Dorset
National
Landscape

Annual Review

2025
2026

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Owen Vachell p30 / Ann Cambell p32 / Roger Bond p34 / Andrew Child p36
Robin Mills p39 / All other photos Dorset National Landscape team.

Annual Review

2025 — 2026

As Chair of the Dorset National Landscape, this year it has been a great pleasure to bring partners together to agree an ambitious vision for nature, climate, people and place though the new Management Plan 2026-31. During the public consultation, writer Louisa Adjoa Parker distilled people's hopes and fears in a wonderful poem 'Bones of our land', evoking a keenly felt sense of emotion about our National Landscape. If you haven't had a chance to read her work yet, I would urge you to read it online on the 'Postcards from the Future' page.

Alongside the new Plan's long-term vision for the area, it has also been full steam ahead with the many projects we lead and support that see real tangible action on the ground. The Farming in Protected Landscapes programme, Access for All fund and Capital Fund between them provided over £1,100,000 to benefit the working landscape, nature and reducing barriers to access the landscape.

One of the roles of the Partnership for this nationally important landscape is to be a testbed for new and innovative ways of working that can deliver deeper benefits. We have been experimenting with how natural flood management can bring long term benefits to nature as well as people. And trying out new ways to widen the welcome people into the countryside through the Nature Buddies Network and Flavours project, both helping to break down real and perceived barriers to access.

We achieve these successes through our small staff team, working with local landowners and land managers, communities, businesses and partner organisations is key to our success. This year we have turned every £1 of Defra support into £10.75 of action on the ground and for every £1 of Dorset Council funding we have levered in £54.02 for landscape change.

Read on to find highlights of our work in this Annual Review and more information on all our work can be found **www.dorset-nl.org.uk/annualreview**

The Working Landscape

The Dorset National Landscape has been shaped by over 8,000 years of human occupation. Our need for food has driven the most change; alongside forestry, quarrying and other rural land uses this is very much a working landscape.

Supporting farmers

Farming in Protected Landscape (FiPL) is a national initiative funded by Defra through which the English National Landscapes and National Parks are supporting farmers, landowners and others to deliver projects which meet the programme's outcomes for People, Place, Climate and Nature.

Between 2021 and 2026 the Dorset National Landscape team allocated £3.2 million of FiPL funds to 218 projects and the scheme has now been extended for a further 3 years until March 2029, with circa £635k per annum to allocate along similar principles.

During 2025-6, there were 44 projects completed with £553k of FiPL support, and thanks to a redesign of the FiPL website pages all 218 projects can be viewed on a map alongside case studies showcasing successful projects.

HIGHLIGHTS

- 5 projects targeting the **recovery of the threated Duke of Burgundy butterfly** involving 30+ farmers and stakeholders.
- 15 projects to **reduce flood risk** including supporting Dorset Rural Run Off projects at key flooding blackspots (project total 81).
- Knowledge Exchange events have been delivered to encourage the uptake of regenerative farming and upskill farmers and land managers. For example, **agroecological and regenerative farming skills training** for people from diverse backgrounds was delivered this year at Tamarisk and Fivepenny farms.
- 64 **educational farm visits** delivered (project total 274).
- 4 km **new hedges** planted (project total 15.5km), 1.2km **existing hedgerows restored** (project total 5.8km) and 1356 trees planted (project total 7226).
- Projects have been supported to **widen participation** in the Protected Landscape including outreach to offer 62 children in receipt of frees school meals in Purbeck being funding for a 'night under the stars' in the Big Purbeck Campout, delivered by Land & Wave as part of Purbeck Goes Wild network.
- 70 **new farmers engaged** with programme (project total of 332)

River and streams

The Dorset National Landscape supports communities in West Dorset and along the coast to care for their catchments and improve their rivers, with particularly active groups along the Asker, Char, and Swan.

Over the past two years, the team has focussed delivery on the wider River Brit Catchment (inc. the Simene, Mangerton and Asker) alongside West Dorset Wilding and Dorset Wildlife Trust, delivering Natural Flood Management interventions and working with the University of Exeter to monitor impacts. This work aims to reduce flood risk, cut sediment pollution, and raise awareness of the rivers' benefits for local people and businesses.

In partnership with Dorset Wild Rivers, the team has supported landowner advice, improved land and habitat management, river restoration and invasive species control, and supports the community-led Clean Rivers of West Dorset group.

HIGHLIGHTS

- Significant Natural Flood Management measures delivered: 2.3 ha of floodplain reconnection and 8 km of leaky dams (254 structures), reducing flood peaks, trapping sediment and re-naturalising straightened channels.
- Twenty volunteers, managed by West Dorset Wilding, monitor water quality every six months.
- Dorset Wild Rivers Partnership has secured five more years of funding from Wessex Water.
- The Landscape Lab at Pineapple Estate helps farmers understand soil health and supports community river water-quality monitoring.
- We are a partner in the Swanage Streams Partnership, taking a community-led approach to issues on Swan Brook and other local streams.
- We are also a partner in the Rivers Run Through Us project, led by Blackdown Hills National Landscape and supported by The National Lottery Heritage Fund, focusing on the River Axe's health and community engagement.

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Wild Purbeck

Wild Purbeck is one of the strategic nature-focussed partnerships that the National Landscape team lead and it contributes to many others including the SNCI Forum, Jurassic Coast Nature Recovery Network, Dorset Local Nature Recovery group and Dorset Local Nature Partnership.

The National Landscape Partnership also directs significant funding towards nature outcomes through Farming in Protected Landscapes (FIPL), the Wytch Farm Landscape and Access Enhancement Fund and Capital Fund.

HIGHLIGHTS

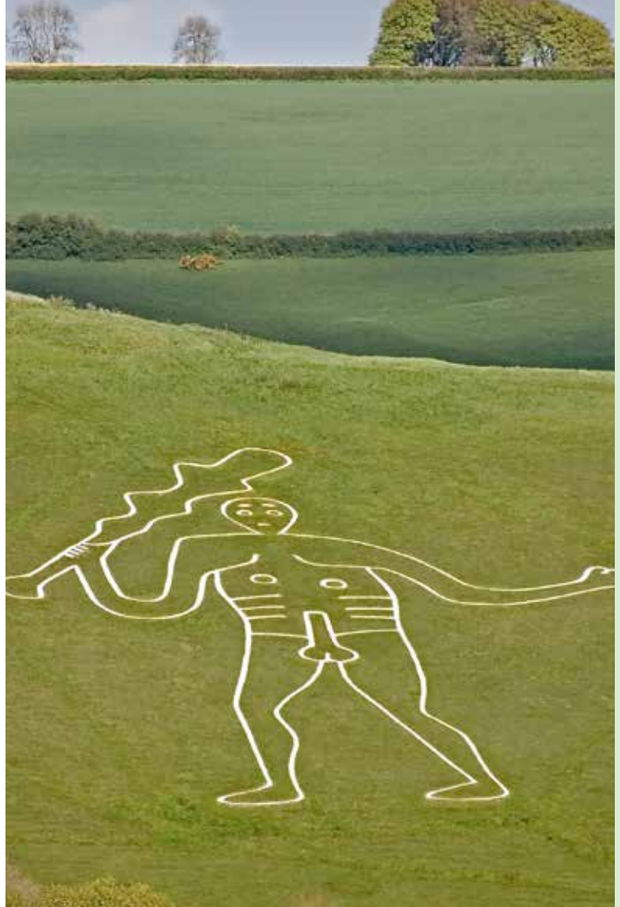
- The Purbeck Heaths National Nature Reserve continues to be an **exemplar for nature recovery at scale** and restoring natural processes and the team has received 5 delegations from across the country to learn about the practices.
- The National Landscape team is convening parties interested in **expanding the area of National Nature Reserve in Purbeck** bringing in new sites across the Isle of Purbeck.
- Forestry England commissioned a study looking into the issues and opportunities of **introducing bison** to this landscape to manage scrub and regrowth of trees.
- A new **Public Spaces Protection Order** was introduced to include more high nature value heathland sites vulnerable to wildfire, including all of the Purbeck Heaths NNR. The Order prohibits activities which could cause fires.

Dorset National Landscape

Capital Fund

The Partnership received core capital funds of £375,717 from Defra this year. The funds were allocated for delivering National Landscape purposes, with emphasis on projects which 'invest-to-save' and deliver on the national 30x30 ambition (the plan to ensure 30% of our land is managed for nature by 2030).

The proposals were assessed by the Farming in Protected Landscapes panel, which looked at 12 projects in 2025-26.



HIGHLIGHTS

- Contribution towards **National Trust's land acquisition at Cerne Abbas** (£236,000). The contribution was specifically for Lot 3, 27.26 acres of arable land adjoining the Giant Hill SSSI which will be managed for nature, expanding the area of natural habitats and buffering the SSSI for greater resilience.
- Tree planting, installing 11 leaky dams, re-routing ditches and installing barn owl boxes at **Magdalen Farm in the Axe Valley** near Winsham (£43,352). 1.5ha of new wetland and riparian habitat created complemented by 189 m^2 of planted wetland scrapes and backwaters.
- **Peat restoration works at Agglestone and Greenlands mires** in the Purbeck Heaths under the direction of the Dorset Peat Partnership. 9ha of peat has been restored by reconnecting mire habitat, raising the water table, diverting water away from drainage channels and upgrading boardwalk infrastructures (£36,972).
- The **purchase of a Ryetec 'cut & collect' flail** for Dorset Wildlife Trust's grassland restoration works across the National Landscape and beyond (£21,820). 14 sites and 7.3ha meadow habitat cut and collected.
- **Dorset Fingerpost Project** (£17,566) – see full report on p35
- **Middlebere Wood Pasture** (£7,253) Tree planting labour for 5000 trees supplied by Woodland Trust and the purchase of 410 cell trees to create 7ha of woodland, wood pasture and shrub mosaic.
- Signage to support the **enforcement of the Open Spaces Public Spaces Protection Order** (£5,719) to mitigate the risk of wildfires and their impact on the heathlands.
- Research and development project by RSPB investigating soil macroinvertebrates to support the proposed **chough reintroduction** on the Purbeck Coast (£4,136). 3 days sample collection and 7 days analyses.
- **Wildflower grassland restoration** at Ewen's Farm and Landlord's Knapp totalling 2.18ha (£1,378).
- **Butterfly scrape creation** at Dorset Downs Vineyard (£510).

Dorset Community Tree Fund

This project supports communities to plan for, plant and look after trees that will contribute to nature recovery and survive our future climate. The project is supported by Dorset Council, co-ordinated by the Dorset National Landscape Team, and covers the Dorset Council area. There are two main strands: a small grant fund to support the planning of tree planting projects, as well as community planting and engagement activities; and a pilot Volunteer Tree Warden scheme offering training and support for parish and town councils.

Since opening, 27 applications have been submitted to Dorset Community Tree Fund, and 16 projects have been approved for funding totalling £38362.93.

HIGHLIGHTS

- **7 projects were approved for funding, totalling £21,776.50.** Projects include a parish allotment, a community nursery, an orchard and 2 school planting and education projects.
- Following on from the successful tree workshops with West Dorset primary schools last winter, a third round of workshops and tree planting sessions was carried out, **engaging 6 primary schools and over 200 children**. This is a project is led by the Dorset National Landscape team.
- We attended **Sustainable Swanage Big Tree** meet-up, to raise awareness of tree warden scheme and recruit more tree wardens in the local community.

Landscape Enhancement Initiative

The Linking Chalk, River & Vale project, supported by the National Grid through the Landscape Enhancement Initiative, has been delivered in partnership with local farmers and landowners, Dorset Wildlife Trust, Farming and Wildlife Advisory Group South West and the National Trust.

DELIVERY TO DATE

- 135m dry stone wall restored
- 3 ponds restored
- 3.4 ha scrub managed to support grassland restoration
- 0.4 ha wildlife corridor enhanced for nature
- 9 native trees planted

Dorset Food & Drink CIC

Dorset Food & Drink champions Dorset's food, drink and hospitality sector, connecting people and place through events, partnerships and promotion, helping strengthen Dorset's reputation as a food destination.

HIGHLIGHTS

- **Successful DF&D core events** included the Abbotsbury Easter Food Fair, Abbotsbury Swannery Food & Craft Fair, the Dorset Food & Arts Festival and a Winter Food Fair at Athelhampton.
- Creation of **'Taste the Story'** suite of short films and social media content showcasing the Dorset Food & Drink food scene and a variety of its producers – made possible with £10k from the Rural Prosperity Fund via Visit Dorset.
- Ongoing **collaboration with Dorset Farmers' Markets.**

Exploring, Understanding, and Engaging

Connecting to the Dorset National Landscape can benefit health and wellbeing, offering opportunities for physical activity, social interaction, relaxation and inspiration. However, many people still face barriers to accessing this landscape. Our work focusses on supporting people to explore, understand and engage with the landscape in a positive and equitable way.

Nature Buddies

Spending time in nature has been shown to reduce stress, ease anxiety, and improve overall mental health. But not everyone finds it easy to access green spaces or feel confident engaging with the outdoors.

The Nature Buddies project is working with partners to develop a network of trained volunteers offering a one-to-one connection that brings the benefits of nature to people in a way that's accessible, personal and meaningful. Significant progress has been made in recruiting individuals and organisations into the Network.

The Nature Buddies team have also developed a new website All Ways Out to help people access nature from their home and also ideas for nature-based activities.

The project is funded by the National Lottery Heritage Fund and has been extended until March 2027.

HIGHLIGHTS

- 6 **host organisations recruited and trained to host Nature Buddies**: Upton Country Park, National Trust South-West, South West Coast Path Coastal Connectors, Bere Marsh Farm (CRT), Waggy Walks and Christchurch Nature Reserves.
- 12 **Nature Buddy activities** offered across the 6 organisations and Nature Buddies Activity Finder webpage live.
- **Nature Buddy training** delivered to 25 individuals: 22 volunteers and 3 Rangers.
- 26 **Community Nature Buddy volunteers recruited and trained** in partnership with Volunteer Centre Dorset. These volunteers support clients in connecting with nature and heritage from home.
- **Significant promotion**, including 6 webinars and 2 presentations to a Primary Care Network.
- 18 projects funded through the **Community Access Fund** to improve countryside inclusivity & accessibility, totalling £59,075.

Flavours project

The Flavours project is all about finding ways for people from ethnic minority and refugee backgrounds living in Dorset, to explore the landscape. Over the past 3 years we hosted 959 people on 22 days out to the countryside, with stunning landscape, a warm welcome and delicious food at the heart of every event.

The project is led by the Dorset National Landscape, in partnership with Dorset Race Equality Council, Activate Performing Arts, Dorset Food & Drink and with support from BPC Indian Community, Dorset Ukraine Community, Grace the Space and financial support from The National Lottery Heritage Fund.

HIGHLIGHTS

- This year we welcomed **371 community members** to the countryside with trips to Durlston Country Park, Upton Country Park, Blue Pool and Corfe Castle.
- Artists have been one of the keys to the success of the project. Activate organised a **training event f**or artists to share experiences of connecting communities to nature, to recruit more artists to take on this role in future.
- A **toolkit of films and web-based information** has been created for our community groups, to build confidence to take further visits to the countryside independently.
- In January 2026 we made our **final claim to the National Lottery Heritage Fund** but the Steering Group continues to meet, looking at ways of sustaining activity and maintaining relationships with the communities involved.
- Protected Landscapes Partnership are keen to share learning from the Flavours widely amongst the protected landscape sector. They have interviewed the steering group are producing a **film about the project** to share good practice.

Nature Calling

Dorset was one of just 6 National Landscapes to take a leading 'Hub' role in this national project led by the National Landscapes Association in collaboration with Activate Performing Arts. The project culminated this year with a new Giant being created and toured on prominent hills throughout September.

In May 2025, 6 community and school groups from Yeovil came out to Cerne Abbas, where we explored the ancient Cerne Giant and beautiful springtime nature of Giant Hill together. Artists from Radical Ritual then engaged them in creative workshops based on the game of Consequences. They then used the community artwork to create a new Giant for Dorset that was launched alongside the Cerne Abbas Giant in September. This attracted significant national media interest and reach.

After Cerne Abbas, the 40m tall Giant was pitched at Summerhouse Hill in Yeovil, where a joyous parade of over 50 local people welcomed the Giant to Yeovil. Next stop, the Giant appeared on the slopes of Corfe Castle as part of the Inside Out Dorset festival.

HIGHLIGHTS

- Nature Calling Dorset **engaged over 200 people from Yeovil community groups** in creating the new Giant.
- The Consequences Giant artwork was **seen live by over 27,000 people** in September and had an **online audience of more than 64,000 people** and an inspiring film has been produced documenting the Dorset project.
- **Nationally, the Nature Calling programme exceeded expectations** with a total of 8,258 active participants engaged, live audiences of over 55,000 people and online and digital audiences over 550,000.
- **Artistic legacy** of the project also includes 'This patch of land' prose poem written by Louisa Adjoa Parker; Consequences Giant soundtrack composed by musician Douglas Dare; and illustrated written work by author Nick Hayes.

Visitor management

Dorset's outstanding landscape is the main reason most people visit the area. The landscape underpins the tourism economy and plays a huge role in supporting local services. Our visitor management work covers a wide range of projects focused on managing visitor impacts so that the outstanding natural beauty and special qualities are protected and enhanced, while enabling people to enjoy, understand and engage with the area.

Since 2023, a focus has been on making the landscape more accessible to all. Working with partners, Dorset National Landscape has delivered a series of improvements that open up new opportunities for inclusive access. Our visitor management programme covers the whole Jurassic Coast, ensuring consistent visitor management across England's only natural World Heritage Site.

HIGHLIGHTS

- **Inclusive Blue Space**: We are a key member of a new working group with a shared vision for Dorset to be recognised as the UK's leading inclusive blue space capital, a place where people with disabilities can access and enjoy the coast and its waters. Through inclusive design and community & cross sector collaboration, we feel Dorset can lead the way, using blue spaces to promote wellbeing, connection and opportunity for everyone. Evidence, research and the shared vision was presented at the All Party Parliamentary Group for Outdoor Recreation and Access to Nature at the House of Commons.

- **New signage**: In Lyme Regis, essential new safety signage has been installed along the popular East Cliff multi-user walkway, using existing posts to reduce costs and waste. In Charmouth a new landscape and wildlife interpretation panel has been installed in the playing field to inspire young people and enhance visitor welcome and awareness of local natural features.

Access for all

Our Access for All work has supported many of our partner organisations to make the countryside and seaside more accessible to everyone, including wheelchair users and people with limited mobility. The programme has been running for 3 years, made possible by financial support from Defra. We have so far invested nearly £500,000 to create new routes and upgrade existing rights of way, to build beautiful boardwalks over flooded areas, buy trampers and beach wheelchairs, purchase beach matting and create accessible parking spaces. Improving access for all really does just that- evidence shows everyone benefits from easier, better access.

In 2025/26, six transformative initiatives to the value of £198,700 have helped make Dorset National Landscape more inclusive and enjoyable for everyone:

- **Brownsea Island:** A multi-terrain tramper has been purchased and delivered, enabling access across the island. A new accessible ramp has been installed at "The Villa," now a Visitor and Education Centre managed by Dorset Wildlife Trust.
- **Lyscombe Nature Reserve:** The potholed and uneven car park has been resurfaced at this Dorset Wildlife Trust site, to accommodate more accessible parking spaces, a picnic area and easier access for all.
- **Portesham to Abbotsbury Route:** Significant accessibility improvements and resurfacing led by Dorset Council Greenspace team have delighted users of this peaceful route.
- **Wareham Two Rivers Walk:** This previously flooded and muddy section often became impassable in winter. The new walkway, constructed of durable recycled plastic, includes wheelchair turning spaces and improved year-round access for all.
- **Knoll Beach:** As part of the Inclusive Blue Space project and in collaboration with the National Trust, an amphibious wheelchair and beach matting have been purchased to enable access into the sea for people with disabilities and mobility limitations.

Planning for Landscape Quality

There is an obligation for all relevant authorities to seek to conserve and enhance the natural beauty of Dorset National Landscape. To fulfil this, the national importance of the landscape needs to be recognised and reinforced, thereby ensuring that changes within it and its setting achieve the highest standards of sustainability, design and quality.

Town, country and marine planning

The Team received approximately 260 consultations during 2025-2026, this being a very similar number to the preceding year. These consultations include planning applications, felling licences, woodland management plans, marine licence applications and requests from statutory undertakers, particularly electricity distribution companies.

HIGHLIGHTS

- The Team provided a comprehensive response to the **Dorset Local Plan** options consultation.
- Renewable energy developments have remained a significant area of work, with some **solar farms** having been subject to appeals, as have some **battery storage proposals** in the setting of the National Landscape. The Team were also consulted on the proposed replacement of a large wind turbine in the setting.
- The Team has been involved in some **large minerals planning cases**, including one that was dismissed at appeal due to the impacts on the National Landscape. We have also been engaged in discussions concerning an extension to an existing site, where a landscape enhancement fund will be established.
- The Team continues to respond to numerous **woodland creation proposals**, reflecting the availability of grant funding opportunities from the Forestry Commission. Additionally, we have seen an increase in consultations as part of the Agricultural EIA Regulations, often linked to **nature recovery projects**, where restructuring and changes to land cover are proposed.

Dorset fingerposts

Dorset's iconic fingerposts, timeless fixtures of the rural landscape, have faced significant decline, with many in disrepair. In partnership with Roger Bond of Normtec, Tim Beer and a team of skilled volunteers, the Dorset National Landscape are proud to fund and support the restoration of these historic landmarks, safeguarding Dorset's cultural heritage for future generations.

Our dedicated Fingerpost Champions, expertly guided by Roger Bond and supported by CPRE funding, are revitalising Dorset's historic fingerposts for the enjoyment of future generations.

HIGHLIGHTS

- Complete restoration of 26 fingerposts across various Dorset locations, including Birdsmoor Gate, Roman Road, Leigh, Shroton Brake, Charminster and Higher Halstock. An additional 14 fingerposts are in the process of repair/restoration.
- The restoration efforts encompass diverse sites across the county, including Parish, Town, and Dorset Council locations, ensuring a comprehensive approach to preserving these historic landmarks across the county.
- A new website provides useful information and updates on the Dorset fingerpost restoration initiative, where you can also view the ongoing work and meet the dedicated team behind the project.

Partnership and finance

The Dorset National Landscape Partnership is made up of representatives of 17 local government, local community, national Defra agencies, farming, rural business and conservation organisations.

This Partnership oversees a core team of 6 (5.3 full time equivalent) officers whose direct work, project development and influence helps conserve and enhance this special place.

A further 7 (4.95 full time equivalent) officers are engaged on projects and the whole team is hosted by Dorset Council.

Total direct spend by Dorset National Landscape Partnership was £2,198,295 (core and projects). Core costs of £323,688 were covered by Defra (72%), Dorset Council (17%) and earned income and grants.

Total 'added value' makes the effective total £3,049,340, the additional £851,045 derived from £117,905 in volunteer time and £733,140 in partner spend on joint partnership and granted projects.

Direct spend delivered for each pound contributed by core partners (Defra & Dorset Council)

- **£1 core funding levered in £6.46**
- **£1 Defra core contribution levered in £7.45**
- **£1 Dorset Council core contribution levered in £38.94**

Total value, including volunteer and partner spend delivered for each pound contributed by core

- **£1 core funding levered £8.96**
- **£1 Defra core contribution levered £10.75**
- **£1 Dorset Council core contribution levered £54.02**

Dorset National Landscape Management Plan 2026-31

Dorset National Landscape is one of 46 protected landscapes in the UK. To help keep it 'outstanding' now and for generations to come, it is a legal requirement to produce a Management Plan to highlight what's special about the Dorset landscape, the challenges it faces and prioritise action.

This year, we worked with partners and stakeholders to create the new plan. The public consultation July – September shaped it, and the plan was adopted in December 2025. We also engaged over 100 people in 'Postcards from the Future' asking what people value about the landscape and their hopes and fears for its future. Writer Louisa Adjoa Parker wove these postcards into the evocative 'Bones of our land' poem.

The new Management Plan is all about conserving and enhancing the natural beauty of the Dorset National Landscape. It sets out a vision for the area and priorities for the Working Landscape, Exploring, Understanding and Engaging and Planning.

Responding to the climate and nature crisis, the new plan places a greater emphasis on nature recovery and encourages a wider and more diverse range of people to enjoy it. It is a plan for the National Landscape Partnership and team, the individual partners, farmers and landowners, communities and businesses.

GET IN TOUCH, FIND OUT MORE

We are always very happy to talk about the Dorset National Landscape and our work, so do get in touch if you would like to know more!

Ideas of places to go:
www.dorset-nl.org.uk/explore

Projects featured in this Annual Review
www. dorset-nl.org.uk/annualreview

Other UK National Landscapes
www.national-landscapes.org.uk

GET IN TOUCH WITH THE TEAM

Caroline Richards
e: caroline.richards@dorsetcouncil.gov.uk
t: 01305 224717
Dorset Council, County Hall,
Colliton Park, Dorchester, DT1 1XJ

Dorset National Landscape

National Landscapes Association

www.dorset-nl.org.uk