not constitute legal advice and can be no substitute for considered advice on specific problems. Although every effort has been made to ensure the accuracy of the information printed in this publication, Dorset CPRE cannot accept liability for errors and omissions. The views expressed in this publication are not necessarily those of CPRE.



Front Cover image – Orchids on Hambledon Hill in the Blackmore Vale, taken by Rupert Hardy.

The AGM

For our AGM in November, we invited Roger Morgan-Grenville to be our guest speaker. Roger was originally planning to talk to us about the new GCSE in Natural History which was due to be introduced in schools in September 2025. However, this was not to be. The incoming government had decided not to follow through with the Department of Education's 2022 recommendation and the GCSE was promptly dropped.

Instead, Roger gave a fascinating talk on the work of Curlew Action of which he is Chair of Trustees. He started by describing the threats facing the eight extant species of curlew as well as mentioning the slender-billed curlew (*Numenius tenuirostris*) which has not been seen since 1995. He then went on to describe the work of Curlew Action with respect to the ecology of the familiar Eurasian curlew (*Numenius arquata*) and their efforts to conserve the species.

However, we are pleased to see that, as of 21st March 2025, the Department for Education has confirmed again plans to move ahead with the GCSE Natural History qualification, in a Parliamentary Question. The qualification will be one of the first new GCSEs introduced in over a decade. A Review Group is expecting to publish its final report with recommendations in autumn 2025.

Welcome New Trustees

At the AGM new Trustees were elected to office.

Alex Rottenburg brings significant expertise in managing business investments which means he will be a useful collaborator for our Hon. Treasurer, Bob Bowmer.

Sandra Brown has returned to the Board of Trustees bringing with her a wealth of knowledge and experience of volunteering with various environmental charities.

Having been elected, **David Holmes** subsequently discovered that he was not able to devote sufficient time to the role and has resigned. We wish him well for the future.

Government initiatives

As stated above, one tries to remain apolitical but by necessity one has to be objective and tell it as it is.

The Government's stated commitment to growth seems to be predicated on building major infrastructure projects. Particularly eye catching is the stated aim to build 1.5 million houses during this parliament. We are all well aware that there are insufficient truly affordable housing in our existing towns and villages. Last summer's Dorset CPRE planning conference: *Dorset's Affordable Housing Crisis?* gave testament to this. However, there is a danger with a policy that seems to rely on building for building's sake that we end up with the wrong houses in the wrong areas which does nothing to help the young and disadvantaged.

A particular manifestation of this emphasis on infrastructure is the recent approval of the waste Incinerator at Portland Port despite the views of Dorset Council, strongly voiced local opinion, and even the Sailing Academy.

Another perceived threat to local democracy is the imposition of a devolved model of local government which will be headed up by regionally elected mayors. In November, Wiltshire, Dorset and Somerset Councils, and later joined by BCP Council, submitted a revised Expression of Interest to central government for the Heart of Wessex devolution deal. Although not picked for the fast-track process which commenced early in 2025, our region is likely to be in the second tranche with financial incentives being withheld if counties choose not to join. Many questions remain. For instance, where will the mayor be based? The likelihood will surely be in one of the larger urban centres which leads one to ponder how sympathetic they are likely to be to the rural voice.

As a response to this initiative, I have reached out to the chairs of Somerset CPRE (Hugh Williams) and Wiltshire CPRE (Anne Henshaw). We do not believe that we should lose the autonomy of our county branches. However, we will need to have an understanding to cooperate where regional infrastructure projects that cross traditional boundaries are planned such as motorways, new towns, etc.

As always, we keep a watching brief.

From across the pond

Only a matter of a few weeks ago, it would have been hard to imagine that decisions made in Washington would have any direct impact on our Branch. However, the turbulence in the markets has a great potential to disrupt and damage our investments. Thankfully we have a very experienced treasurer in Bob Bowmer, who has been actively managing our accounts. On behalf of our Trustees, I wish to pass on our thanks to Bob for his diligence during a difficult time.

Sadly, that is not the only issue we are likely to face during Donald Trump's presidency. A climate change denier, who's call to arms is "Drill, baby, drill" is, quite frankly, chilling (no pun intended). We, as a species will only survive the climate and biodiversity crises if we pull together and put the environment front and centre of every decision.

Dorset Wildlife Trust

Last year, the Trustees decided we should reach out to Dorset Wildlife Trust (DWT). As two Dorset-wide voluntary organisations with nature at their heart, we have many similar aims, and where these overlap, there may be opportunities to collaborate.

On 14th March, representatives of our Branch visited Lyscombe, DWT's newest large-scale acquisition. The purchase of Lyscombe was made possible through funding from Natural England's National Nature Reserves programme, and planned Nutrient Mitigation Credit Scheme, alongside generous donations from DWT members and supporters.

Members of Dorset CPRE had raised some concerns about the implications for the wider landscape as the Credit Scheme allows developers to purchase such credits to offset the nitrogenous waste from new houses built in the Poole Harbour catchment. After a thorough discussion of the issues, we were reassured that purchasing nutrient credits did not of itself guarantee that any particular site would be developed: all existing checks and balances would need to be satisfied. On the other hand, the gains for wildlife in Lyscombe with its restorative farming model, are huge. I would heartily recommend a visit to the reserve, 10 miles north-east of Dorchester, to see their work in progress.

2025 Planning Conference: 'Net Zero Homes. Can Dorset do it?'

Finally, I'd like to thank our Planning Group (Chaired by Andrew Procter and administered by Planning Advisor Heidi Poole) for organising this important event.

Following our successful conference in 2024, we are hosting this online conference on 4th June, starting at 6:30pm. It will explore the potential for achieving zero carbon construction in Dorset and the policy changes and incentives needed to support innovation in the industry. See page 4 for more details.

I would recommend that anyone with an interest in planning should attend this vital online event.

Neil Matthews
Chair of Trustees

Nature's Blessings



How often do I walk among the fields about this place,
How many times this solitude will ease life's manic race,
For here such voices speak to me as many do not hear,
And tell of nature's healing fount I find is ever near.

I hear it in the murmurs of the waters sliding by,
Within the dark and silent stream and blackbirds raucous cry
That warns of strangers passing though I tread with every care,
God's creatures must alert remain as man 'oft threatens there.

Along the margins of each plot take time to look and see,
Do not presume there nothing dwells for certain they will be
With caution going on their ways, and quiet will return
To meet with furtive fox or wren if this sure truth we learn.

Since if I sit and make no sound or movement to alarm,
And if those others can then see I do not mean them harm,
Perhaps on odd occasion there may come within my view,
Acquaintance born of patience given there to very few.

For are they all not equals in this world of rushing fools,
Who see no further than today or how to bend the rules
That safeguards all around us in their ignorance for gain,
Since man can overawe all else with consequences plain.

So here I pause, in knowing that, I draw this breath in deep,
And let these sylvan blessings flow within me as they seep
To meld with every fibre of my being so their balm
Absolves each fevered nuance leaving me with simple calm.

John Seymour

Thurs. 30.5.19.
6.50 – 8.05 pm.

John is based in Dewlish, Dorset, and won an International Poetry Award in 2021.

Planning Conference 2025

'Net Zero Homes'. Can Dorset Do It?

Online, on Wednesday 4th June

6:30 – 9:00 pm

Carbon emissions from the built environment contribute to 39% to global energy related carbon emissions*. If the UK is to meet the climate goal of achieving Net Zero by 2050, it is essential that our homes are designed to be not only net zero in terms of operational energy, but also their embodied carbon.

Our planning conference this year looks at how Dorset can rise to the challenge of ensuring that all new homes meet net zero. The event will bring together industry experts, policy makers, developers and academics to discuss the latest innovations and challenges in zero carbon sustainable housing.

Through the conference we will be showcasing pioneering examples of net zero development and answering the following questions:-

- What measures are needed to ensure that Dorset's new homes meet net zero?
- What policy changes and incentives are needed to support innovation in the industry?
- How must construction methods change to reduce carbon emissions?
- Is the future modular factory built homes?

To find out the answers to these questions and many more, we invite you to attend our free online conference on **Wednesday 4th June** chaired by Jenny Jones, Baroness Jones of Moultescombe, Green Party Member of the House of Lords.

Speakers include:

- Andrew Procter, Dorset CPRE Planning Group Chair
- Dr Will Hawkins, Lecturer in Structural Engineering Design, Centre for Sustainable Energy Systems Team, University of Bath
- Sam Goss, Founding Director, Barefoot Architects Ltd
- Ian Pritchett, Co-Founder & Innovation Director, Greencore Homes

Provisional Programme & Timetable

6:30pm	Kate Adie – Welcome and introduction
6:40pm	Jenny Jones – Chair
6:50pm	Andrew Procter – Making the case for Zero Carbon in Dorset
7:10pm	Dr Will Hawkins – Pioneering Net Zero Carbon Construction Planning Policy in B&NES (Bath & North East Somerset Council)
7:30pm	Sam Goss – Bridport Cohousing: A Place to Grow
8:00pm	Tea Break
8:10pm	Ian Pritchett – Delivering “better than Zero Carbon” homes now
8:30pm	Q&A Session

(* World Green Building Council. Bringing embodied carbon up front. <https://worldgbc.org/climate-action/embodied-carbon/>)

To book for the conference and find the latest information, please visit the events page on our website or e-mail info@dorset-cpre.org.uk to register your interest.

Andrew Procter
Planning Group Chair

Land Use Framework for England

At the end of January the Government released a consultation on a Land Use Framework (LUF) for England. CPRE has been calling for a LUF for some time. A Framework is much needed in order to make joined up land use decisions, as we do not have enough land to fulfil all the functions that we require from it for example food production, environmental commitments, energy, natural habitats, housing and more.

If done well, the new framework could help us build new homes and infrastructure in the most suitable and strategic locations, support nature's recovery, and help tackle the climate crisis. How it operates is critical. Land is critical to economic growth, but our finite land should not needlessly be scarified in the name of growth. We discussed the LUF at our March and April Planning Group Meetings and submitted a response before the 25th April deadline. A big thank you to all our hard-working volunteers for their contribution. Our responses to consultations are posted on the Dorset CPRE website.



Parents and Children in North Winterborne Valley

photo: Rupert Hardy

Barbara Vance Countryside Prize

In our Autumn 2024 Magazine we featured school projects from Damers First School (Nature Information Board) and Charmouth Primary School (Reinstated School Pond) that had received funding of up to £250 from the 'Barbara Vance Countryside Prize'. The funding is for wildlife related projects with evidence of outdoor learning and introducing children to the countryside/rural life. Please get in touch if you know of a school who is undertaking a project that fits our criteria.

Mr Gary Spracklen, Headteacher at The Prince of Wales School, sent us this update on their project.

Growing Minds: Life in Our Vegetable Plot and Wildlife Area

At The Prince of Wales School, our vegetable plot and wildlife area continue to flourish, offering rich opportunities for learning, wellbeing and a growing connection with the natural world.

Thanks to a generous grant from Dorset CPRE, we've been able to expand our provision- investing in tools and sensory planting to make the area more accessible and engaging for all our pupils. This support has been transformative, helping us bring our vision of an inclusive, hands-on outdoor classroom to life.

This spring, our pupils have been busy planting broad beans, spinach, garlic and rosemary- taking responsibility for nurturing these crops and monitoring their growth. In our wildlife area, the Eco Team have helped create a 'dead hedge' and sow wildflower seeds, while bird feeders attract a flurry of feathered visitors for pupils to spot and identify.

This term, the garden is becoming a space for reflection and remembrance as we prepare to mark the 80th Anniversary of VE Day. As part of a lesson on Remembrance, children learnt about its significance while making seed balls filled with red poppy seeds. These will be scattered around the Anderson shelter in our WW2 garden, a peaceful tribute we hope will bloom brightly in the coming months.

Our outdoor learning links seamlessly with curriculum areas such as Science, History, and Art, and helps our children build resilience, empathy and a lifelong appreciation for nature.

We remain deeply grateful to our school community and supporters whose time, donations and encouragement continue to help these spaces grow, not just in what they produce, but in the joy, curiosity and care they inspire.



Creating a Dead Hedge



Radishes in Vegetable patch



Making Poppy Balls



North Dorset Group



Effect of the Government's Excessive Housing Targets

As usual we have been fighting many inappropriate housing developments, but it has been quieter than usual. This may surprise those who are aware of the government's excessive new housing targets. However, Dorset's current housing land supply (HLS) is in excess of the previous five years housing land supply target, and is being honoured for now, but this will expire in October. From then it is expected that HLS will be only half the new target and the floodgates will open with renewed speculative developments expected.

Dorset CPRE are in regular contact with Dorset Council (DC) who see these housing targets as unrealistic too. All the towns and large villages in Dorset will be earmarked for new development, but it will be worse in North Dorset that has less than half its space covered by National Landscapes, which are protected to some degree. It is true that the targets will be difficult to achieve given the available supply of materials and labour and the natural desire of housebuilders not to flood the market with new homes that cannot be sold. However, planners will be forced to approve unsustainable Green Belt and greenfield sites. It will have an adverse impact on the environment and worsen climate change. It will cause major traffic congestion and worsen the existing lack of local infrastructure, particularly in North Dorset.

Planning Applications

I will give you some highlights of the last six months. In February, one of our volunteers, who is also Chair of the local Parish Council, helped overturn a proposal at a planning hearing to build

50 homes in an inappropriate location at Bourton. At Dinah's Hollow Compulsory Purchase Orders have now been served on owners of both banks of the road with both landowners objecting to DC's proposals. It was felt there were alternative methods of doing the work, which would have less impact on the landscape and wildlife, and would be far less expensive. There is likely to be a Public Enquiry in the summer. We objected also to an application for a further 30 houses in Pimperne, adding yet another roundabout on the A354.

There is a worrying proposal for a large 160 acre solar farm at Pennymoor, straddling the A30. It is likely to impact on protected landscapes, heritage assets and use best and most versatile land. It is just north of Duncliffe Wood and is expected to be very visible, and bring cumulative effect given other solar farms in the area, so it is likely we will mount an objection despite Ed Miliband's desire to cover the countryside with industrial panels to meet his 2030 Energy targets.

Planning application P/ FUL/2024/02514 for 44 houses at Park Land, Park Hill, Charlton Marshall, was refused on 4th April. We gave a lot of help and advice to the action group. The Case Officer's report referenced harm to landscape and character. The applicant is likely to appeal this decision.

Appeals

After our success last autumn helping to get the 130 home speculative development on Land North of Ward's Drove, at Blandford St Mary, turned down we now have an Appeal to contend with. We are optimistic that the Inspector will agree with DC's decision to refuse permission later this month.

An appeal was turned down also to build 52 homes at Sturminster

Newton in January. This was thanks in substantial part to the action group, who were helped significantly by North Dorset CPRE. The Inspector stressed the importance of meeting the 5-year HLS requirement while the Sturminster Newton Neighbourhood Plan demonstrated where new housing should be located, which is not here. The proposed site was outside the settlement boundary, while it would have eroded the landscape character of the area, causing significant landscape harm.

AGM and Talk by Kate Adie on "A Correspondent's Life"



About forty people came to the AGM in April at Clayesmore School, and to hear Dorset CPRE's President talk about her life as a BBC correspondent. It was enlightening, particularly as she covered major conflicts, such as the Falklands and the Gulf War, as well as the very worrying concern she has about the way the media is being muzzled in the USA.

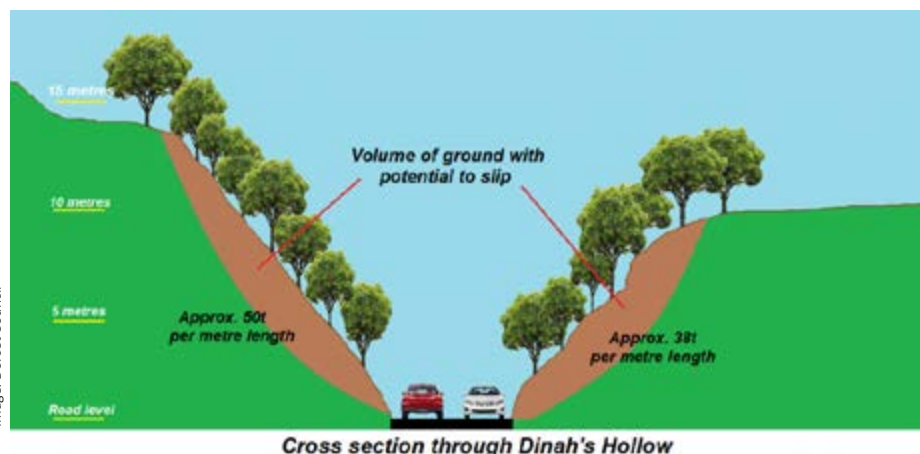
Oak Fair



We will be taking a stand again at the Stock Gaylard Estate over the August bank holiday weekend. It is a good opportunity to meet members and also recruit new ones. Derek Gardiner and I would love to hear from anyone who would like to help.

Rupert Hardy

Chair North Dorset CPRE



Does the Government hate the countryside?



The Government has brought in a multiplicity of measures, some financial but others administrative and planning-related, which suggest it is determined to bring in changes to forward its “growth “ and “clean energy” agendas at the expense of the countryside.

The October budget brought in inheritance tax on farmers, resulting in massive protests. It also hiked the minimum wage and employers’ National Insurance contributions, affecting small businesses particularly and there are more of these proportionally in the rural parts of the country. It even increased sharply rural bus fares, hurting those who have no car. Farmers are also encountering stop-go events in the Sustainable Farming Incentive scheme without warning.

Unrealistic Targets in New National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF)

Changes to the NPPF were brought in last December. The Government is imposing ridiculously high housing targets on Dorset Council (DC), requiring the number of new homes to more than double to 3,230 annually. This is much higher than the 1,793 homes proposed in the 2021 draft Local Plan, which was much criticized then. DC have said they are “unrealistic” targets too, but we may not know whether they defy the Government until the new draft Local Plan is published, later this year. All towns and large villages in Dorset will be earmarked for new development, but it will be worse in North Dorset, where less than half its space covered by National Landscapes designation, which gives some degree of protection.

Those flawed housing targets will be difficult to achieve, given the supply of available building materials and labour. Planners would be forced to approve unsustainable developments on Green Belt and greenfield sites. It would have an adverse impact on the environment and worsen climate change. There will inevitably be increased traffic congestion and more pressure on already inadequate infrastructure.

There is no evidence that planning constraints are the main barrier to house building in Dorset. Last autumn there were over 11,000 approved building plots awaiting development. Overall, we would prefer achievable housing targets to be used – ones based on local data, detailing household growth, affordability and current house completions.

The Government may have recognized there is a crying need for more affordable housing, as well as social rented accommodation, but there is scant funding for it and few targets are being

offered. We need a national land use framework – there could be other solutions. Why did the Government cut housebuilding targets for our cities? Why has there been no attempt to revise council tax bands, or encouraging the sale of large houses in other ways such as reducing stamp duty for ‘last time buyers’?

Local Democracy Threatened

The Government is now set on reducing the role of Planning Committees, with greater reliance on Local Plans for deciding where houses will be built. It also wants more planning to be regionalized with Local Authorities being forced to link up with others. Dorset Council is talking actively to BCP Council, Wiltshire and Somerset, but so far, the Heart of Wessex devolution proposal has been rejected by the Government. All this will result in much less local democracy. In our opinion, it is vital that the formation of strategic authorities should not undermine local democratic consultation and accountability. It is essential that the views of local people should be consulted and taken seriously and that they are encouraged and able to engage with the devolved strategic planning processes. With this in mind, it is important that Spatial Development Strategies undergo the same level of public consultation as is required for the preparation of Local Plans.

Clean Power 2030 Action Plan

In December, Ed Miliband published his Clean Power 2030 Action Plan to switch to 95% clean energy by that date. Much of his plan is based on heroically optimistic assumptions to make the numbers. The mountain of Grid upgrades looks insuperable. The countryside will bear the brunt, of course, as more solar farms on greenfield sites are rushed through and new pylons built. Dorset may be spared the mega solar farms and pylons that East Anglia is facing, and is lucky that the only offshore wind farm being proposed for Dorset, Portwind, can be connected relatively easily to the substation at Chickerell. However, we believe the onshore focus should be on rooftop solar, which the Government has been slow to act on. CPRE has been actively supporting a private member’s bill in Parliament, the Sunshine Bill, which seeks to make it mandatory for all new housing to be fitted with solar panels. We hope it makes faster progress than it has done so far, with it being adjourned until July after the second reading in January .

The next few years are going to be difficult, and it will take time for realism to permeate government thinking. A Trump Presidency is putting pressure on the need for more defence spending, and so some of the Government’s other ambitious spending programmes may get diverted. In the meantime, talk to your local Dorset Councillor and protest to your local MP. Those in marginal seats with a significant rural proportion should be most concerned. We may have an affordable housing crisis, which we addressed in our Affordable Housing Crisis conference last year, but it will not be solved by concreting over our beautiful countryside. Dorset is worth protecting!

Rupert Hardy

Chair North Dorset CPRE



Photo: Paul Sturges



Our Group continues to contribute, as strongly as possible, to the work of promoting the interests of Dorset CPRE. This has been achieved with the help and support of your current committee that, after a very busy time, now needs to be refreshed by the addition of other willing local members.

It is recalled that our Group was founded because of concerns over :-

1. Effects of increasing pollution in the harbour that sits between Purbeck and Poole, and
2. the need to ensure rural and urban areas can be mutually supportive – symbiotic not parasitic!

Our constitution requires an annual meeting but since the pandemic, the reluctance to travel, the expense of hiring halls (for about 30 minutes) and the increasing frailties of some willing members this has not proved to be practical over the last few years.

In view of the above, this review is offered as a reasonable substitute “general meeting” of interested CPRE members in the Poole and Purbeck areas. Naturally any local member who feels that this approach is inadequate for required accountability, I would hope that they let me know, **my contact details are on the back page.**

To begin, it is confirmed that your current committee comprises John Larkin, Eve Wilkinson, Sandra Brown, Sue Bellamy, Dawn Skye, Peter Bowyer, Robin Sequeira, Colin Morgan, Colin Brixton

(Group Treasurer and Membership Secretary), Mike Allen, Deirdre Flegg, Andrew Procter, Mike Childs and Gerald Rigler (Group Chairman). The committee has worked well together using emails, telephone calls and occasional ‘get-togethers’ at agreed locations at convenient times – a matter that encouraged the Chairman in progressing suitable research and contributions to assist relevant decision-makers.

Our Treasurer deserves our heartfelt thanks in dealing with the unexpected loss of previous banking facilities and ensuring that we have suitable alternative arrangements with the help of Bob Bowmer, Hon. Dorset CPRE Treasurer. The funds from the closed bank account were transferred to the Dorset CPRE Barclays Current Account and are ringfenced. In this connection it is confirmed that adequate funds are available for our anticipated needs or can be made available for required purposes.

We will have to lose the support of Eve Wilkinson who is moving out of our area but I must express our gratitude for her strong support and help in ensuring some difficult issues became more understandable.

It is also likely that several of our current committee will need to take more of a ‘back seat’ position but the nature of their help will remain invaluable to the rest of us and, as such, more than welcome.

Since my last report in this magazine our Group has :-

- Resisted a retail store that could complicate the safe use of the roundabout / road junction at Canford Bottom.
- Expressed concern over the sustainability of 67 proposed houses at Bere Regis.
- Sought to understand the relevance of the Urban Forest policy issued by BCP Council.
- Recommended refusal of alleged ‘affordable’ houses that would

weaken the Green Belt functions.

- Objected to a proposed incinerator at Canford Magna (on 12th June the BCP Western Planning Committee will meet to decide whether to approve the planning application) and supplementing proposals for two other incinerators in Portland and Parley.
- Sought to understand the nature of the ‘coalition plan of campaign’ that National CPRE supports.
- Supported the proposal, by a large public house, to install roof-mounted solar panels.
- Supported the use of appropriate night lighting (that will not use the blue end of the lighting spectrum) in an environmentally sensitive location at Knighton farm.
- Supported the proposed BCP Council Local Plan and attended the Examination in January set by the appointed Planning Inspectors. It is noted that BCP Council have been requested to withdraw their proposed plan and in effect volunteer to plan for reaching an impossible target of even more dwellings.
- Supported the evolution and implementation of policies considered by the Branch-wide Planning Group. In this connection particular thanks must be given to Andrew Procter and Mike Allen for improving our understandings of statistical and viability issues.
- Initiated contact with local Members of Parliament to ensure they are aware of our current views about local town and country planning issues.

As before, we certainly believe that, in teamwork, “silence” is not golden: its deadly! Also, for me as Chairman, “strategy” is not a solo sport. Consequently, to keep our Group alive and functioning for a while more, please let me know how to contact you directly so that we might refresh our committee to protect, enhance and even promote the wonderful attributes of our area.

I would certainly like to meet any of our local members, perhaps at one of our occasional ‘get-togethers’? Refreshing our team is now a “must”. Please help us maintain a local and willing group committee that knows, like Chris Packham, NIMBY actually means **Nature** in my back yard.

Gerald Rigler
Group Chairman



Photo: Paul Sturges

Dorset COP 2024 at Bournemouth University

On 2nd November, the Dorset COP 2024 (Conference of the Parties) event took place in the spacious facilities of Bournemouth University. This year's aim was to help community groups develop plans for the coming year 2025. There were workshops, exhibition stands, interactive experiences, presentations and a considerable amount of invaluable networking.

Presentations

Among the varied topics addressed were: the presentation by the Dorchester Transport Action Group (DTAG) on Dorset's future transport system; Defashion Dorset's promotion of sustainable clothing; Let's Go Zero on creating a school climate action plan, and; Good Food Partnerships. Dorset Community Energy's two presentations on retrofitting ecological power to homes and the logic of up-front community energy projects gave rise to in-depth discussions.

Throughout, there was a quietly expressed, heartfelt wish to reverse the disastrous impact of human activity, on the planet. It seemed that many of the 300+ volunteers have consistently devoted a tremendous amount of thought and free time to improving the environment. Implicit in the COP 2024 aim was to harness volunteers' extensive experience and expertise, to share their knowledge.



Over 60 people gathered around tables to explore the 6 themes of the Sustainable Food Places framework, looking at how these relate to food in Dorset

Nurturing the Network in BCP

With this in mind, the 'Nurturing the Network in BCP' discussion centred on how individuals and voluntary organisations might work together to become stronger, whenever there is a specific community of interest: the objectives being to welcome new participants and encourage an integrated outward-looking approach. It was proposed that a WhatsApp network might bring individuals and different organisations together to share expertise, work on strategy and make decisions. Whilst it was agreed that there is no wish to create yet another organisation, different WhatsApp 'channels' could make it easier for volunteers to focus on an area of interest and avoid being bombarded with unnecessary 'traffic'. Dorset CAN's 'Dorset Deserves Better' was thought to be a useful model to hold Councils to account.

What a thought-provoking and energising day out!

Philip Henneman

The Dorset COP is back on Saturday 1st November 2025 and being held at The Exchange in Sturminster Newton. Additional feedback from CPRE members who attended the 2024 event:

I too enjoyed the conference very much and found it heartening and inspiring – as last year when the first COP was held in Dorchester.

It's always a challenge when different sessions are held in parallel, and one has to choose! Other sessions which I enjoyed included:

- *Truth in ten*: a short, up to date film, in a similar, evidence-based format to Al Gore's 2006 film *An inconvenient truth* of around 20 years ago.
- Climate action in the world of sport, by former Olympian Laura Baldwin. This was not just about how sports organisations can be more sustainable e.g. on travel, facilities, water usage for pitches etc, but an excellent, more general presentation about how we can all help to inform and influence others on climate issues. Laura lives on Portland, opposes the proposed waste incinerator, and joined Debbie Tullett in her short presentation and discussion about that proposal.

I also enjoyed and found thoughtful the keynote speech to the DTAG session on Dorset's future transport policy. Prof. Colin Divall, an historian and member of West Dorset Transport Action Group, summarised how 1950s/60s "ideals" of "modernisation" locked the UK into dependency on the car and road transport, with Beeching's cull of railway infrastructure (so that we now lack the ability to revive many former rail lines as the track-bed has been lost to development), and the "predict and provide" model of planning future road building, under which ever-greater demand for road use was forecast and budgets provided for road construction. It need not have been like this, had different values (e.g. sustainability) been influential. Dorset County Council objected to the "utter folly" of closing Dorset's rail lines, but Beeching's proposals prevailed. The results can be seen in the congestion and pollution problems of conurbations such as BCP. Prof. Divall urged that, for the future, transport policy needs to retain greater flexibility, reflecting uncertainty about what will be feasible and viable.

Sandra Brown

It was encouraging to be among so many like-minded people with such a range of interesting talks or workshops to choose from. I attended 'Eco-literature', 'Green City visualisation', 'Sustainable Food' and learnt more about the establishment and structure of our Planet Wimborne (which attracted people interested in setting up similar community networks, from as far away as Sherborne etc.). The introductory video from an envious Chris Packham, who hinted at a future Hampshire COP, and an inspiring talk by the Bournemouth University Sustainability Manager outlining their energy supply innovations and waste management achievements, together made an encouraging opener.

Gayle Verdi

West Dorset Group



Firstly, I am extremely pleased to welcome Diane Stanley (another retired doctor!) who has joined the West Dorset Group. Diane attends the Dorset CPRE Monthly Planning Group meetings to learn about the planning system. Her main reason for joining is to give general support to the countryside and assists with monitoring planning applications in the Bridport area.

Battery Energy Storage System

On Monday 31st March, I attended the final planning hearing for the smaller 50MW Battery Energy Storage System (BESS), situated close to the Chickerell electrical sub-station. It was as extraordinary as it was depressing. I have to be honest and say I don't believe the counsellors who voted in favour of approving the application really had a clue about the details or the seriousness of the issue. Certainly judging by some of their comments. There have been very frequent cases of serious fires in these BESS installations around the world as I've mentioned before in my reports. The latest big one was at Moss Landing in California with a large toxic plume necessitating the evacuation of 1,200 people and closure of a major motorway. These two Chickerell BESSs, the larger 400MW battery storage site for another company, Statera, was approved in July last year, are very close to people's houses. Water will not extinguish the flames. On top of all that, the energy stored in such a battery will be rapidly used up during dunkelflaute (a period of time in which little or no energy can be generated with wind and solar power, because there is neither wind nor sunlight, conditions we frequently have here). Anyway it was passed – despite the unanimous objection of Chickerell Town Council and all of around 2000 people doorstepped there. Local democracy?

I personally hope nuclear energy will soon come to the rescue of the countryside (but I know some disagree).

Here are some brief figures. One Rolls Royce Small Modular Reactor (SMR) needs an area of just 5.3 acres (2.15 hectares or 3 football pitches). It is designed to generate an annual 3.9 terawatt hours for 60 years (a TWh is one trillion watt hours). 3.9 TWh exceeds Dorset's 2050 estimated electricity demand of 3.2 TWh by 22%.

In comparison the area required to generate the 3.2 TWh with ground-mounted photovoltaic panels (covering green fields) is 16,034 acres (or 6,489 hectares or over 9,000 football pitches). Or, alternatively, using onshore wind energy would require 600 two megawatt 125 metre high turbines. These would require a minimum fall down area of 9,266 acres (3,750 hectares or 5,252 football pitches).

OK these reactors are expensive – but surely worth it? How can one even consider putting a price on Dorset's beautiful countryside?

Portland Waste Incinerator

I am sorry to have to report another major disappointment. You probably know by now that the Portland Incinerator Statutory Review went against us. The action group Stop the Portland Waste Incinerator (SPWI) hope to take it to the Court of Appeal now. They need more funds. How this dreadful incinerator got this far is hard to understand. A major eyesore on the Heritage Coast, not needed anyway, belching toxic fumes over locals and

holiday makers, disliked by all local people and the sailors training in Portland Harbour etc etc. There is only one reason I suppose. Greed and profit.



Neil Matthews

Lyscombe Farm

On a brighter note, in March myself and three Trustees met with the Dorset Wildlife Trust Senior Management Team at their newest site at Lyscombe Farm, Piddletrenthide, 10 miles north east of Dorchester. We are looking at ways we can work together. Lyscombe is in the Dorset National Landscape (formerly AONB). It is stunningly beautiful, like a lot of Dorset! They hope to encourage and develop many natural habitats and have very exciting plans. See separate article on Page 18.

Dr Guy Dickinson
Group Chairman



Chapel and the ruined priest's house at Lyscombe Farm

How to Respond to Planning Applications Guide

This long-standing CPRE guide 'How to Respond to Planning Applications' has recently been updated. It has been produced in collaboration with National Association of Local Councils (NALC), to help everyone navigate and understand the planning application process in England. The guide condenses technical information simply to help make understanding the planning system accessible to everyone.

Whether you have a particular interest, or more general concerns about the type of change your area needs, this guide will help you understand the key planning issues and present your views effectively.

The current guide is one of our most visited pages on the National CPRE website, and it is hoped the updated version will be just as well utilised. An online copy has been shared with our membership, town and parish councillors and all those on our e-newsletter mailing list. It is also available on the Resources section on our website <https://dorset-cpre.org.uk/resources/>.

Now that we've had the anticipated updates from the government, including the recently published Planning and Infrastructure Bill, National CPRE are going to commence work on updating the other two planning guides 'How to shape where you live' and 'Planning explained'.

For Dorset CPRE, Heidi Poole, our Planning Advisor, checks the validated planning applications registered by Dorset Council and BCP Council on a weekly basis and flags up any that need further checking with our volunteers.



Litter Campaigns

We participate in the Litter Free Dorset (LFD) Forum meetings, hosted by Litter Free Dorset – Land, Coast and Sea, and contribute to discussions on a number of topics and campaigns. The meetings are held in-person and online.

Great Dorset Beach Clean 2025

The 35th Great Dorset Beach Clean organised by LFD concluded with remarkable success, showcasing the power of community spirit and dedication to protecting our beautiful coastline. Between 5th and 13th April, 297 enthusiastic volunteers came together to clean 15 beaches, removing a staggering 327kg of rubbish. This event was a testament to the collective effort of our community, with participants from all walks of life coming together to make a significant environmental impact.

Beach Clean leaders included: Lyme Litter Pickers, Dorset Police Cadets, Yoga with Leah Miles, Charmouth Heritage Coast Centre, Easy Riders, Water Babes UK, Swanage Beach Buddies, Clean Jurassic Coast, Sida Yoga, Dorset Goes Wild, Lulworth Rangers, and the National Trust. Their combined efforts were instrumental in the success of the event. Volunteers collected 130 bags of rubbish, including some unusual items such as, school workbooks, a beach roll mat, car tyres, and lots of socks! Alongside these interesting finds, common items including cigarette butts, plastic wrappers, glass bottles, cans, and fishing gear were also removed, significantly improving the cleanliness of our beaches. Community support played a crucial role in the event's success.

Electrical Reuse Project

LFD's Electrical Reuse Project aims to close the loop on electrical waste by increasing the capture and reuse of unwanted small household electricals. In collaboration with Dorset Repair Cafés, the project will offer household collections, carry out repairs and PAT testing, and redistribute items via community events and partner organisations.

12 Repair Café volunteers from across Dorset have now received their Portable Appliance Test (PAT) training, and are ready to start testing and repairing electricals which have been donated. LFD have already started receiving donations from Dorset Council staff, through their drop off point at County Hall.

Home collections will commence in Dorchester from May, followed by Weymouth in June and Blandford in July. These will be followed by a community Give or Take event in each town (including Sherborne and Wimborne), where people can donate unwanted electricals and/or take home any items they would like.

Look out for updates for when you can book a home collection in your town and attend a Give or Take event! To find out more visit <https://www.litterfreedorset.co.uk/recycle-your-electricals/>





Future Sherborne Initiative

At a Seminar on Friday 17th January, we began a new venture for the Town – initially labelled Sherborne Town Centre Action Group, now Future Sherborne. There were over 50 attendees, amongst them the mayor and several councillors and the town clerk.

We emphasised that role was as coordinators not leaders of the enterprise, that rightly should reside in the council and other key stakeholders.

The aim of this initiative is to ensure that Sherborne remains Dorset's premier abbey town, with its own unique blend of history, culture and leisure, whilst developing its potential for increased tourism and as a thriving centre for business and innovation, with a particular emphasis on maximising opportunities for young people.

Four Focus Groups have been established within Future Sherborne:

1. **Young people, innovation and entrepreneurship** – to make Sherborne a more attractive place for business and especially quality jobs for young people.
2. **Cosmetic improvement** of commercial properties.
3. **Sherborne heritage experience** – to improve the experience for tourists.
4. **The Alan Turing Centre** – to recognise the immense contribution of a man who attended school at Sherborne to the victory in WWII.

Newell House

We await the outcome of an interdepartmental meeting at Dorset Council before deciding on next steps to recover this listed building of great architectural and local historical significance. In the meantime, the house has been made safe and boarded up to prevent further vandalism and trespass.



Dorset Council Local Plan

We intend to engage with this and possibly a Neighbourhood Plan soon.



Blackberry Farm Solar Array Proposal

By way of reminder, RWE (a specialist solar farm developer) is proposing to construct ground mounted solar arrays, battery storage and associated infrastructure on an area of land amounting to about 250 acres on a total site of 400 acres. The site is within the Parishes of mainly Castleton, but also Bradford Abbas, Nether Compton, Yeovil and Over Compton. Yeovil is included as the grid connection is intended to run down the A30 into Yeovil itself. Thornford Parish is also materially affected owing to residents' strong views against the proposed solar farm.

The Sherborne and District Society continues to support strongly the action group, Wyke Against Solar on Arable Land (WASA), in their fight against this proposal. WASA have raised a fighting fund of £10,000 to cover the initial costs of two specialist consultants to review

the proposal. Of note, we raised over £7000 which, together with a grant of up to £3000 being contributed by the Dorset CPRE Branch, provided half the funding needed by WASA for the first batch of consultancy work.

We are supportive of the principles of renewable energy, but not at any cost, and we believe that this site is totally unsuitable for such a large solar farm. Reasons include not only the loss of good quality agricultural land, but also the highly detrimental effect on the landscape. In addition, there are several listed buildings and two national monuments which, despite recent suggestions to reduce arrays near them, could still be adversely affected. Indeed, this area has a long history stretching back for 3500 years; this proposal is an effrontery to this rich heritage.

We have heard rumours that the planning application may be delayed again because either:

(a) the Environmental Impact Survey that Dorset Council is requiring them to research and submit is not yet ready and/or

(b) they are hoping that Ed Miliband will announce further concessions for all green renewable energy projects in the near future.

Whatever the reason the application was expected to be submitted in April/early May, now likely to be delayed a few months. This gives us far more time to extend our research and come up with yet more powerful arguments as to why this proposed project should NOT go ahead.

Sir Christopher Coville
Chairman

The Great Big Dorset Hedge – A Positive Outlook



Natural companions – bees and hedgerows

Clear Purpose

Dorset's hedgerows are an iconic feature of the landscape. They also offer farmers a real opportunity to generate a positive impact on the environment without sacrificing food production capacity. The Great Big Dorset Hedge (GBDH) project aims to see hedgerows in Dorset enhanced and extended by bringing together landowners, volunteers, and local communities over a sustained period. We have successfully matched the farmers' needs by generating survey reports that accelerate farmers into this aspect of the Sustainable Farming Incentive scheme and now we are planting hedges too.

Steady Progress

We now have over 100 farmers engaged, we have over 400 volunteers enlisted, and we have drawn together an impressive array of funders including, and especially Dorset CPRE. We have been broadening our impact as the project develops its momentum.

Initially, we prioritized surveying the existing hedges to discover where the priorities for improvement might be found. We did surveys all through the year and we admit it was more difficult when the leaves had fallen from the hedges. That aspect of the mission is far from completed, but with 500 km of hedges surveyed in the past year we are making real progress. That momentum can continue but as an activity it is now likely to be focused more in the summer months.

Last winter we started to develop our volunteer hedge-planting crews. We had less than ten projects and planted only 2 km of hedges but that was just the start. Next winter we will continue to grow the hedge-planting projects but in addition we will explore the extent to which volunteers can contribute to hedge-laying. So, from now on the hope and expectation is that volunteers will enjoy hedge planting, hedge restoration and fewer hedge surveys in the winter but will concentrate their main survey efforts in the summer months.

Increased Popularity

The GBDH project creates opportunities for community engagement. We bridge the divide which might sometimes exist between the urban and rural communities. As a result, GBDH is applauded and supported by Dorset National Landscapes, by the Farming and Wildlife Advisory Group (FWAG) and by an ever-increasing list of businesses and organisations who share our vision of a sustainable landscape in which the full potential of hedgerows is again being achieved.

Disrupted Policy

The farming community has been impacted by radical policy changes that have taken some years to evolve (in the case of the Environmental Land Management Scheme or ELMS), but more recently the shocks have come thick and fast culminating in the sudden blocking of all new applications for the main ELMS component- the Sustainable Farming Incentive. Despite all this, the GBDH project remains viable. We have an estimated 200 farmers to find who did step into the Sustainable Farming Incentive before the door was slammed shut. Those are the farmers who are the most likely to engage with the project. Refinements to the Sustainable Farming Incentive are to be expected when it resumes in the autumn but we trust that the hedgerow component will remain largely unscathed... anything else would be unthinkable!

Sustained Ambition

We have established a solid base of farmers and volunteers. The momentum to increase both feels strong. We have broadened the volunteering activities to increase our impact. We have moved from a purely volunteer-based organisation to one which works with and pays specialist contractors to orchestrate that huge volunteer resource. We will need a stable and steady foundation of funding and then we can feel confident that the improved condition and the increased extent of our Dorset hedgerows is attainable.

John Calder
GBDH Project Manager

The Future for Dark Skies in Dorset

In the Autumn 2024 edition of *The Dorset Review*, I drew attention to the fact that many regions within Dorset are blessed with especially dark skies when compared to many other parts of England, and that there is a good case for preserving our dark skies heritage for future generations. How best to do this? One approach of the CPRE is to work with other organisations across the country who have a shared interest in protecting the night-time environment. In this article we report on recent developments and explore ways we can work with others to achieve this. You, the reader, might also be able to contribute.



Smartphone image taken by Kevin Quinn showing the constellation of Orion the Hunter alongside the brightest star in the sky, Sirius. Kevin is framed standing at the entrance to Maiden Castle. The image was a four-minute exposure!

Dorset's dark sky potential

Conserving and enhancing dark skies across the county should bring many benefits especially promoting tourism activities, science outreach and education for the public, protecting nature, natural resources and the environment, as well as a focus for local communities. Of course, 'astro-tourism' isn't about trips into space but rather about access to dark, quiet places, away from artificial lighting, where visitors can take in and appreciate the splendour of the heavens made possible under a truly dark night sky. Visitors travel to Dorset to view Maiden Castle, Durdle Door and the Cerne Abbas Giant, so why not also create opportunities for them to view the magnificent night-sky panoramas on offer. Some people already arrive with this in mind: staying at village inns, campsites and AirBnBs where they can enjoy the tranquil nature of the countryside. But more could be made of dark skies, which in Dorset is a largely untapped resource. Northumberland is arguably the English county that has done most to exploit astro-tourism. Duncan Wise, Visitor Development & Tourism Officer at the National Park Authority was successful in establishing the Northumberland International Dark Sky Park, the largest 'gold status' dark sky park in Europe, and as a collaborative effort with Kielder Forest Park, its 'Dark Sky' status has not only brought in over £25 million in revenue for the local economy but has also extended the tourism season. Indeed, astro-tourism is potentially an all-year-round phenomenon with visitors more likely to come during the darker evenings from Autumn through to Spring, considerably extending the holiday season.

UK dark skies organisations

In January 2020, an **All-Party Parliamentary Group for Dark Skies** was set up and this has now been re-established in the current Parliament with an inaugural meeting in November 2024. The **APPG** membership comprises parliamentarians of all parties from both the House of Commons and House of Lords. Additionally, in 2022, an informal collaboration of UK protected landscapes, professional organisations and institutions, 36 in all, came together under the banner of the **UK Dark Skies Partnership**. These two initiatives share common objectives, namely:

- Highlighting the importance of preserving the environmental benefits of a dark sky at night and protecting biodiversity from the negative effects of stray artificial light.
- Protecting existing UK Dark Sky Reserves and supporting potential new reserves with a view to improving dark skies in the UK.
- Raising awareness of the need to curb both rural and urban light pollution through the adoption of dark sky friendly lighting and planning policies.



On 30th January 2025, the Royal Astronomical Society held a one-day conference in London on '**Light Pollution and its Impacts**'. Fifteen invited speakers represented many organisations including the APPG for Dark Skies, Buglife, CPRE, Dark Skies Cumbria, Dark Sky UK and DarkSky International. Emma Marrington, who has worked for almost 20 years promoting dark skies, represented the CPRE at the conference and encouraged the broad concept of a national light pollution collaboration. Emma also introduced Yolande Watson, CPRE Herefordshire's lead executive member on stemming light pollution, who last November received an important DarkSky International award in recognition of her and her team's work

in addressing light pollution through citizen science, volunteer engagement, and influencing local policy by collaborating with parish councils and local businesses to promote Herefordshire's dark skies. In her talk, Yolande emphasised that it is important to scrutinise the policies and practices of county councils and unitary authorities, and that every parish council should have a biodiversity action plan that included protection of dark skies. One on-going initiative in the Wye Valley is to train local people to use sky quality meters to measure the amount of any light pollution during night walks and stargazing events. In this way they can obtain benchmark readings for an area before any proposed development is carried out and so that intrusive lighting and light pollution can be controlled.

Dark sky places

In our last edition, mention was made of dark sky reserves such as the one established in 2019 as part of the Cranborne Chase National Landscape. These reserves are a world-wide phenomenon managed by DarkSky International, which was initially set up by Dr David L. Crawford, a professional astronomer from Arizona who turned dark-sky champion and whose name became synonymous with the fight against light pollution around the world. I had the privilege of meeting and spending time with him during a visit to the U.S. in 1988, when he explained his vision for protecting dark skies as we shared a meal one evening. Little did I realise how successful his ideas would prove after having established his brain-child, the International Dark-Sky Association that very same year. This organisation, and its successor, have now certified 235 dark sky places in 22 countries, with some 21 of these places having 'reserve' status.



There are several other types of certification possible including parks, sanctuaries and communities. A good example of the latter is the Gower Peninsula. You might be surprised to learn that in England and Wales, the very first Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) was created in 1956 in what is now called the Gower National Landscape. In January this year, this protected area received international recognition by being designated an International Dark Sky Community.

Dark sky discovery sites

How best to protect dark skies in Dorset? In our county, some areas outside that designated national landscape also benefit from dark skies and so it would make sense to include these (e.g. the southern reaches of the Blackmore Vale) when applying for dark sky status. As stepping stones towards this goal, we should identify certain locations across the county worthy of being classed as 'Dark Sky Discovery Sites'. Such places are away from the worst of any local light pollution, provide good sightlines of the sky, are dark enough for the Milky Way to be easily seen, and have good public access, including firm ground for wheelchairs. Currently there is only one such site in all of Dorset, namely at Durlston Country Park, a nature reserve near Swanage where stargazing sessions are held roughly once per month. In contrast, the Isle of Man puts us rather to shame in that they have a total of 26 dark sky discovery sites distributed as shown in the accompanying map.



Maps drawn to the same scale showing the locations of dark sky discovery sites in Dorset compared to the Isle of Man.

So let us begin our dark skies crusade by first selecting new locations across Dorset that could serve as suitable places for discovering the night sky largely free from light pollution.

Maybe as a concerned reader you live near such a place and could recommend it? If so, then do email me saying where you recommend and why you believe it would be a good place. I shall reply and collate the responses adding a few suggestions of my own.

Cerne Valley and the 2025 star party

One suitable discovery site that comes to mind in the Cerne Valley is at the Cerne Giant viewing area where regular stargazing sessions have been organised over many years. An even darker place can be found to the south of the village of Cerne Abbas where the local Brewery can be found. No artificial lighting contaminates the area and in October (17th to 19th) we shall be holding the annual star party over three nights, raising money for charities, when people travel from far and wide coming to camp or stay in local accommodation, to socialise, and to observe the night sky: astro-tourism in action. Both these sites are good for discovering dark skies and celestial wonders so do consider coming along to the star party to listen to the talks and to view the stars, planets, and galaxies through various telescopes and binoculars. Here's to clear skies!

Dr Richard Miles

Dark Skies Adviser to Dorset CPRE
(rmiles.btee@btinternet.com)

St Basil's Mysterious but Extraordinary Font, Toller Fratrum



In 1934 the artist, John Piper, drove through the night from Henley with some friends just to see an extraordinary font in the tiny church of St Basil's at Toller Fratrum in West Dorset.

Toller Fratrum is no more than a small, atmospheric hamlet of mostly thatched cottages and an impressive late Tudor farm house, located down a one-way track, near Maiden Newton. The hamlet is now a dead end as earlier lanes to neighbouring villages are no more than farm tracks now. Mentioned in the Domesday Book of 1086, the parish is very old, and was held by the Knights Hospitallers in the medieval era. They were founded in the 11th Century during the 1st Crusade as a religious order to care for the sick or injured pilgrims at their hospital in Jerusalem. Toller Fratrum has always been a somewhat isolated farming community, mostly cut off from modernity except when the railway was built through the parish. However it never had a station there, and the line closed in 1975. The name is taken from its location on the brook formerly known as the Toller, which in Celtic means 'hollow stream in a deep valley' but is now called the Hooke, with the addition of Fratrum which is Latin for "of the brothers", who were the knights of the Order.

The Hospitallers dedicated the church to St Basil, a 4th Century cleric who became the patron saint of hospitals. No one seems to know how old the church is, but it was quite likely Saxon given the rounded shape of the churchyard. It may have been much larger than the present tiny Grade II* listed structure that is there now. The current building, of stone and slate, was probably built on the foundations of the Preceptory chapel where the Hospitallers would have worshipped. It was rebuilt in the Victorian period. The exterior may be unprepossessing but within lurks a rare treasure, a remarkably well carved font dating back also to Saxon times, worth travelling many miles to see.

Beautifully Carved Font

The font may be a simple tub shape, probably of Purbeck stone, but it is the carving on the exterior that is so special. There are figures in high relief showing Biblical characters and scenes. Many have their arms upstretched to the heavens, or in posture of prayer, but the faces are devoid of expression. Eyes peer out from the stone, with hands gripping the plaited rim above.





One explanation is that the principal figure represents Christ, surrounded by his apostles. St Michael is there too, carrying a cross and leading souls from Hell. There are animals, such as a four-legged creature standing on columns sharing a human face with another animal, and another creature that may represent the Holy Spirit and the Lamb of God. Another possible explanation is that the icons could be showing Moses saving the Israelites at the battle of Amalekites, which relates to a story in Exodus, from the Old Testament. Could these be scenes from the life of Moses, or a passage from the Book of Revelations?

Anyway the carving is exceptional, even if shrouded in mystery. It fascinated John Piper, whose photograph of the font is at the Tate Gallery in London. It was featured in the first Shell Guide to Dorset, produced by his friend Paul Nash in 1935, the war artist who was a convert to surrealism. John photographed the font several times, often wetting the stone and lighting it with a paraffin lamp, to achieve a more dramatic effect. He was an early enthusiast for Romanesque sculpture, which some may have perceived as primitive and unbalanced, but others see as radiating a magical strength. He believed that contemporary artists, such as Picasso, drew inspiration from sculpture of this early period.

John Piper wrote about this font: "For the primitive artist the Deity..... Is above all awe-inspiring and majestic; powerful, and very unlike powerless man himself. So there is very little that is knowable, touchable or human about these associates of the primitive God on a village font." His visits to the South West were part of a rediscovery of the Romanesque which had been ignored by the lovers of English Gothic in the Victorian era.

Mary Magdalene

There is also a mysterious stone fragment in St Basil's, above the altar, depicting Mary Magdalene washing the feet of Christ that tells a poignant story, and shows here her drying his feet with her own hair. It is thought it may have been a part of the 11th Century Chichester Reliefs found in the town's cathedral.

The east wing of the farm may now appear as just another outbuilding, but was once the refectory for the Knights. There are some lovely carvings on the stringcourse (the decorative horizontal band on the exterior wall of a building), especially one of a boy playing the bagpipes. The farm has a surviving medieval carving of a poor man being given a loaf of bread, reflecting the hospitality which was one of the duties of the Knights.

I can recommend Toller Fratrum, Little Toller Books' slim volume on the hamlet and the church. The latter may be closed for regular worship, but is still open for visitors.

We need to care for and visit our small historic churches in Dorset, such as the one opposite our house at Winterborne Tomson. St Andrew's is one of only four English single-cell Norman churches with an apsidal east end. They offer a priceless legacy of the beauties of our past. Do visit it and this corner of a historic and very unspoilt Dorset!

Rupert Hardy

Chair North Dorset CPRE



Lyscombe Nature Reserve – Making Space for Nature



Lyscombe Nature Reserve

The world is facing a major ecological crisis, the effects of which are increasingly seen in Dorset. To deliver nature recovery and realise Dorset Wildlife Trusts' vision of a wilder Dorset by 2030, we need to make more space for nature in our landscapes, parks and gardens.

Nestled in the heart of Dorset, a new chapter is unfolding at Lyscombe Nature Reserve. Building on its history as an organically managed farm, this remarkable landscape is now being restored and reimagined by Dorset Wildlife Trust as a place where wildlife can thrive, natural processes can return, and people can reconnect with nature.

Our work at Lyscombe balances careful restoration and stewardship of the chalk downland Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) with rewilding and natural regeneration across the wider, non-designated areas. This integrated approach allows us to conserve heritage habitats while also creating space for natural systems to shape a more resilient and dynamic landscape.

Over time, Lyscombe will evolve into a vibrant living mosaic of habitats where grasslands are sensitively grazed, woodlands are allowed to expand, and streams flow freely once again. Our long-term ambition is to see Lyscombe recognised as a National Nature Reserve, a beacon of biodiversity and nature recovery.

Vision for Lyscombe

Our vision for Lyscombe is ambitious yet simple: to create a landscape alive with sound, colour, and life. We aim to restore ecological processes, re-establish wild habitats, and allow natural systems to lead the way in shaping a resilient future. Lyscombe will be a place where wildlife abounds, where the land breathes freely again, and where people can rediscover their connection with nature.

The transformation is already underway. Since acquiring Lyscombe just over a year ago, we've seen barn owls return, attracted by a resurgence of small mammals in the fields

and hedgerows. It is already beginning to feel wilder. These early signs of recovery are a powerful testament to the land's resilience and its potential for regeneration.

Our approach at Lyscombe is rooted in landscape restoration. That means looking beyond isolated habitats and working at a larger scale – reviving ecological systems, reconnecting fragmented areas, and rebuilding the natural integrity of the entire site.



English Longhorn Cattle at Lyscombe Nature Reserve

Support conservation grazing

One major step is the removal of up to 23km of old fencing, clearing the way for a more open, connected landscape. In its place, we are installing carefully planned, long-lasting infrastructure to support conservation grazing. Starting with



Lyscombe Buildings Before: Existing farmyard in early April, with extensive concrete hardstanding, modern asbestos containing barns and buried chalk stream.



Lyscombe Buildings After: Visualisation of the proposed scheme, showing reinstatement of the chalk stream's original path, demolition of modern barns and conversion of existing buildings, including reinstatement of the barn's historic cruck roof.

English Longhorn cattle on the Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI). Grazing is vital in maintaining the health of chalk grasslands, preventing scrub encroachment and enhancing biodiversity.

A diverse mix of grazing that mimics natural disturbance patterns has already shown success at our Wild Woodbury site near Bere Regis, where cattle, ponies and pigs have begun to restore compacted soils and revive neglected grasslands.

Wetland habitats

River restoration lies at the core of our plans for Lyscombe. One of the most transformative projects will see the Little Piddle stream returned to its natural course, after decades of modifications that altered its flow. By removing concrete culverts and associated decrepit agricultural infrastructure, we will restore the Little Piddle valley, delivering vital wetland habitats and improved water quality for countless species.

Restoration journey

Dorset Wildlife Trust will also be working with Historic England to ensure that key historical features, including the chapel and the ruined priest's house are preserved while giving the land back its historic character. The restoration of some of the barns, the removal of modern agricultural buildings and

areas of concrete will signal a major turning point in helping Lyscombe recover its natural character and ecological richness. To guide our restoration journey, Dorset Wildlife Trust has launched a comprehensive programme of wildlife monitoring and ecological surveys. From butterflies, bats and breeding birds to invertebrates and small mammals, this research will shape our interventions and ensure we act based on strong ecological evidence.

By 2030, our aim is for Lyscombe to be officially designated as a National Nature Reserve, a recognition of its ecological value and successful restoration. We are building the foundations now through science-led restoration, sustainable grazing, wetland creation, and community involvement.

Help Restore Lyscombe

The regeneration of Lyscombe is only possible thanks to our community of supporters, members and volunteers. You can be part of this landscape-scale transformation by joining Dorset Wildlife Trust or making a donation to support our work. Every contribution helps to bring life back to this extraordinary corner of Dorset, for wildlife, for people, and for generations to come.

Brian Blease
Chief Executive



The River Char Charter

After months of work by local supporters, **the River Char now has a Charter**. The Char is the fourth river in the UK to have its own Charter – putting it at the heart of a movement across the country (and the world) to recognise the rights of nature in law.

A growing number of people believe that 'Rights of Nature' legislation will be the most effective way to address the ecological crisis globally. Countries like Ecuador and Bolivia have already enshrined the Rights of Nature in law and countries like New Zealand, Canada and Bangladesh have recognised the rights of individual rivers in law. The River Char Action Group predicts that the UK will catch up by 2035!

The River Char Action Group is calling on everyone who knows and loves the River Char to sign the Charter on www.riverchar.org/charter.



Photo: Dana Assinder

The River Char at Charmouth

CPRE Annual Report & Accounts for Year Ending 31st August 2024

Objectives

The objects of the Branch shall be seek to improve, protect and preserve for the benefit of the public, the countryside and the market towns and rural villages of the County of Dorset. To meet this objective the charity seeks charitable donations and subscriptions from the public.

Grants totalling £13,102.80 were paid out for the following projects:

Dorset CPRE:

Fingerpost Grants	£3,350.00
Barbara Vance Countryside Prize – Wildlife related projects	£ 486.55
Sponsor Dorset Hedgelaying competition	£ 250.00
The Great Big Dorset Hedge (Dorset CAN project)	£6,000.00
Pimperne PC – 1/3 of SoS Call-in appeal costs	£1,040.25

North Dorset CPRE

Barbara Vance Countryside Prize – School Award's Scheme	£ 130.00
Part funding appeal against Wyatt Homes planning application at Blandford/Pimperne	£ 666.00

Sherborne and District Society CPRE

Sherborne Primary School Christmas Appeal	£ 300.00
Charlton Horethorne Planning Application consultancy fee	£ 780.00
Garden Vouchers presented to local resident for gardening work in The Wilderness	£ 100.00

Dorset CPRE will consider giving money to causes as well as campaigns that meet our charitable objectives.

		Unrestricted funds £	2024 Total funds £	2023 Total funds £
	Notes			
Income and Endowments from:				
Donations and legacies	2	21,551	21,551	29,209
Activities for generating funds	3	2,363	2,363	1,186
Investment income	4	24,164	24,164	15,254
Total Income		<u>48,078</u>	<u>48,078</u>	<u>45,649</u>
Expenditure on:				
Raising funds	5	(58,239)	(58,239)	(41,298)
Charitable activities	5	(12,853)	(12,853)	(14,021)
Total expenditure		<u>(71,092)</u>	<u>(71,092)</u>	<u>(55,319)</u>
Gains/losses on investment assets		<u>34,843</u>	<u>34,843</u>	<u>(5,186)</u>
Net movement in funds		11,829	11,829	(14,856)
Reconciliation of funds				
Total funds brought forward		748,813	748,813	763,669
Total funds carried forward	11	<u>760,642</u>	<u>760,642</u>	<u>748,813</u>

Finances

The branch finances remain healthy. The Charity receives from National CPRE a percentage of the subscription income paid by members who are registered as Dorset members. The investment income is performing relatively well in comparison to 2022/23. It is hoped there will continue to be better returns on our investments over the next two years. The current investment strategy is for a balanced outcome with an emphasis on income in future years. Currently any income generated by the Canaccord Genuity portfolio is reinvested within the portfolio.

James Knowles, Investment Director and Head of Fixed Interest at Canaccord Genuity Wealth, met with Trustees on 5th June 2024. He continues as our adviser regarding this investment and there has been no change to the current underlying strategy namely to continue with a balanced portfolio managed for future income and growth. There is an environmental focus on the investments and growth will come as companies transition to green energy. Annual fixed income return is likely to be 5% over the next 3 years. Trustees will keep this under review as part of an action to explore ideas for increasing income taking into account the fees charged by the fund manager.

The Reserves and Investment policies were discussed at the 23rd February 2024 Trustees Meeting. The Investment Policy was updated in March 2024 to reduce the total for unvested funds and delete the reference to using investment professionals to advise on our investments. The Treasurer will recommend investments with investment managers or UK regulated financial institutions, with such recommendations agreed and recorded by the Trustees in committee.

Governance

The current Constitution, last updated in 2014, is being reviewed with the aim to increase the number of Trustees, include the role of Vice-Presidents which is missing from the current version, and update the list of Committees and Groups.

The Dorset CPRE Policies are recorded in a single file making it easy to share with new Trustees and anyone who would like to receive a copy. A table has been added to record the addition of new policies, amendments and updates. The policies are reviewed annually in February.

We encourage our volunteers to take up free online training organised and promoted by National CPRE to provide helpful skills and knowledge.

Review of Activities and Future Development

Our Strategy 2023-26 for Dorset's Towns, Villages and Countryside

The Trustees and Countryside Forum members review the Strategy annually in September as part of a health check and desire for it to be a living document.

The Strategy guides the Branch as we address issues including planning, landscape, rural economy and farming, campaigns and projects, membership, organisation, influencing Opinion Leaders and Dorset Decision Makers, and climate change and nature emergency.

Planning

We continue to host monthly online Planning Group Meetings to discuss the Local Plans and consultations. Members have joined in to contribute, ask questions, observe and receive regular planning news updates. This is enabling more volunteers to come forward and make a valuable contribution. This has been a busy year, there have been several local and national consultations since the start of the year including: BCP Council consulted on the draft BCP Local Plan, Local Transport Plan 4 survey, draft revisions to the planning system, Strengthening Planning Policy for Brownfield Development and Street Vote Development Orders.

We notified all those on our e-newsletter list about these consultations and included a summary of our views. Our responses to consultations are posted on the Dorset CPRE website. A big thank you to all our hard-working volunteers for contributing their input to the Dorset CPRE responses.

Landscape

Dorset has a distinctive rural character that we need to nurture for future generations to allow everyone to enjoy the countryside for its health and wellbeing benefits. We wish to see planning and development which deliver the right houses in the right places, through Local Plans which are appropriate to their areas and communities.

Dorset CPRE maintains that excessive local housing targets are wrong, since they lead to planners being compelled to allocate sites for market housing on precious Green Belt land. The Government is setting totally exaggerated and unrealistic Housing Targets for Bournemouth, Christchurch and Poole (BCP) and Dorset Councils. A new formula announced on 30th July would require an additional 93,000 homes in BCP and Dorset over 15 years. The build rate in Dorset would need at least to double, as the Government seeks to shift house building from big cities. The proposed target won't achieve key goals. It would neither bring down house prices nor address the shortfall of truly affordable housing and lack of social or low-rent housing.

We continue to promote the Great Big Dorset Hedge (GBDH) survey - a Dorset Climate Action Network (CAN) campaign to map, plant and rejuvenate sections of hedgerows across Dorset. CPRE volunteers also help with hedgerow surveys as part of the GBDH initiative and meet the landowner where possible. In December 2023 Dorset CPRE agreed a £6,000 funding request for the GBDH project to sustain the momentum as they manage further growth and in recognition of the ambition and potential of the project. There are 76 farmers participating in the project currently. Kate Adie and Neil Matthews met with John Calder, GBDH Project Manager, in January 2024 to undertake a short survey and learn about the Sustainable Farming Incentive (SFI) scheme that can give farmers access to capital grants to improve their hedges.

Grants and Sponsorship

Dorset CPRE is now one of the sponsors of the annual Dorset Hedge Laying Competition held in September and organised by the Melplash Agricultural Society who are committed to keeping the traditional skill of hedge laying alive.

We continue to offer grants of up to £200 per request for Fingerpost repairs and this is advertised in the Dorset National Landscape Fingerpost Project webpage. As of August 2024, we have spent £21,187.50 on grants for 154 fingerposts, since the scheme was launched in 2017.

Following visits to Schools, Trustees set aside £2,500 for a 'Barbara Vance Countryside Prize', enough to fund a minimum of 10 schools, if they are all successful in receiving the maximum of £250, for wildlife related projects with evidence of outdoor learning and introducing children to the countryside/rural life. An article on completed projects is featured in our magazine.

Ahead of the centenary in 2026, National CPRE is prioritising youth involvement in shaping our work. We believe it's essential that young people feel empowered to take action on countryside issues like the climate emergency and that their voices are at the heart of our campaigns.

Detailed set of accounts

A detailed set of accounts including a review of activities and future development can be found on the Charity Commission website and are also available on application to Linda Williams or Bob Bowmer.

CPRE Recent Publications

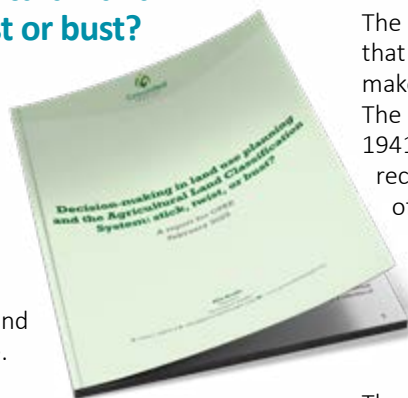
National CPRE publishes a number of reports based on detailed research. The reports are free to download and can be found on the CPRE Resources webpage www.cpre.org.uk/resources:

Land use and the Agricultural Land Classification: stick, twist or bust? (February 2025)

The Agricultural Land Classification (ALC) is a scientific system used to assess how good land is for growing crops in England. It takes into account soil quality and local climate to evaluate how well the land can support different types of crops and how reliable their yields might be.

The ALC grades land into six different categories, ranging from Grade 1 (excellent) to Grade 5 (very poor). Grade 3 splits into 3a and 3b. Grades 1 to 3a are considered the UK's 'Best and Most Versatile' (BMV) farmland. Planning authorities must give special consideration to protecting it when deciding where to permit development.

The system plays a crucial role in helping us understand where our most productive farmland is. It helps guide informed decisions about land use and protection of the UK's ability to grow its own food.



Why does it need to change?

The report for CPRE by Ellie Brodie, Grounded Insight, shows that the ALC system has several significant problems that make it increasingly unreliable for modern decision-making. The system relies on outdated climate data collected between 1941 to 1980 and, therefore, does not take into account more recent climate change. More up-to-date measurements of temperature and rainfall would likely show a dramatic reduction in the amount of high-grade agricultural land available. At its core, what this means is that we may be overestimating the quality of our farmland.

Better data for land use

The need for an updated ALC system has become even more pressing with the government's recent consultation on a strategic Land Use Framework for England. The ALC should be central to these important discussions about how we use our finite supply of land, but in its current form it is not reliable enough. Climate change is already having a severe impact, with 60% of England's highest-grade farmland now at high risk of flooding. At the same time, there is growing pressure to use land for housing, renewable energy infrastructure, and nature restoration. There is a real risk that irreversible decisions are made that compromise our nation's food security.

Farming on the edge: new insights into farming in the urban fringe (February 2025)

There are multiple demands on England's urban fringe, and land use within it is highly contested. In this context, farms can struggle to compete. However, CPRE argue that greater support for farming in the urban fringe is a key part of making best use of this land in our increasingly urgent context of mitigating and adapting to climate change, restoring nature, improving public health and feeding people.

What is the 'urban fringe'?

We define the urban fringe as both Green Belt and 'Comparator Areas'. Together the urban fringe covers 22% or just under 3 million hectares of land in England.

Green Belts are areas of land around towns and cities which are protected in planning policy to remain open or undeveloped to prevent unrestricted urban sprawl. Examples include the South East Dorset Green Belt which extends over some 168 square kilometres of open land in and around

Upton, Wimborne, Ferndown, Poole, Bournemouth and Christchurch and stretching south-west as far as Wareham.

Comparator Areas are areas of land around urban centres (of more than 100,000 people) that are not covered by existing Green Belts.



Dorset CPRE Membership

Thank you for being one of our valued members. Your membership makes a real difference to what we can achieve, and with your generous support we will continue our work towards our vision of a thriving, beautiful countryside for everyone.

Gift of Membership

Have you considered the gift of Dorset CPRE membership?

Joining CPRE is the single most effective way to stand up for the countryside. Once farmland and green spaces are built on, they are lost forever. The more you can give, the more we can do to keep our countryside safe. You can join online via our website www.dorset-cpre.org.uk or contact our office on 0333 577 0360 to receive a copy of our membership form. Individual £5 per month and £7 for Household membership. We also provide membership for Organisations, Town and Parish Councils.

As a member you'll receive our regular Countryside Voice magazine, and enjoy discounted entry to houses, gardens and other attractions around England.



Visitors are asked to check for individual opening times before setting out as many are seasonal.

Please visit our website for details on how to join or contact our office for a joining form. CPRE Membership also makes an ideal present.

Don't forget to take your membership card with you. All houses and gardens' opening dates and times are subject to coronavirus restrictions and may be updated throughout the year so please call, email, or check entries' websites.

Dorset CPRE Members also receive –

- The Dorset Review magazine in the spring & autumn
- Access to our Planning Hotline for advice from CPRE Staff
- Membership of your local county branch
- They can also join our Planning Group meetings

Diary Dates

Please visit the Dorset CPRE website www.dorset-cpre.org.uk for 2025 meeting dates for the Countryside Forum, Planning Group, District Groups and events.

21st May – Farm Visit to Coppet Hill / Purcombe Farm, Whitchurch Canonorum

4th June - Summer Planning Conference, 'Net Zero Homes. Can Dorset Do It?'. Please see page 4.

16th June – Farm Visit to Eastbrook Farm, Shillingstone.

15th November – 88th Anniversary AGM, 11 am, Cerne Abbas Village Hall. Guest Speaker John Calder will give an update on the Great Big Dorset Hedge Project, a Dorset CAN initiative.

Campaign to Protect Rural England

DORSET BRANCH

Registered Charity No. 211974

Dorset CPRE, PO Box 9018, Dorchester, Dorset DT1 9GY.

BRANCH CONTACT **Linda Williams**

PLANNING ADVISOR **Heidi Poole**

Tel: 0333 577 0360

email: info@dorset-cpre.org.uk

website: www.dorset-cpre.org.uk

   @DorsetCPRE

Contacts

CHAIR OF TRUSTEES

Neil Matthews **01305 264974**
3 Athelstan Road, Dorchester, Dorset DT1 1NR

VICE-CHAIR OF TRUSTEES

Jez Hughes CBE **07957 334675**
Brownshall Farm, Stourton Caundle, Sturminster Newton DT10 2JN

HONORARY TREASURER

Bob Bowmer **07500 184141**
Fairfield House, 2 King's Road, Sherborne, Dorset DT9 4HU

ELECTED MEMBERS

Sandra Brown **01929 551071**
Badgers Keep, Barnhill Road, Ridge, Wareham, Dorset BH20 5BG

Dr Frances Hogwood **01305 259576**
8 Hintock Street, Poundbury, Dorchester, Dorset DT1 3FB

Alexander Rottenburg **01258 818007**
Cider Barn East, Kingston, Sturminster Newton DT10 2AR

PRESIDENT

Kate Adie CBE

VICE-PRESIDENTS

Peter Neal **01935 814801**
5 Abbeymead Court, Sherborne, Dorset DT9 3AU

Richard H Norman **01258 472887**
Mngani, 15 Hillcrest Close, Glue Hill, Sturminster Newton DT10 2DL

Dr John A Larkin **01929 555366**
Lorien, Grange Road, Wareham BH20 5AL

Dr Guy Dickinson **07747 776580**
1 Beech Road, Weymouth, Dorset DT3 5NP

LIFE VICE-PRESIDENTS

Capt Dickie Bird, LVO, RN **01935 850576**
Manor Farm House, Trent, Sherborne DT9 4SW

Rear Admiral Richard Heaslip, CB **01202 594982**
2 Longfield Drive, West Parley, Ferndown BH22 8TY

Stephen G Howard **01747 853029**
12 Savoy Court, Bimport, Shaftesbury SP7 8BN

Richard H Nicholls
159 Victoria Grove, Bridport DT6 3AG

Group Chairmen

West Dorset:

Dr Guy Dickinson **07747 776580**
1 Beech Road, Weymouth, Dorset DT3 5NP

North Dorset:

Rupert Hardy **07803 907711**
The Manor, Winterborne Tomson, Blandford Forum, Dorset DT11 9HA

The Sherborne and District Society:

Sir Christopher Coville **07753 925434**

Purbeck & Poole:

Gerald Rigler **01202 601109**
9 Sundew Road, Broadstone, Dorset BH18 9NX

East Dorset

Bournemouth and Christchurch:

Contact Dorset CPRE Branch

Countryside Forum Chair

Rupert Hardy **07803 907711**

Advisers to the Forum

Trees for Dorset

Rachel M Palmer **01929 462423**
Clouds, 14 Cologne Road, Bovington,
Wareham BH20 6NR. email: info@treesfordorset.co.uk

Groundwater Flood Risk consultant

Guy Parker **07454 282 110**
email: guy@fonslimpidus.co.uk

Dorset CAN (Climate Action Network)

Giles Watts **07840 061 712**
Email: dorsetcan@gmail.com

CPRE SOUTH WEST

Regional Chair:

c/o CPRE South West, 8 Rowdens Road, Wells, Somerset BA5 1TU

Please sign up to our e-newsletter on
the Dorset CPRE website to receive
regular news updates.

DISCLAIMER

The views expressed in some of the articles do not, necessarily, represent the views of Dorset CPRE. Many of the articles have been written from a personal viewpoint.

EDITOR/DESIGNER: Linda Williams/Shawn Hodge

PRINTED BY: Remous Ltd, Sherborne, Dorset DT9 4FW