

Donhead St Mary Parish Council

Annual Parish Report 2025/26

Following the Parish Council election process in May 2025 eight Parish Councillors were appointed, there being only eight people standing for eleven available seats. At a subsequent meeting two former parish councillors who had not stood for re-election came forward and they were formally co-opted onto the council. There remains one vacant seat which can be filled by co-option if a suitable applicant comes forward.

It has been a very full and busy working year for the Parish Council. As will be seen from the following report much has been achieved although there is always more to be done. Many of the projects completed this year were started in previous years, reflecting the fact that the Parish often has to work with, and through others, to get things done.

Ludwell Flooding

The most significant and concerning event this year was the sudden and unforeseen flooding of seven properties along the A30 in Ludwell on the 27th of January 2025. The alarm was initially raised about 6.30am by an affected resident. Cllr Lin Walker, the Parish Flood Warden was soon on the scene and worked to obtain assistance from the emergency services and give support to affected residents. The Grove Arms was also partially flooded but staff opened the doors to flooded residents and emergency responders and ensured that plentiful refreshments were freely available. This generous action has been commended by all those affected.

The flooding was triggered by intense rainfall in the previous 24 hours, exacerbated by blockages in the stream where it passed under the A30 causing an upstream build-up of storm water.

Following on from this disastrous event the Flood Warden convened a meeting for all affected parties to identify as to why the flooding happened so rapidly, where the initial problems arose and the responsibilities of riparian and bank owners to ensure a clear riverbank and watercourse. This is ongoing work and the Parish Council recorded thanks to Cllr Lin Walker for her hard work and commitment to help all those impacted by this dreadful incident.

Roads and Highways

A considerable part of the Parish Council's work is addressing the many roads and highways issues which arise within the parish. With the support of our Wiltshire Councillor, Gerry Murray, and his predecessor Richard Budden, some of the major maintenance backlog to minor roads has been addressed and some long overdue

repairs have been undertaken. That said, there is still a catalogue of outstanding work and the PC continues to press for action.

The PC has invested in Speed Indicator Devices (SID's) and these have been effective in achieving mean speed reductions particularly on the A30 through Middle Coombe and Ludwell. A scheme to upgrade road signage and road markings in Middle Coombe was funded by the Council and has added to the effectiveness of the speed reduction measures.

Cllr Paul Dewey manages the SIDs, collates the statistics and liaises with the police and the highway authority to ensure there is effective use of the information. This is invaluable work, undertaken by him, for the benefit of the community, and we express our appreciation to him for the way he carries out this important task.

Safety signage work at the A350/ Wincombe Lane junction has been carried out although we are still awaiting the associated road markings to be put down.

Ongoing highways projects include pursuing a reduction of the 50mph speed limit on the A30 through Coombe to 40mph and seeking a weight limit for HGV's using Dennis Lane. Both these projects are currently under active discussion with Wiltshire Council as is a proposal to provide village gateway signs for Charlton to remind road users that they are passing through a village area.

Planning matters

A major part of the PC's work is responding to consultations from Wiltshire Planning on planning applications and for proposed tree work in Conservation Areas under Tree Preservation Orders. Where necessary, site visits by Councillors take place to inform decisions. In the past year the Parish Council has responded to over 24 consultation requests.

Dorset Council published a draft Housing Local Plan last summer which suggested expansion of the housing allocation for Shaftesbury. A formal response to these proposals was made concerning the potential impact on this Parish.

Open spaces, Cemeteries and Play areas

The parish council is responsible for the care and management of the Cemetery and church yard at St John's including grounds maintenance and boundaries.

In this past year the ownership of play area at Coronation Drive was transferred to the Parish from Wiltshire Council including a payment to secure improvements and future maintenance. Upgrades and additional equipment have been provided at this location using Solar Farm funding with the provision focussed on the needs of younger children and families. Two large items of play equipment have also been installed at the Remembrance Field Play area for older children.

Routine grounds maintenance works and safety inspections continue to be overseen by our Parish Clerk to ensure that we fully meet our legal obligations. We commend the way in which Simon Pritchard, the Parish Clerk, carries out this essential work and manages the formal work of the Parish Council.

Roger Brake Parish Council Chairperson