

Levens Parish Council

MINUTES of the Ordinary Meeting of the Parish Council held on 10 September 2024 in Levens Methodist Church commencing at 7.30 p.m.

Present: Cllrs. R. Mason (Chairman in the absence of Cllr. R Atfield), H. Burrow, J. Battye, K. Holmes, D. Rogerson

In Attendance: M. R. Curry (Clerk) and 3 members of the public.

42/24 Apologies for Absence: Apologies had been received from Cllrs R. Atfield, M. Willacy and PCSO Jayne Park.

43/24 Declarations of Interest: No Declarations of Interest were submitted.

44/24 Minutes: It was **Resolved** that the Chairman be authorised to sign the Minutes of the Ordinary Meeting of the Council held on 09 July 2024 as a true record.

45/24 Public Participation:

Following representations from a resident at Underhill, it was **Agreed** to log the following issues on HIAMS:

- a) The worn condition of road markings in the vicinity of the village shop
- b) The poor condition of the Old Road and the public footpath between Underhill and Gilpin Bridge
- c) Confusing signage on the A590 slip road past Lawrence House
- d) The condition of the 30mph road sign near the Hare and Hounds

Cllr. Mason confirmed that he had yet to engage with Dobsons about recent tree work on Underhill Road.

46/24 Reports:

a) Reports from Councillors attending meetings:

- i. Cllr. Rogerson confirmed that he and others from the Parish Council had attended the Briefing Meeting for Town and Parish Councils on the bridge closures held on 21 August. This is the subject of a separate Agenda item.
- ii. Cllr. Rogerson had also brought attention to concerns from the Institute about the condition of the building, noting damp in particular.

b) Westmorland & Furness Council (W&FC): Cllr Battye reported that:

- i. W&FC is in a consultation phase regarding the 20 mph initiatives that were accepted in the first round of applications. Levens is in the 2nd tranche for consideration sometime in the new year.
- ii. There is up to £1,000 available to W&FC Members for distribution as a grant(s) to local initiatives benefitting the community. Cllr. Battye is looking for perhaps two causes which might value support from this budget.
- iii. As part of W&FC's update of the Local Plan it is likely that there will be a new call for possible development sites and that W&F will not rely on the previous submission made to SLDC. W&FC is also working on a new Design Code for its area.
- iv. Green bin collections have been erratic recently, possibly as a result of a shortage of drivers and / or lorries and W&FC is addressing this. There is also concern that sorted recycling is all being thrown into one container on the lorries – Cllr. Battye confirmed that this is temporary and that all re-cycling is sorted at the depot.
- v. There is to be a briefing meeting via Teams on 11 September on the Boundary Commissions proposals to review ward boundaries within the W&FC area.
- vi. Dog fouling complaints have been received from residents once again. Cllr. Battye suggested that this issue might be routed through the new Community Development Officer.
- vii. Cllr Battye and an Officer from W&FC have met with Mrs Pooley about a proposed memorial bench and discussions about siting are ongoing.
- viii. At a recent meeting with the office of the Police and Crime Commissioner, Cllr. Battye had raised the issue of community policing, and it was confirmed that this remains a priority. The Clerk reported that he had written on this and received an acknowledgement but no substantive follow-up. He will write again to chase this.

c) Police: PCSO Park's apologies had been reported earlier. She confirmed that she is doing monthly drop-ins in the village (pre-advertised) and will try to re-arrange shifts if there is a specific item of concern that the PC wishes to discuss. As it stands, there are no matters of note reported on the police log for Levens.

47/24 Finance

- a) **Receipts:** Councillors noted that there had been no receipts for the period 01 July – 31 August 2024.
- b) **Payments made between Meetings:**
Councillors **Ratified** the payment by direct debit on 18/07/2024 of the Annual Registration Fee to the Office of the Information Commissioner: £ 35.00
- c) **Payments Required:**
- i. M R Curry: Salary July 2024 - (PC: £244.40; Project: £411.39; Charity: £3.26; Mileage: £10.80)
Month Total: £669.85
M R Curry: Salary August 2024 – (PC: £110.89; Project: £175.28; Charity: £52.16; Mileage: £5.40) Month Total: £343.73
Grand Total: £ 1,013.58
 - ii. Armstrong Watson: Submission of Quarterly VAT Return period ending 30 June 2024 150.00
 - iii. Zurich Municipal: Insurance Renewal 2024-25 – Premium: 472.62
 - iv. Parish Online: Digital Mapping tool – annual subscription: 45.00
 - v. Copyright Agent: The Clerk reported that the Chairman had received a demand for a fee of £400 from Copyright Agent – a firm specialising in recovering fees for the unauthorised use of copyrighted images. This stems from the use of an image supplied by a local third party to publicise an upcoming event on the website. There are reasons to believe that this is probably not a scam. The Chairman had challenged this on the basis that it was a genuine error by a not-for-profit community organisation but could do no more than secure a small discount to £340. Councillors expressed concern at this situation and whilst not approving payment at this stage **Agreed** that the website needed to build-in some protection to prevent a recurrence. This should include a clear statement to contributors that the responsibility for checking copyright would lie with them and not the Parish Council. It was **Agreed** to secure more detail of the source of the image used to advertise the event in question.
- d) **Bank Reconciliation:** The Clerk submitted a bank reconciliation showing a bank statement balance of £23,720.83p with no unrepresented cheques as at 31 August. This was accepted and signed by the Chairman. Ring-fenced funds are £2,100.00 (woodland management) and £2,142.06 (Christmas event). On the latter, Cllr. Burrow asked fellow Councillors to note the ever-increasing costs of buying a Christmas tree annually and proposed that it would be more cost effective to have a substantial one made for use year after year. This was **Approved** and Cllr. Burrow received authorisation to incur expenditure on it from within the existing Christmas ring-fenced fund
- e) **Bank Mandate:** It was **Agreed** that various mandates required review and update and that Cllr. Rogerson would be nominated as the 4th signatory for the Parish Council.
- f) **Annual Governance and Accountability Return (AGAR):** The Clerk reported that the external auditor has raised two minor queries on the 2023-24 AGAR which were being dealt with.

48/24 Levens Community Project

- a) **Project Updates:** Cllr. Mason led this item commencing with **Approval** for the recommendation to invite Henry Prescott to become a member of the Project Advisory Group (PAG).
- b) **Other reports** were as follows:
- i. Due to the number of apologies received, there had been no meeting of PAG in September, but no critical decisions were currently outstanding.
 - ii. Two contractors from the original tender exercise remain in contention for the construction of the village hall and work continues to refine the quotations submitted. The procurement process remains ongoing with investigations into further value engineering options.
 - iii. Sale of Plots: The plot at Church Hill remains to be sold. There has been recent interest, and the Agents are following this up.
 - iv. A meeting was held with representatives from Eden Housing Association on-site on 27 August to explore current opportunities for funding support for the affordable houses. The Project is awaiting feedback from this meeting.
 - v. Project Cash Reserves and Funds held in HSBC accounts:
The Clerk submitted a bank reconciliation for both accounts which were accepted and signed by the Chairman. The bank reconciliations were as follows:
 - HSBC Current Account: The bank reconciliation at 23 August showed a balance of £68,325.27p and it was **Agreed** to transfer of £50,000 from the current account to the deposit account.

- Investment (Deposit) Account: The reconciled balance at 31 July 2024 was £1,435,975.27. It was **Agreed** that the Clerk should continue to investigate the placement of funds on short, fixed term deposits to secure more favourable interest rates.
- The following payment was Approved:
United Utilities: Water Connection, New Village Hall £1,777.23

49/24 Planning Applications:

a) Schedule of Planning Applications: Updates to the Planning Schedule on 10 September had been circulated and the following were noted:

PC Ref	Application No.	Location	Proposal	Status
43.	SL/2022/0074	Land to NE Levens La	Footpath down Levens La.	See note below.
A meeting had been held with Highways Officers on-site recently. They are asking about the possible sale by Levens Hall of a strip down the lane, but the PC already knows this is highly unlikely. Cllr Mason will enquire again. It was noted that the current timeframe extension for the submission of a detailed plan expires on 30/09/2024. It was Agreed to write with an update on the current position and request a further extension.				
29.	2024/0232/FPA	Lakesway Holiday Home & Lodge Park	Erection of leisure and spa facility building and associated infrastructure	PC objection submitted. See note below.
This application is likely to be considered by the Planning Committee on 24 October. The Clerk stressed the need to have robust evidence of the grounds for objection. He was asked to chase for an answer on the question of the discharge of previous planning conditions, particularly on the question of passing places.				
33.	24/0616/NMA	Wain Gap, Heaves	Non-material amendment to previous consent (SL/2015/0844)	ACON 06/09/2024
36.	7/2024/5329	Sizergh Castle LA8 8AE	Surfacing of existing unsurfaced track. No provision for consultation	REFUSED under NOI procedure 08/08/2024
37.	2024/1000/FPA	Two Acres, Force Lane LA8 8ED	COU from agricultural land to domestic curtilage and erection of garage and store	No Objection submitted: REFUSED 20/08/2024
38.	24/1111/FPA	Heaves Farm, Levens	Extension to dairy livestock building	No Objection - Pending
39.	2024/0361/FPA	Levens Shop LA8 8ND	1 st floor extension for holiday accommodation to support the existing business	Circulated to Councillors 29/08/2024. Revised plans: Resolved: No Objection
40.	2024/1237/LBC 2024/1238/FPA	Lawrence House Farm	Subdivision of single dwellinghouse to form 2 dwellings	No Objection submitted: ACON 06/09/2024
41.	24/1034/FPA	Hundred Acre View, Levens LA8 8PS	Extension to dining area	Circulated to Councillors: Resolved: No Objection

b) Other planning matters: No other planning matters were raised for consideration.

50/24 Parish Council Vacancy: The Clerk reported that at the deadline date for the submission of Expressions of Interest (31 August 2024), three EOIs had been received. It was **Agreed** to set up meetings with those interested as part of the co-option process.

51/24 Levens Charity:

a) Next meeting of the Trustees: The Clerk reported that a meeting of the Appointed Trustees is still to be arranged.

52/24 Bridge Closures: As previously reported by Cllr. Rogerson, representatives of Levens Parish Council had attended an on-line briefing for Town and Parish Councils on 21 August, which had been followed by the publication of a public newsletter. After formatting issues had been resolved, this had been posted on the website and the local Facebook site. The update confirmed that as a result of a peer review of the original report, W&FC had been correct to close the bridges. Work is now ongoing including:

- Investigation of structural integrity with a view to future options
- Improving the condition of the diversion routes
- Exploring any short-term options for access (such as propping, use of underpasses)
- Supporting, as far as possible, local businesses impacted by the closures
- Considering a further public meeting – possibly in Brigsteer

It was acknowledged that whilst Levens understands and sympathises with the plight of other communities affected by these closures, the impact on Levens itself is relatively minimal. However, representatives will monitor developments. The next on-line briefing is to be held on 18 September and the invite will be circulated.

53/24 Parish Council Communications: The Clerk referred to previous email correspondence where he had expressed the view that formal lines of communication / engagement with the Parish Council were:

- a) Email
- b) Via the Contact facility on the website
- c) Representations in person and publicly at Parish Council meetings
- d) Letter
- e) Word of mouth – subsequently recorded and submitted as written contact

The Parish Council does not engage with social media, but any Councillor becoming aware of items on social media platforms in which the Parish should be involved is encouraged to report those on in writing for consideration. It was **Agreed** to put a statement on the current position on the website and in the next Newsletter. The Clerk will draft a Communications Policy for consideration.

54/24 Parish Assets and Land:

- a) Maintenance work: Cllr. Holmes will ask Andy Brayshaw to undertake tidying-up work (hedges / verges etc) in the Autumn.
- b) Brigsteer Road site: James Senior is to complete the walling work.
- c) Jubilee Orchard: The Clerk confirmed that £4,500 had been received from the Coronation Community Orchard Fund and work will commence. A second phase with grant from elsewhere will improve the boundaries and access to the site.
- d) Reinstatement of land at Nelson Square: Mr John Ritchie has been in direct touch with Mr Crosier of ENWL and it is expected that the reinstatement work will be undertaken.
- e) Woodland Management: The Clerk has asked Treescapes Consultancy when they intend to commence the update of the Tree Health and Safety Report, and their response is awaited. Cllr. Holmes reported that he had received a consultation notice regarding proposed work at Sampool Wood and Councillors agreed that they had no objections to the proposals.

55/24 Open Actions Not Covered Elsewhere on the Agenda

- a) Levens Traffic Management: The following reports were noted:
 - i) Traffic Management within the village: Cllr Battye will raise this again direct with Helen Karaaslan.
 - ii) Road repairs and advance notice: It was **Agreed** to write direct to Highways to request notification of the upcoming programme of road works, such as re-surfacing, within the Parish.
 - iii) It was noted that there had been a Notice of Works from Highways England of the intent to put speed enforcement cameras on the A590 from Ayside to Brettagh Holt. There was concern that this had not been notified to the A590 Working Group whilst other initiatives appeared to have been shelved. This will be raised at the next meeting of the Group.
- b) Levens Greening Campaign: Cllr. Battye reported on plans for the Autumn programme which will include presentation of the effective use of smart meters by CAfS and an update on the Local Nature Recovery initiative.

56/24 Correspondence: In addition to the routine circulation of matters from CALC and other Agencies, the Clerk reported on the following items not otherwise dealt with in the meeting:

- a) A resident has re-iterated an observation about trees on Lowgate obscuring the streetlights. This was discussed as part of the Village Tour in June, and it was agreed that as the tree was growing on private land the matter should be referred to Highways via HIAMS.
- b) A request for a representative from the community to attend the 50th anniversary of the formation of Cumbria had been received. Councillors agreed to consider this and submit ideas for a nomination.
- c) Notice of a feasibility study on the possible re-introduction of the White-Tailed Eagle into Cumbria had been received and was noted for further developments.

57/24 Future Agenda Items:

- a) The Autumn / Winter Newsletter
- b) Matters that might be advised prior to the next meeting;
- c) Otherwise follow-up to the current Agenda items.

58/24 Date of the Next Meeting:

The next meeting Ordinary Meeting of the Parish Council will be held on Tuesday 08 October 2024 in the Methodist Church, Levens.

The meeting closed at 9.52 p.m.

Signed (Chairman) Date.....