

Norton Fitzwarren Parish Council - Chairman's Report 2026

Before I begin, I would like to take a moment to remember our former Chairman, Mike Palmer, who sadly passed away earlier this year.

Mike gave a great deal of his time and energy to this parish. His contribution to this community will not be forgotten, and on behalf of the Parish Council, I would like to again place on record our sincere thanks for his service and say our thoughts remain with his family and friends.

I must also acknowledge, with deep sadness, that this will be Graham's final meeting as a Parish councillor. Graham has been a valued member of this council for a long time, and his contributions and knowledge have made a genuine difference. On a personal note I wish to thank him for all his help getting me settled as parish councillor. On behalf of the whole council we would like to thank him sincerely and wish him all the very best.

I am delighted to welcome our newly co-opted councillors.

Recognising Our Community

This parish thrives on the dedication and goodwill of its people, and it is right that it is recognised.

A particular congratulations goes to Iona, who has done outstanding work engaging young people on behalf of the parish council. Her involvement with local schools and the Youth Parliament has been impressive.

I would also like to extend our sincere thanks to Janet, our Parish Clerk. Much of what keeps this council and the village functioning, happens behind the scenes. Janet's knowledge and patience are invaluable.

More broadly, I want to thank the many volunteers who make Norton Fitzwarren such a welcoming and wonderful place to live. So much good work happens quietly, by people giving their time freely for others and the community as a whole, and without expectations for anything in return.

In particular I would like to thank:

- The Village Hall Committee.
- The volunteers at the Skittles Cafe.
- The organisers of the Annual Scarecrow Trail. It's always lovely to see so many young people and parents roaming the village on that weekend.
- The Playing Fields Association.
- Norton Community News
- And the volunteer litter pickers who keep our village tidy.

To those who quietly get on with making this community so wonderful - thank you. This village would not be what it is without you.

Community Projects & Overview

Playing Fields

As a parish council have been working towards taking on the management of the playing fields for some time and we are hopeful this will be formalised in the coming year.

Speed Indicator Device (SID)

The SID recently purchased and installed is having a positive impact on vehicle speeds through the village. We will continue to publish and share this data, using it to support further road safety measures in due course, where appropriate.

A sincere thank you goes to the volunteers who install and rotate these devices through the 3 postings in the village. Again, a great example of an essential but often unseen contribution.

Russet Cider Trial

Following an approach late in 2025 we engaged with the Russet Cider Trail group. After much discussion and numerous routes suggested, a way forward has now been proposed that seems to work for all involved. We are pleased this has reached this outcome and wish the group the best of luck with their ambitious aim and goals.

Planning & Development

It seems that progress with Ford Farm Development remains stalled and has hit further planning obstacles due to ongoing issues involving the Environment Agency having concerns about flood management and mitigation. We will continue to monitor the situation closely and will keep residents updated with any changes.

Staplegrove Development

Although not within our boundary, we are actively monitoring the new Staplegrove development, particularly the impact of associated roadworks. We are conscious that these works affect the daily lives of residents and the Parish Council will continue to ensure those concerns are heard by the appropriate people.

Flooding & Environment

Flooding remains a significant concern in parts of the parish. Lots is being done to help manage those risks where possible. This includes successfully lobbying Somerset Council Highways Department to clean the gullies on our main road. As well as regular logging and reporting of known flood spots, evidence is vital to support our efforts to get the Unitary Council to do more.

We are also pleased and thankful to Janet for her work to successfully secure a grant from the Somerset Rivers Authority for flood alleviation works in the west of the parish. These works are expected to take place over the coming year and should help mitigate flooding. We will continue to keep the community informed about progress.

Community Safety

We have seen an improved engagement with Avon and Somerset Police over the past year. And have been informed, once all recruitment and necessary training has been completed there should be a modest increase in visible policing in the village. This is welcomed, and we will continue to press for a consistent and visible presence in our community year round.

Grants

Grants supporting community groups and projects locally is a vital function of this council and something we feel privileged to be able to do. In the last financial year, a total of £7,748.99 was awarded.

Notably:

Following changes to funding from Somerset Council, we as a Parish Council, now fund maintenance for the Playing Fields and the Churchyard

The allotments received a grant to purchase a mower. This has had the added benefit that the allotment holders now maintain the adjacent footpath saving the Parish Council money on maintenance.

We have also supported the Village Hall with repairs, provided funding for the Village Choir, helped with rent payments for the PCC All Saints Benefice Office and provided funding for vital equipment at the local primary school for the Special Educational Needs Room.

A Note on Somerset Councillor Attendance and Engagement.

First I would like to thank Cllr Sully for all his efforts and continued engagement remotely at a difficult time, wish Mrs Sully a speedy recovery and wish both of them the best.

I think it is important to also note our disappointment at the limited attendance of Cllr Rigby at parish meetings this year, and regretfully scant engagement outside of meetings too. Having strong working relationships with our elected Unitary Councillors, particularly at a time when the Unitary Council is facing a grave financial situation, is vital for adequate representation of our residents. I do hope to see a more consistent and engaged presence in the coming year.

The wider Somerset Council Picture

Finally, I would like to briefly touch on the wider picture at Somerset Council & Growing Pressures.

Out of respect for everyone here, I want to speak plainly about the broader context in which we as a Parish Council are operating. Somerset Council is facing significant financial challenges, including the real risk of having to issue a Section 114 notice (effective bankruptcy). This has direct consequences for parishes like ours.

As financial pressures at County Hall increase, responsibilities for some services are being passed down to us at parish level. We are stepping up where we can, because we are committed to maintaining services for our residents, but unfortunately this is not without cost. The reality is that taking on additional responsibilities places pressure on the parish precept. We will always seek to minimise increases and deliver value for money, but some upward pressure as a result is inevitable. At a time when many residents are having to tighten their own belts, it is difficult to strike the right balance between; precept & budget pressure vs maintaining the same levels of delivery locally. We will continue to robustly represent Norton Fitzwarren's interests at Unitary Council Level, particularly on highways and open spaces, where the impact of reduced provision is most visible. Where delivery is withdrawn or short of the expected mark, will do our best to pick up as much of the slack as we can, but we also need your help;

If you are experiencing issues: potholes, overgrown verges, or declining service standards in particular departments, please report them to us as well as to the Unitary Council. Every report strengthens the evidence we need to press for action and our calls to get things done. Whether we like it or not, decisions and resource allocation, in this day and age, are strongly 'data driven' and the stronger our data, the stronger our voice.

Conclusion and the Year Ahead

Bringing this to a conclusion and looking to the year ahead, the Parish Council will focus on:

- Delivering flood alleviation works
- Taking on management of the playing fields
- Monitoring developments at Ford Farm and Staplegrove
- Using SID data to support road safety improvements
- Strengthening engagement with the police
- Pressing for better engagement from Somerset Councillors
- Managing, where possible, the impact of Somerset Council's financial position on residents.
- Continuing to advocate for proper service levels from the Unitary Council.

Above all, we want to encourage greater community involvement. This council exists to serve you, and the more we hear from residents, the better we can do that.

Please do come and speak to us, attend meetings and share your ideas.

Kye Gordon
Chairman - Norton Fitzwarren Parish Council

6th May 2026