

Singleton & Charlton Parish Council
Fire Safety Talk — West Sussex Fire and Rescue Service
Summary for Council Record

Date	Tuesday 25 August 2026
Time	18:03–19:55
Venue	Singleton Village Hall
Speaker	Matthew Gamblen, Station Officer, West Sussex Fire and Rescue Service

Speaker

Matthew Gamblen is a Station Officer responsible for five on-call rural fire stations (East Wittering, Selsey, Midhurst, Petworth and Arundel), the Wildfire Lead for West Sussex Fire and Rescue Service, Chair of the South East Interagency Wildfire Group, and a National Wildfire Tactical Advisor.

Attendees

As recorded: the Chair (Singleton & Charlton Parish Council), Jasmine Hathaway, Tracie Bangert, Jack Lovejoy, and members of the public, including Philip Maber (Singleton Forest Watch).

Summary of the talk

1. Wildfire is defined as an uncontrolled vegetation fire requiring suppression action, classified when it meets at least one of: an area of one hectare (about 2.4 acres), a sustained flame length over 1.5 metres, a need for four or more fire appliances, or a serious threat to life, property or environment.
2. National wildfire incidents have risen sharply: over 1,100 recorded across the UK by August 2026, with July 2026 the busiest month on record. West Sussex recorded 11 wildfires in 2026, mostly field fires.
3. West Sussex sits within the South East Interagency Wildfire Group alongside Hampshire, Surrey, East Sussex, Kent and Thames Valley, sharing training, equipment and response procedures.
4. A national wildfire capability pilot launched in June 2026, aiming for two specialist teams per UK region for major incidents requiring tactical burning and large-scale fire breaks.

5. Tactical wildfire plans (contacts, hazards, water supplies, rendezvous points) are now in place for high-risk sites across West Sussex, developed with landowners and managers.
6. The Wildfire Prevention Patrol, a volunteer programme of over 70 dog walkers and countryside users, reports risks such as smouldering campfires, fly-tipping and unsafe barbecues through a dedicated form; the programme has since been adopted by other fire services and has fed into school-based fire education.
7. The Midhurst-based “6x6” wildfire vehicle carries specialist equipment (leaf blowers, forestry hose, hand tools, a mini pump); new climate-adaptive vehicles convertible between wildfire and flood configurations are expected by March–April 2027.
8. Roughly 90% of wildfires are caused by human activity, typically within 100 metres of a road.
9. Singleton Oilfield was raised specifically: a leaning tree near the gas pipeline is a known risk, and a formal tactical wildfire plan is being developed for the site with the Forestry Commission.
10. Questions and discussion covered farmland fire breaks, use of drones with thermal imaging, the what3words location system, and how residents can report risks.

Decisions and next steps

11. The Wildfire Prevention Patrol will continue to expand service-wide.
12. Tactical wildfire plans are now standard for high-risk sites in West Sussex, including Singleton Oilfield.
13. Philip Maber (Singleton Forest Watch) has separately followed up directly with Matthew Gamblen about the Singleton Oilfield fire plan and a wildfire-vulnerability document for Singleton Forest; this is being progressed outside the Council.