

Dorset Review

Spring/Summer 2026 News Issue 126

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100
YEARS



Campaign to Protect
Rural England
Dorset



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Front Cover image – Sheep taking shade under Oak Tree on farmland proposed for development North of Dorchester, taken by Rupert Hardy.

Welcome to our spring magazine

We're 100! 2026 marks our centenary year, and we couldn't be more excited! From the first Green Belts to protecting and planting hedgerows, dark skies and treasured landscapes, together we've stood up for our countryside – and we're just getting started. Please see Rupert's article on 'Protecting what matters since 1926' on page 4.

We'll be celebrating the Centenary at a special Reception at Milton Abbey on Friday 25th September. Please see enclosed the booking form.

Parliamentary Reception at the House of Lords

On 3rd February, Kate Adie, Dorset CPRE President, and I attended a Parliamentary Reception hosted by CPRE at the House of Lords. We were joined by politicians, sector partners and network colleagues. At the Reception, CPRE announced the findings of a new national polling, carried out by More in Common for CPRE, that explores how people think and feel about the countryside. The poll uncovered near-universal support for protecting the countryside. 75% of Britons want existing measures to protect specific areas of land to be strengthened, while less than 2% want to see them reduced.



Parliamentary Reception, from left Mary-Ann Ochoa, Baroness Parminter, Baroness Hayman, Roger Mortlock, Mariella Frostrup and Kate Adie

Photo: National CPRE

2026 Planning Conference

'Getting the Balance right between Dorset's Housing, Nature and the Countryside' on 9th June 2026

Following Dorset CPRE's recent sequence of influential conferences including in 2020: **Better Design and Better Planning for Dorset's Housing**; 2024: **Dorset's Affordable Housing Crisis?**; 2025: **Zero Carbon – Can Dorset Do It?** – our 2026 webinar will focus on the challenge of delivering for nature and the environment in Dorset's planning and development. Dorset CPRE is concerned that despite past planning policies, too many developments fail to follow through during design, construction, and long-term management to enhance environmental protection. I'd like to thank our Planning Group (Chaired by Andrew Procter and administered by Planning Advisor Heidi Poole) for organising this important event.

Partnerships

We can achieve more working with others than on our own. For example, promoting the Great Big Dorset Hedge initiative, working with Dorset CAN on housing matters, meeting with Dorset Wildlife Trust... Our planning conferences help to bring together industry experts, policy makers, developers and academics – all helping us to achieve the common good.

We have also linked up and arranged special meetings with local CPRE branches to discuss planning issues and the impact the Government's new housing targets have had.

We also continue to organise farm visits, on 21st May we will visit George Hosford's farm, Travellers Rest, which lies within the South Wessex Downs Environmentally Sensitive Area and the Dorset National Landscape.

Governance

The Trustees of Dorset CPRE are mindful of their responsibility to regularly review the constitution of the Charity and keep it up to date. Dorset CPRE has recently updated its 2014 Constitution and it was adopted at the November AGM. The updates reflect important clarifications and improvements to our governance, ensuring the Branch's continued effectiveness and compliance with National CPRE requirements.

CPRE Award Presentation

At the Dorset CPRE AGM, Captain Lionel (Dickie) Bird RN received a CPRE Special Contribution Award and Medal in recognition of his exceptional service to the Dorset Branch and the Sherborne and District Society over the past 49 years.



Dickie Bird with his CPRE Award

New Chair and Trustees

At the November Trustees Meeting I was delighted to be elected Chair and Sandra Brown as Vice-Chair.

Our newly approved Constitution allows for up to eleven Trustees, we currently have room for two Trustees who could

be co-opted during the year. We would love to hear from potential Trustees in the Bournemouth, Christchurch and East Dorset area. At the AGM five new Trustees were elected to office including Andrew Procter (Planning Group Chair) and Local Group Chairs, Rupert Hardy, Gerald Rigler, Guy Dickinson and Sir Christopher Coville. I would like to take this opportunity to thank my predecessor in this role, Neil Matthews, and Dr Frances Hogwood, both of whom have stood down as Trustees.

Welcome New Members

We welcome new members and more volunteers who can bring enthusiasm and new energy and help us to find positive solutions for the issues and threats facing our beautiful Dorset countryside and our communities. Working together for a better Dorset is our aim and we would like to thank all of you for making Dorset CPRE effective and influential.

Jez Hughes CBE
Chair of Trustees

Planning Conference 2026

'Getting the Balance right between Dorset's Housing, Nature and the Countryside' Online, Tuesday 9th June, 6:30 – 9:15 pm

Following Dorset CPRE's recent sequence of influential conferences including in 2020: *Better Design and Better Planning for Dorset's Housing*; 2024: *Dorset's Affordable Housing Crisis?*; 2025: *Zero Carbon – Can Dorset Do It?* – our 2026 webinar will focus on the challenge of delivering for nature and the environment in Dorset's planning and development.

How do we move from policy aims and promises to real environmental outcomes on the ground?

The conference aims to:

- Increase awareness and provide clarity and leadership ahead of the next round of Local Plans and major housing allocations
- Make attendees aware that nature and Dorset's countryside are critically under threat
- Explore how local authorities, wildlife bodies, and communities can collaborate to secure better results
- Explore how a balance between nature recovery and development can be achieved under the planning system
- Look at the role CPRE can play in scrutiny, community engagement, and positive proposals
- Caring for nature supports the wellbeing of everyone, now and in future generations.

Speakers include:

- Imogen Davenport, Director of Nature Based Solutions, Dorset Wildlife Trust
- Professor Malcolm Tait & Dr. Kiera Chapman, Planning for Nature Project (University of Sheffield)
- Matt Wheeldon, Director, Wessex Water
- Cllr Millie Earl, Leader of BCP Council
- Cllr Nick Ireland, Leader Dorset Council

Provisional Programme & Timetable

6:30pm	Kate Adie – Welcome and introduction
6:35pm	Chair (TBC)
6:45pm	Imogen Davenport – The Current State of Nature in Dorset
7:05pm	Professor Malcolm Tait & Dr. Kiera Chapman – Securing Biodiversity Net Gain, is it being delivered?
7:25pm	Tea Break
7:35pm	Matt Wheeldon – Water Management, its effect on Nature and impacts of development
7:55pm	LUC – Landscape Led Development: Protecting Dorset's Unique Character
8:15pm	Dorset Council and BCP Council – The Challenge of meeting development needs whilst protecting and improving the environment
8:45pm	Q&A Session

To book for the free online 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

Protecting what matters since 1926



Sunset over Kimmeridge Bay, part of Dorset's protected National Landscape

One hundred years after the founding of CPRE we celebrate its legacy while urging renewed defence of Dorset's rural landscape

CPRE has spent 100 years campaigning to protect the English countryside from unregulated development and urban sprawl. CPRE has helped to shape England's National Parks, Green Belts, and the modern planning system. Ten decades has given CPRE some big wins: the results of which many now take for granted. CPRE's work has been shaped by thousands of people – volunteers, members and supporters – acting locally and nationally to protect the countryside.

Founding Years – Protection from Industrialisation

In the 1920s, architects, planners and local campaigners warned repeatedly that unregulated development – driven by new roads, cars and buses – was rapidly scarring the countryside. CPRE was founded in 1926 by Sir Patrick Abercrombie and Sir Guy Dawber as the Council for the Preservation of Rural England. It brought together organisations with similar ambitions, including the National Trust and the Commons Preservation Society (now known as The Open Spaces Society).

Early efforts targeted ribbon development and the lack of planning controls in rural areas. Abercrombie had famously warned against 'ribbon development' as it would create "glimpses through an almost continuous hedge of bungalows and houses" – a vision he believed would destroy rural beauty. Key early achievements included securing the Petroleum Act in

1928 to control roadside advertising, influencing the 1932 Town and Country Planning Act, creating the first Country Code in 1935 and campaigning for the Metropolitan Green Belt Act in 1938. It was helped by such inspiring figures as Sheffield-based Ethel Haythornthwaite, the environmental campaigner and poet.

Post-War Transformation

Following World War Two, CPRE's advocacy contributed to significant land-use legislation. The 1947 Town and Country Planning Act addressed many of CPRE's goals for land-use controls. After a 20-year campaign, the 1949 National Parks Act established National Parks, Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty, and Sites of Special Scientific Interest. By 1955, the government accepted CPRE's call for protected Green Belts around major urban areas.



Ethel Haythornthwaite

image: CPRE Peak District and South Yorkshire

Campaigns in the Last Seventy Years

- CPRE's focus has evolved to address new threats and environmental sustainability such as:
- From the 1953 coronation, CPRE launched the Village Greens campaign – later evolving to the Best Kept Village competition.
- In 1963, we successfully campaigned for the protection of England's coastline.
- A long campaign against hedgerow loss led to legal protections in 1997.
- From the 1980s onwards, work have included promoting brownfield development, energy efficiency, and opposition to fracking.
- Longstanding work against littering helped trigger the government's Keep Britain Tidy campaign.
- More recently, CPRE has focused on dark skies and rural tranquillity, developing light pollution maps and promoting 'star count' initiatives.
- Leading up to its centenary, CPRE has also been shaping planning policy and strongly promoting rooftop solar energy, affordable rural housing and hedgerow restoration.

Standing up for the Countryside

CPRE is celebrating a hundred years of standing up for the countryside, and a century of achievements, impact and dedication with lots of events throughout England. As Mariella Frostrup, CPRE Somerset President, puts it: "Protecting the countryside isn't about freezing places in time or saying no to change. It's about making better change – for people, for nature, and for the long term. " Award-winning designer Sarah Eberle is creating a CPRE Show Garden 'On the Edge' at RHS Chelsea Flower Show. It celebrates the countryside as a living, shared space that shapes our wellbeing, our communities and our future, shining a light on the overlooked 'edgelands' of our towns and cities. After the show it will be relocated to a regenerated housing development in urban Sheffield. We have also produced a short video 100 Years in 100 Seconds. There was also an exhibition at The Museum of English Rural Life (MERL) in Reading celebrating the charity's centenary and pivotal role in shaping and protecting England's countryside.

In April our centenary book, *Future Rural: Imagining Tomorrow's Countryside* was published. *Future Rural* gathers together a powerful chorus of diverse voices – writers, farmers, activists, ecologists, and thinkers – and asks them to interrogate the past and present in order to imagine what lies ahead for Britain's rural landscapes and communities. A CPRE history book *Protecting the Countryside: The First Century of CPRE*, written by Professor Matthew Kelly, will be published in July. Both books are being printed in Dorset by Little Toller Books based in Beaminster.

Dorset CPRE's Successes

Focusing on Dorset, our local branch has been campaigning to promote and protect our countryside, as well as supporting rural communities. Recent successes have included:

- Helping stop the West Dorset, Slyer's Lane and Blandford Hill windfarms, as well as the Rampisham, Mapperton and Sadborow solar farms, which we believe would have had serious visual impact on the unspoilt Dorset countryside.
- Helping to save the beautiful Crown Meadows from a housing development we considered inappropriate in Blandford Forum.



Bottles and cans collected during litter pick

- Working with communities and local groups to oppose or mitigate the effects of hundreds of inappropriate planning applications.
- Campaigning throughout Dorset to control littering since our former National CPRE President, Bill Bryson, launched Stop The Drop.
- Sponsoring and judging the Best Dorset Village Shop competition until 2019 (the Best Dorset Village Competition is sadly currently in abeyance as it needs a new major sponsor).
- Helping to fund the refurbishment of Dorset's iconic fingerposts.
- Sponsoring the annual Dorset Hedgelaying Competition, organised by the Melpash Agricultural Society. We also promote and provided funding for the Great Big Dorset Hedge initiative too.
- Providing funding to schools for wildlife related projects, with evidence of outdoor learning and introducing children to the countryside/rural life, through the 'Barbara Vance Countryside Prize'.

Organising a number of successful conferences: the next will be one on June 9th on 'Getting the Balance Right between Dorset's Housing, Nature and the Countryside'.

How will Dorset CPRE Celebrate the Centenary?

First we are organising a big party at Milton Abbey, with a panel of speakers, to which our members and others will be invited. Second we will be planting hundreds of trees, including England's rarest native timber species, the Black Poplar. The main site will be at Kingston Maurward, a land-based college, which is now part of Coastland College, just east of Dorchester. Third we have a brand new logo and updated website and offering the opportunity to join CPRE at a special rate of only £3 per month.

Finally we must fight resolutely this government that seems determined to concrete over the countryside and flout local democracy.

Rupert Hardy

Trustee and North Dorset Group Chairman



Looking west from Swyre Head Purbeck, taken by Rupert Hardy

Dorset Council is continuing the preparation of its draft Local Plan, hopefully to replace / correct the adopted plan for Purbeck, as respect grows for the habitats and benefits of the countryside with the active influences of our 100 years young and active national organisation.

At the time of writing we have continued to seek responses to the information issued about possible (not necessarily probable) housing development sites. It is hoped that Dorset Council is obtaining very clear understandings of the limitations and constraints affecting the potential use of the sites that they identified to us all. As the Local Plan is progressed further we hope our Members and local communities will share their views with us so that we are empowered to ensure any proposed Local Plan is both legal and practical (“sound” in terms of the controlling legislation) for actual (“viable”) delivery within the plan period concerned – not possibly at some distant future time!

Recent Contributions

Since the previous edition of this magazine our Group has:-

- Objected to the proposed retention of an existing oil well site at Waddock Cross for another ten years, since the site should have been restored by October 2023 and the commercial viability of any potential oil has not been proven, amongst other significant matters.
- Supplemented our earlier efforts to help ensure the required “soundness” of any eventual Local Plan being developed by each Unitary Council in Dorset. In this connection our support for a further Regulation 18 consultation by Dorset Council was confirmed.
- Objected to the provision of four dwellings at Wool that proposed

unfortunate precedents for many more dwellings in the area – particular concern was expressed over the proposed use of “off-site biodiversity units” which are extremely challenging for Purbeck.

- Objected to the provision of tourist accommodation in ancient woodland at Bere Regis that involved housing about 130 residents, plus service personnel, adversely impacting the existing environment.
- Sought clarification of plans about accessible hospital services, after being advised that Purbeck communities might have to travel to the far East of Bournemouth for emergency care at certain times. It was good to be reassured by the local Chief Executive that Poole hospital will remain accessible for responding to such needs 24/7.
- Supported the campaign by Magwatch, a group of local residents from Canford Magna, Merley, Oakley and Bearwood, in resisting an enormous incinerator in the Green Belt at Canford that included some help in funding necessary legal advice and support. The Planning Inquiry will start on 2nd June.
- Continued contacts with Purbeck Parish and Town Councils, Poole Neighbourhood Forums, plus other activists in the conurbation to try to support their needs.
- Continued contacts with local Members of Parliament to ensure they are aware of our current views about local town and country planning issues.

Purbeck Dark Skies Reserve

We are pleased that some local communities have warmed to our concerns about light pollution and its various adverse effects related to siting, strength, and the environment. Purbeck contains internationally protected habitats – heathlands, coastal environments – with species such as bats, nightjars – that are

sensitive to artificial light. A clear lighting policy helps avoid ecological harm. CPRE’s interactive dark skies map shows Purbeck and wider Dorset areas are increasingly vulnerable to spill-over light from development and infrastructure.

It is particularly good to learn that Sustainable Worth and Worth Matravers Parish Council, in partnership with Corfe Castle and other local councils and societies, are taking forward a proposal for recognition of a Purbeck Dark Skies Reserve. Sandra Brown, Dorset CPRE Trustees and Dr Richard Miles, our Dark Skies Advisor, have attended a discussion about this proposal. It is early days and much work, including surveys, evidence gathering and community engagement, remains to be done. The measurements of light pollution will also be materially very useful when detailed planning of sites for extra housing commences and when environmental impacts require consideration.

Share your Views

Teamwork gives us strength to help care for the needs of many in our area. Please share your views with us about local circumstances and projects so that it may be possible, with your help as well, to focus concerns and try to influence matters to serve the public interest in our part of Dorset including the health and future of Poole harbour.

Lastly, please do let us know about any planning issues that we may be able to progress with you or for you – contact details are on the back page. We appreciate nobody can be aware of everything but together suitable messages could strengthen our assistance in helping ensure local planning is right. “Going with the flow” is not always a ‘sound’ policy.

Life and living involves action. Our Group welcomes all active support and new members on our committee.

Gerald Rigler

Group Chairman

Dorset Local Nature Recovery Strategy

In March, we attended the official launch of the Dorset Local Nature Recovery Strategy hosted by Dorset Local Nature Partnership (DLNP).

The DLNP Forum celebrated some of the fantastic work already happening to restore nature in Dorset and marking the transition from developing the strategy to delivering it collectively on the ground. The strategy provides a 10-year framework to enable everyone to work together to achieve a shared vision for nature recovery in Dorset.



Nature recovery is the process of actively restoring and enhancing the natural environment by creating more wildlife-rich spaces across the countryside, coast and towns.

Co-produced with local organisations and people, the strategy identifies key pressures and opportunities for nature recovery and sets 13 nature recovery priorities along with the activities needed to support them – including one for Hedgerows. It also has a local habitat map to help target efforts to achieve the biggest benefits for nature. Dorset CPRE contributed to the consultation which closed in July 2025 – see article in our autumn review 2025 edition.

30by30 target

At its core is a commitment to the national and international 30by30 target to protect and manage 30% of land and rivers for nature by 2030. Progress will be monitored through a review process led by Dorset Council, which will assess achievements every 3 to 10 years. A copy of the strategy can be found on the Dorset Council website.

Dorset's natural environment is one of our greatest assets, but over time it has been weakened. Dorset is home to a wide variety of habitats, such as heathland, grassland, woodland, wetland and coastal areas, which support a whole range of species. But over the years the amount and variety of wildlife in our county has reduced and many areas for nature have been split up or lost, leading to a nature emergency that needs urgent action.

The strategy calls for everyone to play a role in creating more sustainable practices that benefit both nature and people, whether it involves sustainable farming, forestry, urban planning, or wildlife-friendly gardening.

Upton Heath saved by successful DWT fundraising campaign

In April, the Dorset Wildlife Trust (DWT) launched an urgent campaign to Save Upton Heath, a key parcel of land at the heart of Upton Heath was set to be sold by auction, putting one of the UK's largest remaining areas of precious lowland heathland at risk. It is an internationally important heathland with views across Poole Harbour, Corfe Castle and the Isle of Purbeck.

The successful community fundraising effort was backed by local MP Vikki Slade, together with strong partnership and financial support from Dorset Council and BCP Council. This acquisition safeguards one of Dorset's most ecologically significant heathland landscapes from the risk of mineral extraction and long-term habitat decline. Its protection ensures the future of rare and threatened species including sand lizards, Dartford warblers and smooth snakes.

Following the launch of a public appeal which was shared online by Dorset CPRE and many organisations, DWT raised over £110,000 from the community in just two weeks, with



A separate Dorset heathland being restored at Hyde's Heath, near Wareham, taken by Dr John Larkin

further significant contributions from private donors. Dorset Council and BCP Council are providing major contributions, enabling the charity to secure the site for wildlife and people in perpetuity.

This is a brilliant outcome. DWT will now begin restoration work to reinstate heathland management, improve public access, and deliver long-term conservation benefits across the tenth largest area of heathland in Dorset.

North Dorset Group



North Dorset Group

As usual we have been fighting many inappropriate housing developments throughout North Dorset. However there have been fewer planning applications than expected, especially now Dorset has inadequate housing supply figures. This is probably attributable to house builders experiencing weak demand for housing, despite government measures, and uncertainty regarding the Local Plan. I am afraid though this is only a temporary hiatus.

We have noticed though that we, together with Dorset Council, have lost a number of planning appeals against large housing developments. In particular this was for 30 homes and another 50 in Bourton. This can be attributed to a reluctance by the Council to pay for legal counsel save in exceptional cases, and Planning Inspectors only too willing to follow the government's desire to concrete over the countryside and flout local democracy, riding roughshod over sensible Planning Committee decisions and Neighbourhood Plans.

On the planning enforcement side we have got the Enforcement team at DC to send out an enforcement letter to the developer who built the solar farm north of Hambledon Hill. Local residents noticed there were mis-matched panels in the open land near Iwerne Minster that are clearly visible from nearby roadsides and from Hambledon Hill, following the installation of replacement panels. These are an eye sore. Let us see what effect this has.

Local Plan Consultation

I covered the Consultation in the last Review. We have not had a full response from Dorset Council yet but they have said the government target is "challenging". They were pleased to receive over 9,000 responses, as this shows that the Council have consulted widely. Dorset Council have said they can show the government their housing target is not consistent with the National Planning Policy Framework in that it cannot be delivered sustainably. They know however they must approve some larger developments to reduce the 5-year housing supply deficit.

Dorset COP 2025

On 1st November, we attended the Dorset COP 2025 (Conference of the Parties) event held at The Exchange

in Sturminster Newton. Now in its third year, the focus was on 'Turning Environmental Ambition into Action'. There were workshops, exhibition stands, presentations (including one on Shaftesbury's growing reputation as an Orchard Town) and a considerable amount of invaluable networking. The Dorset COP is back on Saturday 14th November 2026 and being held at Coastland College (Kingston Maurward), Dorchester.

A new chapter for The BV

From May's issue, The BV was rebranding as Dorset Life. The award-winning digital magazine, which began in 2020 as a local digital response to a difficult national moment, has long since grown beyond a sole focus on North Dorset or the Blackmore Vale, and the new name better represents the magazine today. The BV name is regularly mistaken for the free printed newspaper. Becoming Dorset Life removes that barrier – it says exactly what it is, and who it is for. We contribute a monthly 'Rural Matters - CPRE' article to update readers and Dorset communities on our local work and campaigns.

AGM and Talk by Dr Miles Russell on "Excavations at Winterborne Kingston: Investigating Iron Age and Roman Dorset"



Over forty people came to the AGM in March at Clayesmore School. It helps to have an inspiring speaker like Miles Russell, who gave an excellent talk

on the Durotriges tribe and how little their daily life was affected by the Roman occupation. You can tell from the number of questions afterwards the high level of interest. We are so lucky in Dorset to have lots of archaeological remains to inform us how our ancestors lived.

Visit to George Hosford's Farm at Durweston 21st May

I can highly recommend this visit for members to Travellers Rest Farm which stretches around Durweston village. Much of the farm lies within the South Wessex Downs Environmentally Sensitive Area and the Dorset National Landscape. George Hosford, Dorset CPRE's Agricultural Advisor, is very well informed and delightfully candid about the problems Dorset agriculture faces. Spring flowers should still be out.

Oak Fair

We will be taking a stand again at the Stock Gaylard Estate over the August bank holiday weekend on 29th and 30th August. Now in its 20th year, the Oak Fair is a celebration of the countryside, woodland, timber, traditional craft and above all, conservation. Stock Gaylard Estate is a small traditional country estate just over 4 miles from Sturminster Newton and 8 miles from Sherborne. 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

Group Chairman



North Dorset Group AGM

Securing a water system that works for everyone



Photo: River Lim Action Group 2023

Monitors testing and photographing water sample on the beach in Lyme Regis

The Government through DEFRA recently published its *A New Vision for Water* White Paper following Sir Jon Cunliffe's review of the whole water industry. As stated by The Rt Hon Emma Reynolds MP, Secretary of State for Environment, Food & Rural Affairs, *"This is a once-in-a-generation opportunity to reform a sector vital to public health, our environment and the nation's economic growth and prosperity. With a new stronger single regulator, and a renewed focus on securing a fair deal for customers, investors, and the environment, we will rebuild trust and secure a water system that works for everyone"*.

The key themes of this White Paper are as follows:

- **A New Direction for Water:** Reforms to set clearer long-term direction - including reforms to Strategic Policy Statements, rationalising plans, better joined-up regional water planning function, and a long-term stability objective.
- **Resetting Regulation:** Establishing a new integrated water regulator to provide greater stability, transparency, and an integrated view of both economic and environmental performance.
- **Attracting Investment:** Making water a more attractive and reliable sector for investors seeking stable and fair returns.
- **Putting Customers First:** Creation of a new independent water ombudsman.
- **Clear Action for Clean Water:** Building on record investment in storm overflows and wastewater treatment, taking action to tackle sewer misuse and introducing a single set of stronger and clearer standards and enforcement for agricultural pollution.

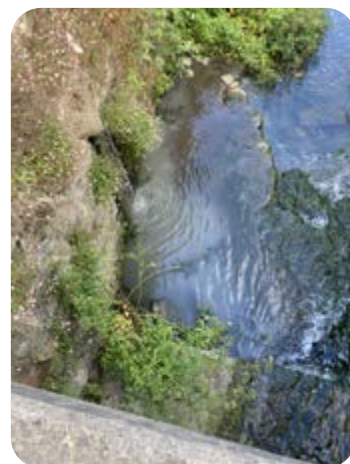
- **Water Security:** Improving asset health through new mapping and statutory resilience standards, while cutting leakage and increasing water efficiency with more water reuse, smart metering, and innovative regulation.
- **Transition Plan:** Committing to publish a Transition Plan this year to lead the water sector through transformative reforms.

The full report can be located on www.gov.uk/official-documents. The report is very detailed in its description of these themes. We would recommend that anyone interested in this sector, should prepare themselves for some quite heavy reading!

Nutrient Neutrality

One of the key issues affecting housing development in recent years has been the adoption of legislation governing nutrient neutrality. In 2019 and 2022, Natural England issued planning advice to 74 local planning authorities for 31 sites spanning 27 river catchments in unfavourable condition due to nutrient pollution. Building projects and plans could only go ahead if they do not cause additional pollution, referred to as 'nutrient neutrality'. Nutrient neutrality does not seek to reduce the nutrient pollution levels affecting protected sites, but to limit future increases from development.

A detailed report (Changes to Nutrient Neutrality – Jonathan Wentworth) has just been published which outlines the current status of nutrient neutrality in England – 69 pages with 468 separate references! Certainly one of the most detailed reports on this subject. It can be accessed on <https://post.parliament.uk/research-briefings/post-pn-0755/>.



Woodmead Road, Lyme Regis, with blue effluent, taken in 2023

Environmental Delivery Plans

The Planning and Infrastructure Bill provides for a new approach to nutrient neutrality by creating Environmental Delivery Plans, funded by levies paid into the Nature Restoration Fund. Developers must calculate the excess nutrients ('nutrient load') created by a proposed development using catchment nutrient calculators, which compare the development with previous land uses. Mitigation measures must remove this excess amount, either on the development site or within the same catchment. Natural England will take a catchment-scale strategic mitigation approach to Environmental Delivery Plans, implementing the existing nutrient neutrality scheme measures upstream of protected areas. Research suggests that, if Environmental Delivery Plans are to be successful, measures should be tailored to specific catchments and affected protected areas, including their physical and natural features, and nitrogen and phosphate pollution sources.

Derek Gardiner

Topic Leader Water and Flooding



Flooding

Earlier this year, it was impossible not to have noticed the severe flooding around Dorchester and elsewhere. Roads blocked and fields under water. There was even a “threat to life” warning – deep and fast flowing flood water near the Upper Frome area. Dilute sewage bubbled up through drains in Kings Road, Fordington. I understand this is not infrequent.

Proposal North of Dorchester

And yet Wyatt Homes who want to build up to 4000 houses across the north of Dorchester seem undaunted. The fields where the development is proposed were saturated with water. I’m quite certain they do not have the skills of the ancient Venetians – so how they think this will work is beyond me and many others. Not many people will risk buying a house in a proven flood zone area. The proposed area when concreted over would stop rain being absorbed into the ground and may cause further run-off downhill and more flooding.

Dorchester town currently gets drinking water from the Eagle Lodge aquifer but Wessex Water will apparently have to find an alternative source for enough supply further out. This, they say, may lead to a ‘degraded supply’. The developers claim the excess water on the site will drain using “sustainable urban drainage” – which seems questionable looking at how sodden the fields were recently.

The proposed area is an arc of farm land from Charminster round to Stinsford, taking in the area just north of the water meadows and the River Frome. You would think the flooding would be



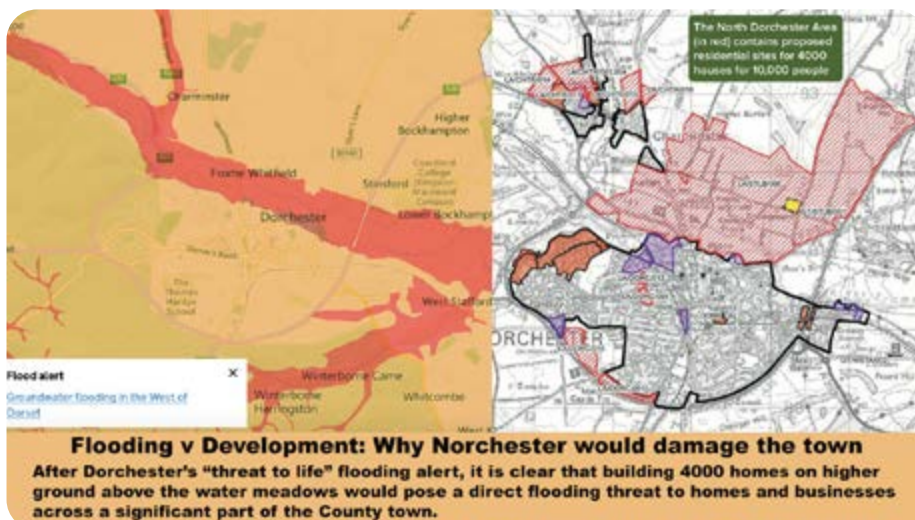
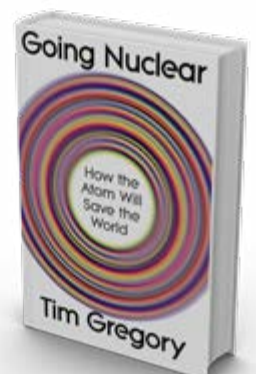
With thanks to KG Drone photography

enough to stop this proposal but there are plenty more reasons. Traffic will be very heavy on already congested roads. The people of Dorchester’s quality of life will be degraded – and they are very angry. The population of Dorchester would be increased by 35%. Dorchester as a tourist attraction will be severely at risk. There will inevitably be huge strains on schools and medical services. The development would be highly damaging to the town and its rural surrounds. There would be significant landscape and heritage impacts from the proposed development, as well as loss of valuable farmland. The scale and mass of the development will fundamentally change the character of the town and its setting.

As mentioned in our previously group reports, there is the excellent action group STAND (Save The Area North of Dorchester) who are campaigning against the proposals and now a new group CHARM covering the Charminster area.

Book

On a different subject, please may I alert everyone to this excellent new book *Going Nuclear – How the Atom will Save the World* by Tim Gregory – now a best seller. I know not everyone is in favour currently but this is well worth reading. Tim Gregory, a nuclear physicist from Sellafield, explains the basics of the science. More than that, he is also very honest about the fears and potential downsides. Overall though the conclusion is, I believe, that nuclear power is badly needed. “Net Zero” is surely unreachable without it. The size of a Small Nuclear Reactor (SMR) made by Rolls Royce is tiny compared with the vast area taken up by the equivalent number of solar panels and onshore turbines – which of course do not always produce electricity anyway (depending on the weather).



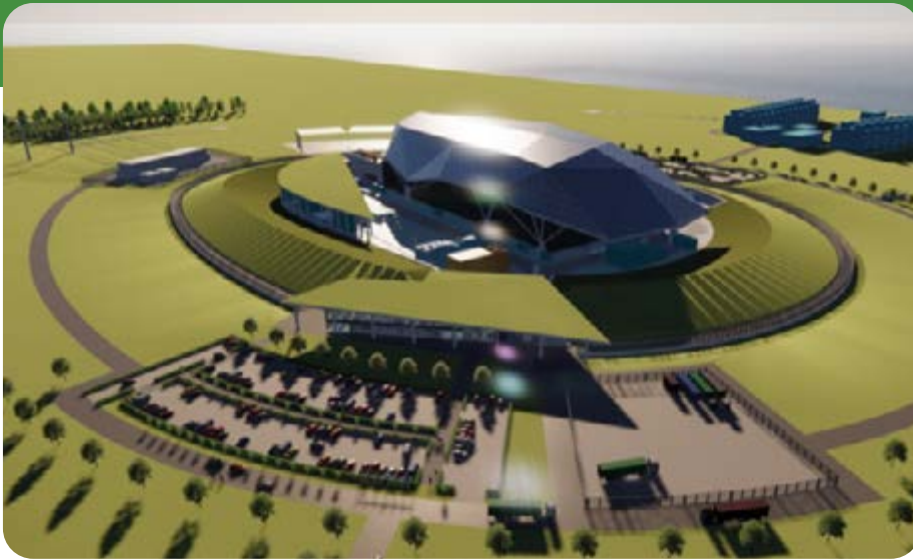


Illustration of Rolls Royce SMR

It has been calculated that a 470 MW reactor has a footprint of 5.3 acres (3 football pitches). It can generate easily enough to exceed Dorset’s estimated 2050 electricity demand. The equivalent area needed for solar panels to produce the same (assuming the weather is clement – it often isn’t!) is over 16,000 acres (over 9000 football pitches). I am certain the countryside would benefit enormously!

Dr Guy Dickinson
Group Chairman

Litter Free Dorset Campaigns

Litter Free Dorset Summit

Litter Free Dorset (LFD) hosted the first Litter Free Dorset Summit on 14th January 2026, bringing together environmentalists, local authorities, community groups and organisations, to share ideas and skills, make new connections, and find real solutions to the environmental challenges we face in Dorset.

The day focused on two key issues: Implementing Circular Economy Solutions and Tackling Litter in Dorset. Speakers included Circular Economy specialists Circular&Co and Behaviour Insight experts Social Engine.

Electrical Reuse Project

Last year, LFD teamed up with Dorset Repair Cafes to create an innovative and exciting way to recycle small electrical items. During 2025, the LFD team visited Weymouth, Blandford, Dorchester, Sherborne, Wimborne, and Gillingham, making 116 home collections of unwanted electrical items. Thanks to incredible volunteers, these items were repaired and PAT tested before being given away at the LFD popular Give or Take events – where the community could donate and take items for free. Every item rehomed has been a win – helping to champion reuse and reduce waste!

Have you spotted the new signs that have sprung up around Weymouth?

LFD are organising a litter-focussed ‘Love Weymouth Harbour’ campaign to coincide with the installation of the new pump-out station, and are also set to expand the campaign to other harbours in Dorset.

LFD installed fresh, welcoming signage around the Marsh playing fields and Melcombe Regis Cemetery to gently remind visitors to act responsibly when it comes to litter, using public bins and picking up dog poo.

You’ll also notice eye-catching **Bin Your Butt** signs along Custom House Quay and Trinity Road, alongside two new cigarette bins, in addition to those recently installed by their partner businesses.

All of these locations were identified as litter hotspots through LFD’s Weymouth litter survey, community focus groups, and school workshops earlier in the year. They are trialling different styles and messages and will be monitoring how effective these interventions are over the trial period.



LOVE WEYMOUTH HARBOUR

All hands on deck to keep our harbour clean

<p>DON'T THROW ANYTHING OVERBOARD</p> <p>Use the waste facilities onshore instead. Scan the QR code below to find a map of the harbour.</p>	<p>USE ONSHORE TOILETS</p> <p>There are dedicated facilities for boaters around the harbour. Scan the QR code below to find a map of the harbour.</p>
<p>FIT A HOLDING TANK OR CHEMICAL TOILET</p> <p>We will soon have a pump-out station at Weymouth Harbour. In the meantime, you can use Portland Marina pump-out station on T1 pontoon. Contact the marina crew by telephone or on VHF 80 for assistance.</p>	<p>ENJOY A SPARKLING CLEAN HARBOUR!</p> <p>Map of toilets and waste facilities</p>

The Sherborne and District Society



2026 looks like it could be a very significant year for Sherborne, its surrounding villages and our beautiful landscapes. We continue to seek radical improvements to our Town Centre, aligning our work with that of the Future Sherborne initiative, which Sherborne CPRE initiated. Much emphasis will be devoted to our historic centre, which we recognise as a precious but fragile asset that is showing signs of neglect in several areas.

Listed Buildings

Sherborne has a conservation zone with over 400 listed properties, most are in the care of conscientious owners, which is a major strength of the town. The care of this conservation zone is a great responsibility for the local authorities and the Sherborne and District Society CPRE will continue to bring at risk properties to their attention. This issue came to the fore in April following the tragic loss to fire of Newell House and its associated Barn, both of which are Grade 2 listed and falling into disrepair.

Fire at Newell House

At the time of writing, we are still awaiting the police and fire service investigation into the cause of the fire, but in the meantime, we called on the Sherborne Town Council to initiate an independent inquiry into the background, actions taken and lessons to be learned from this tragic loss of one of Sherborne's best loved houses.



Photo: Anita Toscani

We believe that the County leadership could and should have done more to prevent this totally predictable outcome, and we expect the proposed inquiry to hold the Dorset Council vigorously to account and to make recommendations which will ensure better protection of Dorset's historic buildings, which number over 12,500. More details are available on the Dorset CPRE website.

Wyke Farm / Blackberry Solar Farm

A growing threat is the inappropriate siting of Solar Arrays; we support the increasing shift towards renewables, but not at any cost. As covered in previous magazine articles, the proposal to disfigure good arable land with a mass of solar panels at Wyke Farm to the west of Sherborne in delightful countryside is being fiercely resisted by local groups – with our full support. Indeed, we have part funded consultants ready for action when a planning application eventually appears. The Environmental Impact Assessment, which the developers RWE have been trying to evade, has still not been completed, and there have also been issues regarding the eventual transmission to the grid which could be substantially delayed.

The Chairman of Wyke Against Solar on Arable Land (WASA), the group we are supporting in its opposition to the Solar installation, recently asked the developer RWE for an update on its potential planning application. This is the reply:

"The results of the Government's grid reform process (called "Clean Power 2030") concluded towards the end of last year after some delay. We are currently reviewing the outcome and are awaiting further updates from

the DNO as part of this process, expected later on this year. This will then allow us to finalise our strategy for the site – as soon as we have further news on this I will of course be back in touch."

Our best estimate is that the application might be in early next year and the WASA campaign group who we are supporting, are ready to 'fight' when this occurs.

Dorset Local Plan

But perhaps the major event requiring our attention this year will be the next stage of the Dorset Local Plan – due in August. This will develop the previous draft, taking account of the many observations and objections, including ours, from the period of consultation.

In DT9, i.e. in Sherborne, Bishops Caundle, Thornford and Yetminster, around 3,000 possible dwellings are envisaged, of which 2,000 are allocated to Sherborne. For Bishops Caundle the allocation is for 300 dwellings, a 100% increase on its current housing.

As always, we will closely scrutinise plans to ensure our demands for preservation of the historic centre, insistence on the retention of The Yeatman Hospital and abandonment of the piecemeal options which would have been totally inappropriate. Of course, the main issue will be the proposed development to the west of the town. The topography of Sherborne means that over 90% of such further housing will require the use of greenfield farmland. This is a great pity when we should be supporting farming and more food production. However, we do have an advantage in that the preferred sites are all in the control of Sherborne Castle Estates who are therefore in a good

position to deliver a scheme through a masterplan with a good selection of affordable houses, including rental for local people, and integrated infrastructure.

As in the past, our focus will be on design, incorporation of adequate affordable houses, green spaces for leisure and sport and robust infrastructure. We need to ensure that any development creates a sense of place of which the town and the residents living in it can be proud. This won't be easy as there are considerable landscape issues to overcome as well as the necessity to provide satisfactory infrastructure to include public transport, schooling, and medical facilities.

Neighbourhood Plan

Two other initiatives in which we are involved relate, firstly, to the development

of a Neighbourhood Plan, which looks at how the town and the Yeohed and Castleton Parish Council will see itself over a period and plan accordingly. It has to be in line with anything in the Local Plan. We have been pushing for this Sherborne Neighbourhood Plan for at least 10 years and are pleased that work has now commenced. A copy of the proposed plan can be found on the Sherborne Town Council website www.sherborne-tc.gov.uk.

Secondly, Dorset Council is developing a Design Code for new development, which will set strong guidelines for suitable designs which fit the local area and hopefully also set some standards associated with good quality build including movement to a zero carbon basis.

Separate from this, we are also looking at developing a design code so that the

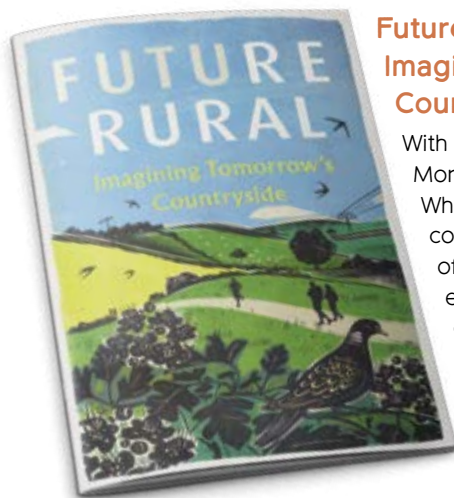
unique nature of our town centre can be maintained, with suitable frontages, colour schemes and signage which fits rather than jars.

Gryphon School

In March we meet with the Student Eco Group at the Gryphon School. One initiative we are working together on is the renovation of a small pond, introduced to the school some years ago, but now needing relining. The pond is home to several aquatic creatures, including frogs, toads, newts and many varieties of flying insects. We are providing funding, include a grant from the CPRE Barbara Vance Countryside Prize, towards the repair costs.

Sir Christopher Coville
Chairman

CPRE Centenary Books



Future Rural: Imagining Tomorrow's Countryside

With a foreword by Michael Morpurgo.

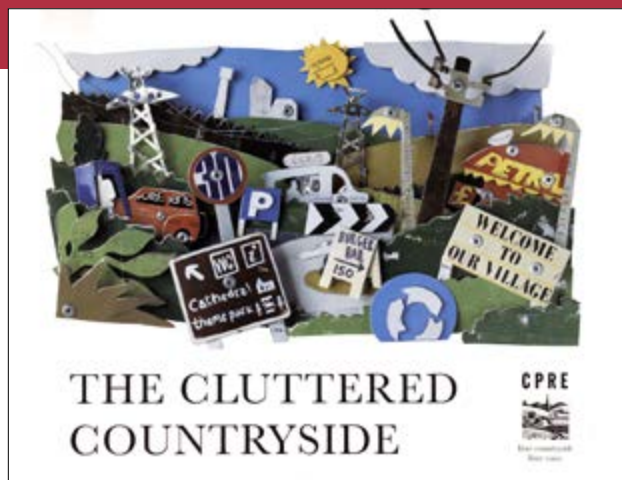
What is the future of the countryside? In a time of rapid environmental, economic, and social change, what does the countryside mean to us, and what could it become?

Future Rural gathers together a powerful

chorus of diverse voices - writers, farmers, activists, ecologists, and thinkers - and asks them to interrogate the past and present in order to imagine what lies ahead for Britain's rural landscapes and communities. From the creativity of the countryside and the impact of Empire on rural England, to the urgent need for affordable housing, equitable land access and the growing threats of climate change and habitat loss, this new collection confronts the complex realities facing our countryside. But it does so with hope, offering stories of resilience, regeneration and new ideas for how we live with the land.

With essays and poetry from leading and emerging writers on the land, social history and ecology, Future Rural searches for a fairer, more sustainable and thriving rural England. It is a call to action and a celebration of the centenary of the Campaign to Protect Rural England.

Available to order direct from the publisher, Little Toller Books (www.littletoller.co.uk), based in Bridport.



Protecting the Countryside. The First Century of CPRE

Professor Matthew Kelly explores CPRE's history and celebrates our achievements and influence over the last 100 years. Drawing on his extensive research into CPRE's archives (held in the Museum of English Rural Life in Reading), Matthew take us through the key stages of CPRE's first hundred years, from its formation in the 1920s, through wartime change, post-war planning, and the political and environmental shifts of the late twentieth century. He explores CPRE's role in shaping rural policy, public debate and the protection of the countryside.

Matthew is Professor of Modern History at Northumbria University, his work focuses on modern British history, particularly environmental policy, landscape history, and the development of National Parks and conservation. He is the author of 'Dartmoor: A British Landscape in Modern Times' and 'The Women Who Saved the English Countryside.'

The book is also being published by Litter Toller Books and due for release in July.

Hedgerows are at the Heart of Dorset's Nature Recovery

Enabled by the Great Big Dorset Hedge Project

Across Dorset this winter, something remarkable has been happening. While national policy shifts and budgets tighten, hundreds of local volunteers have been quietly stitching the county's landscape back together – one hedgerow at a time.

Now in its fourth year, the Great Big Dorset Hedge (GBDH) project has become one of the county's most effective grassroots nature-recovery initiatives. With around 200 active volunteers and 120 farmers engaged, it represents a powerful example of what can be achieved when communities, landowners, conservationists and charities collaborate.

This winter alone, volunteers planted 4 km of new hedgerows across a dozen local farms. With the planting season now closed, the project returns to its core activity: hedgerow surveys, which will continue across Dorset throughout the spring and summer. A dozen surveys were scheduled for April, and similar numbers are expected every month until the next planting season begins.

A Proven Model – Now Underpinned by Dorset CPRE Funding

Dorset CPRE members will already appreciate the value of hedgerows. They store carbon, shelter and feed wildlife, stabilise soils and connect fragmented habitats. As a former Environment Minister put it, they are “probably the most important ecological building block in the farmed landscape”. On 120 farms, volunteer-led surveys have mapped the condition and composition of more than 1,000 km of hedgerows. In the first year of their Sustainable Farming Incentive (SFI) 2025 agreements, a dozen farmers have already planted up gaps identified by our surveys or created entirely new hedges. GBDH volunteers have planted 4 km of those hedges themselves. Time and again, our hedgerow surveys lead directly to the enhancement and restoration of Dorset's hedgerows.

Until now, GBDH has offered the first 5 – 8 km of hedgerow survey work on each farm free of charge. Many farmers have then chosen to commission full-farm surveys at £50 per km, knowing they could recover the cost through the SFI. With DEFRA's decision to remove hedgerow surveys from the SFI 2026 offer, that model has been disrupted.

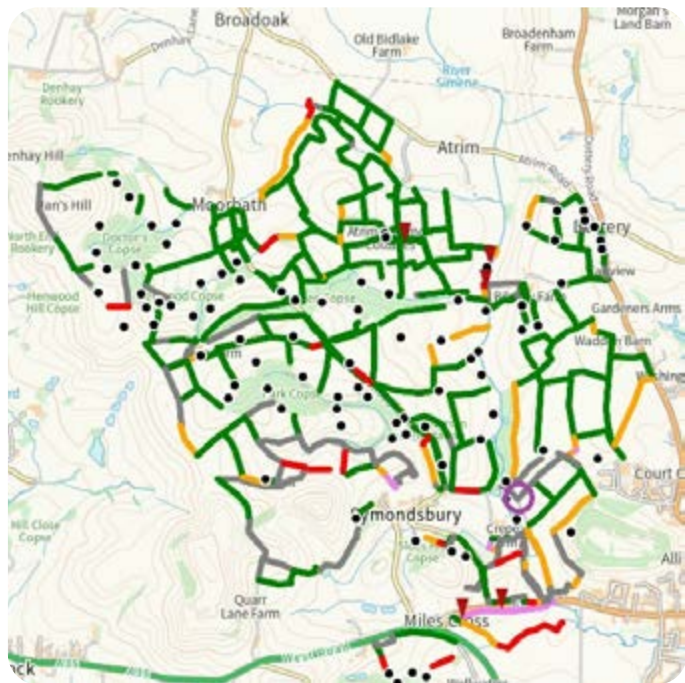
However, Dorset CPRE has stepped in decisively with £10k of funding so far this year which will be used to expand the number of farms and active volunteers participating in the GBDH. Thanks to its continued support – and especially its new funding for a further 200 km of hedgerow surveys in 2026 – the GBDH can now increase the free survey allowance to 16 km per farm. This expanded offer will make it easier than ever for more farmers to join the project, despite the unexpected change in national policy, whether or not they are participating in SFI.

Dorset's Local Nature Recovery Strategy

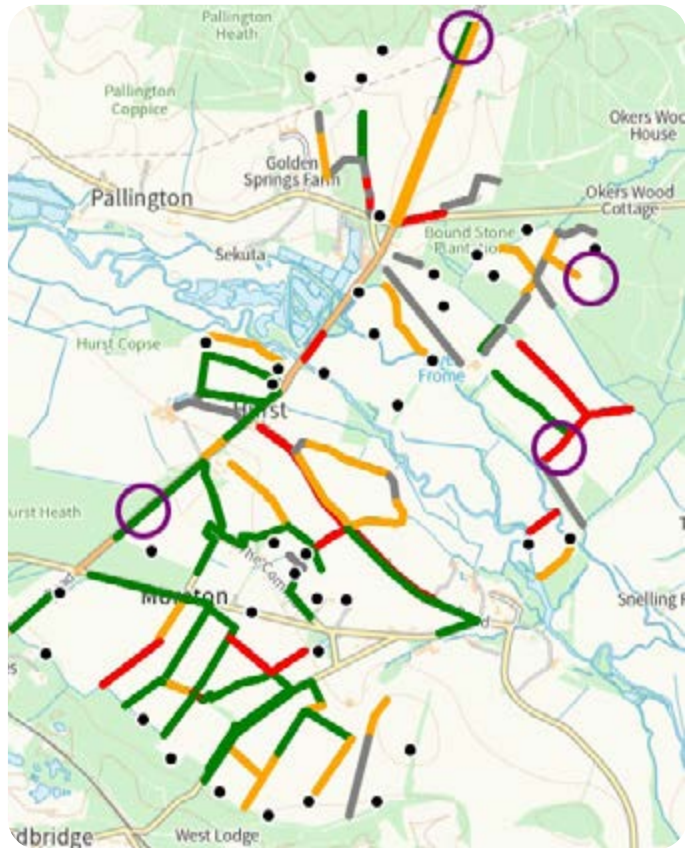
In March, Dorset and BCP Councils launched their Local Nature Recovery Strategy which was published in December 2025, identifying hedgerows as one of thirteen priority habitats. The strategy cites GBDH as an example of nature recovery in action – that is clear recognition that assessing need and delivering restoration must go hand in hand.

Farmer led successes

One of the most exciting developments this year has been GBDH's growing involvement in the Brit Valley Project, led by Dr Sam Rose of West Dorset Wilding. This landscape-scale initiative aims to restore nature across dozens of farms, supported by DEFRA funding and driven by collaboration.

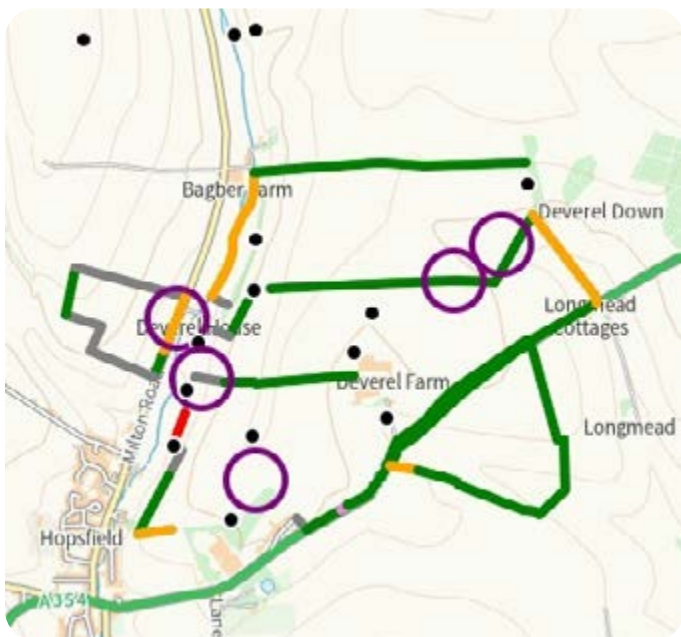


Hedge planting at Symondsburry Estate



Hedge planting at Hurst Farm, Moreton

One of the larger partner farms is the Symondsburry Estate, where GBDH volunteers have already surveyed 39 km of hedgerows, contributing more than 400 volunteer hours. The



Hedge Planting at Deverel Farm, Milborne St Andrew

next phase – planting up gaps and establishing new hedgerows – made a modest start this year but will require even more hands, more coordination and more commitment.

As Symondsburys Estate owner, Sir Philip Colfox notes, “The Great Big Dorset Hedge Project has been brilliant here... They have done something really useful for us and for the nation.”

When farmer Matt Chandler asked GBDH to survey his hedgerows as part of his SFI agreement, he expected a baseline assessment. He got that, but it revealed 500 metres of significant gaps. Matt simply decided to plant every one of them in a single season. Volunteers planted nearly half the gaps and Matt’s family completed the rest over Christmas. It is a shining example of what can happen when farmers and volunteers work together with shared purpose.

Deverel Farm was introduced to us by Wessex Water, who funded their initial farm survey and went on to fund the hedge planting that followed it. Over 500 metres of hedge was planted by our volunteers in 5 distinct sites.

The Symondsburys estate, Hurst Farm and Deverel Farm are just three of the twenty-six farms where the farmer has chosen to pay for full-farm surveys leading up to their decisions to plant hedges.

The planting projects are marked on the maps by purple circles.

A County-Wide Movement – Powered by Volunteers

The GBDH has grown beyond its origins as a purely volunteer-run initiative. Part-time Operations Managers now support the programme, ensuring surveys are scheduled, reports delivered and relationships with farmers nurtured. But the heart of the project remains the volunteers themselves.

As long-time volunteer and now coordinator Helen Kemm puts it, “I gained a sense of friendship and well-being while achieving a worthwhile goal... Now I see the wider picture of environmental and community benefits, but also the hard work and dedication it takes.” That dedication is what keeps the project moving forward.

What Could You Do?

If you know farmers who would like their hedgerows surveyed, please introduce them to us. The volunteers are ready. And if you are inspired by the role hedgerows play in Dorset’s landscape, you can join the effort. Training is provided, and you’ll be working alongside people who care deeply about the countryside we all share. You can volunteer by joining up here <https://tinyurl.com/VolunteerGBDH>

John Calder

GBDH Project Manager April 2026



The GBDH Planting crew at Wrackleford Farm, Stratton, in February

Dorset housing: targets vs needs

Dorset's draft Local Plan could be ruled unsound if it sticks to inflated government housing targets – ONS data says Dorset's true need is far lower

Dorset Council's emerging Local Plan may be rendered unsound if it continues to adopt the government's Standard Method target to build 3,246 homes new homes a year. The latest household projections from the Office for National Statistics (ONS) cast serious doubt on that target.

Just as Dorset residents thought the Local Plan (LP) Consultation was over, and we agree it was a very time consuming process for those who got involved, Dorset Council (DC) now needs to consider the latest ONS 2022-based household projections, published in late October 2025. They indicate that Dorset's true household growth will be between 1,700 and 2,000 per annum, depending on migration assumptions. This stark difference exposes a fundamental conflict within the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) itself. On the one hand the NPPF requires councils to use the government's Standard Method to calculate housing need. On the other, it requires plans to be effective – that is, demonstrably deliverable over the plan period.

In Dorset's case, these two tests cannot both be met. A plan built around 3,246 homes a year would not be deliverable, so it cannot be considered sound.

Government Housing Targets

By way of background, we have consistently argued that the government's Standard Method produces housing targets that are both unsustainable and undeliverable. The method applies an arbitrary baseline of existing local housing stock and then adjusted upwards to reflect perceived local affordability pressures. In Dorset, this generates targets of around 3,300 homes a year – figures that bear no relation to reality. Over the past two decades, delivery has averaged only 1,300 homes a year, and anything close to the government's target would overwhelm local infrastructure. Dorset CPRE strongly supports the Council in pursuing a locally justified housing figure based on Dorset's environmental capacity, infrastructure limitations, and genuine housing need, including truly affordable homes for local people.

In support of this, we welcomed Dorset Council's decision to commission, jointly with Bournemouth, Christchurch and Poole (BCP), an up-to-date assessment of Dorset's housing need. This work, together with new evidence such as the Green Belt Review and site assessments, should inform a draft Local Plan that is realistic and environmentally responsible. These ONS Household Projections make it even more important.

The Evidence from ONS

The ONS projections, which incorporate the latest population and migration data, show that:

- Under the recommended migration category variant, Dorset will see growth of 29,430 households (≈1,730 p.a.) between 2026 and 2043.
- Even under a high in-migration scenario, growth rises only to 35,349 households (≈2,080 p.a.).

The Standard Method requirement of 55,182 homes is therefore at least 20,000 dwellings higher than any credible demographic projection. Moreover, 88% of projected growth comes from households headed by people aged 70 and over, with almost all the increase is in one-and two-person households as average household size continues to fall. We hope the Local Plan will make provision for this and reflect this reality.

Dorset's Physical and Infrastructure Constraints

Even if demand were higher, Dorset faces severe environmental and infrastructural limitations:

- Over 50% of the county lies within National Landscapes (formerly AONBs), protected for their scenic and ecological value, or in areas designated as Green Belt.
- The county has a dispersed rural settlement pattern, limited public transport and a road network already at or beyond capacity in many areas.
- Utilities and public services (sewerage, GP capacity, water supply, schools) are constrained and cannot easily accommodate large-scale dispersed growth particularly re health care for population growth in people over 70 years.

These constraints further limit the realistic scale and the location of sites that can realistically be delivered. A strategy of 3,246 homes a year would force development into unsustainable locations, in direct conflict with the NPPF's environmental and infrastructure principles.

Market Realities

Developers only build to meet demand, not targets. Dorset already has more than 10,000 plots with planning permission that remain undeveloped. Increasing allocations or permissions will not result in faster build-out: it will simply lengthen developer control of supply. Demand for housing is not governed by theoretical, over-simplified formulae which purport to reflect "need" or "affordability". Even IF local incomes were to rise substantially or major subsidies are introduced, the market cannot absorb the level of construction implied by the Standard Method.

Consequences of the Standard Method

Proceeding with an undeliverable target exposes the Local Plan to two levels of failure. At examination, the Plan risks rejection by the Planning Inspector as unsound, since its housing strategy would fail the NPPF test of deliverability. On the other hand, if adopted, the Plan would inevitably fail to meet its own delivery targets, fuelling speculative development and undermining confidence in the planning system.

A Realistic and Defensible Approach

Dorset CPRE therefore urges the Council to:

- Base its housing requirement on realistic, deliverable local housing need, and ensure that the Housing Needs Assessment jointly commissioned with BCP Council takes account of the ONS 2022-based projections, particularly the migration category variant implying around 1700 dwellings per annum.
- Demonstrate that this level is both deliverable and potentially compatible with Dorset's landscape and infrastructure capacity;
- Highlight the inherent policy conflict within the NPPF as part of its evidence to Government and the Planning Inspectorate and
- Ensure that the forthcoming Housing Needs Assessment makes full reference to ONS 2022-based projections and the local need for truly affordable social rent housing.

Such an approach would be consistent with the evidence, faithful to NPPF soundness tests, and sustainable in Dorset's environmental context.

Rupert Hardy

NPPF, the rulebook for planning

What is the National Planning Policy Framework?

Planning policy, in simple terms, shapes much of how we live. From large quarrying and warehousing projects to houses and roads, it determines what gets built where. But what guides decision-making when it comes to planning? The answer is the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF).

Although currently non-statutory (not enshrined in law), the NPPF is a vitally important framework. It can shape how we can build the houses and infrastructure we need in a way that protects our countryside and involves local communities.

Rulebook for Planning

The NPPF is a document which acts as the rulebook for planning. It advises local planning authorities (Local Planning Authorities, usually district or county councils) and developers on what they can and cannot do when planning developments. Developments in this regard can refer to anything from roads and buildings but also changes in land use such as converting offices into housing. It contains a range of policies that ultimately determine what gets built where.

What's in the NPPF?

The NPPF is a wide-ranging document which is available to view on the government website. It sets out national planning policies covering housing, the economy, business, transport and the countryside and natural environment. It covers many policies which are key to CPRE, from the Green Belt to affordable housing and tranquillity.

The NPPF and Planning

To understand what the NPPF is used for, and why it's important, it's important to understand how our planning system works. In its broadest sense, our planning system is a toolbox which contains the rules, guidelines and democratic process that help us plan for and manage how we use land. In this context, the NPPF forms part of the guidelines. Planning ultimately determines what gets built where, and the NPPF is intended to provide the checks and balances: to make sure developments and plans are sustainable, well-located, and with maximum benefit to people, communities, the economy and the environment.

NPPF Consultations

The NPPF isn't a document fixed in time. The government routinely proposes revisions to the NPPF in accordance with its policies, and when this happens, a consultation is usually launched. This is where organisations like CPRE can influence what changes, and try to ensure that the NPPF delivers what we think is needed for a thriving countryside.

In March, our Planning Group responded to the government's planning consultation on a draft revised National Planning Policy Framework issued in December 2025.

Sustainable Development

The overall theme of the NPPF is the achievement of sustainable development as defined by the United Nations. This is to be achieved through balancing economic, social and environmental objectives. Given that we are in the midst of a global climate



Bellway, Brewery Square development of apartments in central Dorchester

crisis with biodiversity in decline and at further risk, never has the achievement of truly/genuinely sustainable development been more important. Dorset CPRE is concerned that the emphasis of the proposed new NPPF has shifted in favour of economic development at the expense of meeting social and environmental objectives.

Local communities have an important role to play in ensuring that local development proposals are truly sustainable and are able to meet their needs. We are concerned about the centralisation of policy and decision making, and the absence of encouragement for public participation.

As highlighted in the *Dorset Housing targets vs needs* article on page 16, the Office for National Statistics figures indicate that nationally our population is in decline with fertility levels well below replacement questioning the validity of the current approach for calculating housing need and the allocating of ever more valuable farmland for housing.

Dorset CPRE's Planning Group responded to selected consultation questions including:

- Chapter 4 (**Achieving sustainable development**)
- Chapters 10 (**Securing clean energy and water**)
- Chapter 18 (**Managing Flood Risk**) and
- Chapter 19 (**Conserving and enhancing the natural environment**) and those relating to viability assessments.

Our full response to the NPPF consultation is available to view in the resources section on the Dorset CPRE website.

National CPRE Response

National CPRE broadly welcomes elements of the proposed NPPF update – especially the clearer separation between plan making and decision making policies – while raising significant concerns about centralisation, weakening of environmental protections, housing delivery mechanisms, and the threat to the Green Belt.

A consistent theme of the National CPRE response is the need for a brownfield first, plan-led, community centred, climate aligned planning system, with local discretion protected rather than eroded.

Planning is at the heart of so much that affects our daily lives: housing, green spaces, transport and roads, schools, shops, energy, communications and the countryside are all affected by planning policy. That's why these consultations are so important, and why we're keen for everyone to understand why.

Based on article written by Lewis Townsend, National CPRE

Laying Hedges: Encouraging Growth and Density



George Hosford shares with us an inside look at what's happening on his farm, Travellers Rest which stretches around Durweston village, with regards to hedgerows.



Our good friend George Darwall has been steadily working his way along this overgrown hazel hedge alongside Lime Kiln field along the road to Shepherds Corner, over the last few years, rejuvenating it by laying. He has also patiently re-acquainted me with the ancient skills required, it is a long time since my hedgelaying course in 2002 next to the cricket ground in Moreton village. This winter he has also branched (!) out by training some Great Big Dorset Hedge (GBDH) volunteers, so that they may go forth, armed with billhook, axe and saw, to set to the task of renewing some of the many miles of Dorset hedge that over the last two years they have surveyed and found in need of restoration.

Over 100 farmers across the county have engaged the wonderful GBDH group to come and survey the condition of their hedgerows. This is the first step

towards getting to grips with what in many cases are long overdue overhauls, by laying, coppicing and gapping up, or simply by incremental trimming with a flail trimmer.



Hazel stool before clearing out



The same stool ready to lay

The process of laying itself is very satisfying, if slow and hard work. First one has to clear out dead wood and unsuitably shaped branches, before you can start laying the best straight uprights. A well sharpened billhook is best for this, you chop into the stem for around half its width, and then split downwards leaving a thickness of wood and bark sufficient to sustain life, and yet thin enough to allow the wood to bend and lay over horizontally. You are then left with a heel, the remains of the stem that the main branch was split away from, which needs angled cutting off close to the base of the split, to prevent the forming of a gap for water to enter the base of the trunk.

A good toothy one-handed saw like a Silky is ideal for this.



Hazel is by far the easiest Tree to Lay

An experienced hedgelayer might sniff somewhat; hazel is by far the easiest tree to lay, it grows lovely straight stems, which split readily, both reasons which lend it so well to use for hurdle making, spars for thatchers (they fix thatch to the roof), and other uses. A real challenge to lay is a mixed species hedge, with plenty of gnarly thorn in, it is far more difficult to split and lay down as the wood is often twisted and much harder than hazel.

George is a passionate fan of hazel hedge farming, preferably on a 7 year cycle of cutting. Once laid, he favours returning after 7 years to lay again, without any mechanical trimming in between, which would create knuckles in the stems which render them useless for the uses mentioned above. The

uninterrupted growth will produce a good yield of straight and strong sticks, very suitable for spars and hurdles. Will we find someone willing to harvest and market them in 7 years' time though? We have many many miles of hedge on the farm, a great proportion of which desperately need laying, so the big question is should we create an in-cycle hedge along Lime Kiln, or incrementally trim it with the flail next year and every other year hence, rendering the timber largely valueless, in order to put off the day when it next needs laying for as long as possible.

George believes that hazel hedges are capable of producing a higher amount of better quality usable timber than a traditional hazel coppice, he says this is because there is more exposure to sunlight, and less competition between stools for nutrient and space than in a coppice. I find it hard to accept this admittedly persuasive logic, having been brought up to believe that hazel coppice is the ultimate in farmed woodland, a unique habitat that not only produces spars, hurdles, pea sticks and fuel for charcoal production, but is an ecosystem all of its own. The 7 year cycle allows countless other species to thrive and decline, on a long cycle, as the hazel grows up and up, and is then cut down, to rise again every 7 years. However, as we have only a few hundred yards of almost pure hazel hedge (we have no idea why or when it was planted), why not manage it to suit the hazel rather than the farmer?

After a couple of weeks of laying, I am convinced that a hazel hedge is not particularly valuable as wildlife habitat, the long straight smooth stems, with few branches unless it has been flailed, offer very little purchase for birds' nests for example, and there is no 'bottom' to it at all, all stems reach for the sky from day one.

Planting a New Hedge

When planting a new hedge I would never intentionally plant Hazel, it would outgrow all other species, and when flailed leaves unseemly split ends on every stem. Another no for a hedge mix would be Elder, poisonous to many animals, too fast growing, and seems to possess allelopathic properties (suppresses neighbouring plants), also on the no list would be any bramble, or wild clematis (Old Man's Beard), which can ruin a young or re-growing hedge.



Another trouble maker can be Ivy, which will appear from nowhere, and needs repeated knocking back, I have to admit it is quite satisfying to cut a ring around an ivy clad tree, and then watch over the following months as the ivy leaves shrivel and fall, and finally the stems decay and fall away. There is little sadder a sight than a tree that is clearly losing its battle with marauding ivy, which when it reaches the crown, declares a pyrrhic victory, only to crash to the ground with the defeated tree once it has been suffocated. Don't get me wrong, Ivy has a beauty all of its own, and it supports a wide variety of other species, especially when flowering in late summer, it truly hums. But there's a time and a place.

SFI26 and Hedgerow Condition Assessment being dropped

The latest edition of the Sustainable Farming Incentive, SFI26, announced by DEFRA secretary of state Emma Reynolds in February, has for some inexplicable reason, dropped the option of Hedgerow Condition Assessment (CHRW1).

SFI26: details, definitions and what to expect

The Team, 24 February 2026 - Farming and Countryside Team



Credit: Becky Briggs

This was a very simple and relatively inexpensive payment to land occupiers to begin the process of hedge improvement. John Calder, the GBDH Project Manager, spotted an opportunity for non-farmers to engage in this important process, since then many miles of Dorset hedge have been surveyed, gaps have been planted up, and potential hedge layers have dipped a toe in. There is a huge band of around 400 volunteers willing and able to get stuck into the project, but without the SFI assessment incentive, will this have an impact on the GBDH project? See John Calder's article on page 14 for an answer.

This is what we are all too often up against, the constant moving of goalposts.

George Hosford

Agricultural Advisor to Dorset CPRE

Removed	CHRW1	Assess and record hedgerow condition	£5/100m (one side)
Removed	CHRW3	Maintain or establish hedgerow trees	£10/100m (both sides)

Reason for removing: CHRW1 has very high uptake, but it is being removed because it does not deliver direct environmental benefits and therefore gives very low value for money. CHRW3 also has very high uptake and low value for money. The removal of CHRW3 means we will no longer pay specifically for the maintenance of existing hedgerow trees (which gives limited additional environmental benefit because most farmers maintain these trees anyway).

CPRE Annual Report & Accounts for Year Ending 31st August 2025

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 £10,799.70 were paid out for the following projects:

Dorset CPRE:

Fingerpost Grants	£ 1,650.00
Barbara Vance Countryside Prize – Wildlife related projects	£ 249.70
Sponsor Dorset Hedgelaying competition	£ 300.00
The Great Big Dorset Hedge (Dorset CAN project)	£ 6,000.00
Consultancy work ref Blackberry/Wyke Solar Farm	£ 900.00

Sherborne and District Society CPRE

Consultancy work ref Blackberry/Wyke Solar Farm	£ 900.00
David Birley's Christmas Appeal	£ 300.00
Sponsoring new lime trees in front of the Abbey	£ 500.00

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

Statement of Financial Activities for the Year Ended 31 August 2025

	Unrestricted funds £	2025 Total funds £	2024 Total funds £
Income and Endowments from:			
Donations and legacies	39,275	39,275	21,551
Activities for generating funds	255	255	2,363
Investment income	24,708	24,708	24,164
Total Income	<u>64,238</u>	<u>64,238</u>	<u>48,078</u>
Expenditure on:			
Raising funds	(57,740)	(57,740)	(58,239)
Charitable activities	(12,448)	(12,448)	(12,853)
Total expenditure	<u>(70,188)</u>	<u>(70,188)</u>	<u>(71,092)</u>
Gains/losses on investment assets	<u>12,337</u>	<u>12,337</u>	<u>34,843</u>
Net movement in funds	6,387	6,387	11,829
Reconciliation of funds			
Total funds brought forward	760,642	760,642	748,813
Total funds carried forward	<u>767,029</u>	<u>767,029</u>	<u>760,642</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. 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 security and income in future years. Currently any income generated by the Canaccord Genuity portfolio along with Flagstone IM is reinvested within the portfolio.

Tom Stevens is our new Investment Manager at Canaccord Wealth UK (rebranded from Canaccord Genuity Wealth Management) and no change is recorded in the underlying strategy. 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, however, our prime focus is the pursuit of secure and carefully considered investment.

The Reserves and Investment policies were discussed at the 25th September 2025 Trustees Meeting. The Investment Policy was last updated in March 2024. The Treasurer will recommend investments with investment managers or UK regulated financial institutions, with such recommendations agreed and recorded by the Trustees in committee.

Our North Dorset Group received a donation of £13,800 from the Save Our Siltan Group after they closed their bank account. The donation came with a proviso that that the group can ask for up to £10k in the next five years if needed to fight a new application – there are four years remaining.

Governance

The Trustees of Dorset CPRE are mindful of their responsibility to regularly review the constitution of the Charity and keep it up to date. Dorset CPRE has recently updated its 2014 Constitution. The updates reflect important clarifications and improvements to our governance, ensuring the Branch's continued effectiveness and compliance with National CPRE requirements. The number of Trustees is increased from seven to eleven to help share the workload.

The Dorset CPRE Policies are reviewed annually in February and no new policies have been added during the year.

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 as part of a health check and desire for it to be a living document. The Trustees are looking to refresh the Mission and Strategy for 2026, National CPRE's Centenary year.

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

In June, our online planning conference looked at how Dorset can rise to the challenge of ensuring that all new homes achieve Net Zero. 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 that we have responded to including: Brownfield Passports, Examination of BCP Council Local Plan, Land Use Framework, Dorset Local Nature Recovery Strategy, Dorset Council Local Plan Site Options and Dorset Local Transport Plan (LPT4).

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. Thank you to all our members. We extend our heartfelt thanks to members who have supported us through their volunteering efforts during this year, we are very grateful.

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. We know that our communities need some development to support economic and community growth. This includes both market and truly affordable homes. But these need to be homes that reflect genuine local need not an arbitrary central government target. See article 'Dorset housing: targets v needs' on page 16 for more details.

We continue to promote the Great Big Dorset Hedge (GBDH) project, a long term campaign to facilitate the restoration and extension of hedgerows across all of Dorset. Currently, there are 120 farmers participating in the project. CPRE volunteers help with hedgerow surveys as part of the GBDH initiative and meet the landowner where possible. In April 2025, Dorset CPRE agreed another £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.

Grants and Sponsorship

Dorset CPRE is one of the sponsors of the annual Dorset Hedgelaying Competition held in September and organised by the Melpash Agricultural Society. We attended the 2025 event and continued with support during the 2024/5 financial year. Some of the prize winners are featured in an article for our Autumn 2025 magazine.

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 2025, we have spent £22,837.50 on grants for 164 fingerposts, since the scheme was launched in 2017. Our February 2025 press release on the grant scheme was well received, and two volunteers came forward to offer their skills as Fingerpost Champions.

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. To date, we have paid out grants for three projects with an additional two approved and awaiting completion. An article on completed projects is featured in our magazine.

We are looking forward to a landmark year ahead with CPRE's National Centenary in 2026. Hopefully it will provide an opportunity to engage the public and create a stronger future for CPRE. See article on page 4 for details on CPRE's Centenary.

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:

Grey Belt Planning Appeals (December 2025)

Produced by CPRE and Good Plan Consulting.

Since the NPPF changes in 2024 introduced grey belt policy, there has been a significant number of successful appeals against rejected planning applications in the Green Belt. It appears that the policy change has stimulated a flurry of appeals in cases that were refused prior to grey belt being introduced.

The notion that grey belt policy is intended to enable the re-use of derelict land in the Green Belt – as it was communicated by government on its introduction – contrasts sharply with a strong greenfield emphasis to what is being approved. Of the grey belt cases approved, 10 sites (77% of the total) are greenfield, and these greenfield sites will accommodate the vast majority of the housing to be built (88%). The cases CPRE and Good Plan Consulting examined that have been determined since the policy was introduced provide 1,250 houses, of which just 152 are on previously developed land, brownfield (12%).

Timelining the Pipeline: housing development end to end (December 2025)

New research undertaken by the University of Reading and Lyon CPT, supported by CPRE, exploring how time is used in the development pipeline. The research explores nine case studies, including one showing the entire development pipeline of a project in southern England, from landowner permission to the end of build-out.

Little research has been carried out examining time use across the development pipeline. Dorset MP Oliver Letwin (2018) came closest to this but did not look at what tasks and issues were involved, or the whole pipeline and only assessed very large construction projects.

Strategic Housing Market Assessments in rural areas (January 2026)

Produced by University of the West of England

The aim of this research is to assess the identified need for social housing in rural England and make the case for meeting this need to be prioritised within the new government's planning policies.

A Strategic Housing Market Assessment (SHMA) is a study of the way the housing market works in any particular area. It looks into the type of people living in the area, where they work and what sort of houses they need. The government encourages local authorities to work together on SHMA for their area. Here in Dorset, an assessment of housing needs is being undertaken to inform the production of the Dorset Council Local Plan, and the Bournemouth, Christchurch and Poole Local Plan and scheduled to be published in late April.

Understanding the tools for integrating land use decision-making (March 2026)

Demand has never been higher on England's finite land, with 1.5 million new homes planned during this parliament alone, in the context of a changing climate. Yet decisions on land are not integrated, creating ever-more pressure on this finite resource. The current policy context in which land use decisions are being made is undergoing change at pace with major implications for



England's cities, towns and countryside. This research, authored by Ellie Brody and founder of Grounded Insight, speaks to the challenge and considers the tools that enable integration of land use decision-making across sectors and scales.

The report identifies six strategic mechanisms, including Spatial Development Strategies, Local Nature Recovery Strategies and the Climate Adaptation Reporting Power, that already exist and could enable smarter, joined-up decisions to be made about land use.

The report highlights that the issue is not a lack of policy tools, but that they're being used in silos. Each mechanism has been developed through the lens of a different government department, producing a patchwork of strategies that overlap, contradict and occasionally cancel each other out.

Of the six tools examined, Spatial Development Strategies - which will be introduced as part of the English Devolution Bill - emerge as the most promising. They have the potential to balance housing need alongside climate, nature and food priorities but risk being treated simply as a means of distributing housebuilding targets.

With major planning consultations open and the Devolution Bill progressing through Parliament, CPRE is calling on the government to establish a statutory national plan for land use, develop a spatial framework that integrates all major sectors, and support Strategic Authorities to deliver on climate and nature targets alongside housing.

Also in March, National CPRE responded to the publication of the government's Land Use Framework (LUF), welcoming its ambition while urging stronger safeguards to ensure the countryside is protected as competing demands on land intensify. Dorset CPRE responded to the LUF consultation in April 2025.

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, £7 for Household membership, and new for 2026 we have a digital Campaign Membership option for £3 p/m. We also provide membership for Organisations, Town and Parish Councils from £5 a month or £60 per year.

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. Please note that all opening dates and times are subject to change, so please check property website details or phone ahead before visiting.

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 Travellers Rest Farm, Durweston.

9th June – Summer Planning Conference, 'Getting the Balance right between Dorset's Housing, Nature and the Countryside'. Please see page 3.

25th September – Centenary Celebration event. **Please return enclosed booking form.**

21th November – **89th Anniversary AGM**, 11 am, Cerne Abbas Village Hall. This marks CPRE's Centenary year. Simon Murray, Chair of National CPRE, will talk us through the first 100 years of CPRE since the pioneering days of 1926.

Campaign to Protect Rural England

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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.

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