

The Urban Heaths Partnership

...working together on Action for Heaths

The Urban Heaths Partnership (UHP) was formed in 2001 and delivers heathland mitigation on behalf of its 14 partners as listed below:

- Amphibian and Reptile Conservation Trust
- Borough of Poole
- Bournemouth Borough Council
- Christchurch Borough Council
- East Dorset District Council
- Dorset County Council
- Dorset & Wiltshire Fire and Rescue Service
- Dorset Police
- Dorset Wildlife Trust
- Natural England
- Purbeck District Council
- National Trust
- Forestry Commission
- Royal Society for the Protection of Birds



A core team of staff is funded jointly from developer contributions collected by each Local Planning Authority from development within 5km of a heathland site. Dorset County Council employs the team on behalf of the partnership.

Funding is formalised in the Dorset Heathlands Planning Framework 2015 – 2020 Supplementary Planning Document adopted by the 6 Local Authorities, available online:

https://www.dorsetforyou.gov.uk/media/219362/Dorset-Heathlands-Planning-Framework-2015-2020-SPD/pdf/Dorset_Heathlands_Planning_Framework_2015-2020_SPD_Jan2016.pdf

The core team is responsible for co-ordinating and delivering education and monitoring elements of Strategic Access Management and Monitoring (SAMM). Also delivery of the “Dorset Dogs” project,



which works with dog owners, dog related businesses, charities and land managers to promote positive management for dogs and responsible ownership and behaviour.

The wardening element of SAMM is delivered by the Local Planning Authority partners, also funded from developer contribution along with Heathland Infrastructure Projects (HIPs) which include development of Suitable Alternative Natural Greenspaces (SANGs).

Fire Reduction Techniques

The partnership has worked closely to reduce wildfires started by arson on heathlands using the following initiatives:

- **Site Specific Risk Information.**

The Fire Service developed individual Site Specific Risk Information, including identification of fire access gates and routes and rendezvous points recorded on maps held by local crews.

- **Early warning fire pager system.**

Fire Control send pager messages to a group of land managers of heathland sites anytime a heathland fire is called through. The land managers within the partnership have an agreed response to support each other in the event of the pagers being activated.

- **Fire training.**

Training in Fire behaviour, how to respond to fire incidents and how to provide best support for the Fire Service during an incident is provided annually for land managers, rangers and wardens.

- **Land managers working closely with Fire Service**

Land managers liaise with the Fire Service in labelling and recording on maps access routes and gates. DWFRS visit sites to familiarise themselves and check accessibility for appliances.

Land managers also manage sites with fire control in mind cutting Fire Defendable lines in the vegetation to help with controlling a fire.



- **Proactive education programme**

An agreed education programme has been established working with schools near to heathland sites. The programme focusses on 2 priority messages:

1. The importance of heathlands due to their wildlife and biodiversity.
2. The consequences of heathland fires to the wildlife and the community.

All activities delivered have been developed around these 2 priorities. The Arson Courtroom Drama (ACD) is a curriculum based session specifically designed to reinforce the importance of heathlands due to their wildlife and biodiversity and highlight the consequences of heathland fires to the wildlife and the community. Aimed at 12 – 13 year olds it is based in a courtroom setting with students acting the roles of Judge, Accused, Witnesses, Defence and Jury. Each year this session is delivered from January to April to 12 target Schools within the project area, totalling around 1800 students in 60 sessions.



Targeting younger students is considered an important educational aim as the child will develop an understanding and awareness of the heathlands to enable them to identify the importance of heathland sites when taking part in the ACD. This is accommodated with a range of heathland related activities.

The Education Officer along with partners including land managers, police officers and fire officers will work reactively with schools to deliver assemblies and heathland related activities in schools close to heaths where incidents have occurred.



- **Operation Heathland.**

Close collaboration with Dorset Police has been key within the partnership, each year Dorset Police run an internal Order which provides Officers across the area with information on how to deal with heathland related incidents. Regular partnership meetings take place to discuss shared partnership intelligence, monitoring fire and other incidents to identify any potential spates or trends. The meeting also looks at actions which might help alleviate risks or promote messages.

- **Increased site wardening.**

Funding from developer contributions is used by Local Authority partners to provide extra site presence over and above that which the countryside management teams can provide, increasing time spent on site engaging with visitors.

- **Volunteer programmes.**

Working with partners UHP runs training for regular heathland visitors to raise their knowledge of who to report incidents to and what information they can provide to support the quickest response, providing them with fire access maps of the sites they most regularly visit. There have been great benefits of engaging with these regular visitors who can act as eyes and ears on ground.

Monitoring

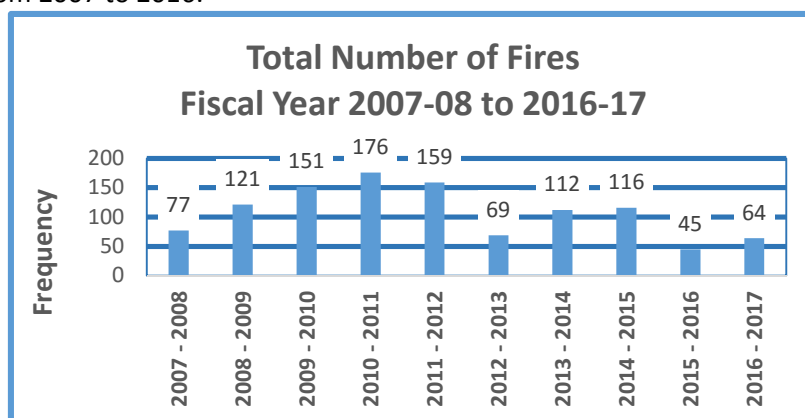
An extensive monitoring programme has been developed, to monitor condition, incidents, visitor numbers and behaviour.

Monitoring data collected includes:

1. Annual Bird Surveys of 3 key species across the Dorset Heathland Special Protection Area (SPA).
2. Remote people counting sensors on selected sites across the area providing visitor trends.
3. Co-ordinated car park counts collecting data on travelling visitor habit and trends.
4. Recording all fires and other incidents on the Dorset Explorer mapping system.

Annual Incident and Monitoring Reports are available summarising all monitoring data, for further information contact the project team at: urbanheaths@dorsetcc.gov.uk

The following table shows number of fires recorded on heathland sites within the project area of South Dorset from 2007 to 2016.



DORSET & WILTSHIRE
FIRE AND RESCUE

