

Supplementary Papers for Place Overview and Scrutiny Committee



Date: Wednesday, 16 November 2022

8. Fire Breaks

Presentation to be given to the Committee

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Fire Breaks

Place Overview & Scrutiny Committee
16 November 2022

Martin Whitchurch – BCP Strategic Lead Greenspace

Paul Atwell – Urban Heaths Partnership

Simon Wilkins – BCP Senior Emergency Planning and Resilience Officer

Stuart Gillion – D&WFRS

bcpcouncil.gov.uk



Request for review of Fire Breaks



Request to consider the current policy on wildfires following a large heathland fire on Canford Heath nature reserve earlier this year, and other wildfire events across BCP.

It has been noted how effective the Urban Heaths Partnership (UHP) was in managing the fire at the time.

There is significant existing resource dedicated to making our green spaces and nearby land that are susceptible to wildfires, as safe as possible.

The scrutiny report and this presentation summarises some of this resource and work to enable a discussion.

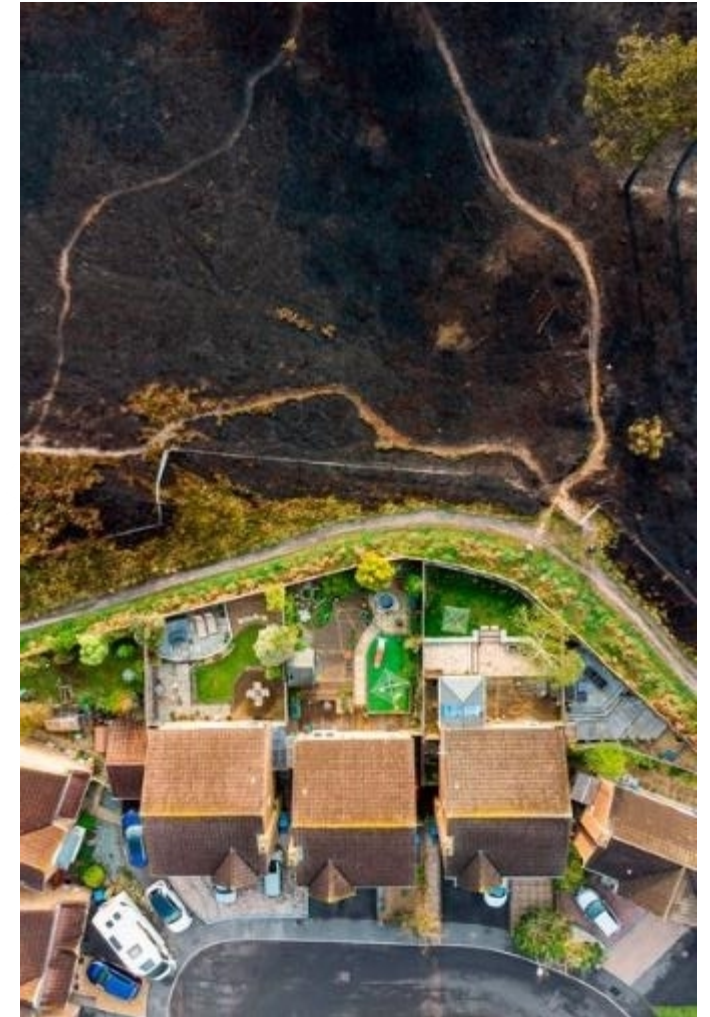
Presentation:

- 2022 fires
- Green spaces and management
- UHP – Paul Atwell
- D&WFRS
- Coordinated work
 - Fire break & habitat management
 - Wardens: education and information, monitoring
- Operation Heathland
- BCP Emergency planning
- Winter 2022/23 work plans
- UHP 2023
- Summary

Request for review of Fire Breaks

- April 2022 – significant wild fire on Canford Heath Nature reserve.
 - 16.7 Ha
 - 35 appliances and 114 personnel
 - 6 staff from within BCP/Urban Heaths Partnership
 - allowing deployment of tractors, 1 bowser & 1 flail and moving of livestock
 - BCP out of hours duty officer; Police response
- Studland Fire – National Trust; Cliffs fire near Boscombe Pier
- Frequent fires across many open spaces – camps, BBQ's, wildfires
- **Total wildfires recorded 101 in BCP in 2022**
- **Wild Fire:** *“Any uncontrolled vegetation fire which requires a decision, or action, regarding suppression.”*





Urban Heaths Partnership



Delivering heathland mitigation on behalf of the 10 partner organisations including the following:

- Education
- Monitoring
- Dorset Dogs
- Firewise
- Wildfire reduction work



The Partnership's aim is to alleviate urban pressures on the Dorset heaths brought about by new residential development in the area.

Urban Heaths Partnership

Education

- Working with schools close to heathland sites across BCP area
- Raising awareness of the importance of heathland and the consequences of heathland fires
- Arson Courtroom Drama (ACD) for 12 – 13 year olds.
- The Crime Scene investigation (CSI) is an interactive “who dun it” type activity
- Younger students are targeted to develop an understanding and awareness of the heathlands to enable them to identify the importance of heathland sites.

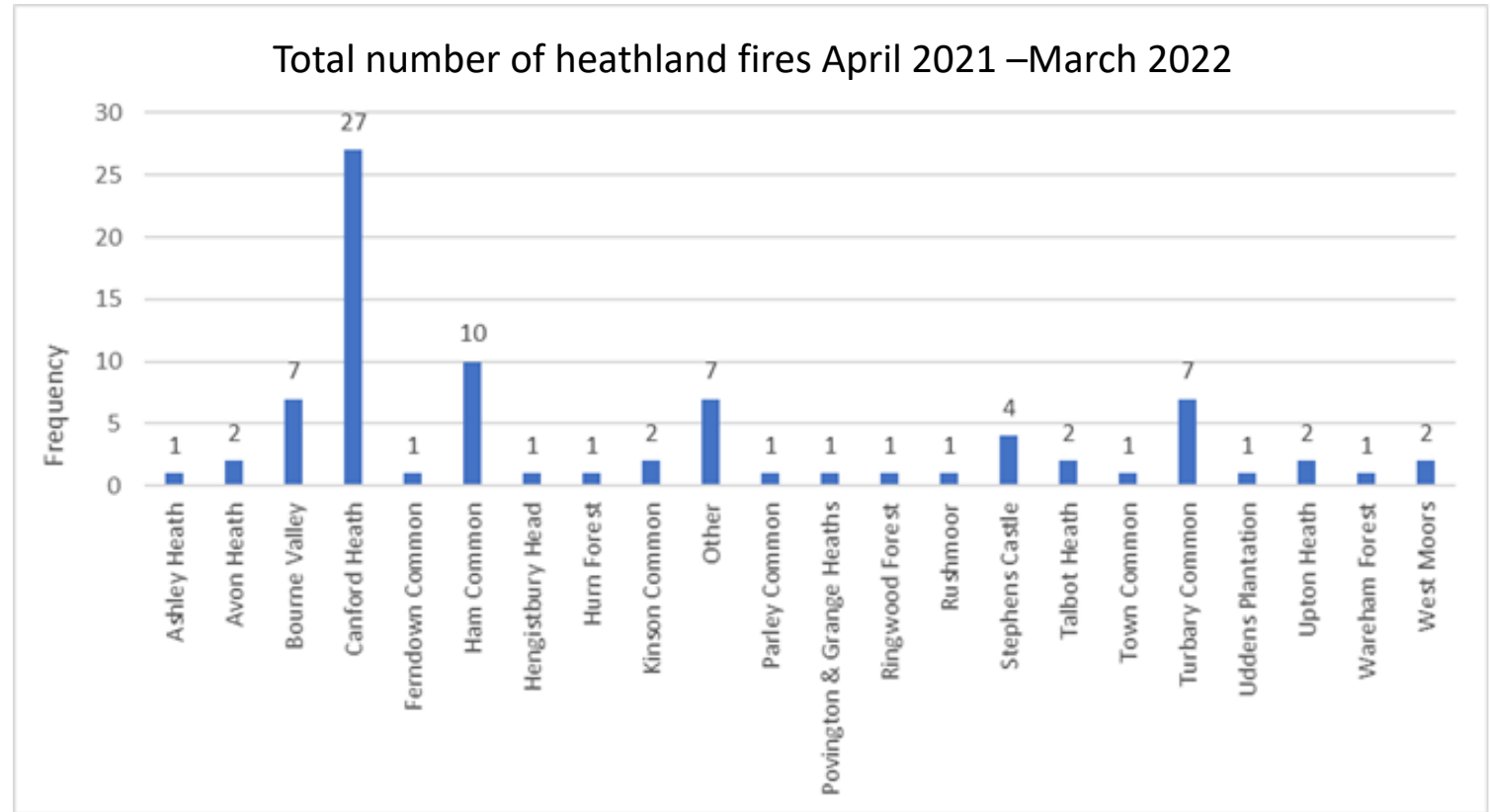


Urban Heaths Partnership

Monitoring

The Heathland Monitoring Strategy collects visitor data and is analysed to inform heathland mitigation management.

Monitoring of heathland condition is carried out using key indicator species and all incidents including fires are mapped to understand patterns of pressure.



Urban Heaths Partnership

Firewise - is based on the international programme from The National Fire Protection Association (NFPA) of America.

- The Firewise information provides practical steps for the home and garden which can reduce the risks from wildfire
- Emphasises that everybody has a part to play, we can all help ourselves.
- Delivering K9 Firewise volunteer patrols working with Dorset Dogs.
- Summer 2022 - delivered pop up events on target sites and fire station open days at Westbourne and Christchurch Fire Stations. Around 600 people engaged with.
- Leaflet drop to 200 homes in the Canford area providing Firewise information after fire in partnership with BCP staff and DWFRS.
- National enquires about scheme



www.firewiseuk.org

FIREWISE CHECKLIST

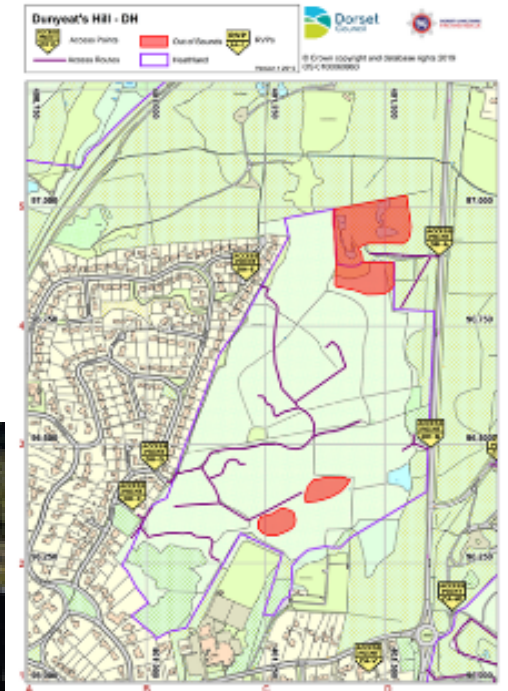
- ☐ CLEAR leaves and other vegetation from roofs, gutters and decks
- ☐ REMOVE dead vegetation and other items from under your deck and within 10 feet of your house
- ☐ SCREEN areas below patios and decks with wire mesh to prevent from accumulating
- ☐ REMOVE flammable materials eg. wood piles, from the vicinity of your house if possible
- ☐ PRUNE trees so that the lowest branches are 6-10 feet from the ground
- ☐ KEEP your lawn hydrated (use grey/waste water if necessary) and maintained
- ☐ DISPOSE of lawn cuttings and debris quickly and responsibly to reduce fuel for any fire
- ☐ INSPECT roof tiles and replace or repair as necessary to prevent ember penetration

Urban Heaths Partnership

Wildfire reduction work:

- Individual Site Specific Risk Information, eg fire access gates, routes, no drive areas
- Early warning fire text and WhatsApp groups, Fire Control send text messages to a group of land managers anytime a heathland fire is called through.
- Maintained list of all machinery and resources held by partners that could be called on in the event of a large fire incident
- Campaigns such as BBQ campaign and #Operation Heathland campaign, raising awareness of risk to heathlands and encouraging everyone to respect, protect and enjoy them using on site banners and social media
- Partnership support for damping down and wildlife rescues after large fire incidents

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Dorset and Wiltshire Fire and Rescue Service

DWFRS have a range of fire appliances available to respond to wildfire events.

- specialist appliances such as light off-road vehicles (M1),
- Heavy off-road vehicles (P4) and the service has one Unimog (P9) available from Wareham.
- These vehicles are based at local Stations in and around the BCP area.
- If necessary, additional resources are requested from Hampshire and Isle of Wight FRS.
- DWFRS also has a National Wildfire Tactical Advisor that attends most significant wildfire events.

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Regarding the incident on Canford Heath earlier this year. In my opinion, if the mitigation works had not been carried out around the Rural Urban Interface (RUI) adjacent to the properties, then it is likely that homes would have been damaged or lost as in Wennington during the summer.

Andy Elliott

Station Commander and Wildfire Tactical Advisor

Dorset & Wiltshire Fire and Rescue Service



#Operation Heathland

- Police Operational order and promotional campaign that leads a partnership approach to monitoring wildfires each year on the urban heaths of East Dorset.
- Frequent review meetings held
- Quick strike action if needed re specific schools
- Sharing of resources and intelligence, as well as debrief meetings following larger incidents

When you are out and about in the forest and heathlands remember these points to help you enjoy your visit:

- Keep yourself and dogs to tracks, footpaths and bridleways. This will reduce the risk to you and your dog from ticks and snake bites, and will keep plants and wildlife safe from disturbance.
- Put in a bin or take home your dog mess and litter. It's detrimental to the heathland and a health risk to wildlife and other users.
- Never have a fire or BBQ on heathland, it is illegal to do so. If you need to take food a picnic is an easier option.



BCP Countryside Team

- Managing specialist habitats with legal designation/protection
- Using machinery, volunteers and contractors to manage heathlands
- Core BCP countryside team members instigate/undertake the management of the habitats, access and fire risk management.
- Reparation work following incidents - fencing, tracks, burnt material, species rescue and animal casualty recording post fire
- Ecological surveying of the sites to aid planning of habitat/wildfire management
- Team members attend the regular Operation Heathland meetings



BCP Countryside Team



- Heath Mitigation Wardens funded by Developer Contributions.
- 7 day rota, enabling evening and weekend provision
 - 5 x full time
 - 5 x temp contract

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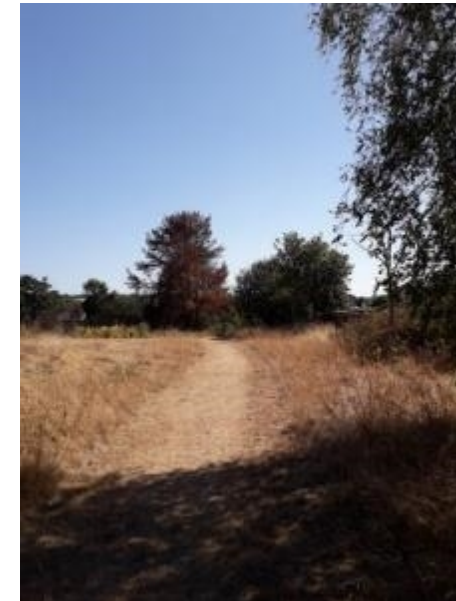
Delivering

- Daily patrols and engagement (monitoring and data logging)
- Information stands and events
- Guided walks and talks
- Recruiting and managing volunteer network
- Assisting in delivery of campaigns i.e., BBQ Campaign
- Social media



Fire Risk Management

- Fire Risk management is focussed on heathland:
 - Gorse and heather are highly flammable and in the summer can become very dry, creating a high-risk level
 - Woodland, bramble and grassland has much lower risk levels as they stay damper for longer having more shade; or carry less volume of combustible material
 - Some Heathlands are adjacent to housing and industrial areas that mean boundary management is essential
 - 'Firebreaks' – Fire defendable lines is a more accurate description as fire will jump even very wide 'breaks' and instead they are part of the Fire Services strategy for tackling fires.



- Most fire defensible line management is undertaken in the winter (due to wildlife legislation). Although there are a handful of locations where a summer recut is also undertaken with hand power tools where properties are against the boundary.
- One size does not fit all. Each location needs to be assessed for:
 - risk and the level of that risk (habitat, neighbouring property),
 - what habitat & species needs are and the heat intensity posed by plant species present.
 - linear 'breaks' are not the only way to undertake fire risk reduction. It is also important that individual properties assess and reduce where necessary the level of risk within their own boundaries (Firewise). Previously BCP staff have reviewed management on site with DWFRS Wildfire Tactical Advisor, last undertaken on Canford Heath in Feb 2020 and to be reviewed again this winter.
- Colleagues also attend Tactical Wildfire training day run by Wildfire Training & Consultancy.

BCP Emergency planning

- Emergency Planning and Resilience Team has been working with council services and prepared a new draft BCP Council wildfire response plan for use in the event of wildfires within the council area. This is to achieve consistency between the mitigation and response to any wildfire which may occur on BCP Council land as responsibility currently lies with two different services: Environment and Destination and Culture. Wildfire digital mapping is being reviewed and updated jointly with Dorset and Wiltshire Fire and Rescue Service showing all suitable access points to identified risk locations.
- A multi-agency debrief was held following the Canford Health Fire on 14th May 2022 and learning identified is being incorporated into The Dorset Local Resilience Forum
- LRF subgroup led by BCP Council has produced a draft Poole Harbour Islands Evacuation Plan.
- New evacuation plans are to be produced for Hengistbury Head due to the risk of people being stranded in the event of a wildfire and not being able to leave using normal routes.

