

Levens Parish Council

MINUTES of the Ordinary Meeting of the Parish Council held on 11 March 2025 in Levens Methodist Church commencing at 7.30 p.m.

Present: Cllrs. R. Atfield (Chairman), J. Battye, H. Burrow, K. Holmes, R. Mason, D. Rogerson, M. Willacy.

In Attendance: M. R. Curry (Clerk) and one member of the public.

120/24 Apologies for Absence: Written apologies had been received from Cllr. Forshaw.

121/24 Declarations of Interest: Cllrs. Atfield, Battye and Holmes declared an interest in matters relating to Levens Playing Fields, otherwise there were no declarations of interest or requests for dispensation submitted.

122/24 Minutes: It was **Resolved** that the Chairman be authorised to sign the Minutes of the Ordinary Meeting of the Council held on 11 February 2025 as a true record.

123/24 Public Participation: Mr J. Morris advised Councillors that he was pleased to note work at Underhill in relation to the affordable housing site and developments at the Community Orchard site.

124/24 Reports:

a) Reports from Councillors attending meetings: There were no reports submitted.

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

- i. The Devolution Priority Programme for Cumbria is progressing and the consultation period remains running to 13 April (<https://consult.communities.gov.uk/lggc/cumbria-devolution-consultation>).
- ii. The Local Government Boundary Commission for England (LGBCE) review of electoral arrangements for Westmorland & Furness Council continues and a consultation is running to 12 May (<https://www.lgbce.org.uk/all-reviews/westmorland-and-furness>)
- iii. The Community Governance Review is also ongoing with a proposal to bring forward the date of Parish elections from 2028 to 2027 in order to synchronise the date across the region. A consultation is running until 06 May and is at <https://consult.westmorlandandfurness.gov.uk/westmorland-and-furness-council/community-governance-review/>.
- iv. Lighting Policy – proposals to rationalise street lighting will go to Cabinet for approval in the following week. Until then there is no formal proposal nor yet a call for response.
- v. W&FC Local Plan – as part of its preparation of a Local Plan for the region and to address its target of building 1,330 houses per year there will be a Call for Sites opened in April and consultation later in the year.
- vi. Dog-fouling – A new Enforcement Officer has been appointed and Cllr. Battye will pass details on to Cllr. Burrow. The latter will make contact and identify what resources are available to help the local initiative to combat this problem.
- vii. The condition of several road signs including at the junction of the A590 were mentioned and will be reported on HIAMS.

c) Police: Relatively minor incidents on the A590 were noted. The most recent editions of the Focus Newsletter had been circulated otherwise there were no matters of direct relevance to Levens.

125/24 Finance

a) Receipts: There were no receipts for the period 01 February – 28 February 2025

b) Payments: The following Payments were **Approved:**

- i) M R Curry: Salary February 2025 - (PC: £291.20; Project: £193.01; Charity: £54.18; Mileage: £5.40): £ 543.79
- ii) Printing Plus: Spring Newsletter: £ 154.00
- iii) Heaves Farm: Various items – **Agreed** to pay these from ring-fenced CIL funds £ 340.60
- iv) Armstrong Watson: VAT submission Q3: £ 150.00
- v) Levens Playing Fields: Hire of Pavilion for High Sheriff Event (to be refunded): £ 15.00
- vi) Levens Playing Fields: Maintenance Grant as per 2024-25 budget: £ 1,600.00
- vii) Levens Methodist Church: Grant to support Post Office as per 2024-25 budget: £ 700.00
- viii) Other payments: No other payments required approval, but it was noted that Cllrs. Atfield, Battye and Holmes abstained from the approval of payments to the Levens Playing Fields. Also, that Cllr. Battye's grant for improvements at the allotments would soon be utilised. And finally it was noted that a receipt of £723.28 would be received from the Christmas event.

- c) **Bank Reconciliation:** The Clerk presented the bank reconciliation for the period 01 January 2025 to 28 February 2025 which showed a balance of £21,536.45 and the Chairman was authorised to sign the bank statement. An associated note on ring-fenced funds in the sum of £6,865.46 was **Approved**. Adjustments will be made to the March ring-fenced funds to reflect recent transactions.
- d) **Bank Mandate:** The bank mandate previously submitted to HSBC had been returned as allegedly having a missing page(s). A new mandate was completed for re-submission.

126/24 Annual Governance and Accountability Review (AGAR) 2024-25: The Clerk had previously referred Councillors to the suite of governance documents currently on the website with the advice that they should be checked to their satisfaction. The Clerk had also reviewed the documents and was able to recommend that the following were fit for purpose without need for amendment: Standing Orders, Code of Conduct, Equal Opportunities, Safeguarding, Complaints Procedure, Data Protection, Retention and Destruction of Documents, Infectious Diseases, The Model Publication Scheme. Councillors accepted the Clerk's recommendation, and the documents were **Approved** for 2025-26. The following documents were still subject to review: Financial Regulations, Risk Register, Asset Register.

127/24 Levens Community Project: A meeting of the Project Advisory Group (PAG) had been held on 04 March and Cllr. Mason reported as follows:

Project Updates:

- a) **Plot 3, Church Road:** Following Agent's advice, the plot is now off the market for the time being as agreed at the last meeting. The Clerk has asked Tony Hills (TH) if he has a suitable drawing for a graphic sale board.
- b) **Underhill:**
 - i. **Water Supply:** Four standpipes are now on the site. All are locked and Cllr Mason has the keys. The Clerk has notified United Utilities that the standpipes have been erected and are ready for inspection and connection.
 - ii. **Electricity Supply:** It was noted the permit from the Environment Agency is still awaited.
- c) **New Village Hall:**
 - i. **Quotes from Contractors:** A further quote for the main build is still awaited, but it is hoped that this will be available for the next PAG meeting in April. A quote had been received from Tim Thacker (TT) for the retaining wall, situated immediately behind, but not connected to, the main NVH. Construction of the wall is necessary, but the new proposal will not compromise the future build. This quote proposes the use of leggio blocks and is a significant saving on other quotes. Tony Hills (TH) had indicated his approval in principle and on this basis, it was **Agreed** that this section of the work should go ahead. TT had also submitted a quote for the foundations, car park, steel frame etc, which TH will compare with figures from Robinson's and Bansco. It was agreed to ask TH to confirm that proposed minor amendments to the original plans have been referred to the planning authority.
 - ii. **Recent works:** There had been no new recent works to report but a letter had been received from the Church requesting clarification on access to the Church wall for repair if necessary. The situation will be considered and a reply agreed.
 - iii. **Sale of Stone:** Sales continue steadily. One outstanding invoice will now be pursued formally.
- d) **Funding Matters:**
 - i. **Community Led Housing Fund:** Discussions are taking place with Kate Skillicorn (Housing Development Officer at W&FC) to explore new funding opportunities for the affordable housing. An application to W&FC Affordable Fund has been completed subject to the inclusion of updated financial information which is being revised to support the case.
 - ii. **Business Plans:** The narrative sections in the existing Business Plan have been updated and revised financial metrics will be agreed and included. It was **Agreed** to create a new business plan for the new village hall; Owen Malton and Mike Dyer have offered assistance in preparing this.
 - iii. **Funds in hand at 23 February 2025 and bank reconciliation:** The most recent bank reconciliation for the current account had been circulated prior to the meeting. Funds in the current account at 23 February were £18,096.90p.
 - iv. **Deposit Account:** Funds in the deposit account were £1,500,543.27 as per the statement dated 28 February. The Clerk has been asked by the bank to resubmit the information already provided regarding moving some of the money into higher interest-bearing accounts.
 - v. **Payments Required:** The following payment was **Approved**:
Levens Playing Fields: Room Hire Award Presentation: £ 15.00

- e) **High Sheriff's Award:** The presentation of the High Sheriff Award had taken place in the Playing Fields Pavilion on 28 February. It was attended by Cllrs. Atfield and Burrow and John Wood and had gone well.

128/24 Planning Applications:

- a) **Schedule of Planning Applications:** Updates to the Planning Schedule on 11 March had been circulated and were noted. The following were of specific note:

PC Ref	Application No.	Location	Proposal	Status
43	SL/2022/0074	Land to NE Levens Lane	New footpath	Current application valid until 31 March 2025. Clerk to confirm previous request for a further extension.
29.	2024/0232/FPA	Lakesway Holiday Home & Lodge Park	Erection of leisure and spa facility building and associated infrastructure	The application was approved by the Planning Committee on 09 January, but the decision is still showing as pending.
47.	2024/2242/FPA	Fiddlers Croft Church Road	Removal of Condition 9 – habitation of lower ground floor	Agreed to submit written representation to the Planning Inspectorate reinforcing the previous submission of No Objection
48.	2024/2299/FPA	Land adjacent to the Langdales	Erection of a 2-storey extension as an amendment to previously approved plans.	The case is to be heard by the Planning Committee on 24 April and it was Agreed to make representations on the basis that the proposal is not a minor material amendment.

- b) **Other planning matters:** It was **Agreed** to write to Bridge End Garage about the amount of parking associated with the business that is taking place on the adjacent old road and verges. This is causing issues for others using the road, and it was believed that a national cycle route passes along the road. It was **Agreed** to place a note on the National Highways and W&FC reporting systems.

129/24 The Annual Parish Meeting: The representative from BT (Digital Voice Switch over) has offered to do a virtual presentation on the night. This was considered but not felt to be manageable in the context of the meeting. The main speaker is likely to be Cllr Forshaw on LEAP and Cllr. Battye will report on W&FC activity. Otherwise, the poster with indicative Agenda has been prepared and the event has been publicised on the website. Village organisations have been invited to attend and there has been a good response to the request. The formal Agenda and Minutes will be circulated to Councillors beforehand and made available in hard copy (and on the website for attendees). Cllr Atfield will arrange for refreshments to be available.

130/24 Open Actions Not Covered Elsewhere on the Agenda

- a) **Levens Traffic Management:** The following reports were noted:
- Levens Lane footpath:** The feasibility study into the Levens Lane scheme has been submitted to W&FC and is understood to consider every possible option. It remains under initial consideration and cannot yet be shared but Cllr. Battye will continue to liaise with Highways and report back on developments.
 - Traffic Management within the village:** Information is awaited on the outcome of the impact that the cones are having on the road in the region of the Playing Fields. There was discussion about their effectiveness based on spacing (the gap between them is too big). Cllr. Battye will seek an update on this initiative and request an additional cone to reduce the space between them.
 - Road Safety Improvement Scheme:** Cllr. Battye is pursuing funding for the following improvements:
 - A passing place in the vicinity of Guy Paton's house.
 - Safety improvements around the school (possible zig-zag lines) and at the Church Road junction.
 - Repainting of white-lining, faded Slow and other road markings.
 - Children Playing signs including at Meadow Wood and on Greengate – though these are not Highways responsibility.
 - 20-m.p.h. Initiative:** W&FC will host a Levens specific briefing on the process via a Teams meeting on 01 April at 10.30 a.m. Cllrs. Atfield, Battye, Burrow and Rogerson will attend.
 - Recent road works and works on the A590:** Re-surfacing and white-lining has been completed in certain areas of the village. The 50-m.p.h. speed limit on the A6 had been extended past Heversham and towards Levens village. Work on the installation of average speed cameras on the A590 continues. National Highways are thought to have been responsible for the lopping of saplings at the Heaves and Church Road junctions with the A590. This work was left lines of unsightly stumps and will be brought to the attention of National Highways.

b) Woodland Management: The recommendations in the Tree Health and Safety Report will be implemented when appropriate later in the year. Trees in poor condition on the western side of the junction of the A590 with Church Road have been raised with the land agent at Dallam and a response is awaited.

c) Parish Assets and Land

- i. **Brigsteer Road Picnic site:** The walling is due to be completed in March. A draft text for an information board has been circulated and comments were invited.
- ii. **Coronation Orchard:** The levelling of the site has been completed, and trees have been procured from the South Lakeland Orchards Group. The RPA Capital Grant Scheme (for boundary walling) is expected to re-open in the near future and an application will be submitted for the renovation of the roadside boundary wall. Additional environmental gains will be built into the scheme and could include new hedging. Design elements for the entrance between the site and the affordable houses plot will be considered.
- iii. **Allotments:** The Clerk confirmed that one vacant plot has been filled from the waiting list and that all rents for 2024-25 had been paid. Invoices for 2025-26 will be sent out at the beginning of April. Improvements to the water supply to individual plots are due to be implemented and number of requests were raised including getting notice of shoot dates and the possibility of getting the adjacent field topped to reduce the thistle burden. These will be followed up. The Clerk clarified the VAT situation whereby if VAT is not charged to tenants then it cannot be reclaimed on the rent paid to the superior landlord (Levens Hall Estates). This will result in a small loss in 2025-26 however this will be regularised in future years.

d) Electric Vehicle Charging Points: There has been no further update on this scheme.

e) Parish Emergency Plan: Cllr. Forshaw had submitted his apologies and his update will be presented to the next meeting

f) Brigsteer and Underbarrow Bridges: By way of update, it was confirmed that the Brigsteer Bridge weight restriction had been increased to 7.5 tonnes on 28 February.

131/24 Correspondence Received: Other than the routine receipt of communications from regional agencies, including various dates for engagement meetings on current initiatives (circulated as appropriate) the following correspondence (excluding items discussed in the meeting) was noted:

- a) 11/02/2025 from R. Binley: A new resident to the village enquiring about the possibility of a footpath down Levens Lane. A reply with update had been sent.

132/24 Future Agenda Items:

- a) Follow-up on the current Agenda items.

133/24 Date of the Next Meeting:

The Annual Parish Meeting will be held on 18 March 2025.

The next Ordinary Meeting of the Parish Council will be held on Tuesday 08 April 2025 in the Methodist Church, Levens.

The meeting closed at 9.44 p.m.

Signed (Chairman) Date.....