

# Levens Parish Council

**MINUTES of the Ordinary Meeting of the Parish Council held on 16 April 2024 in Levens Methodist Church commencing at 7.30 p.m.**

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

**In Attendance:** M. R. Curry (Clerk) and 1 member of the public.

**126/23 Apologies for Absence:** All Councillors were in attendance and no other apologies had been received.

**127/23 Declarations of Interest:** The following Declarations of Interest were noted:

- a) Cllrs. Bagot and Mason in matters concerning then Levens Lane footpath
- b) Cllrs Atfield, Battye and Holmes in respect of any matters to do with the Levens Playing Fields
- c) Cllr. Battye in respect of the request for a grant for the Levens Art Trail

**128/23 Minutes:** It was **Resolved** that the Chairman be authorised to sign the Minutes of the Ordinary Meeting of the Council held on 12 March 2024 as a true record.

**129/23 Public Participation:** No matters were raised by the public.

**130/23 Reports:**

- a) **Reports from Councillors attending meetings:**
  - i. Cllr. Battye reported on the successful litter pick held on the previous Saturday and recorded thanks to Sheila Watson for organising this.
  - ii. Cllr. Holmes had attended a meeting of the Lynster Farmers Group that had discussed conditions in the Lyth Valley. Concern had been expressed about the retention of water in the valley and how much wetter it was becoming as a result of the current level of drainage and increased rainfall. It was suggested that this will cause negative environmental impact and could affect local wildlife including lowland curlew breeding success. In response to a question, Cllr. Holmes confirmed that the Group is liaising with the EA on these issues.
- b) **Westmorland & Furness Council (W&FC):** Cllr Battye reported as follows:
  - i. The Bus Improvement Service Plan which had been circulated to Councillors in late March. The consultation period provides an opportunity for local communities to submit thoughts on the level of service they would like and runs to the end of April.
  - ii. W&FC are commencing a review of local street lighting and want to work more closely with local communities to try to streamline the system. This is an important initiative and could result in lights being turned off at agreed times to improve the dark sky environment and reduce energy consumption. A further session is to be held in June. Cllr. Battye will report back on progress.
- c) **Police:** Recent editions of Focus had been circulated, but there had been no items of specific relevance to Levens.

**131/23 Finance**

- a) **Receipts** - The following receipts in the period 01 March – 31 March 2024 were noted:
  - i. Salary Refund Project: (25/03/23-27/02/24) £ 3,658.00
  - ii. VAT Refund: (Q2 23-24 & Q3 23-24) £ 418.00
  - iii. Salary Refund from Levens Charity to PC (full year - 2023-24) £ 600.00
  - iv. Refund of Project Audit fees 2022-23 paid by PC £ 1,400.00

The following payments had been advised but were not on the March statement:

  - v. Christmas Event: Receipts as advised by Cllr. D. Rogerson: £ 760.80
  - vi. W&FC: Notification of pending CIL receipt (development to be confirmed) £ 2,063.03
- b) **Payments:** The following payments were **Approved**:
  - i. M R Curry: Salary March 2024 - (PC: £453.24; Project: £329.98; Charity: £32.68; Charity Balance annual allowance: £95.32; Wage adjustment (u/p Oct): £0.09; Mileage: £5.40; Exes £22.97. A salary adjustment from that shown on the wage slip was noted to take account of HMLR expenses (£6.00) re the Orchard and £3.00 underpaid on the cheque for February (although the amount approved was correct) Total payment: £ 948.68
  - ii. PAYE: Months 10-12: £ 711.68
  - iii. Levens Hall Estates: Allotment Rent 2024 ((approved subject to confirmation) £ 432.00
  - iv. Levens Institute: Hire of Institute for the Annual Parish Meeting: £ 18.00
  - v. CALC – Annual Subscription 2024-25: £ 315.99
  - vi. Tom Hecht – Annual webhosting fee: £ 35.65

vii. Mitchinsons Payroll Administration to 05 April 2024: £ 144.00

viii. Adam Kirk: Costs for recent tree and woodland work: Amount to be advised.

- c) **Bank Reconciliation** and report on Ring-Fenced Funds at 31 March 2024: The bank reconciliation at 31 March showing a balance of £14,799.87 was noted and signed by the Chairman as a correct record. Two cheques totalling £100.00 remain unpresented. The ring-fenced funds held by the Parish Council remain at £2,100 for woodland and £1,381.26 in respect of the Christmas event (to be augmented by the return of £708.80 from the 2023 event).
- d) **Annual Audit:** The Clerk reported that notification of audit had been received and that arrangements were in hand. Councillors acknowledged the complexity of the audit and **Approved** the commissioning of external support for the process at a cost commensurate with previous years.
- e) **Governance Documents:** The Clerk advised that governance documents need to be approved annually. Apart from the Asset Register and the Risk Register, he confirmed that Standing Orders, Financial Regulations, The Code of Conduct and all other policies listed on a Schedule previously circulated and visible on the website had been reviewed and updated where necessary. He advised that Councillors could approve them. It was **Agreed** unanimously that they be approved and the 2024 versions would be uploaded to the website. Updates to the Asset Register and Risk Register will be presented at the next meeting for approval.
- f) **Levens Art Group:** There was discussion on this based on updated information from the Group. It was **Agreed** that they should make a formal application for support to Levens Charity.

### 132/23 Levens Community Project

- a) **Levens Community Project Advisory Group (PAG):** Following a meeting of PAG on 02 April Cllr. Mason reported as follows:
- Sale of Plots:**

Plot 1, Cotes: Sale is proceeding and the purchasers are keen to complete as soon as possible. Outstanding enquiries on drainage matters are in hand via respective solicitors.
  - Underhill:** It was noted that Tony Hills has formally accepted the electricity quote of £42,092.11 + VAT (total £50,510.53) received on 23 October 2023 as approved by the Council at Minute 68/23(a)(ii). The first cheque payment was stopped for administrative reasons, but a second has now been raised. Once receipt is acknowledged, the sum will be reclaimed from Infrastructure Grant.
  - New Village Hall:** Work to lead electricity supply to site is underway and this will include running the water pipe along the same route. The sale of stone continues and a schedule of sales is being maintained.
  - Tenders:** Five companies returned tenders by the due date of 04 April together with the estimate produced for the Project by external consultants. Following a meeting of PAG with Tony Hills on 14 April, Councillors **Agreed** PAG's recommendation that he should produce a briefing paper for discussion by PAG and then the PC. This is likely to involve competitive interviews with contractors to establish who is offering best value. Until this process has been completed the tenders need to be kept confidential.
  - Project Management and Review of Finance:** There will be a further report on the strategic forecast for the Project when the tenders have been fully evaluated.
  - Community Ownership Fund:** A new Expression of Interest has been submitted in the sum of £250,000 and accepted. Work has started on completing the detailed application form.
  - Cash Reserves** and Funds held in HSBC current account:
    - HSBC Current Account: The bank reconciliation at 23 March showing a balance of £22,469.89 was signed by the Chairman as a correct record. Unpresented cheques totalling £8,278.00 were noted.
    - Investment (Deposit) Account: Funds at 31 March 2024 were £1,314,108.08 which included £6,496.90 gross interest to 29 February. The transfer of £50,000 from the Deposit Account to the Current Account to cover the payment for electricity at Underhill (to be reclaimed from Infrastructure Grant) was **Ratified**.
- b) **Payments Required:** No payments were presented as requiring approval.

### 133/23 Planning Applications:

- a) **Schedule of Planning Applications:** Updates to the Planning Schedule on 15 April had been circulated and the following were noted:

PC Ref	Application No.	Location	Proposal	Status
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28.	2024/0046/FPA	1 Low Pastures Levens LA8 8QH	Int & ext alts inc single storey ext to W with glazed roof terrace over. Single story ext to E elevation & alts to driveway.	Objections submitted 14/02/2024 and 04/04/24.
<b>It was noted</b> that the Planning Portal still showed this as to be a delegated decision despite the Parish Council objections which means it should go to Planning Committee. Cllr. Battye will investigate this.				
29.	2024/0232/FPA	Lakesway Holiday Home & Lodge Park	Erection of leisure and spa facility building and associated infrastructure	Circulated to Councillors 20/02/24 & 07/03/2024. Objection submitted 14 March and acknowledged. Decision pending.
A representation from a parishioner about the number of pitches exceeding the original planning consent had been received via the PC website. Despite being out of time, it was <b>Agreed</b> to forward this to planning.				
31.	2024/0361/FPA	Levens Village Shop Levens LA8 8ND	1 <sup>st</sup> floor extension to provide additional holiday accommodation to support the shop business	The applicants had given notice that the plans were not going ahead for now. As a result, the PC had not submitted comment.
32.	2024/0485/FPA	Bridge End Garage, LA8 8EL	Application for the erection of advertisement board in connection with current development	Submitted to Cllrs. by email. No objections received and submitted.
33.	24/0616/NMA	Wain Gap, Heaves LA8 8DX	Non-material amendment to approved consent SL/2015/0844 – self-catering proposals	Noted as non-material

**b) Other Planning Matters:**

**Shepherd's Mill:** Cllr. Burrow reported that she and Cllr. Battye had met with the Valuation Officer who had advised that her Team is unable to assist until the building becomes fit for occupation.

**134/23 Parish Council Elections - May 2024:** The Clerk reported that he had submitted 7 sets of nomination papers to W&FC before the deadline date of 04 April. W&FC had subsequently issued a Statement of Persons Nominated amounting to 7 names for the 8 available places (i.e. no other nominations had been received). Those nominated were: Cllrs. Atfield, Burrow, Battye, Holmes, Mason, Rogerson and Willacy. Cllr. Bagot had not sought nomination to the new Council. A Notice of the Result of an Uncontested Election had been issued on 10 April confirming that those nominated were duly elected as Councillors on Levens Parish. The Annual Meeting of the new Parish Council must be held within 14 days of the date of the election (02 May 2024) and Levens has its scheduled for Tuesday 14 May. On that date a vacancy will arise and the Parish Council may fill this by co-option without notice.

**135/23 Levens Charity:**

- a) **Next meeting of the Trustees:** The Clerk reported that he should have end of year figures in the next few days and will arrange for a meeting of the Appointed Trustees to receive the Financial Report.
- b) **Payments:** An invoice for training on Charity management attended by the Clerk had been received and payment was **Approved:** £ 30.00
- c) **Levens Playing Fields Grant:** The Clerk reported the receipt of updated information on 15 April (i.e. the day before this meeting) which he had circulated. It was **Agreed** that the detail needs to be considered to ensure that the conditions of the £5,000 grant previously agreed in principle have been satisfactorily met.

**136/23 Open Actions Not Covered Elsewhere on the Agenda**

- a) Levens Traffic Management: The following reports were noted:
  - i) Levens Lane footpath: Cllr. Battye confirmed that a new Highways Officer has been appointed and that she will work with that officer to arrange for a meeting as part of the design / feasibility study. Cllr. Bagot mentioned the following points:
    - Owner's consent will be essential and must be kept in mind for any proposal
    - Those promoting the scheme need to recognise that Levens Hall land is classed as Exempt Land and any proposal will need consent from the Capital Taxes Office of HMRC
  - ii) Traffic Management within the village: The Highways Officer responsible for submitting plans for lining options for the school had responded to an enquiry from the Clerk by asking for any additional proposals that the Parish Council might have. Cllr. Burrow reminded the meeting that the previous engagement with Highways had resulted in them undertaking to put a plan together for both the school and the wider village, but this had not been forthcoming. Cllr. Battye was asked to speak to senior officers about this commitment. The Clerk was asked to see what records there are of

previous correspondence and summarise the earlier concerns in a new note to Highways and request new engagement.

- iii) 20-m.mph. initiative: The outcome of the recent application was still awaited.
- iv) Bus Service Improvement Plan – this matter had been discussed under Cllr. Battye’s earlier report.
- b) Woodland management: The following reports were noted:
  - i) Cllr. Mason reported that further work had been done by Adam Kirk resulting in a significant tidying up of the woodland at Cotes. Saleable timber was being brought together and a formal process is to be prepared for its sale.
  - ii) Tree Health and Safety - Update Survey: Treescapes Consultancy are yet to commence the survey work.
- c) Parish Assets and Land:
  - i) Brigsteer Road Site: Cllr. Mason is waiting for a final quote for the walling work.
  - ii) Jubilee Orchard: The Clerk confirmed that a full application for grant from the Coronation Community Orchard Fund had been submitted and a positive response received. The Fund organisers had requested clarification of a couple of points and a response is to be provided. If successful, initial work will commence in 2024 including ground preparation, purchase and planting of trees. A further grant for capital works from the RPA can be made in 2025.
- d) Request to site a memorial bench on Parish Land – As a result of follow-up, the enquirer has expressed a preference for a memorial bench to be sited on the Green – which is not Parish Council land. The Clerk will explain the position to the enquirer.
- e) Strimming of the flower-rich site at the Crossings by the National Trust was noted.
- f) Handyman: Kevin Holmes will advise Andy Brayshaw of work required - initially at the Brigsteer Road picnic site. Cllr Rogerson will try to speak with the maintenance team at Beathwaite Gardens regarding the overgrowth of trees onto the Lowgate verge.
- g) Parish Website: It was **Agreed** to offer a retainer to Tom Hecht and Cllr. Atfield will confirm the amount with him.
- h) The Annual Parish Meeting: It was noted that the Annual Meeting had been held successfully on 19 March with the active participation of Parish groups and individuals.
- i) Levens Greening Campaign: Cllr. Battye reported that a talk on Planting for Pollinators by Cumbria Wildlife Trust was to be held on 22 April. Plans for the Great Big Green Week in early June were developing.
- j) Parish Emergency Plan: It was noted that there had been no response to the previous trawl for a volunteer leader of this initiative. Further consideration will be given on how to proceed.

**137/23 Correspondence:** In addition to the routine circulation of matters from CALC and other Agencies, a Schedule of Correspondence had been circulated and the following items (not otherwise dealt with in the meeting) were noted:

Cllr. Burrow reported that she had received several representations about speeding traffic entering the village from Whitegates and it was **Agreed** to reference this in correspondence with Highways.

**138/23 Future Agenda Items:**

- a) Matters that might be advised prior to the next meeting; otherwise follow-up to the current Agenda items.

**139/23 Date of the Next Meeting:**

The next meeting of the Parish Council will be its Annual Meeting to be held on 14 May 2024. Before closing the meeting, the Chairman referenced the standing down of Cllr. Susie Bagot who had served on the Parish Council for over 40 years. Councillors had already given personal tributes and expressions of gratitude for this long-standing and invaluable commitment to the community and the Chairman now requested that the Minutes formally record the thanks and appreciation of the Parish Council for this service.

The meeting closed at 9.47 p.m.

Signed ..... (Chairman)      Date.....