

CROWD: Clean Rivers Of West Dorset

FRIDAY 4TH SEPTEMBER 2025 MEETING

WOOTTON FITZPAINE VILLAGE HALL, WOOTTON FITZPAINE DT6 6ND – 11:00AM-1:00PM

NOTES

- APOLOGIES: Edward Morello MP; Caroline Pearce **River Brit (Lower River)**; Emma Teasdale **Litter Free Dorset**; Peter Stapleton (**River Winniford**); Ian Rees **West Dorset Rivers and Coastal Streams (Catchment Officer)**; Jim Flory (**Environment Agency**)

Present:

- **River Winniford (Winniford River Action Group, WRAG)**: Lee Ramsden, Paul Ramsden
- **River Char (River Char Community Project, RCCP)**: Andrew Carey
- **River Char (River Char Action Group & Riverfly Testing Coordinator)**: John Kenward
- **River Mangerton and River Asker (River monitor)**: Chuck Willmott
- **River Mangerton (River monitor)**: Margaret Morgan-Grenville
- **River Brit (Upper River)**: Rosemary Rychnovsky
- **River Simene (Parish Councillor)**: Bob Hamblett
- **West Dorset Wilding**: Dana Assinder
- **Wessex Water** – Andy Mears

INTRODUCTION: What has uplifted us?

- Swallows gathering and a flock of house martins
- A grey phalarope amongst dunlin and ringed plovers
- The return of butterflies and honeybees
- Dinosaur footprints on Purbeck
- Bats and a hobby over the pond
- A spearmint green idyll at the riverfly spot on the Mangerton
- Four late hatching barn owlets – two of them shouting on the patio
- A kingfisher darting under Stockham Bridge whilst river testing – plus badgers, deer, hedgehogs and a battered dark green fritillary.
- A furious wren
- Firecrests at Trinity Wood and the sensation of walking in a wet wood after a drought.

(There is no word, but AI proposes *dendrichor*. [*Dendr-*: From *dendron*, meaning “tree” and *ikhōr*, the ethereal fluid in the veins of the gods.] Meaning: the sensory experience of entering a wood after a long dry spell has been broken by rain, including the earthy smell, the sight of saturated greens and glistening surfaces, the sound of water dripping, the squishy feel of the ground underfoot, and the sense of invigoration that comes from witnessing the woodland’s revival.)

NEWS FROM WESSEX WATER – Andy Mears

- **Seatown** – Golden Cap Holiday Park has a contractor booked to make a permanent repair to their sewer pipe late November/early December this year.

- **Newlands SPS** – There had been no further spills so far since February – and further work to seal sewers at Newlands is scheduled for 16th September (Note: the work has now taken place.)
- **Monitoring the right things** – (following up on discussions at the July meeting, Wessex Water ecologists strongly agree that Riverfly, Ammonia and Phosphate are good things to measure.
- **Coast & Rivers Community Partner** – this is the job title of Andy’s replacement. The new recruit should be in post soon.
- **Litton Cheney** – The works scheduled for 2025-2030 will be a nature-based scheme: including a wetland and vertical flow reedbed. The works depend on suitable land being bought.

Andy noted that all nature-based schemes will get a bypass (to handle excess flow in storms). Each use of a bypass will be declared as a Storm Overflow spill. He also said that the EA and Defra are softening their initially resistance to nature-based schemes (which they had called ‘unproven’). Details of Wessex Water’s Hanging Langford reedbed [are here](#).

NEWS FROM CROWD

River Brit – Rose

- There have been good counts from Riverfly testing with stonefly numbers especially high in late summer.
- Bob will start monitoring downstream from Rose, below a muddy tributary.
- The soil in the area around Beaminster contains an enzyme that helps milk to stay fresh longer. Who knew?
- A significant planning application with river/sewage implications is expected soon from Parnham House. (Andy noted that Wessex Water cannot say it hasn’t got capacity for a new building development - it is required by law to supply the capacity.)

Brit Valley Project / West Dorset Wilding – Dana

- The Brit Valley Project volunteer and Citizen Science consultation meeting is now expected to happen in October/November.
- The Brit Valley project aims to put its final project proposal to Defra after Christmas.

River Winniford – Paul

- WRAG has been being doing Riverfly testing on the Winniford this year and initial results are poor (as low as 1 and never exceeding 4).
- Recent *E. coli* tests along the river and at the lagoon suggest that there is no build-up of bacteria in the lagoon.
- *E. coli* tests further up the river in North Chideock had produced alarmingly high results (c. 93,000 cfus/100ml) earlier in the summer. Working with the local farmer and, through him, with neighbours and other residents has led to a number of local residents having their septic tanks emptied. Subsequent tests have shown a very encouraging improvement with acceptable levels of *E. coli* in the upper river.
- WRAG hopes to start work on tackling Himalayan Balsam next year. (Dana suggested sowing native wildflower seed on soil recently cleared of Himalayan Balsam.)

River Char – John

- Himalayan Balsam pulling on the River Char has had little impact so far – the principal benefit has been public engagement.
- Riverfly counts (and water level/flow) have been very low recently.
- Like the news from the Winniford, one landowner upriver has been improving his septic tank as a result of RCAG tests – and this seems like a model for the future. E.g. We could invite farmers and residents concerned about their impact on the river environment to request free and confidential water tests from us.
- RCAG has identified a need for a better data collection form for citizen science data and is working on developing one. **Dana** suggested using iNaturalist. **Chuck** has set up a group on iNaturalist to do this and has 3 people using it. In response to concerns about finding and listing rare species, **Andy** said eBird has a ‘sensitive’ option that blurs the exact location of a sighting.

River Simene – Bob

- There are water voles in the top lake upstream of Symondsburry.
- Bob had attended a meeting in East Devon that included new information on pollution sources in local rivers. **Action: Bob** to write a brief report.
- Bob is doing CSI monitoring at Atrim Bridge. He suggested that the river also be tested at Foundry Lea. **Action: Bob** to find a volunteer to do this.

River Mangerton – Margaret and Chuck

- The EA is testing regularly at Mangerton Mill and its results match Margaret’s. Margaret is getting good riverfly counts currently.
- A spring piped under the road near Chuck’s home has dried up for the first time this summer.
- Amy Smith (LNRS Lead at DC is holding drop in consultations - **Drop-in session** at [Dorchester Library](#): Tuesday 15th July, 10.00am to 4.00pm. [See other drop-in sessions](#).

Other Business:

- **Andrew** had attended a meeting for Town and Parish Councils organised by Dorset Council’s . Amy Smith (LNRS Lead). He had proposed that DC could offer the infrastructure to help coordinate river groups across Dorset.
- **Rose** asked if there was a mechanism for slow release of water from a water butt. **Andy** said the top half can be emptied via a perforated hose.
- Wessex Water may be going to start extracting water from the upper River Axe. **Action: Bob** to ask Lucy Lowe for details.
- **Andy** is leaving WW on 19th Sept. CROWD thanked him warmly for his help and support since the group’s inception and wished him well in whatever comes next. We will miss him.

NEXT MEETING: Friday 5th December, 11am – 1pm. Wootton Fitzpaine Village Hall