

River Char Action Group and River Char Community Project

– Newsletter May 2025

We've been busy with our mission to help clean up our river. If you've joined any of our events over the last year – thank you! If you'd like to know more about what we're doing, please read on:

1. River Charter: We've worked hard to agree a River Charter and the River Char is only the fourth river in the UK to have its own Charter. The publication of the Charter coincides with Robert Macfarlane's book *Is a River Alive* and will be publicly launched at the River Festival on 31st May (see below). But you can sign it now at Charmouth Library, Charmouth Doctor's Surgery or online: www.riverchar.org/charter

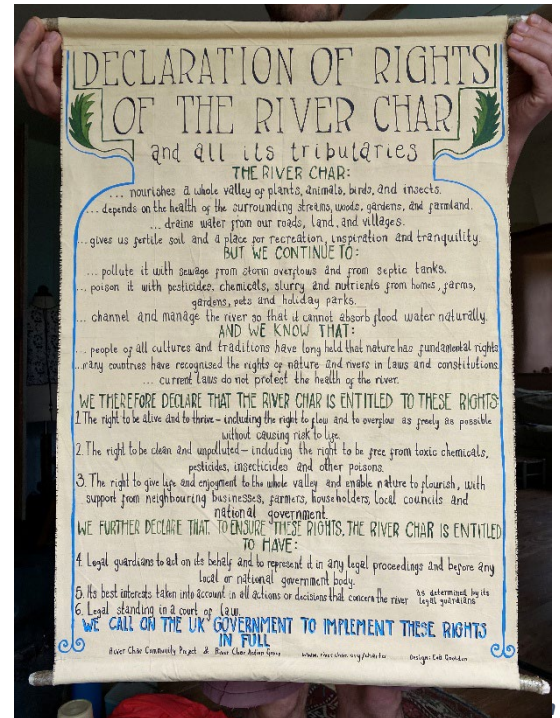
2. Water quality testing: With support from Char Valley Parish Council, Dorset National Landscape, Wessex Water and others, we've been monitoring the condition of the River Char at 6 points between Stockham Bridge (outside Whitchurch Canonicorum) and the sea.

Our testing programme has been going for a year now, relying on the skills and home laboratory of retired vet John Kenward. We have produced a detailed report on **Pollution in the River Char** and discussed it with the Environment Agency and Wessex Water, who invited us to their laboratory near Bath (our measurements are checked fortnightly against theirs). Read the report at www.riverchar.org/2024report

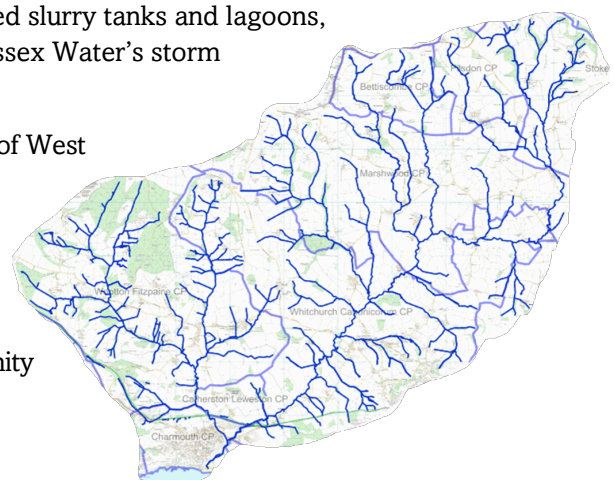
3. Identifying sources of pollution: This year we are extending our testing programme to identify pollution hotspots and the main sources of chemical and bacterial pollution – these are likely to include faulty domestic and commercial septic tanks, poorly maintained slurry tanks and lagoons, road runoff, agricultural/farming practices and spills from Wessex Water's storm overflows in Charmouth.

4. Working with others: We coordinate CROWD (Clean Rivers of West Dorset Group), including the Monkton Stream, the Char, the Simene, the Winniford, the Brit, the Asker and the Mangerton. Meetings are regularly attended by our MP, the Environment Agency and Wessex Water: www.dorsetcrowd.com. We are also co-organising the Dorset Climate Action Network's **Rivers and Beaches Team** and helping to co-ordinate community river groups across the county (including at a county-wide online event on 13th May).

5. River walks to help residents get to know the river better: We've held guided walks, led by Nick Gray (Dorset Wildlife Trust) and Ian Rees (Dorset National Landscape), near Stockham Bridge and at Revelshay – following previous walks at Northay Farm, Crabbs Bluntshay Farm and New House Farm.



The Declaration of Rights of the River Char



The Monkton Stream and River Char

- 6. Monitoring the health of the river:** We regularly use Riverfly testing methods to count numbers of fish and insect larvae in the river – this is a reliable guide to the ecological health of the river.
- 7. The Charmouth Dragon River Festival:** Our Festival is on 31st May, working with local children, families and volunteers. A procession led by our Dragon starts at 11am at Barr's Lane Playing Fields and follows the river down to the beach. There will be stalls all afternoon at St Andrew's Hall. Please come. Details: www.riverchar.org/dragon



Misty the Charmouth River Dragon

- 8. Film and information evenings:** We've held regular local events looking at farming practices, river pollution, water voles and wildlife – and showing the wonderful film made by cinematographer Max Redwood: vimeo.com/995438684
- 9. Reducing pollution at home:** We encourage residents with Septic Tanks to maintain and empty them regularly. We also aim to reduce (and eventually eliminate) the use of chemical pesticides by gardeners. We encourage householders on mains drainage to reduce the rainwater from roofs and drives that goes into the sewage system (causing flooding and pollution). Information at www.charvalley.org/sewage

- 10. Natural Flood Management:** We've run working party sessions doing flood management work at Bafferlands and New House Farm and are exploring other ways to slow the flow of the river, to make the surrounding landscape more 'spongy' and reduce the impact of floods.



Flooding at Gasson's Lane, February 2025. Photo: Bob Hamblett

- 11. Working with farmers:** Alongside us, Dorset National Landscape and Dorset Wildlife Trust continue to do amazing work with farmers to restore river habitat, help farmers better understand the funding currently available to them and address practices that have an impact on the river.

- 12. Cleaning up plastic pollution at the river mouth:** Working closely with Charmouth Heritage Coast Centre, we got significant funding from South West Water to bring in the Nurdle Organisation for two week-long efforts to clean up the nurdles and biobeads at the river mouth and on the beach at Charmouth. Read more at www.riverchar.org/nurdles

How you can help:

To join our Action Group, help with river testing, learn more about flood management and keep the river free of sewage, or make a donation... please visit www.riverchar.org

