

# Char Chat News

For residents and our guests in

Whitchurch Canonicorum, Wootton Fitzpaine, Morcombelake

Stanton St Gabriel, Fishpond, Ryall and Monkton Wyld

August 2022

## Welcome to the Char Valley Parish Council newsletter

August 2022

By the time you read this, we'll probably have everyone complaining about the excessive rain, washed-out roads, and pollution from sewage plants over-loaded with rainwater and agricultural run-off. Ha - its good to talk! Seriously though, we need volunteers to take on the role of Flood Warden locally—NOW. Really, this *is* important.

However, as I am writing this in mid-August, we're happy complaining about the heat and drought, which, officially, may continue well into next year. So it's a good time to remind everyone of the dangers of fire. Even if we have had some rain, many of the plants and trees are tinder dry, and our wonderful 'sea breeze' always blows through to suck out moisture and fan any flames.

We have two key messages for you. First please ensure you understand the risk of wild-fires near your own home through fields, common land, heathland, and even your gardens. We live in an area of small roads and restricted access, making it difficult for emergency services, so take some time to be prepared.

Second, if you have visitors or tourists staying, please make sure they are aware of the restrictions on BBQs and fires in public spaces here in Dorset—even on some beaches!! They won't know unless *you* tell them.

Here in West Dorset, our economy is particularly vulnerable to the effects of more extreme weather conditions on tourism and farming, but, in addition, we are all faced with the shock of a considerable rise in the cost of living. Dorset Council has published a leaflet with some good advice and contact numbers—please read and act on this. Even if you think you can cope, if you know of a neighbour or friend who may struggle with the massive increases coming along, not just in fuel, but in food and other essentials, please help them to make use of this information—and do it now.

It's not all gloom and doom—how could it be!—so read about our fingerposts and the skills of bird-ringing too. Enjoy...

*The Editor*

**Char Valley Parish Council (CVPC)** is a group council made up of the civil parish councils of Stanton St Gabriel, Whitchurch Canonicorum (North and South), and Wootton Fitzpaine.

Because each separate council is small, we join up for meetings so we can take decisions together and achieve more.

The combined civil parish stretches from the Jurassic Coast to the Marshwood Vale, all falling within the West Dorset Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB).

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Opinions expressed by individual contributors do not necessarily represent the views of CVPC as a whole.

## CVPC Meetings

CVPC meets monthly except in August and December. Being a group council, our meetings are normally held in each of our village halls in rotation—James Hargreaves Hall in Morcombelake (JH), Whitchurch Canonorum village hall (WC), and Wootton Fitzpaine village hall (WF). The meeting minutes and agenda are posted on parish notice boards and website. All our meetings are open to the public and we welcome public participation.

Our meetings start at 7:30pm, with the following schedule:

*2022 Meetings:* 12<sup>th</sup> September JH 10<sup>th</sup> October WC 21<sup>st</sup> November WF

### CVPC COUNCILLORS

[www.charvalley.org](http://www.charvalley.org)

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#### Representing: WHITCHURCH CANONICORUM (SOUTH)

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Clare Mahaddie (vice chair)	01297 489813	E: <a href="mailto:cmahaddie@charvalleypc.com">cmahaddie@charvalleypc.com</a>
Chris Noon (chair)	03333 030963	E: <a href="mailto:chrisnooncvpc@outlook.com">chrisnooncvpc@outlook.com</a>

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#### Representing: STANTON ST. GABRIEL

Andrew Carey	01297 560057	E: <a href="mailto:acarey@charvalleypc.com">acarey@charvalleypc.com</a>
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#### Representing: DORSET COUNCIL: Councillor for Marshwood Vale ward

Simon Christopher	07798 833715	E: <a href="mailto:cllrsimon.christopher@dorsetcouncil.gov.uk">cllrsimon.christopher@dorsetcouncil.gov.uk</a>
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#### CLERK

Tamsin Ely	07786 086038	E: <a href="mailto:charvalley@dorset-aptc.gov.uk">charvalley@dorset-aptc.gov.uk</a>
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<b>Footpath Officers:</b>	Wootton Fitzpaine	Sarah Dewe	<a href="mailto:sarahdewe@mac.com">sarahdewe@mac.com</a>	07973920001
	Whitchurch	Christine Peat	<a href="mailto:christine_peat15@yahoo.co.uk">christine_peat15@yahoo.co.uk</a>	

<b>Tree Officer:</b>	Emma O'Bryen	<a href="mailto:emma@obryen.co.uk">emma@obryen.co.uk</a>
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At the annual meeting in May, Hilary Joyce stepped down as chair of the Council but stays on as a Councillor, and Chris Noon was elected as chair. Many thanks to Hilary for her work both as chair and representing CVPC in many important ways, especially during the difficult times of the pandemic.

## Broadband

Reliable, high speed connection continues to be a challenge in many parts of Char Valley, either through fixed connections or mobile. Although this is unlikely to change in the near future, there has been some encouraging activity with 'Jurassic Fibre' entering into competition with Open Reach for your business. Both companies are working towards a fibre connection for all premises as the preferred solution but, as you may have guessed, their timetables are driven by commercial interests rather than ours. So, if you are interested in improving your connectivity, you should register on both Open Reach (<https://bit.ly/RegisterOR>) and Jurassic Fibre (<https://bit.ly/RegisterJ-F>). Jurassic Fibre (a local Exeter company) is currently actively working in Bridport, making them a more likely supplier in this area and your registration influences their rollout.

## Call for Evidence—Short Term Tourist Accommodation Registration

The UK Government has launched a review of short-term lets in England through a Call for Evidence. The Call for Evidence follows the UK government's intention to consider a "Tourist Accommodation Registration Scheme."

This is your opportunity to make your voice heard and help inform any future UK Government policies around short-term lets.

The Call for Evidence includes 13 questions and the deadline for responses is 21st September 2022. Contribute to the Call for Evidence here: <https://bit.ly/CVPC36>

## Char Valley FLOOD WARDEN

The Char Valley needs a new Flood Warden—or Wardens.

The Warden coordinates flood plans with the Environment Agency, checks local water-courses and rivers for blockages etc, identifies local helpers, ensures supplies of empty sand-bags, makes sure signs are displayed, identifies local resources such as 4x4s or kayaks and boats, helps raise awareness and preparedness, and, if needed, coordinates with the rescue and support services.

This all sounds a lot of work—and in the early stages it will involve updating the existing plans and resource identification. After that, keeping the plans up-to-date and liaising with local support should require much less time.

This is a very important voluntary role in our local community and can be shared between a number of people if that works.



As I'm writing this with the sun shining and the country in an official drought, I can only think that NOW *is* the right time to be doing this, so please contact us if you are even remotely interested in helping out.

Don't wait until you're up to your knees in muddy water!!



# Act early

# Cost of living help

## Help and advice

**Citizens Advice and Age UK** (for over 55s) offer free, independent, and confidential advice and support. If you need to talk to someone, whatever problems you are facing, do contact them first.

Find out more and how to apply for everything in this leaflet, online at [dorsetcouncil.gov.uk/cost-of-living-help](http://dorsetcouncil.gov.uk/cost-of-living-help) or use the links and telephone numbers below.

### Accessing food

Don't skip meals to pay bills. Find your nearest foodbanks, community fridges and affordable food.

Visit [helpandkindness.co.uk/food-projects](http://helpandkindness.co.uk/food-projects) or call 01305 595958  
Call Citizens Advice 0800 144 8848 or visit your local Citizens Advice office

### Benefits

Claim benefits for the first time or check if you are getting everything you are entitled to.

Visit [dorsetcouncil.gov.uk/benefits](http://dorsetcouncil.gov.uk/benefits) or call 01305 211970

### Council Tax

Problems paying your Council Tax or check if you can claim Council Tax Support.

Visit [dorsetcouncil.gov.uk/counciltax](http://dorsetcouncil.gov.uk/counciltax)  
If you live in East or North Dorset, call 0345 034 4569

If you live in Purbeck, West Dorset and Weymouth or Portland, call 01305 211970

### Extra money for older people

Apply for the **Household Support Fund** if you are a pensioner and have savings of less than £10,000.

Visit [dorsetcouncil.gov.uk/household-support-fund](http://dorsetcouncil.gov.uk/household-support-fund) or call 01305 221027

If you are on a low income, check if you can claim **Pension Credit**. It helps with Council Tax, NHS treatment, heating costs and more.

Visit [gov.uk/pension-credit](http://gov.uk/pension-credit) or call Pension Service helpline 0800 731 0469



### Support for children

Check your eligibility for free school meals, healthy start vouchers and childcare funding.

#### Free school meals

Visit [dorsetcouncil.gov.uk/free-school-meals](http://dorsetcouncil.gov.uk/free-school-meals) or call 01305 221090

#### Healthy Start vouchers

Visit [healthystart.nhs.uk/how-to-apply](http://healthystart.nhs.uk/how-to-apply) or call 0300 3307010

#### For childcare funding

Visit [dorsetcouncil.gov.uk/childcare-funding-options](http://dorsetcouncil.gov.uk/childcare-funding-options) or call 01305 221066

### Housing

Homelessness support, housing register (social housing) and general housing advice.

Visit [dorsetcouncil.gov.uk/housing/homelessness](http://dorsetcouncil.gov.uk/housing/homelessness) or call 01305 211000

### Managing your money

Budgeting and managing debts or unpaid bills.

Visit [citizensadvice.org.uk/debt-and-money](http://citizensadvice.org.uk/debt-and-money) or call 0800 144 8848 or visit your local Citizens Advice office

### Mental health and wellbeing

Tips on wellbeing and support if you need to talk.

Visit [publichealthdorset.org.uk/mental-health](http://publichealthdorset.org.uk/mental-health) or call Connection (NHS) available 24 hours a day 0800 652 0190

In a life-threatening situation always call 999.



### Utility bills

Contact your supplier for help in the first instance if you can't pay your gas, electricity, phone/broadband or water bills, and for information about lower tariffs for eligible people.

For advice and guidance on energy call Citizens Advice Energy Unit 01929 775500 or email [energy@edpcitizensadvice.org.uk](mailto:energy@edpcitizensadvice.org.uk)

### Work worries

Advice on your employment rights if you worried about your work.

Visit [citizensadvice.org.uk/work](http://citizensadvice.org.uk/work) or call Citizens Advice 0800 144 8848 or visit your local Citizens Advice office



For **free, independent and confidential advice** on cost of living help, you can also contact our partners:



Citizens Advice in Dorset

Visit [citizensadvisedorset.org.uk](http://citizensadvisedorset.org.uk)  
Call 0800 144 8848



Age UK (for over 55s)

North, South and West Dorset  
Visit [ageuk.org.uk/northsouthwestdorset](http://ageuk.org.uk/northsouthwestdorset)  
Call 01305 269444



Age UK (for over 55s)

Bournemouth, Poole and East Dorset  
Visit [ageuk.org.uk/bournemouthpooleeastdorset](http://ageuk.org.uk/bournemouthpooleeastdorset)  
Call 01202 530530



Want to get online?

Call the digital hotline on 01305 221048 to book an in-person session with a digital champion at one of our libraries.



## Check list

- ☐ Find my nearest foodbanks, community fridges and affordable food
- ☐ Claim benefits for the first time or check if I'm getting everything I'm entitled to
- ☐ Sort problems paying my Council Tax or check if I can claim Council Tax Support
- ☐ Apply for the Household Support Fund (people of state pension age)
- ☐ Get housing advice
- ☐ Get help with budgeting and managing debts or unpaid bills
- ☐ Look after my mental health and get help if I need it
- ☐ Check our eligibility for free school meals, healthy start vouchers and childcare funding
- ☐ Find help paying my utility bills
- ☐ Get advice about my employment rights

## Act early

## Cost of living help



If money is tight and life is worrying you, **act early** to prevent small problems turning into bigger ones.

We are working with your local Citizens Advice and Age UK to help you.

## Please join us and help to clean up the River Char

One way our River Char Community Project is trying to get a picture of the health of the river is with riverfly monitoring. Every month 10 local volunteers count the numbers of different river insect larvae found at different points along the riverbed. This helps us learn about the quality of the water and any problems with it (for example, too little oxygen will mean that many insects struggle to survive and reproduce, while run-off from fields and leaks from faulty septic tanks can pollute the water so badly that many insects are killed.)

Over time, riverfly monitoring shows us general trends in water quality (as insect numbers rise or fall) and highlight particular pollution events (when insect numbers drop sharply). Even then it's hard to identify all the causes of a problem or trend. For example, more frequent floods and droughts caused by climate change affect water flow and increase erosion; and pesticides used to treat crops and livestock may kill large numbers of river insects (like caddisflies) at the stage of life when they are flying.

We're also working alongside our sister project in Charmouth (the Lower Char Community Project) to measure levels of key chemicals (like phosphorus) in the water in a Citizen Science scheme run by Westcountry Rivers Trust. The Lower Char project is focusing particularly on reducing the number of times each year that untreated sewage spills into the river because the sewage system gets overloaded by storm water. Higher up the valley, where there is no mains sewage, we are more concerned with septic tanks and agricultural run-off.

One thing that's clear from our river monitoring (and which you will know if you walk the river regularly) is the mixed picture on wildlife and biodiversity. Compared to even a few years ago there is an alarming

shortage of frogs and other amphibians and no sign of water voles (*please tell us if you know of any along the river*). Numbers of dragonflies, butterflies and other insects are extremely low compared to those we saw in hot



*Elver*

summers in recent living memory. On the other hand, riverfly monitoring at Prime Copse at the start of August this year encouragingly turned up a young eel and three bullheads, even though (or perhaps because) water levels were very low.



*Bullhead*



*Cased caddisfly larva*

### How you can help

If you'd like to be on our River Char Community Project mailing list for news of forthcoming project events (walks, talks and working parties), please email our Clerk, Tamsin: [charvalley@dorset-aptc.gov.uk](mailto:charvalley@dorset-aptc.gov.uk)

If you'd like to help out in Charmouth with their Lower Char Community Project looking at micro-plastics on the beach and sewage releases, please visit their website: <https://www.riverchar.org>

If you've got a septic tank/cesspit/sewage treatment plant, you can help keep the river free of sewage by maintaining your tank and getting it emptied regularly. (See <https://www.charvalley.org/sewage>)

If you see anything interesting or worrying along the river (kingfishers, mink, water voles, pollution, etc.) let us know – with a photo if possible. Email: [acarey@charvalleyipc.com](mailto:acarey@charvalleyipc.com)

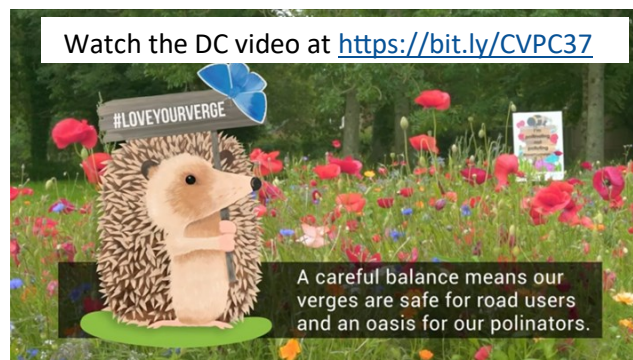


## Roadside Verges

We receive many questions about maintenance of verges on our roads and lanes so to help us to understand, here is an extract from Dorset Council's website <https://bit.ly/Dorset-verges> :

Cutting is undertaken by contractors – two cuts per year for A and B class roads, one cut per year for C and D class roads. The junctions and visibility splays are cut by contractors and also regularly throughout the year on an 'as needed' basis by our in-house teams. Where required, we will undertake additional cutting anywhere on the network later in the season, in order to maintain safe passage along the highway.

There is a huge opportunity for verges to be managed more sympathetically to help compensate for the 97% reduction in UK wildflower meadows since the 1930s. Dorset Council has significantly changed the way we manage many of our verges in the last few years to do more than ever to protect, conserve and enhance the verges in Dorset for biodiversity.



We now cut the B and C class rural road network once instead of twice. Previously all rural roads (40 mph and above) received two cuts per year with a side arm flail. This is now reduced to one cut, from late June / July onwards. This ensures not all the verges are cut in a similar time and many flowers complete their life cycles uninterrupted before cutting.

We are creating verges which have been designated Sites of Nature Conservation Interest (SNCIs) by Dorset Wildlife Trust (DWT). Working with DWT, we hope to create, by good management, more verges of SNCI quality due to the diversity of herbaceous species present.

Some verges already have high biodiversity value. These are known as "conservation verges". These verges avoid the first cut, and are then cut as usual later in the summer. This package of measures ensures that biodiversity can thrive on more of our verges each year. While we have reduced cutting, it is important to remember that for wildflowers to exist on our verges, they will still need cutting. Too little cutting results in verges turning to bramble and scrub, which would prevent wildflowers from living on our verges. Many may think it is a paradox, but if we want good populations of wildflowers, we will inevitably need to sometimes cut verges with wildflowers present. The vast majority of any cut flowers will soon bloom again between cuts, so don't be too alarmed if you sometimes see mowers cutting verges where wildflowers are present.

### Public involvement

Please note it is dangerous to maintain verges, and members of the public should avoid doing it themselves. However, if you or a group are interested in performing maintenance tasks in your community, then please contact our Coast and Countryside service.

### Weed control

Control of weeds on highway hard services, e.g. kerb edges, is done with a biodegradable herbicide. This work is carried out once or twice a year during the growing season. This helps reduce weeds and maintain the integrity of Highway infrastructure.

If you think that the verges are not being cared for correctly, then please let Dorset Council know, through their website at <https://bit.ly/Dorset-verges>

## Dorset Finger Posts

The history of finger posts makes interesting reading. Legislation was enacted in England in 1697 which enabled magistrates to place “direction posts at cross-highways”. The Highways Act 1766 and Turnpike Roads Act 1773 made use of finger posts on turnpike roads compulsory. The Motor Car Act 1903 passed road sign responsibilities to the relevant highway authority within Great Britain and Ireland, although no specifications were set. Guidance was given in a 1921 circular that road direction signs should have 2 ½ or 3 inch high (64 or 76 mm) upper case lettering on a white background and white supporting poles. It was also recommended that the name of the highway authority be included somewhere in the design. Mandatory standards were passed for Great Britain in 1933 which required poles to be painted with black and white bands and lettering to be of a different typeface.

Sign posts were removed across much of the United Kingdom during World War II, lest enemy forces used them for navigation. Imagine trying to navigate through the tortuous lanes of Marshwood Vale without a sign post in sight! They were replaced in the late 1940s. Road signing was reviewed again in 1964 whereby local authorities were encouraged to remove and replace traditional finger posts with new designs. At this point the use of ¼ and ½ mile distances was discontinued. Some counties appear to have been more zealous than others in eradicating the old type of signpost. Reacting to concern about the loss of historical finger posts from the rural landscape, an advisory leaflet was issued by the Department for Transport and English Heritage in June 2005 which stated that “All surviving traditional finger post direction signs should be retained in-situ and maintained on a regular basis. They should be repainted every five years in traditional black and white livery”.

Even more fascinating are the 4 red posts within Dorset, two of them being in West Dorset. One of these is at Hewood which is a small settlement near Thorncombe on the Dorset Somerset border. Another is between the village of Evershot and the hamlet of Benville. On the B3145 north of Sherborne close to the village of Poyntington is the third one. The fourth red

post is on the A31 east of Bere Regis where the Anderson to Bloxworth road crosses.

There are various theories bandied about the reason for red posts at crossroads. The most common one is that they were the sites of



hangman's gallows. Once the perpetrator had died from hanging his soul would then be confused into which “road to take”, and thus haunt the area for ever more!

Another more logical reason is the theory that the red posts were stop-off points for guards moving prisoners on foot. There would be normally be a barn nearby where the guards and prisoners stayed overnight. There is a dilapidated barn near the Bere Regis red post which still has shackles on the wall to which the prisoners would have been attached to prevent them absconding. This site is said to be on the route from Dorchester prison to Plymouth and on to Australia. In this area there is a Botany Bay farm and a Botany Bay Inn which lends



credence to this Australian connection.

Research has found that it is approximately 14 miles between Dorchester Gaol and the red post near Bere Regis, and would take approximately 4 ½ hours to walk. The distance between Dorchester and Benville is also approximately 14 miles, and Hewood from Benville would be a similar distance. It appears to be no coincidence that the distance between the Sherborne red post and the Benville is approximately 14 miles.

So, it could be assumed that the red posts continued through Devon until they got to Plymouth and the boarding of the convict ship to the other side of the world.



## Finger Posts in the Char Valley Area

Budget cuts at Dorset Council level have meant that maintenance of finger posts is now a Parish responsibility even though the post remains the property of the County and not the Parish. A finger post working party was formed to tackle the problem and organise the project. The plan was to work on three finger posts a year. The repair process was slow and expensive, involving specialist restorers, skilled craftspeople, volunteers and members of Portland's Young Offenders Institute.



The project was mounted in the early 2000s and led by Carolyn Peck, a councillor at the time, to survey the 21 finger posts in the CVPC with a view to restoring or renewing them. The full restoration of a four-fingered post at that time could cost up to £800. Of course some of the signs had to be taken down completely to be repaired, which would have confused people and cause them to be "lost in the Vale".

Fortunately the CVPC received a grant and several donations to get the project underway. It was found that some posts had lost all their finger posts, had been hit by a



hedge cutter, were rotting around the edges, or just generally looked "very tired".



fingers just along the road from Whitchurch Village Hall.



In some cases an insert of mild steel had to be made to go on top of the pole where it had rusted away. Most of the original roundels (the circular part that fits on top of the pole and finger posts) had been stolen in the past. It was hoped that with a more secure fitting this would not happen with the new ones. The roundel was made by Bridport Foundry.

Offers of practical help were received from several people in the parish and Chris Hawkins, from Whitchurch worked on the post with four



Specific materials have to be used in the restoration. The wood has to be oak and needs to have 4 coats of paint with a Zinsser Bullseye 321 primer, then 4 coats of Sadalin wood shield top coat. The pole is cast iron and painted in black gloss. The letters have to be cast aluminium and painted with etched primer with a matt black finish. The roundel is made of cast iron and the

letters done with synthetic black paint, whilst the rest is of white enamel.

Very recently it was found that the metal parts of 2 arms had

been snapped off on finger posts in both Wootton Fitzpaine and Monkton Wyld. Remedial action for these was done through Alex Brooks of Wootton Fitzpaine.





## The Ringer's Grip

It's 6.45am on a Saturday in late July and the household is up and already on its second cup of tea. This is 'The Weekend'. Finally, after having delayed the event twice due to Covid, Phoebe (my daughter-in-law's sister) is here to ring birds. (We're avoiding the obvious jokes as it soon becomes clear this is a serious, fascinating business.) Phoebe has been bird watching with her father since she was a child but the interest in ringing birds has developed over the last seven years and she is close to being fully trained. This will enable her to record and submit all her findings independently of supervision. A weekend of solo ringing at our home is an important part of her training. It is also a joyful family affair as her parents are also with us, along with my son and his wife Gabby, (Phoebe's older sister).



The five nets, set up the night before around the garden, have been unfurled. The fine, black mesh bellies in the breeze. The nets are almost invisible, set up against hedges and dark vegetation. A tape of birdsong plays to attract the unwary.

We join Phoebe as she checks the nets, done every twenty minutes or so throughout the morning. A black cap is the first bird to be caught. A magpie after a brief struggle frees itself and escapes. Phoebe carefully untangles the blackcap and puts it into a small drawstring cotton bag. She has several such bags, and lanyards round her neck to hold them so she can keep her hands free. But, for the moment, it is just the one blackcap she brings back to "process".

She removes the tiny bird from the bag and begins. She examines its flight and tail



feathers to age it and assess if it is in moult. She counts and notes the condition of its primary and secondary wing feathers. Its wing length is also measured and recorded. She blows its breast feathers to check for a brood patch. The breast, if bald, indicates that the bird has been sitting on eggs. Then, it is ringed. Phoebe stretches out its tiny wiry leg and pincers on a suitably

sized ring. The ring's number is noted against the bird's other details, time and location. Finally, the bird's weight is recorded and the bird is released.



Small birds, such as the blackcap end up head first in a small plastic film canister to be weighed. Larger birds stay in their bag. A great tit generally weighs between 18 and 19gms, a willow warbler just 7gms. Phoebe

has also ringed baby birds in the nest, explaining that the chicks of some bird species of birds have fatter legs than their parents and have to have a bigger ring. It seems they lose these extra millimetres once they fledge – such are the benefits of exercise! Long-tailed tits are often caught in small flocks and are kept in a box until all the individuals are ready to be released together.

Being up close to birds that we usually only see at a distance is a fascinating experience: the bright yellow of a tiny willow warbler; a treecreeper's chequered head, its beak curved, like an upholstery needle, for wheedling insects out of tree bark. I learnt that you can only reliably tell a willow warbler from a chiffchaff by examining its wing feathers – unless it's singing, of course. And blue tits are, according to Phoebe, remarkably feisty and super-pecky!



I also now understand why ringing matters. All the data Phoebe gathered will be logged on a central data base and will add to the information we already have on birds, the familiar and unfamiliar species, the numerous and the endangered. Also, I saw Phoebe's skill, her firm but gentle handling of the birds to avoid harming them, her care and attention to detail. It will all happen again next year when Phoebe returns to ring some of those species she missed and perhaps even catch some of this year's birds again.

Over the weekend, Phoebe caught, ringed and released around twenty individual birds including a blackbird, blackcap, great tit, blue tit, chaffinch, long-tailed tit, treecreeper, willow warbler, house sparrow, robin and wren.



## The Climate's Changing

We're all feeling the effects of climate change. There's the regularly extreme and unseasonal weather, of course. But the climate in our community is changing too. Instead of just wringing our hands about the sharp decline in the numbers of swallows, cuckoos and other birds, moths and other insects, frogs and other amphibians, hares and other mammals – more and more people locally are starting to take action.

Local volunteers are measuring and monitoring water quality in the river and joining working parties to help bring the river banks into good health. [River Char Community Project]

Local volunteers are getting involved in a project to map, plant, expand, extend and join up sections of hedgerow around and across Dorset into multiple corridors that promote biodiversity and help wildlife of all sorts. [Great Big Dorset Hedge]

Local landowners are taking action for improved biodiversity, healthier land and waterways and improved resilience to climate change. [West Dorset Wilding]

Local landowners, farmers and gardeners are taking action to reduce the amount of chemical pesticides and herbicides that they use. [Char Valley Lifelines]

Local volunteers are working with water companies to reduce the number of sewage releases into the river and to stop any more plastic biobeads polluting the river and beach. [Lower Char Community Project]

If you'd like to get involved, you'll find details of all these projects on our website at [www.charvalley.org/environment](http://www.charvalley.org/environment)

## BBQs and Fires in Open Spaces

As residents, we are all aware of the dangers and risks posed by fire, especially given the long dry weather this year. ***We should also ensure that our guests and visitors are fully aware also, including any tourists staying with you. If you don't tell them, then who will?***

Dorset Council are working with other agencies to try to reduce the risk of damage and dangers to life, and have issued **Public Spaces Protection Orders** covering large parts of Dorset countryside and beaches.

From Dorset Council web site:

**A Public Spaces Protection Order (PSPO) comes into force on 1 July that prevents people lighting fires, including BBQs, fireworks, lanterns, and campfires, in many public areas across Dorset.**

**Dorset Council is working with Forestry England and Dorset and Wiltshire Fire service to protect countryside area including heathlands, forests, and coastlines from the devastation that unattended naked flames can cause.**

**There is clear signage at the public areas where the PSPO applies. The PSPO does not apply to private property, such as gardens.**

On the back page of this Char Chat Newsletter, we have reproduced the Fire Services poster so *you can show it to your visitors and guests, or display it in your holiday property.*

We have also reproduced the two-page brochure about protecting yourselves and your own property in the unlikely event that a wildfire occurs near you. By the time you read this, we'll probably have had torrential downpours and be worried about flooding and not fire BUT please don't ignore this advice—just be aware and prepared—with global warming events becoming more likely, this won't be the last drought that will affect us here.



Consider an evacuation plan. Make a list of essentials each family member would need. Include

- Valuables
- Medication
- Money
- Clothing
- Food
- Don't forget pets!

Photograph important documents and passports (including policy numbers) and note important phone numbers. Keep the list handy and make sure everyone knows where it is.

Ensure your car is facing the right way to evacuate safely without reversing

## WHEN ACTION IS NEEDED IN THE EVENT OF A WILDFIRE KEEP SAFE

Phone 999 and ask for the Fire Service, giving location and nearest access

Pack your essentials into a bag or box

Do not tackle the fire yourself

Do not expose yourself to smoke as it is dangerous to your health

Follow advice and guidance from the emergency services or local authority.  
If in doubt - GET OUT

Follow your evacuation plan



Please speak to your children/teenagers about not playing with matches or lighting fires. For more information please visit -



[www.dwfire.org.uk/education/firesetters](http://www.dwfire.org.uk/education/firesetters)



## HOW TO PREPARE YOUR HOME FOR WILDFIRES



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### What is Firewise?

The Firewise Communities programme started in the USA and is an international programme which empowers neighbours and communities encouraging community spirit, resolve and willingness to take responsibility and work together to reduce their risk from wildfire.

If you think your community would benefit from being part of this international programme please contact The Urban Heaths Partnership on:



01202 642787  
[urbanheaths@dorsetcc.gov.uk](mailto:urbanheaths@dorsetcc.gov.uk)



**DORSET**  
POLICE & CRIME  
COMMISSIONER



The definition of a wildfire is an uncontrolled vegetation fire which involves heath, grassland, forest or agricultural land. It can have a devastating impact on nearby homes and therefore it is very important that people living close to these areas are prepared.

This leaflet provides guidance which outlines the steps that you can consider to prepare your home and community

Create your own wildfire action plan

- How to prepare
- What to do
- When to act
- Ensure all members of your household are aware of it and know what to do
- Consider any vulnerable neighbours who may need assistance and reassurance

### HOME SAFETY CHECKLIST

Identify possible wildfire risks around your -

- ☐ Home
- ☐ Garden
- ☐ Beyond your garden

### PROTECTING YOUR HOME

- ☐ Prevent embers from entering your roof space by repairing/replacing loose or broken tiles.
- ☐ Identify ember traps around your home - places where dead leaves collect naturally e.g. gutters, roof valleys etc. Clear them regularly.
- ☐ Identify any gaps in soffits/cladding around the roof area and screen using wire mesh to retain ventilation and prevent embers getting in. Advice must be sought if you suspect bats are present.
- ☐ Move any flammable material away from external house walls. Leaves, compost heaps, log piles etc.
- ☐ Ensure your house name/number is clearly visible from the road.
- ☐ Avoid parking on or near any fire hydrants.



### BEYOND YOUR GARDEN

If your property backs onto or is close to a greenspace, the land manager holds the responsibility to manage the risk to that land.

Heathland and forestry land owners/managers, with advice from Natural England, manage the habitat to maintain it for key species.

We need to balance the needs of wildlife protection, habitat management and homes. Everyone has a part to play - balance is key.

These internationally important habitats are subject to legal constraints. Land managers will assess fire risk and work with the Fire Service.



### PROTECTING YOUR GARDEN

- ☐ Trim back shrubs or trees that are close to or touching your house and dispose of cuttings responsibly. Do not put cuttings over your fence as it adds to the fire risk close to your home.
- ☐ Screen areas below patios and decks with wire mesh to prevent debris collecting.
- ☐ Consider removing any plants that contain oils and resins etc. especially if they are close to your house or alternatively plant them in moveable pots.
- ☐ Create separation between trees, bushes and items that could catch fire, such as patio furniture, wood piles, swing sets etc.
- ☐ During hot, dry spells ensure that your garden is maintained regularly and consider using 'grey' (waste) water for watering plants and lawns.
- ☐ Consider the position of garden sheds, consider fireproofing fence panels and wooden sheds.
- ☐ Use caution when having BBQs, bonfires and using fireworks.

## Bring A Picnic Not A BBQ

If British Summer Time and warmer days means you will be visiting one of Dorset & Wiltshire's local heathlands or outdoors spaces to enjoy the wildlife and wilderness, please take a picnic.

Dorset & Wiltshire Fire and Rescue Service (DWFRS) are encouraging residents and visitors to take a picnic and not BBQ. Warmer and breezy weather increases the risk of accidental or deliberate fires in our open spaces. A wildfire can move at speeds *faster than an Olympic sprinter*, so we are asking people who are out and about to follow some simple steps:

- If you are enjoying our open spaces when a fire occurs, get to a safe place and call 999 with as much information as possible.
- Consider downloading and using What3Words to identify your exact location.
- You can also help by reporting any antisocial behaviour on the heath to the Police on 101.

During 2021, DWFRS dealt with 494 fires in the open. In 2022, we have already seen large wildfires in Dorset & Wiltshire and firefighters across the UK have dealt with more wildfires between January and May than in the whole of 2021 (243 compared to 237 in 2021).

Area Manager Marc House, Head of Prevention at DWFRS said:

“As we move into the summer, with longer daylight hours and warmer weather, understandably more people want to get out and use Dorset & Wiltshire's natural environments. There is a trend that the number of deliberately set fires and fires caused by BBQs and bonfires in these open spaces, increases.

“I cannot stress enough how important it is to take extra care when enjoying our beautiful open and forestry areas. If you are a smoker, please extinguish them fully before disposing of them responsibly – never ever just throw them away lit, similar to throwing them out from car windows – the result could be 50 or 100 firefighters tackling the subsequent blaze.”

Anyone caught starting a fire on a heath will be prosecuted whether it is a case of deliberate arson or neglect, for example an unauthorised camp fire or a disposable BBQ that gets out of control. Wildfires cost lives not only to endangered plants and animals but also put people and houses in danger.

We need your help to protect our countryside. Please [#BringAPicnicNotABBBQ](#)

