



Grassland management at Hursey Common

Hursey Common SNCI, on the western edge of Broadwindsor is a small but diverse one-hectare site comprising of ash and alder woodland and an adjacent open area of herb-rich damp meadow. The site is part of a larger area that is actively managed for wildlife by the Parish Council.

On 11 September, Dorset Wildlife Trust's Wider West Dorset volunteer group rose to the task of assisting with the annual cut and collect of the year's growth on the meadow component of the SNCI. Armed with sharp scythes, the team worked away on quite a dense stand of fleabane, interspersed with a wonderful mix of other damp meadow herbs. The scent of mint intermittently filled our nostrils, and the occasional late-flowering devil's-bit scabious also fell to the blade.

After the scything, volunteers raked up the cuttings and removed them from the grassland. It's lovely that this meadow can remain uncut until as late as September, providing valuable habitat for invertebrates into late summer, as it is not needed for grazing or a hay crop.



L-R: © Nick Gray; © Nick Upton

However, the cut and collect, though labour-intensive, is essential for maintaining the species richness of the meadow. The meadow typically puts on a fine display of orchids in the spring, a sign that this sensitive management is paying off.

It was a great day and very handy that our cars were



Scything

© Sheila Hawkins

nearby to dive into for the odd very heavy downpour. Thanks to Sheila for organising this task and a big thank you to the team for their dedication and hard work.

If you need help with a similar project, do get in touch! Our volunteers are not only enthusiastic scythers, but also experienced hedge layers, pond restorers, scrub bashers, and more.

Contact Iona Graham, Wilder Landscapes Assistant:
igraham@dorsetwildlifetrust.org.uk



Volunteers at work

© Iona Graham

The Frome Headwaters Restoration Strategy

This catchment (including the Upper Frome, Wraxall Brook and River Hooke) has been chosen by Wessex Water as a 'Flagship Chalk Stream for restoration by 2035'.



The Frome Headwaters Restoration Strategy is a pioneering initiative working to restore the upper reaches of the River Frome in Dorset — bringing life back to one of the county's most ecologically important rivers.

Goals of the Frome Headwaters Strategy

1. Improve water quantity / flow regime

Address any abstraction pressure and ensure the springfed chalk stream maintains adequate base flow, particularly in the headwater reaches.

Restore connectivity of the stream with its floodplain to support natural hydrological processes and resilience to dry periods and climate change.

2. Improve water quality

Reduce pollutant inputs (agricultural runoff, wastewater / drainage, sedimentation, storm overflow discharge) into the chalk streams in the headwaters area.

Monitor and reduce nutrient loading, improve clarity of water, and support the sensitive ecology of chalk streams.

3. Restore physical habitat (geomorphology and ecology)

Undertake instream and riparian habitat restoration: remove barriers, reinstate meanders, reconnect the channel/floodplain.

Re-establish and protect riparian woodlands, wetlands, and adjacent habitat mosaics that support the chalk stream ecosystem.

4. Adopt a whole catchment collaborative approach

Engage landowners, farmers, water companies, regulators and local communities in the project over multiple years.

Undertake baseline monitoring, establish clear strategies and actions.

5. Make the Frome Headwaters a flagship / exemplar restoration project for chalk streams.

Progress so far

This project officially began in April 2025; however, it was built on a legacy of Farm Liaison and river restoration work in this catchment spanning back over 10 years.

Our work with farmers and landowners is a major strand of this project and with funding from Wessex Water Dorset Wildlife Trust can offer free 1:1 advice to anyone farming in this catchment.

As part this Wessex Water also offer a dedicated capital grant scheme for landowners and farmers in priority areas. The fund supports projects that improve water **quality** and manage water **quantity** across the catchment.

Eligible capital items include:

- **Fencing and riverbank protection** to reduce poaching and sediment runoff
- **Constructed wetlands or sediment traps** to filter nutrients before they reach the stream
- **Riparian buffer strips and cover crops** to reduce nitrate and phosphate loss
- **Leaky dams and flow attenuation features** to slow the flow and reduce peak flooding
- **Rainwater harvesting, swales or diversion bunds** to improve drought resilience and reduce abstraction

■ In-field grassed waterways and tramline disruption kits to manage surface runoff.

Dorset Wildlife Trust have engaged with half the catchment and started the process of grant funding interventions that fit the list above. If you live or farm in this catchment, please get in touch if you would like to hear more. Email: chalkstreams@dorsetwildlifetrust.org.uk or telephone **Emily Newton: 07770 262334**.

This is a partnership project funded by Wessex Water and delivered by Dorset Wildlife Trust and participating landowners. Partnership working is crucial for chalk stream restoration because chalk streams are complex, living systems influenced by a wide range of human and natural factors — and no single organisation or group can address all the pressures alone.

Wessex Water have committed to five years of funding; other project partners are the Environment Agency, Natural England, The Poole Harbour Catchment Partnership and The Dorset Catchment Partnership.

The full restoration strategy covers catchment land use, water company assets, fluvial processes and hydrogeomorphology and ecology and can be seen here: www.dorsetwildlifetrust.org.uk/from-headwaters-project

Supporting SNCIs through Farming in Protected Landscapes

Ali Quinney, Dorset National Landscape Nature Recovery Officer *Photo: Higher Kingsland © Nick Gray*



It can be challenging for individual land managers to access funding to help them maintain or enhance their SNCIs, and this is where the Farming in Protected Landscapes (FiPL) Programme has proved valuable.

Dorset Wildlife Trust have been working with Dorset National Landscape, Farming and Wildlife Advisory Group South West (FWAG SW) and local landowners to enhance the contribution SNCIs make to the ecological network in Dorset. An example of one of the furthest reaching projects is the **Hogchester brush harvester project**.

This initiative began in 2022 and has grown into a successful not-for-profit venture. The funding enabled the purchase of a brush harvester suitable for small sites and provided training for its use, helping to embed the practice within the local community. Further capital funding allowed for the purchase of a Ryetec harvester and supported Dorset Wildlife Trust officer time, strengthening the project's capacity. Seed has been harvested from SNCIs and used to create or restore 25 hectares of lowland meadows across more than 50 sites throughout west Dorset. The brush harvester setup is now a vital part of the local ecosystem, contributing meaningfully to wildflower meadow restoration across the area.

Dorset National Landscapes still has some FiPL funding until March 2026. However, future funding for 2026-2027 has not been confirmed. We'll continue working closely with Dorset Wildlife Trust, so if you have any great ideas for projects, please do get in touch.

For more information about Farming in Protected Landscapes please contact Rachel Janes at Dorset NL: dorset-nl.org.uk/resource/farming-in-protected-landscapes/ or Robert Hall at Cranborne Chase NL: cranbornechase.org.uk/our-work/farming/farming-in-protected-landscapes/

ELMs update

The Sustainable Farming Incentive (SFI), which has helped many farmers fund actions like herbal leys, hedgerow management and low-input grassland, closed to new applications in March 2025 after reaching its full budget allocation. Existing SFI agreements carry on as normal, but new details on the next version of the scheme are expected towards the end of 2025.

Meanwhile the new **Countryside Stewardship Higher Tier** (CSHT) is being rolled out with a focus on larger-scale habitat creation, restoration and connectivity. Applications are open for those who have been invited and gone through the pre-application process. Guidance and an online service are now available and details of the CSHT actions can be found using the 'Find funding for land or farms' tool on gov.uk.

Payment rates across existing Higher Level Stewardship schemes have been uplifted to reflect inflation and align with other schemes.

Capital Grants are currently closed but are expected to open again next year. The 'Capital grant finder' tool remains available to help users search for previously funded capital items and understand the evidence typically required — though these details may change with any forthcoming reforms.

Projects from **Landscape Recovery** Round 1 have now completed the Project Development Phase and are beginning rigorous assessments to secure funding for the Project Implementation Phase. So far, we have heard about two Dorset projects successfully entering into implementation agreements. No date has yet been announced for a third round of Landscape Recovery.

If you would like help understanding how your land fits within these evolving schemes, our advisors are available to help.

SNCI mapped on Dorset's Local Habitat Map

Dorset's Local Nature Recovery Strategy (LNRS) was published in draft form this summer, with a consultation running between May and July, offering opportunities to feed in and comment. The final strategy is expected to be published in December 2025.

An important part of the strategy are Dorset's nature recovery maps. These are tools that can be used to identify opportunities and guide nature recovery activities based on shared priorities agreed by local people and organisations. Three layers form part of the LNRS and together these are called the Local Habitat Map.

SNCI will be shown on Dorset's 'Nature areas of national importance' layer, along with other protected sites and habitats including Sites of Special Scientific Interest, National Nature Reserves, Local Nature Reserves and ancient woodland. To protect the privacy of landowners, the exact locations of SNCI will not be identifiable, but they will be included as points on the online maps which disappear as you zoom in. Including SNCI is important to ensure that future plans to restore nature consider the opportunities to extend and connect existing sites which are already nature-rich.

The two other layers identify where there are the greatest opportunities to maximise nature recovery and identify activities that may help achieve nature recovery priorities. Together the maps will identify where efforts and funding should be prioritised over the next 10 years.

To find out more and view these maps visit:
dorsetcouncil.gov.uk/nature-recovery



Hay meadow with orchids near Beaminster

© Mariko Whyte

Dorset Wildlife Trust may be able to support or facilitate SNCI landowners and managers to connect with nearby landowners or develop opportunities for sharing knowledge or resources when it comes to nature-friendly farming practices and management of special sites and habitats. If you have any ideas for training, events or resources that might be of interest please get in touch. Contact **Mariko Whyte (SNCI Officer)** snci@dorsetwildlifetrust.org.uk

For further information on SNCI and resources for landowners visit:

www.dorsetwildlifetrust.org.uk/SNCI or contact Mariko Whyte, Conservation Officer:
snci@dorsetwildlifetrust.org.uk or 01305 264620

For land advisory services including agri-environment schemes, management plans, access to funding opportunities and surveys and monitoring:

Visit: dorsetwildlifetrust.org.uk/land-advisory-services or contact: enquiries@dorsetwildlifetrust.org.uk

Forestry Commission:

Roly Boughton (Woodland Officer, West Dorset and Purbeck): roly.boughton@forestrycommission.gov.uk
or 07442 862772

SW Area Office: 0300 067 4960

FWAGSW: Alex Butler: alex.butler@fwagsw.org.uk

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