

# Levens Parish Council

## MINUTES of the Ordinary Meeting of the Parish Council held on 09 July 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.

**25/24 Apologies for Absence:** Apologies had been received from Cllrs R. Atfield and M. Willacy.

**26/24 Declarations of Interest:** The following Declarations of Interest were noted:

- a) Cllrs Battye and Holmes in respect of any matters to do with the Levens Playing Fields
- b) Cllr. Mason in respect of Item 8(a): planning application -Heaves Farm

**27/24 Minutes:** It was **Resolved** that the Chairman be authorised to sign the Minutes of the Ordinary Meeting of the Council held on 11 June 2024 as a true record.

**28/24 Public Participation:** A member of the public present thanked the Parish Council for cutting back encroaching vegetation on roadside verges but asked if the Parish Council could consider what might be done about the increasing number of cars parked on pavements. The Chairman said that the observation would be noted in the Minutes and referred to the Police. In response to a further question the Chairman confirmed that the firewood recently moved to the site of the new village hall is subject to enquiry for sale en bloc which the Parish Council is considering.

### 29/24 Reports:

#### a) Reports from Councillors attending meetings:

- i. Cllr. Rogerson reported that two new members had been recruited to the Levens web team. The Team is reflecting on whether advertising space might be made available on the site and if this might be for a consideration. Discussions ensued about the pros and cons and whether this might be by way of a donation to Levens Charity. Cllr. Rogerson also confirmed that notice of the recent bridge closures on the Brigsteer and Underbarrow roads had been posted on the website and Facebook and Councillors will be updated as details develop.
- ii. Cllr. Rogerson also confirmed that he had attended the AGM of the Institute. It had been reported that finances were relatively healthy. The downstairs room needed cleaning and painting but was becoming increasingly damp and was showing signs of vermin.

#### b) **Westmorland & Furness Council (W&FC):** Cllr Battye reported that Council services had been maintained during the run up to the recent general election and reported:

- i. The Council and Cumbria Action for Sustainability (CAfS) are promoting the Cold to Cosy initiative with a focus on village halls and the Locality Board has grants available for such initiatives.
- ii. The Climate Change Team is offering biodiversity assessments of Parish Council land and Councillors felt this could be worth pursuing.
- iii. The Community Power initiative designed to deliver greater services at local level continues to develop. A Family Support Strategy is being developed which includes ideas for youth engagement and active well-being.

#### c) **Police:** Recent editions of Focus had been circulated, but there had been no items of specific relevance to Levens. Cllr. Battye reported that the local PCSO had held an informal surgery in the village in the previous week. The Clerk confirmed that he had written to the Police and Crime Commissioner asking for the reinstatement of periodic visits to Parish Councils by PCSOs and a reply was awaited.

### 30/24 Finance

#### a) **Receipts:** To note receipts for the period 01 May – 30 June 2024: The Clerk reported that income totalling £767.62 had been received during the period. Of this, £352.62 was Council Tax Grant from W&FC (the last year that this will be awarded) whilst the rest was made up of allotment, car park and land rents.

#### b) **Payments Required:** To note and approve payment of the following:

- i. M R Curry: Salary June 2024 - (PC: £316.22; Project: £215.92; Charity: £35.87; Mileage: £21.60 and expenses of £3.89) **Total:** £ 593.50
- ii. HMRC - PAYE: Months 1-3 2024-25: £ 560.59
- iii. Printing Plus – Summer Newsletter: £ 154.00

- iv. Malcolm Richardson: Accountancy Support 2024-25 AGAR: £ 196.20
- c) **Bank Reconciliation:** Councillors noted the bank reconciliation at 30 June showing a bank statement balance of £25,803.62 (£25,544.52 net after unpresented cheques).
- d) **Annual Governance and Accountability Return (AGAR):** The Clerk reported that the 2023-24 AGAR documentation had been submitted to the External Auditor and that the Notice of the Period for the Exercise of Public Rights had been publicised. On the latter, Councillors confirmed that despite an omission in the Minute of the meeting held on 10 October 2023, they had a clear recollection of the Clerk's report on the External Auditor's Report for the 2022-23 financial year. This had included the Auditor's observation that only 22 days (subsequently corrected to 25 days) had been provided for the exercise of public rights, instead of the statutory 30 days. Councillors had at the time noted the need to ensure that this was correctly calculated in future years. Cllr. Burrow referred to her own notes taken at the time and confirmed that the External Auditor's recommendations had been duly reported the previous October.

### 31/24 Levens Community Project

- a) **Levens Community Project Advisory Group (PAG):** Cllr. Mason reported that there had been a meeting of PAG on 02 July attended by Tony Hills. The main item on the Agenda was to consider arrangements for the interviews of three contractors who had submitted tenders for the construction costs of the new village hall. Those interviews had been held earlier in the day – see below for the report.  
Otherwise, PAG had discussed:
  - i. Sale of Plots: One plot at Church Hill remains to be sold. There has been recent interest but offers remain below the Agent's recommended asking price.
  - ii. Underhill: There was no recent work to report on at Underhill.
  - iii. New Village Hall: The cabinet for the electricity supply has been completed. The sale of stone from site continues.
  - iv. **Tenders:** Tony Hills confirmed that contractors had been invited to attend during the morning of 09 July for interviews of approximately one hour apiece to be held in the Methodist Church. Following a brief introduction about the Project, they would be asked to give a presentation of approximately 30 minutes to promote their bid and then face questions from members of PAG. There was discussion about the scope of questions and domestic matters relating to the exercise.
  - v. 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.
  - vi. Community Ownership Fund: The Fund remains closed for bids because of the General Election. The re-opening of Round 4 is awaited.
  - vii. Cash Reserves and Funds held in HSBC current account:
    - HSBC Current Account: The bank reconciliation at 23 June showed a balance of £14,130.56 in the HSBC current account.
    - Investment (Deposit) Account: The reconciled balance at 30 June 2024 was £1,435,975.27 which included £6,836.81 gross interest to 06 June and the proceeds of sale of Plot 1 at Cotes amounting to £160,846.00.
    - No payments were presented as requiring approval.
- b) **Contractor Interviews held on 09/07/2024:** Cllr. Mason reported that the interviews had taken place as planned. Five invitations to tender had been issued and the quotes submitted were all significantly above the original build cost estimate. This had been anticipated as a result of unavoidable delays, rising costs because of Covid, subsequent inflation and pressure on prices due to energy costs and global instability. Contractors had been requested to undertake a value engineering exercise to see what reductions they could bring to their quotes and these revisions were included in their presentations. Costs remain relatively high and discussions are taking place to see what further savings might be achieved. PAG recognises however that it is important to make a start on construction as soon as possible to avoid the impact of further cost rises. Cllr. Battye asked how the final appointment will be made, and it was confirmed that the decision would be taken by the Parish Council, possibly in September, based on a full report from PAG.

### 32/24 Planning Applications:

a) **Schedule of Planning Applications:** Updates to the Planning Schedule on 09 July had been circulated and the following were noted:

PC Ref	Application No.	Location	Proposal	Status
12.	SL/2023/0563	Bridge End Garage	Discharge of conditions	Part Discharged
28.	2024/0046/FPA	1 Low Pastures Levens LA8 8QH	Int & external alterations inc. single storey to W with glazed roof terrace over. Single story extension to E elevation & alts to driveway.	Objections submitted 14/02/2024 and 04/04/24. <b>Approved</b> with conditions (see note below)
<b>It was noted</b> that Cllr. Battye had attended the Planning Committee to represent Parish Council objections. Notwithstanding this representation the application was approved. Councillors thanked Cllr Battye for attending.				
29.	2024/0232/FPA	Lakesway Holiday Home & Lodge Park	Erection of leisure and spa facility building and associated infrastructure	Objection submitted 14 March and acknowledged. Decision pending.
<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.				
32.	2024/0485/FPA	Bridge End Garage, LA8 8EL	Application for the erection of advertisement board in connection with current development	Approved
36.	7/2024/5329	Sizergh Castle LA8 8AE	Surfacing of existing unsurfaced track. No provision for consultation	For information only
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
38.	24/1111/FPA	Heaves Farm, Levens	Extension to dairy livestock building	No Objection (see note below)
Cllr. Mason stood down from the Chair and left the room for consideration of this item. The item was chaired by Cllr. Rogerson.				

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

**33/24 Parish Council Vacancy:** The Clerk reported that the vacancy for one Parish Councillor is publicised on the website, noticeboard and the village Facebook page. Prospective Councillors have been invited to submit an Expression of Interest by 31 August to enable the Parish Council to co-opt at its meeting on 10 September. If no interest is expressed, then the Parish Council will co-opt without further notice.

### 34/24 Levens Charity:

- a) **Next meeting of the Trustees:** The Clerk reported that a meeting of the Appointed Trustees is still to be arranged.
- b) **Closure of the Savin Brow Quarry Charity:** The Clerk reported that, following liaison with the Charity Commission, arrangements are now in hand for the closure of the Savin Brow Charity and the transfer of its assets to the Levens Charity.
- c) **Levens Playing Fields Grant:** The payment of a grant of £5,000 as previously discussed and agreed in principle was formally **Approved**.

**35/24 Parish Council Summer Newsletter:** The delivery and distribution of the Newsletter was noted and the content approved.

**36/24 Bridge Closures:** Councillors received and noted a report from Cllr. Battye on the history leading to the closure of the Brigsteer and Underbarrow Bridges by Westmorland and Furness Council (Highways) as of 12 June 2024 for an indefinite period. This was considered a health and safety imperative following a report based on the structural integrity of the bridges. A bridge in Canada with similar design has collapsed with fatal consequences. Cllr. Battye acknowledged the inconvenience and disruption to local communities and said that the Council was doing all that it could to seek as quick a solution as possible. It was arranging a public meeting in Underbarrow Institute on 11 July and there will be follow-up briefing meetings as the situation unfolds. Levens is fortunate in its proximity to the A590 but will support efforts to get this situation resolved.

**37/24 Parish Assets and Land:** Councillors reviewed the outcomes from the informal village tour held on 11 June and noted in particular:

- a) **Maintenance work:** Following recommendations made on the tour, strimming and cutting had been done by Andy Brayshaw in the areas identified and some remains still to be done. Councillors were

asked to let Cllr. Holmes know if they were aware of any appropriate sites that needed doing. There had been some negative comment on the village Facebook page though others had commented that it was necessary from a road safety point of view. Cllr Holmes stressed that the work had been done after 01 July to minimise environmental impact and had made a statement to that effect. Cllr Battye pointed out that the verges were the responsibility of W&FC, but others felt that it had become evident in recent years that the Council was not cutting them. Cllr Battye was asked to establish whether there was an active programme in place.

- b) Brigsteer Road site: Cllr. Mason reported that the go-ahead has been given for work on the boundary walling to proceed. Costs will be met from the NISA grant.
- c) Jubilee Orchard: The Clerk confirmed that the grant application to the Coronation Community Orchard Fund had been approved in the sum of £4,500 and the Funding Agreement signed. This will cover the first phase of the work to start as soon as possible, including ground preparation, access and tree acquisition and planting later in the year. A second phase with grant from elsewhere will improve the boundaries and access to the site.
- d) Memorial Bench: Cllr Battye confirmed that she had spoken with the donor and assured her that a W&FC officer will be in touch to discuss options for placement on The Green.
- e) Reinstatement of land at Nelson Square: Following work by Electricity Northwest Ltd., proper reinstatement of the ground is still required and Cllr. Mason will pursue this.
- f) Woodland Management: The Clerk will ask Treescapes Consultancy when they intend to commence the update of the Tree Health and Safety Report. The Land Agents for Beathwaite Gardens have responded positively to the approach about cutting back overhanging branches. They are hoping Electricity Northwest will be doing some clearance from their wires in Autumn/Winter.

#### **38/24 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 an on-site meeting with Highways Officers will take place on 17 July. Cllr. Mason will also attend.
  - ii) Traffic Management within the village: Cllr Battye will raise this at the upcoming meeting with Highways Officers, but it was **Agreed** to raise again direct with Helen Karaaslan.
  - iii) 20-m.mph. initiative: Levens was not included in Phase 1 plans but there will be a further opportunity when Phase 2 is rolled out.
  - iv) Bus Service: Councillors had noted the pending termination of the 530/531/532 (Cartmel - Grange-over-Sands - Levens - Kendal) service by Kirkby Lonsdale Coaches due to finish on 21 July. The Council is trying to arrange a replacement service and Cllr. Battye will monitor this and report back. A letter for a resident with constructive suggestions on service timings was noted and will be sent to Cllr. Battye.
- b) Parish Website: Cllr Rogerson's earlier report had been noted.
- c) Allotments: Most tenants have paid the annual rent and returned new allotment agreements. Cllr. Mason will take a look at some maintenance work that has been requested.
- d) Levens Greening Campaign: Cllr. Battye reported on a successful series of events and activities for Great Big Green Week. A summer / autumn programme will be rolled out.

**39/24 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:

A resident had reported what appeared to be clumsy and untidy tree cutting of Parish Council trees on Underhill by Dobsons. Cllr. Mason undertook to have a word about if and how such work should be done. It was noted that details of the consultation period for the review of the W&FC Local Plan had been circulated. There is likely to be a call for sites as part of the developing plan.

#### **40/24 Future Agenda Items:**

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

#### **41/24 Date of the Next Meeting:**

The next meeting Ordinary Meeting of the Parish Council will be held on Tuesday 10 September 2024 in the Methodist Church.

The meeting closed at 9.05 p.m.

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