The Dorset Review

Autumn/Winter 2026 News Issue 127



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100 YEARS CPRE Campaign to Protect Rural England Dorset

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Front Cover image – Walk down the Moor Crichel beech avenue in all its autumn glory, taken by Rupert Hardy.

Chair's Report

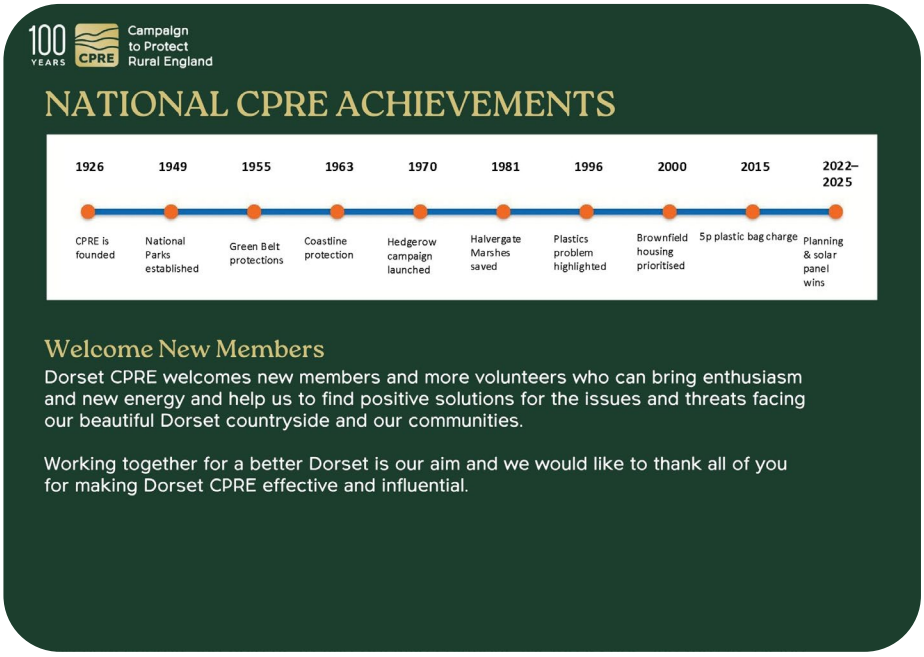


Milton Abbey was a very appropriate place to mark 100 years of protecting the countryside in September. The beauty of the countryside and the historic legacy of the Abbey itself demonstrated how special Dorset is and how vital the role of the CPRE remains today as it has during the last century. The Abbey is a great illustration of the lack of funding for our countryside and heritage. Let's hope their current funding bid is successful in securing a better visitor centre and parking so that more people can enjoy this spectacular place.



Image: Sharon Goble

Milton Abbey



As reported on page 10, the evening we had at Milton Abbey was one to celebrate all that we've achieved over a hundred years as a national charity, next year 90 years here in Dorset. I enjoyed meeting so many members and partners that we work with. Without you we couldn't have the impact we have. Not least, we are keen to support our farmers after such devastating summer weather and the chaos of government support for agriculture. A viable countryside depends on thriving agriculture. As George Hosford, our Agricultural Advisor highlighted when he spoke at Milton Abbey, there's a responsibility that lands on the government but also on all of us.

Sustainable Farming Incentive

The mess of the latest support scheme, the 'Sustainable Farming Incentive' threatens the continuing viability of many of our farms – see also George's article in our Autumn 2025 magazine. At the same time, we as consumers are not fully playing our part. As George pointed out, going into Tesco in September and finding three times as many apples from overseas as from British growers is a disgrace. We all need to spend more time checking the provenance of the food we buy to support our farmers and our community.



Visit to Travellers Rest Farm

A visit organised by Dorset CPRE to George Hosford's farm, at Durweston earlier in the summer, allowed members to see how much effort goes into protecting the long-term sustainability and biodiversity of our farms. Much of the farm lies within the South Wessex Downs Environmentally Sensitive Area and the Dorset National Landscape. George and his brother Dougal host visits from schools, giving pupils the opportunity to learn about food and how it is produced, and to enjoy curriculum-linked cookery sessions. The Hosfords believe that a farm can be a remarkably effective and stimulating classroom, with relevance to most of the subjects taught in school.

Planning Conference 2026

In June we had our annual online planning conference with 111 people attending. Our theme was getting the right balance between Dorset's housing, nature and the countryside. And our speakers did justice to this continuing challenge. It was good to hear from Wessex Water and their commitment to investing in sustainable, linked up water supply systems for the county.

I was also pleased that the leaders of both Dorset Council and Bournemouth, Christchurch and Poole Council gave a joint presentation, both acknowledged the considerable challenge created by mandatory national housing targets, while reaffirming their commitment to protecting Dorset's natural environment. See article on page 16 for more details.

Planning Applications

Vigilance on planning applications continues to be a bedrock part of our work. As well as commenting on appropriateness of housing developments, we are also keen to play our part in the debate about the future role of major developments like Data Centres and the impact that can have on our local communities.

Great Big Dorset Hedge funding

Thank you to all our members who volunteer as part of the Great Big Dorset Hedge project. Our funding of this initiative is vital to its continuation, but so too is our manpower. I was pleased to recently join one of the hedge survey teams and was amazed at how much I learnt about the diversity of species in just a short stretch of hedge and how this can be protected for future generations.

Seeking Trustees

We are looking to appoint new trustees at the AGM and would love to hear from you if interested in becoming a trustee or know of anyone with enthusiasm, skills and a passion for environmental and countryside issues. For more information, please phone or email info@dorset-cpre.org.uk for an impartial chat.

Jez Hughes CBE
Chair of Trustees

89th AGM



Roger Mortlock, CPRE's Chief Executive, Guest Speaker

We are delighted that Roger will join us on Saturday 21st November for our 89th AGM at Cerne Abbas Village Hall, starting at 11am. **Please see enclosed A4 booking form.**

As part of our continuing CPRE Centenary celebrations, Roger Mortlock, CPRE's Chief Executive, will take us through the organisation's first 100 years, from its pioneering beginnings in 1926 to the present day. Find out how and why CPRE started, and celebrate what the organisation has achieved for the countryside.

Roger Mortlock, joined National CPRE as Chief Executive in May 2023 and is responsible for the overall running of the organisation. He joined following 10 years as Chief Executive of the Gloucestershire Wildlife Trust, and leadership roles at the Soil Association and the Royal Shakespeare Company. He is passionate about a more sustainable future for rural England and CPRE's role in finding solutions which make the best use of our land and safeguard our countryside.

Happiest on two wheels or on foot in the countryside, Roger lives in the Stroud Valleys in Gloucestershire. He has held non-executive roles with the Bat Conservation Trust and the Soil Association Land Trust and is currently a trustee with the Summerfield Charitable Trust.

Do come, meet some of your fellow members, and see what we are up to.

Centenary Tree Planting Appeal



Black Poplar Training Day with Tree image by Trees for Dorset

Dorset CPRE is celebrating CPRE's centenary and plans to mark the milestone anniversary by planting hundreds of trees this winter, including endangered species. Planting more trees is essential to offset climate change, restore wetlands, and replace trees in Dorset afflicted by disease, such as Ash Dieback.

The main planting sites should be at Kingston Maurward (DT2 8PX), a land-based college east of Dorchester, now part of Coastland College, with space for 250 saplings.

Black Poplar

The first will be on a water meadow adjacent to the Thomas Hardy Trail and a short stroll from Stinsford church, where Thomas Hardy's heart is buried. The plan is to plant up to a dozen Black Poplars here, Britain's rarest native timber tree, commonly used for cartwheels and floorboards, and an icon of the British treescape. It was used in the construction of Henry VIII's warship, the Mary Rose. John Constable's famous painting The Hay Wain features the tree too. Now there are only 7,000 left in Britain, threatened by gender imbalance, loss of habitat as well as hybridisation. The tree has been native to the UK since the last Ice Age. Greek mythology suggests the black poplar was actually created after Phaeton's fatal attempt to drive Apollo's chariot. Phaeton's sisters made such a fuss mourning his demise that the gods transformed them into black poplars weeping drops of amber.

To recognise them, mature trees can grow to 40m and live for 200 years. The bark is dark brown but often appears black, and is thick with numerous fissures and burrs. Flowers are catkins, with the male red and female yellow-green. Many different species rely on the black poplar to live, breed and thrive. As it's a tree that favours damp conditions, poplars can help clean up our river systems and combat climate change, as part of wetland restoration schemes. The saplings will come from the nursery of local charity Trees for Dorset, one of the groups trying to restore the local tree population. Here is a link to a video recording for their plans for the black poplar https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8yT5dCOOfo8&t=29s/ .

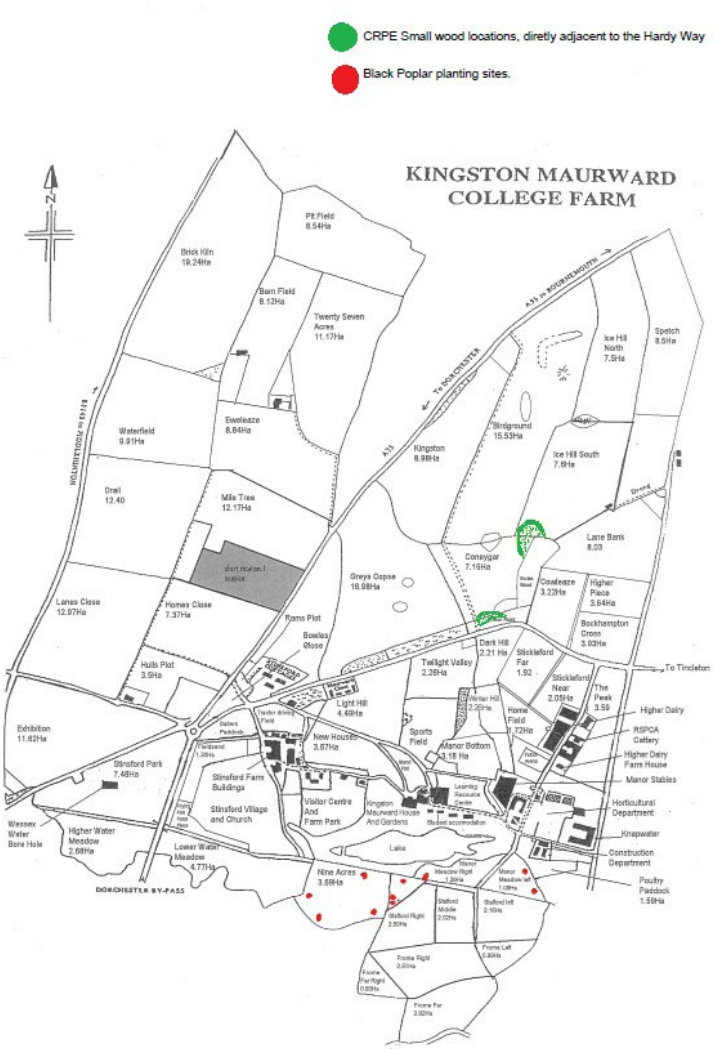
Two other sites are expected to be on beautiful but easily accessible downland close to the Thomas Hardy Trail, where a variety of native deciduous trees will be planted, including disease-resistant Elms. These two are still though at the planning stage. Kingston Maurward will kindly provide the aftercare needed, as well as the sites.



Trees planting downland site



Trees planting downland site 3





Trees planting water meadow site

How To Sponsor a Tree

We hope that CPRE members and others will back our centenary appeal by sponsoring a tree. We aim to raise at least £7,000, and we are well on our way to doing that but we need more, enough to plant 250 saplings at a cost of just £25 per tree. Here is a link to Dorset CPRE's Sponsorship page on JustGiving https://justgiving.com/campaign/dcpre-centenary-tree-appeal. We are only asking for £25 to adopt a tree. We also explain other ways to pay. There is a map of the sites on our website too.

A permanent centenary commemoration plaque will be placed at each site in recognition of donations. We hope people will be generous and adopt more than one tree. Sponsoring one of these trees is a fantastic way to mark CPRE's Centenary here in Dorset.

Rupert Hardy

Trustee and Lead on the Centenary Tree Planting project

West Dorset Group





The Dorchester sign A35



Map of Stinsford development. Arrow shows direction of photo and X where it was taken

Is this the end of Thomas Hardy's Historic Dorchester?

We have been particularly concerned with three large housing applications recently. All three give us serious cause for alarm, but arguably the most troubling is the proposal to build 500 houses (P/OUT/2026/03215) just outside Dorchester, in the Stinsford parish. This application is particularly devious. The huge plan to build 3,750 houses across the north of Dorchester has been "salami sliced" by Grainger PLC and Wyatt Homes. It should be presented in one application. This is, I think, to get the developer's foot in the door and use it as a precedent for the rest – and before the Local Plan is published. Stinsford is where Thomas Hardy was born. He used to walk these fields using them as the settings for his books. He is famous the world over. The centre of Hardy's Dorset, Dorchester, will be effectively destroyed if this and the rest of the 3,750 are built. The Thomas Hardy Society describes this as a 'desecration and sacrilege of his literary heritage'. There is a myriad of very important reasons why this should be rejected out of hand. These include the following. The site is under a mile to the east of the town in open countryside and outside Dorchester's development boundary. Residents will need to drive to shops and school. The resulting traffic from the site will cause gridlock around the Stinsford Roundabout and the A3150 London Road into Dorchester as well as the ring road and elsewhere. Inadequate cycleways and footpaths are planned.



Image: Linda Poulsen

View of Dorchester in the distance, with the proposed building site in the foreground – see map above

The development is close to the Eagle Lodge borehole, the source of Dorchester's drinking water, and may contaminate it. Likewise the River Frome which flows into Poole Harbour, and which has already had many episodes of pollution, is at great risk. We all witnessed flooding on a huge scale last winter. The building north of Dorchester will exacerbate this greatly. Incidentally no realistic medical services are planned.

Good Agricultural Land

The site is on mostly good agricultural land. In these times of increasing pressure on land and the ability to feed ourselves, we cannot afford loss of any more of it. In addition there are vital irreplaceable Roman and Prehistoric archaeological locations which will be destroyed. Overall this is the first section of a mega plan that will make Hardy's "Historic County Town" of Dorchester unrecognisable and irrevocably damaged – as well as it's beautiful green surroundings. "An isolated and car dependent cow pat in the countryside" as the Dorchester Civic Society says. They, along with Dorset Police, Wessex Water, the Environment Agency and Stinsford Parish Council and many others, object to this plan. I should mention the excellent group STAND (Save The Area North of Dorchester) who have been fighting this valiantly.

Housing proposed in Charminster and Weymouth

The other two large development applications are these. One is North west of Dorchester in Charminster. A site of 153 houses (P/FUL/2026/03770) with similar arguments against. An inappropriate development outside the settlement boundary causing severe damage to countryside in the Piddle and Cerne valleys. Charminster, a historic village, will be urbanised. Much damage to wildlife including protected Kestrels and Barn Owls is likely. As above, the traffic would be hugely increased which the area cannot start to cope with. The group CHARM is also fighting this.

The other application is a massive 360 house development (P/OUT/2026/03607) in a vital "green lung" north of the Weymouth police station. Again outside the development boundary and with adverse effects on Radipole Lake SSRI, the Fleet Special Area of Conservation and Chesil Beach amongst other areas of ecological importance.

Melplash Agricultural Show

Dr Diane Stanley (vice-chair) and I attended the Melplash Show attempting to spread the word about our Centenary Celebration Event, attending the sponsors tea later in the day and met representatives from other organisations. Diane also helped out at the Oak Fair (I couldn't make it).

Lyscombe National Nature Reserve

On 15th September, I was at the launch of the Lyscombe National Nature Reserve (Dorset Wildlife Trust and Natural England) – one of the King's Series of National Nature Reserves (NNR) – 334 hectares of chalk grassland, ancient woodland, and heritage features, including 50 hectares of nationally important Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) chalk downland. A beautiful area.

Dr Guy Dickinson
Group Chairman

Litter Free Dorset Campaigns

Litter Free Dorset #MyWeymouth campaign

In Weymouth, the #MyWeymouth campaign brought together businesses, residents and visitors to play their part in keeping it clean, welcoming and litter free. A range of initiatives relied on the engagement and enthusiasm of the wonderful volunteers and businesses who all wanted to take action to reduce litter and waste in Weymouth.

Testing New Ways to Tackle Litter

The #MyWeymouth project is designed to tackle litter at its source across some of Weymouth's key litter hotspots. Before launching any interventions, LFD wanted to better understand local attitudes, behaviours and challenges around littering, ensuring that their actions were guided by evidence rather than assumptions. To gather this insight, they undertook a wide range of engagement activities, including the Litter Free Dorset Summit held in January, a Weymouth wide litter survey that received more than 200 responses, focus groups with residents, workshops with eco clubs at Wey Valley Academy and Budmouth Academy, and ongoing collaboration with Weymouth Town Council. This feedback helped identify priority locations and informed the development of a series of targeted litter prevention trials across the town. Each trial was carefully monitored using before-and-after litter audits to measure its effectiveness. Following positive results, several interventions have now been expanded and rolled out across Weymouth as part of their summer 2026 campaign.



Meet the #MyWeymouth Beach Rangers

One of the most visible additions to the summer programme was the launch of the #MyWeymouth Beach Rangers. Operating throughout the school holidays, the Rangers engaged directly with beach visitors, rewarding positive behaviour, thanking people for disposing of litter responsibly, distributing bin bags and encouraging everyone to play their part in keeping Weymouth clean and welcoming.

Ban the BBQ

As noted in other articles in this magazine, Dorset experienced a prolonged period of hot, dry weather this summer, reducing fire risk became more important than ever. Throughout the season, LFD continued to push for an end to the sale and use of disposable BBQs through their Ban the BBQ campaign.

A key focus of the campaign was engaging with retailers, encouraging them to remove disposable BBQs from sale in line with the British Retail Consortium's voluntary guidance. This year marked the first time the guidance specifically enacted retailers to consider withdrawing these products, and the LFD message was simple: retailers should follow the commitments they have voluntarily signed up to.



Alongside retailer engagement, LFD encouraged the public to get involved by signing the petition to ban the sale of disposable BBQs, downloading and sharing template letters with local stores, and helping spread the message within their communities. The widely shared social media campaign reached hundreds of thousands of people, raising awareness of the environmental impacts, litter issues and fire risks associated with disposable BBQs.

The summer ended on a positive note with the Government announcing a temporary ban on disposable BBQs in response to the extreme conditions. A national alert urged people to avoid activities that could start fires, and temporary restrictions on disposable BBQ use were introduced in response to the heightened risk. While there is still work to do, these developments represent an important step forward and demonstrate the growing momentum behind calls to phase out disposable BBQs for good.

Looking Ahead

Throughout the autumn and winter, LFD will be building on the success of their **Love Your Harbour** project, continuing their work to reduce litter in Lyme Regis and West Bay. This next phase will focus on expanding several of the initiatives that have already proved successful elsewhere along the coast. They will be introducing **Toy Libraries** (families can borrow, play and return beach toys) in both locations, encouraging reuse and reducing plastic waste and litter. They will also be extending the **Don't Feed the Locals** campaign, working with local takeaway businesses to incorporate campaign messaging on packaging and encourage visitors not to feed gulls, helping to tackle litter and associated water quality issues. Alongside this, they will be introducing engaging messaging to remind visitors to dispose of their waste responsibly and help keep our beaches and harbour areas clean and welcoming for everyone.



Join a litter picking group near you!

A big thank you to our members who undertake local and community litter picks. If you are interested in making a difference to your local environment, LFD support a range of community and volunteer groups across Dorset who organise regular litter picking and beach cleaning activities in their local areas. Please visit www.litterfreedorset.co.uk for more information on how to organise your own clean-up and contact details for groups near you.

The Sherborne and District Society





Members visited Mike Tizzard's Dairy Farm at Lower Farm, Lillington, in September 2022

I very much hope you have all survived the unusual summer weather and are now braced to confront whatever the Mega El Nino might have in store.

Farming

It is a time to reflect on the many challenges that have faced our farmers over the past year: uncertainties in weather, government policy, costs and prices. With the world situation and climate change unlikely to help matters, their plight is unlikely to improve. As we are too seldom reminded, we are an island nation, over-dependent in my view on imported food – some 40% and even greater in some specific areas. As national resilience begins to emerge as an important element of security, we need to be doing more to reduce our dependency on others for our food; and that means much more support for our own agricultural industries. We should also be mindful that our farmers are in essence the custodians of most of our green spaces – CPRE's principal partners in our mission to preserve the beauty and accessibility of our countryside.

There are three areas I should like to cover in this issue: Newell House, Planning Issues and this year's AGM.

Newell House

The loss of this prominent listed building through fire remains a challenge for the town. An eyesore at a major portal into Sherborne, it stands forlorn, partly destroyed and boarded up. Efforts continue to get the owner to accept his responsibilities, sell to a reputable buyer and allow the site to be developed or redeveloped in a fitting manner. We shall be pressing Dorset Council to do more to get this urgent action underway, very much in harmony with the Town Council and other local bodies.

Planning

The new National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF), which is designed to speed up the process, came into force in August. Whilst there are some safeguards, the default position is to approve planning applications. Overall, with the Government's target of 1.5 million dwellings in the 5 years between General Elections, the pressure on rural areas and greenfield sites is substantial.

In July, Dorset Council announced it would revisit its Local Plan schedule; the timetable has been published and is available on the Dorset Council Website. The process commences on 21st September with Scoping Consultation until late October, with results published in March next year. The Plan then moves to various stages of development with consultations. It is expected to go for examination in July 2028 with adoption in February 2029.

The Government's Standard Method now requires Dorset Council to plan for 3,246 homes each year – double the average of around 1,600 homes built annually in recent years, and far above the level supported by demographic evidence alone. Dorset Council has yet to determine whether this figure is deliverable or how development would be distributed across the county. Given the default position in the NPPF, it is going to be difficult to protect our countryside, but we will work with Dorset Council and Town Councils to try to do so. As you are aware, Sherborne will have an as yet undefined housing target, but as you will recall earlier estimates spoke of 1500 plus, a figure which we do not recognise or accept. We are working very closely with the landowners, Sherborne Castle Estates, who are developing a Master Plan for the location. I might add that the villages also are being targeted – you will be able to hear more about this at our AGM.

The delay in developing a Local Plan has led to several consequences, including speculative planning applications, owing to the NPPF's presumption of sustainable development applications being granted. There are two such applications which we are opposing or making observations: firstly, the Lenthay Road proposal for a development near the Primary School, which was designated in last year's consultations and was expected to be included in the Local Plan; and, secondly, an outline application by Hallam Land Management for 380 houses North and South of Compton Road, just within Dorset at the end of Babylon Hill.

Two other quick mentions: firstly, we have objected to the change in use of the Hillbrook Hotel to residential accommodation; and secondly, we continue to oppose the development in the Harvest Lane area of Charlton Horthorne, which we jointly opposed with Somerset CPRE and which is now in the appeal process.

AGM

The Sherborne and District Society will be holding its Annual General Meeting on Wednesday 11th November at the Raleigh Hall, Digby Road, Sherborne, DT9 3NL. Wine and soft drinks will be served from 6pm with the AGM commencing at 6.30pm. In addition to updates from the Committee, Nigel Jones will be our guest speaker to provide an insight into Sherborne Castle Estates' plans for its proposed development to the west of Sherborne.

If you are interested in attending, could you please advise David Gidney on davidgidney21@gmail.com.

Sir Christopher Coville
Chairman

A Plea for Common Sense on the Local Plan

Last year Dorset Council consulted local people on sites for new homes in the area. That exercise was based on a Government target of 55,000 extra homes in Dorset by 2043 at a rate of **3,246 each year**.

Dorset CPRE believes that target to be undeliverable, **based on a false assumption** and ultimately harmful.

Market Realities

Lobbyists and commentators tell us that, at ten times average earnings, Dorset's high house prices are caused by lack of supply, so more building will drive down prices and help young people to buy a home (and stay in the area). But is that really true? The consultation last year revealed that there are **10,000 house plots with planning permission in Dorset that remain unused**. If the market were constrained by supply then surely those plots would be built on not left unused?

Also, a detailed look shows that affordability is remarkably stable in Dorset. The ratio of house prices to earnings has remained at around 10:1 for over 20 years. Over that period both earnings and house prices approximately doubled, so something must be keeping them in lock-step. The obvious conclusion is that **demand controls Dorset's house prices** – prices are controlled by peoples' ability and willingness to pay – and new supply is controlled by developers' ability to sell their output profitably.

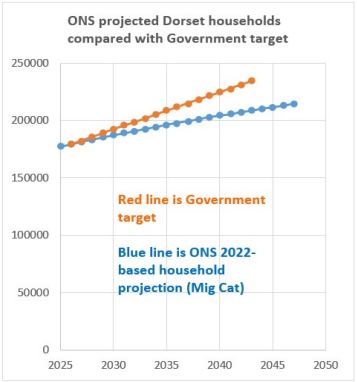


Recent failures to increase home building in England and in London particularly have prompted a new awareness that supply-side planning reform hasn't solved and won't solve the problem of high prices.

The Evidence from ONS

Once the lack-of-supply price myth is dismissed, more attention should be paid to demand and to demography in particular. The Office for National Statistics (ONS) publish estimates of how the number of households in Dorset would change given recent trends in population and household size. None of the Dorset projections comes near to filling 3,246 new homes per annum, the government target.

The most recent figures for the plan period 2026-43 suggest that household size may decline by 7.5% while the household population might increase by 7.7%. Combined, these amount to a total growth in households of 16.4%, or about **1,731 each year**.



That's far less than the Government target and much nearer the recent delivery in Dorset of about 1,600 new homes per annum – so it makes sense to view housing delivery as demand-led rather than supply-constrained.

The implications for planning in Dorset are important.

Dorset Council isn't expected to build those 3,246 homes every year – that's the job of private developers – but if they aren't built at the target rate then national policy takes away the power of DC's planning committees to control where planning permission is granted.

In fact those **developers habitually build far less homes – only about 1,600 each year** – so in effect that high target hands over planning control to them.

The Consequences of Adopting the Government Housing Targets

Sooner or later any Dorset Local Plan based on the Government housing target of 55,000 new homes by 2043 is bound to fail, with actual development based on demand likely to proceed at about half that pace. Meanwhile, **allocating twice as much land as will be used means that half of those allocations will be in places that the Council and communities would not have chosen** – places resulting in more harm than necessary if built on. That's more impact on communities than necessary, more use of crowded roads than necessary, more loss of green space than necessary, more landscape harm than necessary, and so on. The wrong houses in the wrong places. The Council won't be able to say **"no"** because those sites have been allocated in a harmful Local Plan.

Dorset Council's new approach to Local Plan

In July, the Council announced their decision not to continue to progress the Local Plan under the legacy system, but to produce a new Local Plan under the new 30-month system. The local plan is scheduled for adoption in 2029.

Dorset CPRE welcomes this decision, and the opportunities which the new timetable will provide for Dorset Council to reset its approach to the Local Plan. A fresh approach will, we hope, include a renewed commitment to working and consulting closely throughout the process with local communities and other stakeholders, with the aim of shaping a shared vision and preparing a new Plan to address Dorset's genuine needs.

Dorset Council is currently running a Local Plan Scoping Consultation from 21st September to 26th October 2026, inviting public comments on what the new Local Plan should cover and how future engagement should work. Dorset CPRE's response will be published on our website and shared via our e-newsletter.

Andrew Procter
Planning Group Chair

CPRE Centenary Celebration event at Milton Abbey



Image: Sharon Goble

Centenary Event members and guests

September this year proved a perfect time for visiting Milton Abbey with the beautiful late summer weather and the glorious building of the Abbey itself shining in the sunlight. It was a packed occasion for members, supporters, friends, organisations and partner agencies working with Dorset CPRE to meet and celebrate a hundred years of the work of the charity in England. Display boards charted the history and achievements of the Dorset branch founded some ten years later.

Anne Litchfield, Milton Abbey Archivist, started the evening with a brief history of the Abbey.

Renowned journalist and President of Dorset CPRE, Kate Adie, set the scene by talking about the continuing need to protect the countryside as important today as a hundred years ago, but with different pressures and different priorities. Much of the early years were putting in some



Image: Sharon Goble

Kate Adie



Image: Sharon Goble

Kate, George, Nick, and Mary-Ann

key legislation that we still benefit from today. For example, the planning controls and the creation of National Parks. It was only thanks to the pressure of CPRE and others that these actually reached the statute book and were there to help manage the relationship between development and sustainability of the countryside in a way that supported the local economy for the long term. Kate highlighted how CPRE looks to the future of towns and villages as well as the surrounding countryside.



Image: Sharon Goble

Mary-Ann Ochota

National President Mary-Ann Ochota congratulated Dorset CPRE on its work, highlighting its long-running funding for iconic Dorset Fingerposts and its support for the regeneration of Dorset's hedgerows. She summed up the strength of CPRE as an organisation of passionate volunteers with a membership as diverse as the nation we do our work for. She said: **"**It's about being smart, being brave, and being committed to a long term positive future for our countryside**"**.

Passion, Expertise and Commitment

Leader of Dorset Council, Cllr Nick Ireland, congratulated CPRE on a hundred years of protecting the countryside, a phenomenal achievement. He particularly recognised **"**the passion, expertise and commitment Dorset CPRE members bring to protecting the landscapes and communities that make this county so special.**"** He said: **"**Dorset is fortunate to have such a strong voice speaking for all the places we care about**"**.

Nick said that it is wrong to see the future of the countryside as a choice between protection and progress. He described the **"**defining question of our time**"** as how to protect landscapes, restore nature, and support farming whilst also providing homes, jobs, infrastructure and clean energy.



Image: Trevor Bevins

Nick is proud that Dorset has ambitious targets, for natural recovery, sustainable farming, and improving access to nature. He said: **"**A thriving countryside is about people as well as landscapes. One of the great challenges of Dorset is too many of our local people find it necessary to leave their homes to get better employment opportunities. Meanwhile, employers continually tell us they struggle to recruit the skills they need. Many rural communities face challenges around transport, productivity and access to services. But if you care about the future of the countryside, you must care about the future of rural communities too. That means supporting a sustainable local economy, helping market towns and villages to remain vibrant places to live and work.**"**

Make Balanced Decisions

Nick went on to say that **"**development must reflect nature, landscape and local character. We want to make balanced decisions to ensure that development happens in the right places in the right way and the same is true of energy. The climate crisis, combined with policy instability, means we need a rapid transition to clean energy. But that does not mean that every proposal is automatically the right proposal. So I welcome CPRE's approach that we don't have to choose between clean energy and protecting the countryside**"**. He particularly welcomes CPRE's commitment to solar energy from rooftops on existing buildings.

Cllr Ireland concluded: **"**For a hundred years, CPRE has challenged bad decisions and championed good ones. I encourage people to think about the long-term future of the countryside. These responsibilities are no less true today than they were a hundred years ago**"**.

He summed up his vision for the future as **"**A countryside where nature is recovering, communities are thriving, young people have opportunities to stay and progress is delivered in a way that respects the landscape of Dorset. I'm sure we all agree that that is a future worth working for together.**"**

Pace of Changes in Farming

Local farmer George Hosford, highlighted the accelerating pace of changes in farming from when his father first introduced tractors to their farm in the 1940s, and a quarter of the farmland was no longer needed to feed the horses. Fertilisers revolutionised productivity and then from the 1970s onwards there has been increased intervention from government policies, often with little detailed understanding of the realities of farming. He highlighted the latest lottery, the 'Sustainable Farming Initiative' which only a fraction of farmers were able to apply for. He left the audience in no doubt that we also share responsibility for the future success and sustainability of British farming. In September there is plentiful supply of British grown fruit, particularly apples, even in a drought year such as this. And yet, when he visited his local Tesco store, he found apples from Peru, South Africa, New Zealand and France. English apples took up less than a quarter of the space. He called us all to be more diligent in checking where our food comes from and promoting that which is grown locally and supports the local economy and the local environment.

Centenary Tree Planting Appeal

The final speaker was Rupert Hardy, Dorset CPRE Trustee, who called on everyone to contribute to our Centenary Tree Planting Scheme. He said: **"**We are planning to plant hundreds of trees this winter as trees are essential to tackling climate change**"**. The programme includes planting black poplars in the water meadow at Kingston Maurward, now part of Coastland College. The black poplar is Britain's rarest tree with only 7,000 left in Britain.

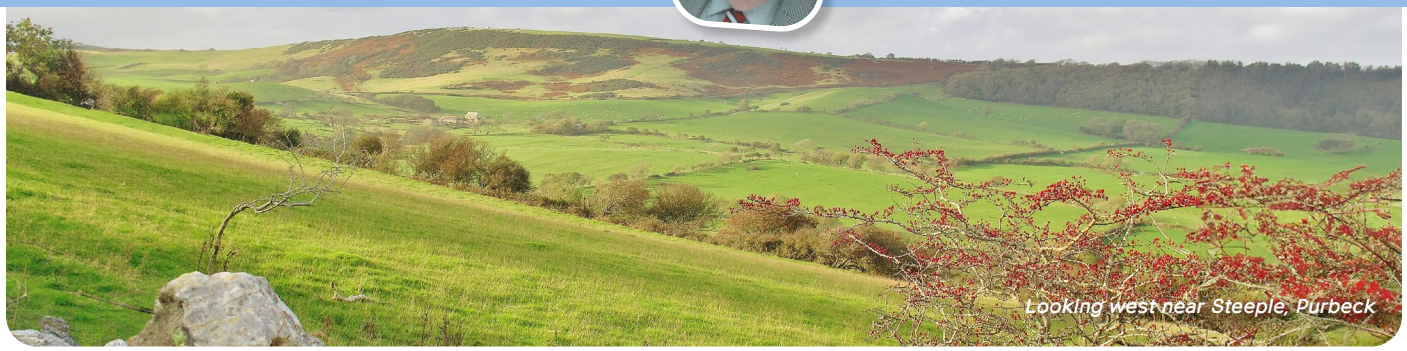
Kate Adie drew the formal meeting to a close, reflecting: **"**It is not enough to look at the landscape and love it and just revel in its beauty. We have to work at it. We made this landscape, so we love it. Yes, there will be change, but we must make sure that it is change for the best.**"**

Jez Hughes CBE

Chair of Trustees

Purbeck and Poole Group





Looking west near Steeple, Purbeck

Local Plans

Both of our Unitary Councils in Dorset are now preparing their Local Plans for the next decade or so. These plans will affect the future of our communities, environment and heritage in Dorset.

Our Group will be considering the implications of both the imminent Local Plans. Group member and Chair of Dorset CPRE Planning Group, Andrew Procter, writes on this topic on page 9 in this magazine. Dorset CPRE Members in Purbeck, East Dorset, Bournemouth, Christchurch and Poole can share their concerns directly with us: my contact details are on the back page.

When considering local environmental impacts we could usefully recall the warning words adapted from Dame Jane Goodall : **"**Here we are, arguably the most intelligent being that ever walked planet Earth, with this extraordinary brain, yet we're destroying the only home we have.**"** Planning in Dorset should promote sustainability and not support such vandalism.

BCP Council Local Plan

Since the previous edition of this magazine, in July, our group responded to the three questions raised in the BCP Council Local Plan Scoping Consultation with input from Heidi Poole (Dorset CPRE Planning Advisor).

Question 1 – Is there anything missing from the key issues we have identified for the plan?
Question 2 – Are there any other topics or specific policies that should be in the Local Plan Scope?
Question 3 – Are there any other ways we should engage with people or organisations?

In our opinion a key issue for the local plan is that it should be based on a realistic local housing target for the conurbation that is deliverable and will meet the needs of the population over the plan period. This is essential for the production of a local plan which is truly sound.

BCP declared a climate and ecological emergency in 2019. The local plan must go further than merely adapting to and mitigating the climate and ecological emergency but ensure that the conurbation will be a) net zero by 2050 and b) ensure that BCP pro-actively seeks to ensure that a minimum of 30% of land and sea is protected for nature by 2030 (30 by 30) in line with Government commitments. This should be a thread that runs throughout the plan.

Designation of the South East Dorset Green Belt as a Regional Park could greatly assist in ensuring that it is able to meet its potential to deliver much needed nature recovery, access to greenspace for local communities and protect our valuable heathlands and countryside.

Canford Incinerator appeal

The Public Inquiry concluded on 25th June. Dorset CPRE supported Magwatch, a local residents' group, with a £1k grant (£500 from our group funds) towards the cost of counsel. The appeal decision on the Canford Incinerator has been delayed, it was due in August. The Inspector invited the three parties involved in the Inquiry (MVV the developer, BCP Council and Magwatch) to make submissions, by 17th September deadline, outlining how the revised NPPF released on 17th August affects the cases they presented to the Inquiry in June. Magwatch's submission can be viewed on https://magwatch.org. A decision is expected later this year.

Policy H14 of the Purbeck Local Plan

We wrote to Cllr Shane Bartlett, Portfolio Holder for Planning and Emergency Planning, to raise concerns about the decision by Dorset Council's Eastern Area Planning Committee to approve a developer's application for the flexible use of dwellings in Langton Matravers. These dwellings are subject to Policy H14 of the Purbeck Local Plan.

Policy H14, which requires that new dwellings be sold for use as principal residences, is of great importance to Purbeck communities such as Langton Matravers. These communities already have many second homes and holiday homes. We ask Dorset Council to consider not only retaining Policy H14 but also strengthening it in the next draft Dorset Local Plan.

Jurassic Coast at 25

In September this year, Dorset celebrated the 25th anniversary of the UNESCO designation of the World Heritage Jurassic Coast. Nick Ireland, on behalf of Dorset Council, wrote about the importance of protecting Dorset's exceptional environment, biodiversity and heritage, saying: **"** … we believe environmental protection and economic prosperity go hand in hand. Protecting Dorset's natural environment is fundamental to our future. That is why tackling the climate and nature emergency, supporting nature recovery, strengthening community resilience, and promoting sustainable growth are central priorities for Dorset Council.**"** Dorset CPRE believes that Dorset's outstanding environment, nature and heritage are central to a thriving, successful, sustainable future for our communities and economy.

Join our Steering Group

If you feel you might have an interest in joining our local steering group for Purbeck, East Dorset and BCP, please let me know.

Gerald Rigler

Group Chairman

Corfe Castle has a shop that knows its market



Villagers first, tourists second: Corfe Castle has a shop that knows its market

The last year has not been kind to village shops. They have faced sharp increases in costs thanks to a government that does not understand small business. Excessive hikes in minimum wages are forcing many to reduce staff, while energy costs are squeezing already-tight margins.

Customers are becoming more price sensitive too. A minor positive has been that more shops are acting as agents for delivery companies. However some shops are still thriving, and that includes the Corfe Castle Village Stores.

Two years ago a new team of Carl Seaward and Sarah Macaulay took over from Terry and Carole Bernie, who had run it successfully since 2014. There had been controversy in the way it had been managed before by the previous owners, the Porters, who called in Mary Portas, TV's Queen of Shops, to give it a radical makeover In 2010. Her strategy was to sell premium-priced local produce to tourists, but ignoring local residents. This was not successful and the business folded.



Carl Seaward and Sarah Macauley

Store is Very Well Located

The Bernies focused on re-equipping the store and catering first for the needs of local residents, and secondly for those of tourists. Most importantly, though, they provided fantastic service – they would order in anything clients wanted. One should add though that the store is very well located, both residents, as it lies in the heart of the village, and for tourists, many of whom travel on the steam-powered Swanage Railway which has a station a few hundred yards away.

Carl, who had been a Spar store manager before, runs the shop helped by Sharon Mayo who worked with the Bernies previously. Sarah does the accounts primarily. They have not changed the Bernie formula too much. However they now use more Co-op branded product to keep prices down on basic lines, important at a time when clients are increasingly price sensitive. They have more promotions too.

They are also building up client deliveries, which have been popular. They are lucky in having a low incidence of shoplifting.



Few Village Shops Offer Over A Hundred Different Gins

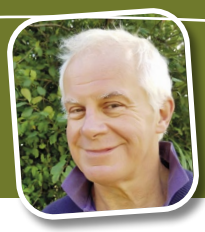
One niche strategy adopted by the Bernies was to offer an extraordinary range of gins – well over a hundred – which goes down well with tourists looking for distinctive local produce. The shop is the major outlet for Cromwell's Ruin gin, a reference to the ruined castle above the town, which is made by Pothecary's, a Dorset-based distiller.

Overall Carl attributes their success to stocking a broad range of products, or at least being able to source it quickly, including quality local products that are not available in supermarkets. Having a Post Office encourages footfall in the shop too, but clients highlight the high level of service. His future plans include improving the exterior – perhaps buying a bench for residents to linger on.

Find them as Corfe Castle Village Shop on Facebook or visit corfecastlevillagestores.co.uk.

Rupert Hardy

North Dorset Group



Planning Committee Success

A rather quiet six months in North Dorset, but we did have a very satisfactory result with the Northern Area Planning Committee Meeting on 4th August. The Planning Officer had recommended approving an application for 50 houses off Manston Road, in Sturminster Newton. It had been through various iterations over a number of years. We have been advising the action group led by Laura Hitchcock (editor of Dorset Life) over those years. Result was unanimous refusal 7-0 on grounds of conflicts with spatial strategy (i.e. beyond settlement boundary, deemed not suitable for Neighbourhood Plan and excluded in last North Dorset Local Plan) as well as harm to landscape, its character, and topography.

Councillors grilled officers on many points and engaged in a vigorous and lengthy debate. Great to see this as it is often a rare occurrence. In particular there was much criticism over the failure of anyone from the Highways team to be present at the meeting, as a lot of concern was voiced over highways safety as access would be off a dangerous road with no footpath on the east side of Manston Road. Answers provided by other officers were seen to be unsatisfactory.

The Planning Officer was taken to task by Councillors for producing a Planning Balance image that appeared to show clear bias in presenting his points. Cllr Sherry Jespersen and Cllr Carole Jones led the charge but with Cllr Belinda Ridout, Cllr Val Pothecary and others, all ably assisting with very pertinent questions. Also there was concern over flooding and drainage issues, as well as a need to protect some onsite Black Poplars. They made it clear that a lack of 5 Years Housing Land Supply should not overrule all other sound objections.

We are hoping that there will be no Appeal given the unanimous result and the fact that there was a clear verdict given by the Inspector at the Appeal of the previous iteration which was only a year or so ago. Fingers crossed!

Oak Fair Success

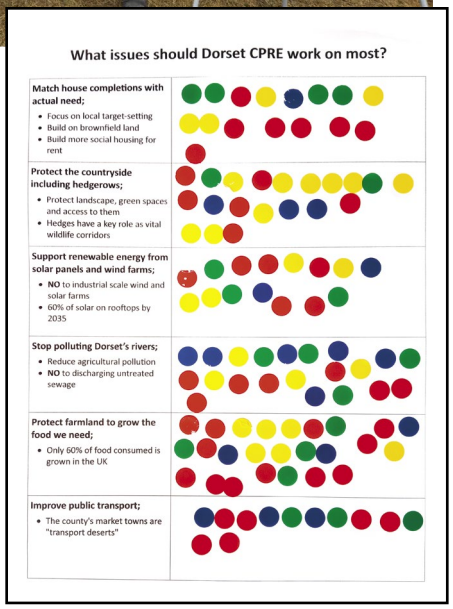
We took a stand again at the Oak Fair in August, with volunteers from all over Dorset helping. Thanks both to Derek Gardiner and Linda Williams for doing most of the organisation. It was a success as we recruited several new members but also signed up many for our e-newsletter. Setting up a **"**discussion board**"**, inviting visitors to suggest topics to focus our campaigning on using coloured stickers, worked well. It helped involve visitors. Overall, the Fair with its countryside conservation focus works well for us, providing an excellent opportunity to engage both the public and our members.



Stand at Oak Fair 2026, from left Derek Gardiner, Linda Williams, Diane Stanley, Gayle Verdi and Jez Hughes



Stand at Oak Fair 2026, from left, Richard Norman, Alex Rottenburg, Mike Allen and Steve O' Connell



Rupert Hardy

Group Chairman

Ground-mounted Solar PV Installations

DORSET COUNCIL GROUND-MOUNTED SOLAR PHOTOVOLTAIC INSTALLATIONS LISTED BY DEVELOPMENT STATUS, AS AT 31 DECEMBER 2025

	Past District Council	Planning Application Reference	Installed Capacity	Development Status at 31 Dec 2025	Ordnance Survey Grid Ref.		Address for Development Site
			MW		Easting	Northing	
1	West Dorset	P/FUL/2025/03066	40.00	AS	358784	109842	Caswell Farm, Ryme Intrinseca, SHERBORNE, DT9 6JP
2	North Dorset	P/FUL/2025/03674	12.00	AS	386151	124127	Motcombe Road, Motcombe, SHAFTESBURY, SP7 9LD
3	North Dorset	P/FUL/2021/02046	49.90	AC	382223	125442	Park Farm, Shaftesbury Road, GILLINGHAM, SP8 5JG
4	Purbeck	6/2020/0595	40.00	AC	380002	85325	Land NORTH of North Fossil Farm, East Knighton, DT2 8DB
5	West Dorset	WD/D/19/003181	35.00	AC	363744	111132	Higher Stockbridge Farm, Stockbridge, SHERBORNE, DT9 6EP
6	West Dorset	21/00701/FUL	32.00	AC	347252	107627	Pipplepen Farm Solar Park, BEAMINSTER, DT8 3HS
7	West Dorset	P/FUL/2022/02429	30.00	AC	377725	85132	Galton Manor Farm, Galton, DORCHESTER, DT2 8BZ
8	East Dorset	P/FUL/2023/03415	30.00	AC	404672	108298	Woodlands Manor Farm, Horton Road, WIMBORNE, BH21 8ND
9	North Dorset	P/FUL/2021/01018	30.00	AC	371610	108186	North Dairy Farm, Pulham, DORCHESTER, DT2 7EA
10	East Dorset	P/FUL/2023/02829	19.00	AC	403221	108856	North Farm, Horton Road, WIMBORNE, BH21 7HL
11	North Dorset	P/FUL/2021/02622	15.00	AC	384009	100312	Blandford Hill, BLANDFORD FORUM, DT11 0AA
12	North Dorset	2/2019/0850/PAEIA	40.00	OP	390129	101525	South Farm, Spetisbury, BLANDFORD FORUM, DT11 9DY
13	West Dorset	WD/D/20/001057	35.00	OP	357927	112190	Clifton Farm, Clifton Farm Lane, Clifton Maybank, YEOVIL, BA22 9UZ
14	East Dorset	6/2015/0516	28.50	OP	387473	87484	Stokeford Farm, East Stoke, WAREHAM, BH20 6AN
15	East Dorset	3/14/0457/FUL	20.40	OP	408332	107310	Manor Farm, Saint Michael's Road, VERWOOD, BH31 6JA
16	East Dorset	3/13/0470/FUL	13.20	OP	409618	105289	Homeland Farm, Ringwood Road, WIMBORNE, BH21 6QZ
17	East Dorset	3/13/0669/FUL	13.00	OP	407075	106873	Wedgehill Farm, Woodlands, WIMBORNE, BH21 8LX
18	East Dorset	2/2014/1066/FUL	12.10	OP	388332	105051	Littleton Farm, BLANDFORD FORUM, DT11 9NB
19	North Dorset	2/2014/0825/FUL	11.60	OP	388136	102088	North Farm, Spetisbury, BLANDFORD FORUM, DT11 9DH
20	Purbeck	6/2013/0134	11.30	OP	393212	92885	Newton Farm, Lytchett Minster, Purbeck, BH16 6HS
21	Purbeck	6/2013/0443	10.00	OP	388420	90356	Bottom Plain, Bere Road, Trigon, WAREHAM, BH20 7PA
22	West Dorset	WD/D/14/003367	9.00	OP	360954	102553	Long Ash Lane, Wardon Hill, DORCHESTER, DT2 9PW
23	North Dorset	2/2013/0770/PLNG	8.30	OP	384027	104272	Canada Farm, BLANDFORD FORUM, DT11 9AD
24	Purbeck	6/2012/0415	7.00	OP	387816	90139	Trigon House, WAREHAM, BH20 7PD
25	East Dorset	3/14/0790/FUL	7.00	OP	405429	101978	Bedborough Farm, Uddens Drive, WIMBORNE, BH21 7BQ
26	West Dorset	1/D/13/000242	6.70	OP	358160	109979	Caswell Farm, Ryme Intrinseca, SHERBORNE, DT9 6JP
27	Purbeck	6/2013/0132	6.10	OP	395765	94289	Race Farm, Huntick Road, Lytchett Matravers, POOLE, BH16 6BB
28	West Dorset	1/D/12/000858	5.00	OP	364300	82750	North Farm, Nottington Lane, WEYMOUTH, DT3 4BU
29	West Dorset	1/D/11/000168	5.00	OP	377194	88984	Redbridge Road, Crossways, DORCHESTER, DT2 DX
30	Purbeck	6/2012/0228	5.00	OP	392823	94543	Redbridge Farm, Lytchett Matravers, POOLE, BH16 6HP
31	Purbeck	6/2013/0446	5.00	OP	384311	87689	Tout Hill, Woolbridge, WAREHAM, BH20 6HH
32	North Dorset	2/2013/0791/PLNG	5.00	OP	377815	128359	Manor Farm, Church Road, Silton, GILLINGHAM, SP8 5PR
33	Purbeck	6/2014/0338	5.00	OP	389957	89555	Bere Road (Oaklands Plantation), WAREHAM, BH20 7PA
34	East Dorset	3/14/0774/FUL	5.00	OP	411316	111949	Cross Roads Plantation, Ringwood Road, Alderholt, SP6 3DF
35	West Dorset	1/D/13/001116	5.00	OP	372299	97660	Bourne Farm, Piddlehinton, DORCHESTER, DT2 7TU
36	West Dorset	WD/D/14/002675	5.00	OP	365099	81019	Newlands Farm, Coldharbour, Chickerell, WEYMOUTH, DT3 4BG
37	West Dorset	WD/D/14/002974	5.00	OP	355089	101344	Rampisham Down, Rampisham, DORCHESTER, DT2 0HS
38	North Dorset	2/2015/0898/FUL	5.00	OP	373303	119285	Stalbridge Park Estate, STURMINSTER NEWTON, DT10 2SB
39	West Dorset	WD/D/15/001708	5.00	OP	378440	85628	Land to North East of Galton Road, Galton, DORCHSTER, DT2 8BY
40	West Dorset	WD/D/15/001856	5.00	OP	377699	87644	Holly Farm, Moreton Road, Owermoigne, DORCHESTER, DT2 HBZ
41	West Dorset	WD/D/15/001858	5.00	OP	377293	86144	Land To East of Moreton Road, Owermoigne, DORCHESTER, DT2 H8T
42	West Dorset	WD/D/15/001862	5.00	OP	360917	102647	Southern Counties Leisure, DORCHESTER, DT2 9PW
43	West Dorset	1/D/11/000453	4.80	OP	334144	98155	Wyld Meadow Farm, BRIDPORT, DT6 6DD (site at EX13 5UL)
44	North Dorset	2/2011/0304/PLNG	4.00	OP	385726	113717	Park Farm, Iwerne Minster, BLANDFORD FORUM, DT11 8TP
45	East Dorset	3/13/0948/FUL	3.90	OP	396735	97102	Henbury Quarry, Corfe Mullen, WIMBORNE, BH21 3QZ
46	East Dorset	3/14/0956/FUL	3.80	OP	409137	97413	Woodtown Farm, West Parley, FERNDOWN, BH22 8SW
47	Purbeck	6/2013/0133	3.00	OP	393388	93923	Newton Farm, Lytchett Minster, Purbeck, BH16 6HS
48	West Dorset	1/D/13/001044	2.40	OP	372234	97408	Bourne Farm, Piddlehinton, DORCHESTER, DT2 7TU
49	North Dorset	2/2012/1042/PLNG	1.80	OP	378233	127441	Slaughtergate Farm, Slaughtergate, GILLINGHAM, SP8 5NH
50	North Dorset	2/2012/0253/PLNG	1.50	OP	378118	112656	Rudge Hill Farm, Rivers Corner, STURMINSTER NEWTON, DT10 2AB
		TOTAL	672.30				
		AVERAGE	13.45				

KEY
OP = Operational
AC = Awaiting Construction
AS = Application Submitted

Please visit the Dorset CPRE website Resources page to view the full report with detailed information including development site size, load factor, power ratings and annual Electricty GWh. Last updated April 2026.

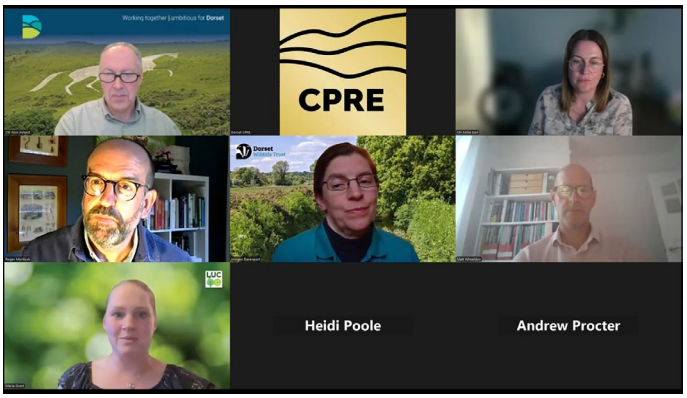
Dr David Peacock
Topic Leader on Renewables

Getting the Balance Right: Planning for homes – without sacrificing Dorset



Image: Belinda Fewings / Unsplash

The Dorset CPRE Planning Conference on 9th June 2026 brought planners, conservationists and council leaders together to ask whether Dorset can meet its housing needs without sacrificing the landscapes and natural systems on which the county depends.



How can Dorset provide the homes it needs while protecting one of England's most environmentally important counties? That was the central question at our conference, which brought together leading voices from conservation, water management, landscape planning and local government. Despite their different perspectives, a striking degree of consensus emerged: good planning must integrate housing, nature, infrastructure and community wellbeing rather than treating them as competing priorities.

Speakers

The conference was opened by our President and former BBC Chief News Correspondent, Kate Adie. Roger Mortlock, Chief Executive of CPRE, then set the tone by arguing that planning should be judged not simply by the number of houses built, but by the quality of the places created. **"**Planning is not just about building homes**"** he said. **"**It's about building places and communities where people can thrive**"**.

He questioned whether centrally-imposed housing targets accurately reflect genuine local need, and reminded delegates that the purpose of planning is to create thriving communities while safeguarding the countryside for future generations.

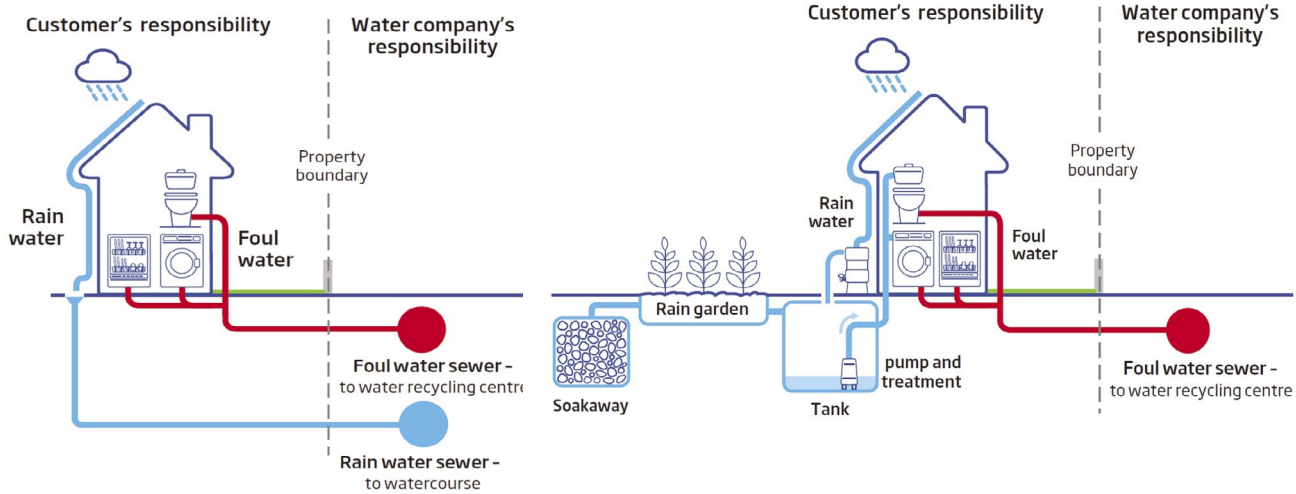
Imogen Davenport, Conservation Director for Nature-based Solutions at Dorset Wildlife Trust, highlighted the continuing decline of wildlife, both nationally and within Dorset. She demonstrated that nature should not be viewed as an obstacle to development, but as essential infrastructure. Healthy nature systems provide flood protection, clean water, climate resilience and healthier communities. Her presentation reinforced the need for nature recovery to be planned across who landscapes, creating strong ecological networks rather than isolated pockets of habitat within individual developments.

Matt Wheeldon, Infrastructure Development Director at Wessex Water, challenged conventional approaches to water

What we build today will be with us when the climate is very different in the future

We need to move from centralised solutions…

…to more decentralised solutions



infrastructure. New developments should "manage rain where it falls", he said, working with natural water systems rather than relying solely on increasingly expensive centralised engineering solutions.

The presentation prepared by the late Professor Malcolm Tait and Dr Kiera Chapman examined Biodiversity Net Gain, under which developments are expected to leave habitats in a measurably better condition than before. Their research found that, while the policy has considerable potential, ecological measures approved through the planning system are too often not fully delivered. Stronger monitoring and enforcement will be essential if promised gains are to materialise on the ground.

Maria Grant, Associate Landscape Planner at Land Use Consultants (LUC), explained how landscape-led planning can provide the framework within which housing, biodiversity, infrastructure and heritage are successfully integrated. Instead of being treated as a constraint after development sites have been selected, landscape should help determine where building takes place and how it is designed.

The conference concluded with a joint presentation and an extensive panel discussion involving Nick Ireland, Leader of Dorset Council, and Millie Earl, Leader of BCP Council. Both acknowledged the considerable challenge created by mandatory national housing targets, while reaffirming their commitment to protecting Dorset's natural environment. The panel discussion was notable for its openness, both leaders also recognised the tension between Government housing policy and environmental protection, emphasising the importance of strategic planning, evidence-led decision making and partnership working.

Three Overarching Themes Emerged

Firstly, nature must be recognised as essential infrastructure. Healthy ecosystems provide flood mitigation, clean water, pollination, carbon storage, recreation and benefits to physical and mental health. Environmental recovery therefore contributes directly to economic and community resilience.

Secondly, planning must pay greater attention to the quality, type and location of development, rather than housing numbers alone. Dorset needs more homes – but genuine affordability will not be achieved merely by meeting numerical targets. It requires the right homes, in appropriate places, supported by transport, utilities and community facilities.

Thirdly, housing, water, biodiversity, landscape, transport and climate resilience cannot be planned independently. East affects the others and all must be considered from the outset. This is particularly important in Dorset. More than half the county lies within designated National Landscapes (Dorset NL and Cranborne Chase NL), while internationally important headlands, chalk streams, coastal habitats and ancient woodlands make its environmental constraints exceptional by national standard. Yet these natural assets also underpin Dorset's economy, identity and quality of life.

The question is not whether development should take place, but how necessary development can be accommodated without destroying the environmental capital on which the county depends.

Landscape is not an Afterthought

Several practical conclusions emerged:

- Greater priority should be given to previously developed land (brownfield) wherever suitable opportunities exist.
- Water management must become central to planning decisions, with developments designed to retain and manage rainfall locally. ***According to the Met Office, July and August 2026 were the driest months on record for Dorset and July was the driest month ever recorded in the county's rainfall series since 1836.***
- Biodiversity Net Gain represents a potentially valuable policy innovation but requires effective long-term monitoring and enforcement if ecological improvements promised through planning permissions are to be realised in practice.
- Above all, landscape should help determine the location and form of development, rather than being considered after sites have been chosen.

Implications for the Local Plans

The findings have direct relevance to the emerging Dorset and BCP Local Plans. Both authorities must accommodate very substantial government-imposed housing targets while pursuing nature recovery, climate resilience and landscape protection. Dorset CPRE believes planning should begin with sound evidence of local housing need and environmental capacity – not with nationally-generated numbers treated in isolation.



Attractive vernacular estate at Old Dairy, Okeford Fitzpaine

Good planning is not measured solely by how many homes are constructed. It is measured by the quality of the places created, the resilience of the communities they support and the condition in which we leave the natural environment for future generations.

Copies of the presentations and a link to the recordings can be found on Dorset CPRE's website on the Events webpage.

Dorset CPRE Planning Group

2026 Hedgelaying Competition

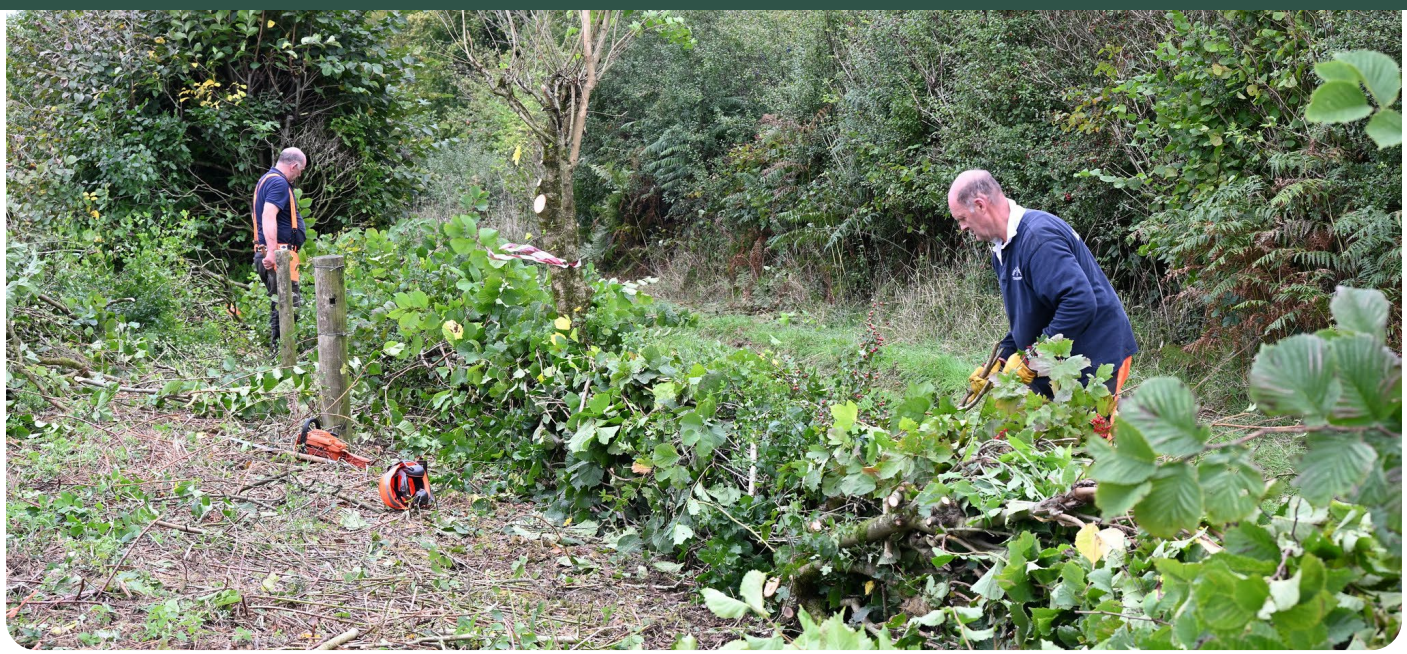


image: Tim Russ

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



image: Tim Russ

John Calder attended the event on Saturday 12th September, scheduled 2 weeks earlier than normal. This year it was held on land beside the Roman Road near Compton Valence, Dorchester, by kind permission of Will Woodlands Trust and Mr Lewis Webster. The spectacular site is near Eggardon Hill, a 2,500-year-old Iron Age hillfort. The event welcomes spectators and is free to attend. Everyone appreciated the tea, homemade cakes and bacon rolls provided by the Beaminster Young Farmers Club. The club raised an impressive £845, with all profits supporting its activities.



John Calders' Favourite Hedge on the day

Starting at 9:30am, competitors were given just over 5 hours to lay 10 metres of hazel hedge in the Dorset Style. There are classes for individuals and pairs open to both novices and experienced hedgelayers.

The Hedgelaying was judged by Mrs Tina Bath, Wells, Mr Ian Connabeer, Totnes, Mr Chris Stanton, Ashburton, Mr Mark Tilley, Crewkerne and Mr Peter Yeates, Bridport.

Chief Steward: Mrs Mandy Woodham and Chainsaw Steward: Mr Mark Tilley

The results are available on https://www.melplashshow.co.uk/.



image: Tim Russ

Hedgelaying Prize Presentation

Dorset Style Hedge

The hedge is laid on top of a bank. It is kept low to the bank, tightly woven with itself and bonds (thin sticks) are used to secure it internally and externally. The finished hedge is a half barrel shape about 2' 6" – 3' high.

A big thank you to the team of volunteers who made it such an enjoyable day for people of all ages.

Scholarships and Travel Bursaries

In 2026, the Melplash Agricultural Society awarded £36,750 in scholarships and travel bursaries to 22 local students. Their Discover Farming classroom welcomed nearly 500 local primary school children, while their careers ambassador teams attended school and college events across the region.

The Dorset Cursus: the biggest Neolithic monument in Britain

Exploring Britain's largest Neolithic monument stretching across six miles of Cranborne Chase

Built around 3300 BC, predating Stonehenge by centuries, the Dorset Cursus is also three times its size. The term **"**Cursus**"** was coined by 18th century antiquary William Stukely, who first believed these long, narrow structures were ancient Roman racetracks. We now know they were Neolithic ritual sites, constructed long before the Romans arrived. Evidence of even earlier activity has been found on the Dorset Cursus, with Mesolithic flint scatter discovered along several sections. Much of the site was hidden until aerial photography revealed it in the 20th century, and the Cursus is still best appreciated from above, as little remains visible from the ground. It is a rectangular enclosure, consisting of parallel banks about 1.5 metres high, spaced approximately 82 metres apart, with external ditches 1.5 metres deep.



Dorset Cursus

Constructing the Cursus was a monumental task. More than six million cubic feet of chalk were removed using a combination of stone, wood, and antler tools – along with a significant amount of human labour. While much of the monument is now hidden, the banks remain visible in a few places, such as Oakley Down near Sixpenny Handley and Bottlebrush Down. Of the terminals, only the one at Thickthorn Down, northwest of Gussage St Michael, remains intact; the terminal at Martin Down has been lost to ploughing. The Cursus is believed to have been constructed as a grand avenue linking long barrows. While other cursus monuments exist across Britain, none match the size of the Dorset Cursus, which is also unique in that it runs perpendicular to the local topography. Spanning two ridges and three river valleys, it was likely built in sections, which accounts for its slightly curved path. The first section ran from Thickthorn Down to Bottlebrush Down – sometimes referred to as the Gussage Cursus – and the second stretched from Bottlebrush to Martin Down via the Allen Valley. Evidence suggests a third Cursus may have existed at the northern end, running at a right angle and aligned with two long barrows.

Significance and Interpretation

The Dorset Cursus probably had a ceremonial purpose, possibly connected to solar rituals or funeral practices. Archaeologist Richard Bradley called it the Avenue of the Dead, suggesting it may have been believed to guide the spirits of the deceased. He theorised that those wishing to communicate with the dead could meet them on the avenue.

The massive scale of the Cursus and its surrounding earthworks indicate it was carefully designed with symbolic meaning. One of the most striking features is how the Gussage Cursus aligns with the sun at the mid-winter solstice – people gathered at the Bottlebrush terminal could have witnessed the sun setting behind the long barrow on Gussage Down. Enthusiasts still gather on 21st December for this magical experience, especially if the weather is sunny. While there is limited direct evidence of ceremonial practices, the discovery of human bones suggests the site was used for excarnation – a practice of leaving bodies to decompose naturally.

An intriguing theory suggests that the Great Cursus at Stonehenge was used to observe two stars, with processions taking place between their setting and rising. This idea of astronomical alignment could also apply to the Dorset Cursus, which may have served as a platform for viewing celestial events.



View over Dorset Cursus at Down Farm by Rupert Hardy

The local archaeologist most closely associated with the Cursus is Martin Green, who has excavated a section of it on his land at Down Farm. Dorset CPRE has organised several visits to Down Farm, where groups of six or more are welcome at his museum*. He also leads tours of the prehistoric sites on the farm, which I highly recommend. In 2024, Martin and others organised a week-long event focusing on the archaeology and history of the Cursus, as well as the culture of our Neolithic ancestors. Martin's early mentor, Richard Bradley, wrote The Dorset Cursus: The Archaeology of the Enigmatic (now out of print, but still available online), and Martin's own excellent book, A Landscape Revealed, on the history of his farm and the Cranborne Chase, is still available.

As a finale Ashley Hutchings, a well-known folksong writer and lead singer of the Albion Band, wrote this song on the Cursus, of which this is an extract:

"When Stukeley to the Cursus came
Low down in hallowed ground,
A Roman race track gave its name,
Low down are secrets found.
For six long miles it stretches west,
Low down in hallowed ground,
And ancient warriors take their rest,
Low down are secrets found....."

Rupert Hardy

For more details, contact Martin at mgreendownfarm@gmail.com

Summer Weather Wreaked Damage On Farmland Across The County

The extremely hot, dry weather that persisted for many weeks over the summer wreaked all sorts of damage on farmland across the county, and beyond.

Many livestock farmers have been feeding precious winter fodder, cut and stored in April and May, but having to be used during August and September, as the grass in the fields shrivelled and died before their eyes. Even maize has struggled, it loves sunshine and is a very efficient convertor of it into feed, but it has been held back badly this year by lack of moisture. At some point extra fodder will have to be bought to help get through the winter, from who knows where, at who knows what cost. The drought covered much of the country, and transport costs will add to the likely weighty cost. Farmers will be giving careful thought to what a sensible stocking capacity for their farm ought to be for the future. Some advisors suggest you should stock for the most difficult scenario, i.e. a drought or a freeze up, whereas the temptation at farm level of course can be to squeeze in as many productive animals as you can. The wheels can fall off rapidly when everyone is short of feed.

Volatile Prices

In the cropping world, we are seeing very volatile prices for grains due to the Russia-Ukraine war, where each side is attacking the other's export facilities, in an attempt to degrade their ability to earn foreign currency. Both sides have had successful wheat harvests, with plenty to export, but they can't export. The Black sea, through which millions of tons of both Russian and Ukrainian grain have passed in recent years, is right now a no-go zone for ships. This plus the poor harvest in the rest of Europe and other grain producing areas of the world due to drought, has added approximately £30 to the value of a ton of wheat since July, which is great news for UK farmers, except that because of the drought, we have less to sell than we had originally hoped for. In our own case we believed that our wheat was 50% sold before harvest, but in fact it was actually 60% sold, due to the reduced yield, leaving less opportunity to take advantage of the inflated prices.



Combining started at 4am on many mornings during harvest, to try to raise the moisture in the grain, which this year was found to go lower than we've ever seen before during the hot afternoons. Lower moisture means lower weight, therefore less to sell. Ultra low moistures can incur penalties from buyers.

Malting Barley performed badly

To add to this, the malting barley crop (for beer and whisky) has performed very badly this year. Mostly spring sown, it is therefore more vulnerable to drought than winter sown crops. What little we got from the field is unfit for malting, the grain size is too small. Malting barley has to meet a number of specifications for successful brewing, and to qualify for the premium price, such as moisture content, specific weight (density), germination, grain size, and nitrogen content, get this last one wrong and you end up with cloudy beer. All the more galling is the fact that prices are low. Malting barley is carrying barely any premium above feed barley this year, just like last year, which saw a big crop, of almost universally good quality, but much of it went for feed, at low prices. One of the problems we are facing is a worldwide drop in alcohol consumption, which is not helpful to those growing the raw ingredients.

Rebuilding Feed Stocks

Next year we will face the after effects of the drought, will it be repeated, and what will be the consequences of the widely reported El Nino effect? Livestock farmers will need to rebuild their feed stocks, as well as hope for sufficient grazing. Arable farmers will be hoping for sufficient rainfall, but only a little at a time, not in torrents, so the dry soil can soak up as much water as possible, before allowing it to leach slowly downwards through the strata beneath the fields, into the aquifers, from



This view across the valley shows the desperate brown of the permanent pastures, with herbal ley in the foreground, which is still sustaining the cows and calves.

where boreholes then feed into drinking water supplies. The worst scenario is rain in huge volumes, which the soil can't cope with, the water will then wash off the fields and into rivers, carrying with it soil particles, and the risk of flash flooding. One important way to help reduce this risk is to sow cover crops on fields destined for a spring sown crop next year. A cover crop is a mixture of species designed to soak up any left-over nutrient from the previous crop, to reduce risk of leaching. The effect of multiple species' roots in the soil over winter is to enhance soil quality, by fostering many mycorrhizal relationships in the soil between roots and soil fungi, and by building organic matter. Cover crops can be lightly grazed by livestock over winter, providing they leave at least half of the crop behind so it can continue growing in the warmer periods of the winter, and continue to provide the benefits mentioned above. This requires good management to ensure no overgrazing, but it can be a very useful source of cheap fodder for the animals.



Fear of Fire

The most traumatic aspect of the long dry period, with the heat, has been fear of fire. Through July and August there have been numerous fires just within a 5 mile radius of our farm. The scariest was the Pimperne one where a burning stubble fire got within 150 yards of gardens, houses and the A354. These have been caused variously by farm machinery such as sparks from field rakes and combines, cigarette ends, and bonfires. Farmers if they have any sense will be geared up with water bowsers, pumps and hoses, and a cultivator ready to hand should the worst happen on their own or a neighbour's farm. Many localities of farmers have set up dedicated WhatsApp groups, where they only discuss fire matters, and if someone smells or spots smoke, everyone on the group has a look out or maybe sends up a drone to have a look to try to pinpoint it, and then if able, will head off to help fight it. Bearing in mind that fire engines generally only carry 2000 litres of water, a farm bowser carrying say 10,000 litres can make a huge difference to fire brigade effectiveness.



Field fire at Hammetts Farm, Pimperne, where burning stubble got within 150 yards of gardens, houses and the A354 © Lewis Blackburn Media



Best place on a hot day

Bluetongue Virus

Another weather related problem which has become an epidemic, particularly in Devon, and it is already reaching across Dorset, is the Bluetongue virus, which seriously affects sheep, which will die if untreated, and cattle slightly less so. The virus, which does not affect humans, is spread by midges which have been favoured by the hot weather. The midge bites an affected animal and then spreads the disease by biting another and injecting the virus which is carried in the blood. The disease can be largely prevented by vaccinating flocks and herds, but protection only develops 10-14 days after vaccination. As it has spread, and farmers have been ordering vaccine in increasing amounts, a shortage has occurred, causing increasing worry. Veterinary advice suggests a separate needle is used for dosing every animal, to prevent risk of further spreading.

George Hosford

Agricultural Advisor to Dorset CPRE

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:**

Improving Green Belt for nature, climate and people (April 2026)

CPRE worked with environmental coalition Wildlife & Countryside Link on this briefing published in December 2024.

The current debate about the Green Belt focuses more on what it blocks, and is missing an opportunity to look towards what it could deliver, if given the chance. As an existing spatial designation, Green Belt has potential to support nature's recovery, climate mitigation and adaptation, local food systems, and people's health and wellbeing. In this briefing, we set out the opportunities to enhance Green Belt for nature, climate, and people – and what policies need to be in place to create this change.

RHS Chelsea 2026 – CPRE 'On the Edge' garden plant list (May 2026)

During the RHS Chelsea flower show in May, Sarah Eberle (the most decorated garden designer in RHS Chelsea history) and Roger Mortlock (CPRE CEO) were interviewed for the BBC programme and made the case for the importance of the countryside. CPRE's On the Edge campaign reached millions of people across the country and beyond, calling for every town and city to be surrounded by protected countryside for nature, climate and wellbeing.

You can view and download the list of plants which feature in the Campaign to Protect Rural England Garden: On the Edge at RHS Chelsea Flower Show 2026.

A 'powerful message'

Created with support from Project Giving Back, On the Edge transforms a neglected urban fringe landscape into a place of abundance, sanctuary and repair. At its heart stands Gaia – a guardian figure carved from a fallen mature tree by chainsaw artist Chris Wood – surrounded by nearly 3,000 plants woven through a snaking dry-stone wall and flowing willow structures.



Image: Mark Spencer

CPRE Award Winning Garden 'On the Edge' at Chelsea 2026

The Gold medal and Garden of the Year for the CPRE Garden recognise not only the garden's powerful message and planting, but also the extraordinary craftsmanship behind its construction. The garden brings together an exceptional team of makers and builders, including willow artist Tom Hare, fifth-generation dry-stone wallers Lydia Noble and Cuthbert Noble, landscape contractors The Outdoor Room and Specialised Metal Fabrications.

After RHS Chelsea, the garden was relocated to Park Hill in Sheffield, where it will become a permanent community green space – continuing CPRE's long legacy of campaigning to protect the countryside around towns and cities.

Local and sustainable food buying (July 2026)

This report sets out how the government can deliver its commitment to source 50% of public sector food from local suppliers or those meeting higher environmental standards (HES), recognising that 'food security is national security'.



Image: Rupert Hardy

Around £5 billion is spent on public sector food procurement each year, of which £2.4 billion specifically covers food buying. Yet much of this does not support domestic producers, sustainable farming or resilient local supply chains. At the same time, we are seeing deeply worrying drops in our farming capacity, with declines in UK vegetable production of 17% in open field areas and 33% in under-cover areas. More specifically, we have lost 3% of the farmed area around our largest towns and cities, along with a 6.6% drop in the number of holdings and a 27% reduction in specialist horticulture businesses in these areas.

With key policies now emerging, including the Land Use Framework, Food Strategy Action Plan and the 25-Year Farming Roadmap, there is a clear opportunity to deliver on this commitment and also help address the worrying decline in our farming capacity. Improved public sector food procurement will also support delivery of wider government priorities, including economic growth, food security, net zero and nature recovery. A resilient, local and sustainable food system – supporting a thriving farming sector – is central to achieving these outcomes.

Dorset CPRE Membership

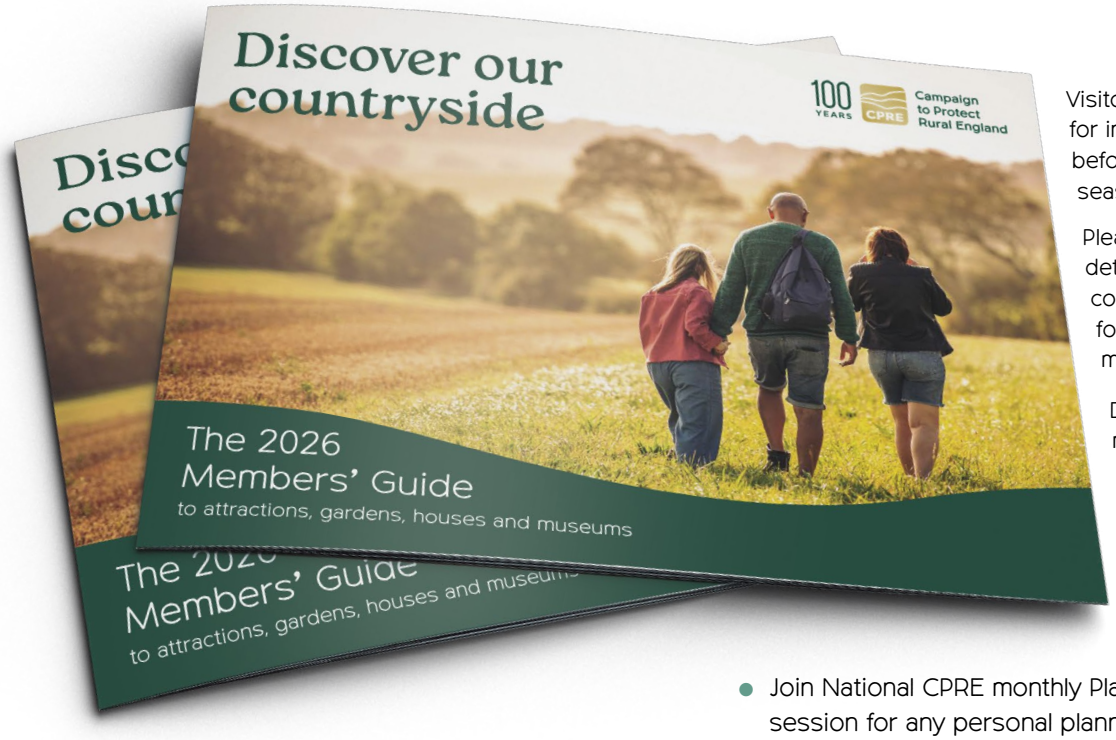
Thank you for being one of our valued members. Your membership makes a real difference to what we can achieve, and with your generous support we will continue our work towards our vision of a thriving, beautiful countryside for everyone.

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
- Membership of your local county branch
- Join National CPRE monthly Planning Surgeries, a drop-in session for any personal planning-related queries for all levels of expertise. Also run quarterly Planning Induction sessions
- Invitation to join Dorset CPRE's Planning Group Meetings and events

Diary Dates

Please visit the Dorset CPRE website www.dorset-cpre.org.uk for 2026/27 meeting dates for the Countryside Forum, Planning Group, District Groups and events.

11th November – The Sherborne and District Society, 6pm for 6:30 pm start, Raleigh Hall, Digby Road, Sherborne. Nigel Jones, Guest Speaker, will provide an insight into Sherborne Castle Estates' plans for its proposed development to the west of Sherborne.

21st November – 89th Anniversary AGM, 11 am, Cerne Abbas Village Hall. This marks CPRE's Centenary year. Roger Mortlock, CPRE's Chief Executive, will take us through the organisation's first 100 years, from its pioneering beginnings in 1926 to the present day.

Campaign to Protect Rural England

DORSET BRANCH

Registered Charity No. 211974

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

BRANCH CONTACT **Linda Williams**

PLANNING ADVISOR **Heidi Poole**

Tel: 0333 577 0360
email: info@dorset-cpre.org.uk
website: www.dorset-cpre.org.uk
@DorsetCPRE

Contacts

CHAIR OF TRUSTEES

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

HONORARY TREASURER

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

ELECTED MEMBERS

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

Dr Guy Dickinson **07747 776580**

Gerald Rigler **01202 601109**
1 Beech Road, Weymouth, Dorset DT3 5NP

Rupert Hardy **07803 907711**

Sir Christopher Coville **07753 925434**

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

Andrew Procter **07709 419308**
Woodlands, Sunnydale Road, Swanage, Dorset BH19 2JA

PRESIDENT

Kate Adie CBE

VICE-PRESIDENTS

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

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

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

LIFE VICE-PRESIDENTS

Capt Dickie Bird, LVO, RN **01935 850576**

Stephen G Howard **01747 853029**

Richard H Nicholls

Group Chairmen

West Dorset:

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

North Dorset:

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

The Sherborne and District Society:

Sir Christopher Coville **07753 925434**

Purbeck, East Dorset, Bournemouth, Christchurch and Poole:

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

Countryside Forum Chair

Rupert Hardy **07803 907711**

Planning Group Chair

Andrew Procter **07709 419308**

Advisers to the Forum

Trees for Dorset
Rachel M Palmer **01929 462423**
Email: info@treesfordorset.co.uk

Groundwater Flood Risk consultant
Guy Parker **07454 282 110**
Email: guy@fonslimpidus.co.uk

Dorset CAN (Climate Action Network)
Giles Watts **07840 061 712**
Email: dorsetcan@gmail.com

Agricultural advisor
George Hosford **07770 833596**
Email: george@durweston.org.uk www.viewfromthehill.org.uk

CPRE SOUTH WEST
Regional Chair:
c/o CPRE South West, 8 Rowdens Road, Wells, Somerset BA5 1TU

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