



West Dorset Wilding Annual Chair's report 09/05/2023

West Dorset Wilding (WDW) was founded in December 2021 by a group of Dorset landowners and ecologists with a shared vision for nature recovery in the Brit catchment and beyond.

During 2022, our first full year of operations, we have made excellent progress on a number of fronts.

Firstly, we have appointed a Board of Trustees with experience across a range of relevant sectors, including farming, land management, rewilding, urban planning, nature conservation and charity governance. We have also appointed an Executive Director, Dr Sam Rose, with extensive experience managing and fundraising for small charities as well as significant expertise in rewilding.

We have subsequently developed membership, governance and financial plans, alongside determining fundraising and strategic priorities. This has led to the development of three important projects during 2023, all of which focus initially on the Brit catchment.

The largest and potentially most impactful of these is the Brit Catchment Recovery Project, which intends to undertake large-scale extensive ecosystem restoration across the Brit catchment, focusing primarily on riparian zones and adjoining areas for habitat creation. We are doing this by bringing together farmers, landowners, NGOs and agencies into a single Landscape Recovery ELM application during 2023. We have been awarded funding from Rewilding Britain to establish a baseline for the catchment by looking at land cover, above ground carbon and bird diversity/abundance as an indicator for wider biodiversity.

The second project is a public consultation on the question of whether beavers should be returned to the River Brit. This has consisted of a series of well-attended local public meetings and presentations, as well as public visits to two beaver enclosures. We have also commissioned Exeter University to undertake a beaver habitat assessment within the catchment. This project has been funded by a grant from Natural England.

The third project is membership development and community engagement, which aims to develop our membership base and help local people engage more deeply and frequently with nature, including furthering understanding of the complex connections between farming and the natural world. Target groups include farmers, landowners, young people and low income families. Funding for membership development and community engagement has been received from Rewilding Britain.

In addition, WDW held a successful wilding conference last April, and later a well-received launch event at Bridport Town Hall which was at full capacity and attended by over 100 people. The event

illustrated the breadth and depth of local support for the objectives of West Dorset Wilding, and the concern shared by many about the perilous state of our natural environment.

Overall it has been a very productive first year, with several core projects underway and ambitious plans for a large scale Landscape Recovery bid. We would like to extend particular thanks to our donors, members and supporters, and also to our Executive Director Sam Rose for his leadership, ably supported by Dana Assinder.

Luke Montagu
Chair of the Trustees of West Dorset Wilding