

Levens Parish Council

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

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

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

Note: The Parish Council may be referred to as the PC and Westmorland and Furness Council as W&FC where appropriate in these Minutes.

66/25 Apologies for Absence: Cllrs. H. Burrow and D. Forshaw had submitted apologies.

67/25 Declarations of Interest and Requests for Dispensation: No declarations of interest were submitted and no requests for dispensation had been received.

68/25 Minutes: It was **Resolved** that the Chair be authorised to sign the Minutes of the Ordinary Meeting of the Council held on 14 October 2025 as a true record.

69/25 Public Participation: Mr Morris raised the following matters:

- a) Status of the Lyth Valley drainage dykes: Cllr. Mason said that the Environment Agency has reduced its level of maintenance work on the dykes and sluices. However, the Lynster Farmers Group (a voluntary local group) is working on plans to ensure the effectiveness of the system.
- b) Footpaths: Several footpaths still require attention. The Clerk will get confirmation of exactly which stretches require work.
- c) Fingerposts: Mr Morris confirmed that new fingerposts had been installed between Lowgate and Underhill.

70/25 Reports:

- a) **Reports from Councillors attending meetings:** Cllr. Rogerson reported on a Teams meeting with James Hulme to follow up on the provision of public electric vehicle charging points in Levens. This included a virtual walk around the village to identify potential areas for the installation of charging points. The opportunities had been noted for further investigation and whilst the confirmation of actual locations is some time off, the meeting had provided a good base for progress.
- b) **Westmorland & Furness Council (W&FC):** Cllr Battye reported on the following initiatives:
 - i) Devolution: The Cumbria Combined Authority (CCA) will be established in early 2026, operating for a year without a Mayor, before Cumbria's first Mayoral election in May 2027.
 - ii) The Community Governance Review (CGR): The CGR has been launched, focusing on matters relating to parish councils, including consideration of size, boundaries and the number of councillors with options to consider merging, creating or abolishing parishes. A public consultation has been launched and is at: <https://consult.westmorlandandfurness.gov.uk/westmorland-and-furness-council/community-governance-review-consultation/>. The consultation is open to the 8th of December, after which there will be a further consultation on recommendations in the new year.
 - iii) The Parking Review: A review to harmonise the provision of parking throughout W&F continues.
 - iv) W&FC Budget 2026-27: Work continues on preparation of the budget for 2026-27. Finalising an agreed budget is likely to be a challenging task.
- c) **Police:** Cumbria Policing Pledge: Cllrs Battye and Forshaw had represented the PC at the on-line meeting on 20 October which had been an informative and positive session. The Police launched the doorbell webcam scheme (FUSIS) which encourages residents to register CCTV or camera-based doorbells. This will provide a database that might be helpful in the solving of crime or anti-social behaviour. The scheme is supported by a poster which will be uploaded on the village website and Facebook page.

71/25 Finance

- a) **Receipts:** The following receipt was noted for the period 01-31 October 2025:

Car-park rent:	£ 40.00
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- b) **Payments Required:** The following payments were **Approved:**
 - i) M R Curry - Salary October (PC: £387.88; LCP: £164.56; Charity: £83.85
Expenses: £13.76; Mileage: £10.80: £ 660.85
 - ii) A. Brayshaw: Strimming - Village: £ 310.00
 - iii) A. Brayshaw: Cut back and tidy Plot 3: £ 180.00
 - iv) A. Brayshaw: Work on bus shelter at Levens Bridge: £ 265.00

- v) Paul Jones: Festive Lights - Christmas event (from Christmas earmarked fund): £ 224.03
- vi) Printing Plus: Winter Newsletter: £ 158.00

c) Bank Reconciliation and Ring-Fenced Funds:

- i) Bank Reconciliation: The bank reconciliation at 31 October (previously circulated) showed a balance of £23,389.71 as evidenced by the bank statement. Unpresented cheques amounted to £87.77p. The Chairman was **Authorised** to sign the bank statement.
- ii) Ring-fenced funds: The R-F funds are £6,919.28, split between Christmas Funds (£2,479.25), Woodland management (£2,200) and CIL funds (£2,240.03). The Clerk observed that when deducted from the 31 October balance of £23,302 (taking into account unpresented cheques) the net sum in hand is £16,383. When projected income of £5,694 to 31/03/2026 is added and projected expenditure of £10,983 deducted there is a projected end of year balance (or reserve) of £11,094. By rule of thumb, the level of reserves should roughly equate to the level of precept which in 2025-26 is £15,741 indicating a figure of approximately £4,500 lower than the optimum. However, the figure of £2,200 reserved for Woodland Management is included because the PC has decided to reserve it. Given that there is CIL money of £2,000 earmarked for woodland management and £1,500 in the current year budget, the £2,200 otherwise reserved for woodland management could be pulled out and used as general reserve should it be required. Bringing that into account would give £13,294. Though a little way short of the optimum, but in anticipation of positive outcomes to the final outturn for the remainder of the financial year, the Clerk judged that the PC would remain close to a suitable Reserves figure. However, this will be monitored in the remaining months of the financial year.

As a result of the discussion about woodland management, it was **Agreed** to procure quotes for thinning work opposite the new village hall and on several other sites.

- d) **Initial draft Budget 2026-27:** The Clerk produced a budget review to 31 October which projected a satisfactory outcome to the end of the financial year. This in turn formed the basis for the production of a first draft budget for 2026-27 which had been circulated. It was **Agreed** that Members would note the current projections in advance of a more detailed review to be considered in January.
- e) **Bank Mandate:** The Chair reported that Cllr. Burrow believes that she had responded to HSBC as requested and that the plan is now for him and Cllr. Burrow to discuss with the bank when she is sufficiently recovered from current illness.
- f) **Governance**
 - i) Assertion 10: Progress with ensuring compliance with Assertion 10 continues. Cllr. Rogerson will proceed with the creation of .org.uk email addresses for councillors. The website will be tested against required standards for compliance and the address amended as appropriate. The following documents will be uploaded as soon as approved
 - Accessibility Statement
 - Transparency Code
 - Freedom of Information Policy
 - Information Technology Policy
 - ii) Approval of Assertion 10 Documents: The Information Technology Policy was **Approved**. The Freedom of Information Policy was **Approved in principle** subject to clarification of a minor anomaly.
 - iii) Approval of Dedications Policy: A Dedications Policy (previously circulated in draft) was **Approved**.

72/25 Levens Community Project:

- a) **Levens Project Advisory Group:** Councillors **Approved** a recommendation from PAG to appoint Caroline Bate as a member of the Group to help with fund-raising initiatives. Otherwise, Cllr. Mason reported on the PAG meeting held on 04/11/2025 as follows:
 - i) Sale of Plot 3, Church Hill: Agents have recommended not to move the overhead electricity line and will prepare a graphic board to enhance the visual impression of the site. Once done the site will be remarketed at an asking price to be agreed. Andy Brayshaw has strimmed the site.
 - ii) Underhill: The PC agreed with a PAG recommendation that the electrical installation should take place at the same time as the as orchard work is completed. Armitstead Barnett will provide the valuations required for the new Business Case.
 - iii) New Village Hall: There has been no recent work on site to report. Several sales of stone have been invoiced recently.
 - iv) Tendering Process: A meeting between Tony Hills, John Sharples and representatives of PAG was held on 04 November. Tony Hills and John Sharples of ACS (Chartered Building Surveyors) will work together to revise and submit plans to W&FC for amendment and resolve the

outstanding Building Regulations issues. That should enable John Sharples to create a Bill of Quantities and propose build costs, following which next steps will be agreed.

The Parish Council **Agreed** the recommendation from PAG to formally engage ACS to provide Project Management and Quantity Surveying Services at a fee of £8,000 + VAT.

- v) Finance Review: The bank reconciliation at 23 October showed funds-in-hand in the current account of £23,790.64. The outstanding Capacity Grant from W&FC has now been paid. A VAT refund of £8,079.06 was due and a transfer of up to £15,000 to the Deposit account was **Agreed**. Funds in the Deposit Account at 30 October stood at £1,485,982.83.

b) To Approve payments: The following refunds to Levens Parish Council were **Approved**:

i) VAT Refunds due to PC, paid via Project:	£ 450.61
ii) Contribution to Annual Audit:	£ 666.75
iii) Project salary paid by Project:	<u>£ 3,769.26</u>
Total	<u>£ 4,886.62</u>

73/25 Planning Applications:

a) New Planning Applications Received:

- i) 2025/1948/OPA: Land to the rear of Little Garth, Lowgate LA8 8NJ. Application for outline consent for one self-build dwelling. It was noted that this was an application for outline planning consent with no detailed plans submitted. It was **Agreed** to submit No Comment at this stage.
- ii) 2025/1715/DISC: The Langdales, Levens LA8 8PJ. Approval of details reserved by Condition 3 (boundary hedge) attached to 2024/2299/FPA. After discussion, it was **Agreed** to submit No Comment

b) Schedule of Planning Applications: Updates to the Planning Schedule to 07 November had been circulated. The following were of specific note:

PC Ref	Application No.	Location	Proposal	Outcome
8.	2025/1913/PIP	Rockfield Stables, Levens LA8 8NU	Permission in Principle for residential development	Following agreement at the October meeting, an Objection to this application had been submitted on 04/11/25. Councillors expressed their thanks and appreciation to the Clerk for preparation of a comprehensive objection.

c) Other planning matters: No other planning issues were raised.

74/25 Levens Charity

- a) Savin Brow Quarry Charity:** The Black Rock investment fund has been closed and the sum of £247.65p received by the Levens Charity. Several cheques received for dividends cannot be paid in to the account as they are made out incorrectly. The Clerk is seeking to rectify this following which the Savin Brow Quarry will be removed from the Register of Charities.
- b) Funds for reinvestment:** Options for the reinvestment of capital assets have not yet been completed.

75/25 Open Actions Not Covered Elsewhere on the Agenda

a) Levens Traffic Management: The following reports were noted:

- i) **Levens Lane footpath:** This is on the list of Projects for potential support from W&FC CIL funds. Cllr. Battye is liaising with Highways over agreement of final specifications of the feasibility study. She and the Clerk will discuss the approach to Planning regarding the extant application which expires on 31 December.
- ii) **Traffic Management in the village:** The white lining work will be done as part of a larger tranche of road marking work to be put to contractors. Cllr. Battye will contribute £500, the £150 balance to be paid from the smaller CIL fund held by the PC. The SID on Bell Hill is not working well – Cllr Rogerson will take a look at the solar panel and battery set up.
- iii) **20-m.p.h. Initiative:** The proposal is currently awaiting approval of a Traffic Regulation Order following which a further starting procedure will commence. Cllr. Battye confirmed that there is no cost to the Parish Council in this process.

b) Other Highways Matters

- i) Flooding at Quags Farmhouse: Cllr. Battye and the Clerk confirmed that they had both submitted requests to W&FC Highways for urgent attention to this matter. Cllr. Battye understands that Highways have acknowledged that this is an important issue to resolve and have issued a works instruction for investigation / excavation.
- ii) 'Welcome to Levens' signs: Cllr. Rogerson said that there are three signs at entrances to the village that need improvement. Highways have confirmed that there will be a cost associated for the

installation of 'non-standard' signs and Cllr. Rogerson will look at design options and associated costs.

c) Parish Assets and Land

- i) Maintenance Work Required: All current maintenance work is now up to date.
- ii) Community Orchard and Roadside Boundary: Cllr. Mason is awaiting the outcome to the bid to the RPA for capital grant which he expects soon. When this is confirmed, work on the orchard and boundary will continue.
- iii) W&FC Tree Planting Initiative: As part of its One Tree per Resident Scheme, W&FC is inviting residents, community groups and local organisations to apply for free trees and hedge packs. Participants can choose from 10 native species of tree, provided as young saplings. The selection has been carefully chosen to ensure there are suitable options for pots, small gardens and larger outdoor spaces. Applications can be completed online and are open until Sunday 30 November. Further details are available on the Council's website.

d) Levens Parish Emergency Plan (LEAP): Cllr. Forshaw has sent his apologies but in a written note had confirmed that he is still waiting for the Community Foundation to progress the funding application.

e) Defibrillator: In the absence of Cllr. Burrow, it was agreed to defer this item to the next meeting.

76/25 Correspondence Received: Other than the routine receipt of communications from regional agencies, (circulated as appropriate) the following correspondence was noted:

- a) Local resident advising of a hate incident: Councillors were concerned to hear of this but understood that the subject of the abuse did not wish to report it formally but merely to raise awareness at this stage. On this basis, other than acknowledging the correspondence Councillors **Agreed** there was nothing it could do at this stage. The Chair will respond to the correspondent.
- b) Levens 10k Run: Letter received from Carolyn Keavan advising of the event to take place on 20 May 2026. Arrangements are as in previous years.
- c) Letter from resident raising a number of issues including:
 - i) Dog-fouling: to be advised that the PC is in liaison with the Dog Warden and new signs have gone up locally.
 - ii) White-lining at passing place: Should a Keep Clear or Passing Place sign be considered to strengthen the message at this point? Cllr. Battye will enquire for Highways view.
 - iii) Parking at Lloyds Garage, Gilpin Bridge: It was agreed that there is an issue here and that PCSO Park should be encouraged to take a look.
 - iv) Wood at the new village hall site: Cllr Mason is considering options for disposal.
 - v) Parking of Taylors vehicles on lay-byes: This is primarily an issue for an adjoining Parish Council but parking on the A590 is of concern. It is understood that alternative parking sites are being investigated and agreed to monitor this at this stage.
 - vi) Observations about a faulty streetlight were noted for report. The Chair will respond to this enquirer.
- d) Letter from resident on Meadow Wood concerning dogs not on leads on the highway: Cllr. Battye has taken this up with the Dog Warden. It was **Agreed** that the Clerk should make enquiries via PCSO Park on this matter.
- e) Letter from a resident raising concerns that Storey Homes have bought land adjoining Meadow Wood for development: The Parish Council has no knowledge of this. Cllr. Burrow has sent a note to Councillors which outlines the position in respect of the Local Plan and it was agreed that the Clerk would use this as the basis of a reply.

77/25 Future Agenda Items: Follow-up on the current Agenda items but also to include:

- a) Defibrillator
- b) Approval of Budget 2026-26 and Precept request

78/25 Date of the Next Meeting:

The next meeting of the Parish Council will be held on Tuesday 13 January 2026 in the Methodist Church, Levens.

The meeting closed at 9.42 p.m.

Signed (Chairman) Date.....