

Chairman's Report – Ponsonby Parish Council

Council Year: July 2025 – May 2026 Chairman: Scott Robertson

I am pleased to present this Chairman's Report summarising the work, progress, and challenges faced by Ponsonby Parish Council over the past year. It has been a period marked by significant infrastructure concerns, major regional developments, improvements to community assets, and continued engagement with residents, partner organisations, and statutory bodies.

1. Governance and Council Membership

The Council began the year with the election of myself as Chairman and Robert Jones as Vice-Chairman. Over the course of the year, we welcomed new councillor **Jane Wheatley**, through Co-option, while also noting the resignations of **James Stanley** and **Liz Dias**, both of whom were thanked for their service.

The Council has continued to operate with strong attendance and constructive participation, ensuring that decisions are made collaboratively and with the best interests of the parish in mind.

2. Geological Disposal Facility (GDF) & NDA Engagement

GDF has remained a standing item throughout the year. Key developments included:

- Ongoing dialogue with the **South Copeland GDF Partnership** and attendance at stakeholder meetings.
- Parish Councils collectively raised concerns about the administrative burden associated with GDF grants.
- By early 2026, the NDA indicated it would soon make a recommendation to Government regarding whether the area should progress to investigative boreholes.
- The Council has repeatedly emphasised the need for clarity on long-term waste storage plans, including what happens if the GDF does not proceed.

The Council also engaged with the NDA on matters relating to **virtual leaseholds**, land options, and Strategy 5, ensuring Ponsonby remains informed about potential impacts on the parish.

3. Highways, Flooding & Road Safety

Highways issues have dominated much of the Council's work this year. Key concerns included:

Major Flooding & Drainage Failures

- Severe flooding at **New Mill**, caused by an overflowing mill pond and inadequate drainage.
- Persistent flooding at **Ponsonby Road End**, blocked drains, and degraded drainage infrastructure along the A595.
- Persistent flooding at **Moss Side/Godderthwaite**, degraded drainage infrastructure along the A595.
- Repeated blockages and debris accumulation between Ponsonby and Calderbridge.

Road Safety

- Meetings held with **National Highways** regarding speeding, vegetation overgrowth, narrow footpaths, and the positioning of 30mph signage.
- Speed Indicator Device (SID) data showed an average speed of **25.4mph**, within limits, though concerns remain about southbound traffic.

Infrastructure Failures

- Collapsed wall near Jacksons Timber.
- Broken drain pipes, lifting tarmac, dangerous potholes, and degraded road barriers.

The Council has consistently reported issues to both **Cumberland Council** and **National Highways**, pressing for long-term solutions.

4. Heart of the Community Fund & Parish Improvements

The Parish Council secured substantial grant funding—over **£35,000**—for improvements including:

- **New play area installation**
- **Village Hall repainting**
- **Village Hall bar**
- **Repairs to walls and fencing**, wildflower area protection, and installation of a handrail.
- **Riverside Garden enhancements**, including picnic benches (including accessible seating), planters, and landscaping.

I would like to extend our deepest thanks to our **Clerk, Hannah Webb**, whose organisation, persistence, and drive made these improvements possible. Without her commitment and hard work, much of this progress simply would not have happened.

5. Walk, Wheel, Cycle Trust (Sustrans)

The Council has actively supported the proposal for a **multi-use path connecting Gosforth, Calderbridge, and Beckermat**. A feasibility study was submitted for GDF funding and approved, with updates and engagement with landowners and stakeholders pending through 2026.

6. Parish Council Forum & Wider Engagement

The Council has participated in:

- Parish Council Forum meetings.
- Meetings with **Cumbria Police**, raising concerns about crime statistics reporting anomalies.
- Stakeholder sessions with **Josh MacAlister MP**, particularly regarding Pioneer Park and A595 infrastructure.
- Meetings with **Cumberland Highways** and **National Highways**, to continue to raise our concerns on road safety.
- Engagement with **Growing Well**, a mental health charity providing community vegetable boxes.

7. Pioneer Park Development

Pioneer Park has emerged as a major regional project, with proposals including:

- A data centre
- A Small Modular Reactor (SMR)
- A property valuation scheme (subject to concern)

The Council has requested open dialogue and transparency, and has formed a **joint working group with Beckermat with Thornhill Parish Council** to ensure both communities remain informed.

8. Refuse Collection Issues

Refuse collection has been a persistent problem:

- Collections in Ponsonby have become **monthly**, with insufficient bin capacity.
- Repeated missed collections and inconsistent service.
- Formal complaints submitted to Cumberland Council.
- Deployment of a smaller refuse vehicle to navigate narrow lanes.

This remains an unresolved issue requiring continued pressure.

9. St Bridget's Church Closure

The Council has monitored the deteriorating condition of St Bridget's Church and repeatedly requested updates from the Parochial Church Council. Concerns have been raised about site security and damaged railings.

10. Assertion 10/GDPR Compliance & Website Modernisation

A major achievement this year was full compliance with **Assertion 10**, requiring:

- Adoption of new IT, GDPR, and governance policies.
- Migration to a new website host (Hugo Fox).
- Creation of OneDrive accounts for councillors.
- Purchase of new IT equipment (A3 printer, laptop).
- Updated contact forms and document management.

This work required significant time and financial investment, and the Council thanks all involved.

11. Financial Overview

The Council has maintained stable finances, with regular reporting of balances and approval of invoices. Key expenditures included:

- Clerk services
- Village Hall hire
- Playdale playground works
- Insurance (Zurich)
- Grass cutting contracts
- Website hosting
- Rock salt, planters, flags, and equipment
- External audit preparation for AGAR

The **Precept remains at £6,000** for 2026–2027. **Importantly**, this **has not been increased** this year, thanks to the hard work and commitment of all councillors and clerk, who have taken on additional tasks and actively sought external funding wherever possible. Their efforts have ensured that essential improvements could be delivered without placing any additional financial burden on residents.

12. Community Matters

Other issues addressed this year include:

- Damaged road signs
- Grit bin refilling and salt procurement
- Litter along the A595
- Collapsed gates and stiles
- Parking concerns at Pelham House
- Christmas lights replacement
- SID deployment requests
- Community Plan updates
- Village WhatsApp group restructuring
- Village Events

Conclusion

This has been a year of substantial activity, with the Council navigating complex Assertion 10/GDPR compliance, website modernisation, regional developments, persistent highways challenges, and major community improvement projects. I would like to thank all councillors, our Clerk, the village hall committee, partner organisations, and residents for their continued support, engagement, and commitment to the parish.

Ponsonby remains a resilient and proactive community, and the Council will continue to work diligently to represent local interests and deliver improvements wherever possible. One of our greatest ongoing challenges is road safety. We are working hard to progress these issues with both Cumberland Highways and National Highways, but we cannot stress enough how important it is for residents to report **any near-misses, incidents, or safety concerns** using the relevant reporting websites listed below. These reports provide the evidence base we need to reinforce our concerns and are essential in helping us push for meaningful action.

Cumberland Highways (South of traffic lights at Jackson Timber yard):

<https://www.cumberland.gov.uk/parking-roads-and-transport/streets-roads-and-pavements/road-maintenance-closures-and-improvements/report-problem-street-or-road>

National Highways (North of traffic lights at Jackson Timber yard):

<https://report.nationalhighways.co.uk/>

We would also like to see **more village events** taking place in the year ahead. These gatherings strengthen community spirit and help bring people together, but to make them happen we need **more event organizers/volunteers**, no need to join any councils or committees to get involved. Both the Parish Council and the Village Hall Committee are already extremely busy managing day-to-day business, statutory responsibilities, and ongoing projects. Additional support from residents would make a real difference and allow us to deliver the kind of events the community has asked for.

Scott Robertson

Ponsonby Parish Chair.