

Purbeck Heaths NNR End of Season meeting at Castle View on 31st October 2023

Presentations given as follows:

- Tom Clarke, NT – gave background to the Sustainable Tourism Plan, and the three threads that progress is being made on – positive nature tourism; equity and diversity; and active and sustainable travel.
- Tracey Churcher, GM NT Purbeck Estate – spoke about how we need to try to get as much nature as possible into everywhere. Local significant projects include the Purbeck Heaths, Wild Woodbury, Arne Moors, Studland Bay seagrass, and Weston Farm. Weston Farm was suffering for very poor soil, the last maize crop all but failed. Since NT bought the property nature has taken over, and brown hares, bats, roe and sika deer have been seen there. There is a glow worm project being run with Sustainable Worth volunteers. Yellow rattle has been planted to help suppress the grasses. A campsite has been reopened there, offering 28 pitches for affordable holidays. Tracey explained that it is not nature v farming, and for example the heaths still provide food but not in the form of intensive farming. As the soils are so poor in areas of Purbeck, and animal food, fuel and fertilizer are now very expensive, the wood pasture offers a good income for farmers. A group of landowners has jointly submitted a bid for a landscape recovery grant for the largest lowland scheme, with the results not being announced until Christmas. The intention is to deliver for nature while still producing food.
- Peter Robertson RSPB spoke about positive nature tourism. Springwatch was hosted from RSPB Arne this year, offering 3 weeks of primetime TV coverage, with an average audience of 2.5million people. The direct benefits to the area were about 75 people staying in the area for 3-4 weeks, as well as employment for local contractors. The indirect benefits include reinforcing Purbeck's brand as a wildlife destination and raising the profile of a wide range of partners. There was a spike in RSPB visitor numbers for the 2 months following the broadcast. Prior to this, there was a downward trend, afterwards there is anticipated to be a 22% increase over the year. In August there was a 130% increase in visitors, and there is also a shift in the type of people visiting, including more younger people, under 45s and families, coming from all across England, and including people with higher spending power. Looking forward, Arne will be hosting Winterwatch in Jan 24. And Springwatch again in May / June 24.
- Becky a NT Ranger spoke about No Fence Grazing at Studland. The no fence area was split into 4, then expanded over the whole area including the track. The new plan is to include the whole peninsular, which will involve fencing the road (not stock fencing). This is required as Ferry Road is owned by the ferry company and they require it for insurance purposes. Fences will be built along ferry road, RHS by end Feb and LHS by end April. There will be access gates but not free access as there is now, which may be a benefit in terms of cars parking along the road.
- Peter Sills, from Swanage Railway Trust spoke about Purbeck Mining Museum. The purpose of the museum is to interpret the railway clay traffic and the quarry landscapes, and how they have been rewilded. It has been open 15-20 years, and open as a museum for 10 years. They have now bought land on either side of the railway, and received a grant to install paths and interpretation information to the East of the road. A lake called Blackwater will be opened up with footpaths; there will be minimal intervention to create the paths, with most trees being kept. The grant is for delivery over 2 years. Dogs will be welcome, taking pressure off the adjacent heathlands.
- Tom CVlark from NT spoke about Equality and Diversity access. There is a vision for every child and young person (0-25) in Purbeck to have experiences and opportunities that the landscape has to offer for the benefit of themselves, community and nature. This is a joint initiative by NGOs, businesses, and schools. It is intended this will also offer pathways to local employment via work experience, work placements and apprenticeships.

- Tom Clark from NY also cover for Alex Brocklesby about Sustainable and Active Travel. Improvements this season include the provision of Beryl Bikes at Studland, the Purbeck Active and Sustainable Travel Week, the 2RN Arne bus service running again and additionally stopping at Norden.
- Ross Kempson from Cyclexperience spoke about their cycle hire business at Norden. 90% of their business is in the New Forest, with only 10% in Purbeck. They have been based in Purbeck for 23years. Turnover is down compared with previous years. They are trialing a self-service option directly from Burnbake campsite, where people book online, obtain a lock code to the cycle store, and hire their bikes that way; this has turned over approx. £8k. This offering will be fine-tuned for 2024. The New Forest business supports 10 full time jobs, thought to be due in part to the New Forest “brand”.
- Steven Booth from Purbeck Community Rail Partnership. One of the Rail Partnerships roles is connecting rail with different transport options, e.g. buses and cycling. The 2RN service which is funded by the partnership, the lottery and South West trains has doubled rider numbers in 2023 compared with 2022. This year there was a lot of marketing, including signs, posters and leaflets. The partnership has also made some promotional videos and sustainable transport in Purbeck, which feature the 2RN, cycle hire, and the Wareham – Swanage rail service. The Rail Minister also visited with VIPs from Network Rail and SWT to see the Wareham – Swanage service in operation raising its profile.
- Gemma, a Transport Planner spoke about the Dorset and BCP Councils Local Transport Plan 4. There is a new approach to the LTPs, being vision led and supporting local plans, rather than reacting to current transport demands. They have and will be continuing to engage over winter 23/24, including surveys, road shows, focus groups, stakeholder session. , looking at issues and opportunities, and people / place / activity elements of the plan. Formal Consultation will take place in Autumn 224.

Next event will be a pre-season event in early spring 2024..

Report by Cllr Helen Sumbler, 4/12/23.