

Donyatt Parish Council (DPC) - Chairman's Report for Financial Year 2024/2025

In my second full year as Chairman and with an excellent team around me, 2024/25 has been another year during which we have achieved much of what we set out to do - and more.

Our key objectives for the year were as follows:

1. Sort out the long-standing problems with NatWest Bank, which ultimately meant moving to another bank which was more understanding of Parish Councils' needs.
2. Install one, preferably two, Speed Indicator Devices (SIDs) in the village to reduce speeding through Donyatt.
3. Work in collaboration with Ilminster Town Council to achieve a 40 m.p.h. limit through Sea.
4. Update our DPC website.
5. Maintain the pressure on Somerset County Highways to alleviate the flooding at Stibbear Lane.
6. Work with 15 other parishes to oppose the proposed dual-carriageway on the Southfields roundabout to Taunton section of the A358.
7. Organise a village event to mark the 80th anniversary of V.E. Day .
8. Continue to work with local pressure groups to influence the outcome of Persimmons' proposal to build a new development off Canal Way, Ilminster and to limit the effect on Donyatt Parish.

I am pleased to report that all of these objectives have been achieved during the year, plus a number of others which presented themselves as issues / opportunities during the year. I will cover these later.

We have now moved to Unity Bank, which offers us online banking, this means we no longer have to write cheques for everything, which was a real pain in the proverbial, plus trying to contact NatWest was even worse.

I wish to thank Zannette, our Clerk, for her dogged determination and forbearance in fighting what was a considerable battle against the intransigence and bureaucracy of Natwest to sort this out.

In response to our Residents Survey, which we carried out last year, we have purchased not one but two SIDs, one in July 2024 and one in March 2025. These have been sited at each end of the village and one only has to stand near them for a while to see the impact in reducing speed. I would like to thank Cllr. Attlesey (Jimmy) and his work-team for installing these and also Jimmy and Cllr. Steve Payne for downloading and monitoring the data from the SIDs.

The 40 mph speed limit through Sea has now been sanctioned by Somerset County Traffic Management & Road Safety, we are awaiting the installation of the new signage as I write. My thanks for achieving this result goes to Cllr. Julia Mc. Kenzie, who has worked tirelessly over the last couple of years and more to achieve this result, she has liaised with Ilminster Town Council, the residents of Sea and County Traffic Management and has overcome many obstacles to get to this result.

Our Clerk Zannette has been working flat-out to get our website up to date and compliant with all regulatory requirements, I know I speak on behalf of all DPC Councillors and Donyatt residents when I say a big 'Thank You' to her for sorting this out.

Towards the end of the 2024 calendar year, Somerset County Highways finally came up with a plan to sort out the flooding at Stibbear Lane, of which we have a copy. Work was meant to be started in January 2025 (not the cleverest time of the year) but due to extreme wet weather, this was postponed to a later date.

I am informed that Kier, on behalf of Somerset Council will start the work when conditions allow.

I am pleased to report that after many meetings and much pressure from many local parishes on Highways England, the plan to dual-carriageway the A358 from Ilminster to Taunton were finally axed. Common sense does sometimes prevail!

DPC organised a D-Day 80th Anniversary event , on the Recreation Field, in June '24. This was planned and organised by Cllr. Kay Light who did an excellent job in pulling together all the elements required to achieve a successful event, which was attended by around 90 people and included a 'tug o' war' which proved very popular. My thanks to her for her sterling work on this project.

I continue to sit on the Ilminster pressure group which aims to influence and limit the excesses of Persimmons in their proposed housing development off Canal Way. My input is to limit the effects on our Parish boundary, which forms the southern edge of the site and to protect the integrity of the Cycleway which runs past the development. I have secured an £80K commitment from Persimmons to fund maintenance of the Cycleway from Ilminster to Chard.

Throughout the year, all 19 footpaths in the parish were maintained in good order, the Parish Path Liaison Officer (me) would like to thank those members of the Parish Council and the members of the public who were able to help with this task.

Also the section of the National Cycleway which runs through our parish, was maintained in good order, any fallen trees were quickly removed and only heavy flooding prevented us from keeping it open for 365 days.

As mentioned earlier, there have been a number of things that cropped up during the year which we were able to sort out:

I have reached an agreement with Kevin Dyer, Operations Manager at Chard Town Council, to maintain the verges either side of the National Cycleway, between Ilminster and Chard. Maintenance of the Cycleway has been abandoned by Somerset Council who own the land so a local arrangement was urgently required, which I was pleased to be able to facilitate. This arrangement has the blessing of Sustrans, for which I am also the local Area Ranger. There will be no cost to DPC with Chard and Ilminster Town Councils sharing any costs involved.

We have, for the first time in DPC's history introduced Annual Reviews (Appraisals) for our Parish Council Clerk, the only 'employed' person on DPC. This is an important part of our obligations to our Clerk and vital for that individuals' development and employment record. I only wish we could have done this sooner but as you will have seen from my reports from this year and last year that we have had many mountains to climb and obstacles to overcome. These appraisals will take place every year from now on. Zannette continues to be an excellent Clerk.

Cllr. Steve Payne has spent some time completely renovating the notice board opposite The George, it is now back in place and looks as good as new, my thanks to Steve for seeing that this needed to be done and for just getting on with it.

During the aforementioned recent heavy rain,, several tons of soil and clay washed onto the Cycleway between the Halt and the Coldharbour bridge.

I would personally like to thank John Grabham who very kindly came out with his digger and cleared this, saving us much manual labour.

Also a couple of tons of gravel was washed down from an adjacent path onto Donyatt Halt.

On 9th March we organised a working party of volunteers from the village and reinstated the gravel path, putting the gravel back where it belonged. My thanks to all those from Donyatt who helped with this task.

The wooden bridge over a stream next to Long Rapp plantation collapsed last year. I am pleased to report this was replaced in March by Somerset County Rights of Way Bridges Team and footpath CH11/9 is now open all the way to Whitney Hill.

The awards we have granted this year are as follows;
Donyatt Village Hall - £2,000

The Recreation Field (DRAC) - £1,250 (we were able to add an extra £300 later in the year towards the cost of new goal-posts and nets)
St. Mary's Church - £1,500

Some things that have not gone so well:

Donyatt continues to be affected by flooding, we had a months' rain in one day on one Sunday in February which caused widespread chaos in Donyatt and surrounding towns and villages. DPC will continue to work with local residents, landowners, FWAG, the Environment Agency, The Rivers Authority and any other agencies we can to try to alleviate the worst effects of flooding in the future.

The so-called Devolution of Services from Somerset Council to local Town and Parish Councils has been a damp squib with not much more happening, County seem to have gone into a torpid state with many changes of staff and responsibilities. As mentioned in my last years' report, in anticipation of us as a Parish having to take over some of the responsibilities that District/County Councils used to do, we have been building up a 'war-chest' in anticipation of more costs coming our way. We await the next set of announcements.

The Local Community Networks (LCNs) that Somerset County set up to replace District Councils have failed abysmally, now widely widely rejected and boycotted by local Councils, including Donyatt.

With our local LCN having around 35 Town and Parish Councils on it, small Councils like Donyatt would always be at the back of the queue for any funding or work and the system was never going to work for us. In my opinion, doing away with Districts was the worst days' work Local Government ever did!

On a more positive note:

Objectives (so far - early days yet though !) for 2025/26;

Organise a V.E. Day 80th Anniversary event in the Village Hall planned for May 8th 2025.

Cllr. Kay Light has once again stepped up to the plate and kindly volunteered to organise this event which we all look forward to.

We will continue to search for ways to alleviate the worst effects of flooding in Donyatt and at Sea, which will include applying for any grant-funding available and working with the local community so we can use local knowledge to help us achieve this aim.

Personnel Issues;

It is with sadness that we lost Cllr. Mike Grabham, who died at the end of 2024 after a short illness. He joined DPC in 1963 and served an amazing 61 years on Donyatt Parish Council.

I was pleased to attend Mike's service at St. Mary's Church on 30th January and to say a few words of thanks in his memory and to thank him for his service to the community of Donyatt. Our thoughts go to his family.

James Attlesey (Jimmy) who took over from Bill Porritt this time last year, has proved to be an excellent Vice-Chairman and I thank him for his continued support and help.

We have now taken on a new Councillor, Guy Wilson, who joins us from the Stibbear / Crock Street community. Guy brings a wealth of local knowledge, having lived in or near Donyatt all his life and an in-depth knowledge of estate-agency and planning procedures, with a keen interest in farming and land issues. Welcome aboard Guy.

Finally, I would like to take this opportunity to thank everybody in the Donyatt Parish Council team for their dedication and hard work over the last year.

Every single one of them is an asset to our community, taking on tasks which normally sit outside of the usual (and narrow) remit of a parish councillors' role.
We are a small parish Council and the numbers would simply not work if we were not prepared to work and think 'outside the box' to get the job done.

My thanks to you all!

David Light - Chairman Donyatt Parish Council - April 2025