

Levens Parish Council

MINUTES of the Ordinary Meeting of the Parish Council held on 13 January 2026 in Levens Methodist Church commencing at 7.30 p.m.

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

In Attendance: M. R. Curry (Clerk) and two members 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.

79/25 Apologies for Absence: All Councillors were present. PCSO Park had submitted written apologies.

80/25 Minutes: It was **Resolved** that the Chair be authorised to sign the Minutes of the Ordinary Meeting of the Council held on 11 November 2025 as a true record.

81/25 Declarations of Interest and Requests for Dispensation: No declarations of interest were submitted and no requests for dispensation had been received. Cllr. Burrow asked for it to be noted that she would declare an interest if and when the proposed development off Greengate becomes formalised.

82/25 Public Participation: No matters were raised for consideration by those members of the public present.

83/25 Reports:

a) Reports from Councillors attending meetings:

- i) Cllr. Atfield had attended the CALC AGM on 15 November (held online as a replacement for the face-to-face meeting scheduled for 04 October but cancelled due to Storm Amy). 26 delegates had attended. As part of the usual business of an AGM, CALC announced the annual increase of the NALC portion of the subscription fees to Town and Parish Councils will be 3.6% in 2026/2027 and the CALC portion will increase by 3.5%. During a Q&A session it was acknowledged that the work devolving on Parish Councils and Clerks was increasing and there had been discussion about the status of the annual pay awards to employees.
- ii) Cllr. Atfield had also attended the online 'Winter Ready' event organised by W&FC at which they outlined their procedures for community support in the event of bad weather, including advice on gritting services.

b) Westmorland & Furness Council (W&FC): Cllr Battye reported on the following initiatives:

- i) Devolution: Work continues with the set-up of The Cumbria Combined Authority (CCA) which will be established in early 2026, operating for a year without a Mayor, before Cumbria's first Mayoral election in May 2027.
- ii) Budget: The 3-year Funding Settlement from central government is challenging and hard decisions will be taken at local level as a result. The Council Tax increase for 2026-27 is likely to be at its maximum 4.99%. Initiatives on raising revenue from garden waste disposal, car parking charges and other service areas are being reviewed as well as adopting cost-efficiency measures such as offering voluntary redundancies and rationalising car park enforcement throughout the region. Miranda Cannon has now taken up post as new Chief Executive, and it is anticipated that she will bring considerable experience to the strategic management of W&FC finances.
- iii) Local Plan: Work continues and initial assessment of the call for sites (for potential development) is entering its next phase. The local housing target has been raised to 1,300 p.a. and none of the 5 sites put forward for Levens has been deleted at this stage. However further work is required on detailed assessments, and it is likely to be as long as two years before the final plan is adopted. This prompted considerable discussion about the proposed development of approximately 54 houses on land off Greengate which had been the subject of a public consultation organised by the developers during the day. This site is not currently allocated for housing, but developers are benefitting from the fact that under the existing (legacy) Local Plan, W&FC cannot meet its 5-year housing supply target offering the opportunity for plans to be submitted for new developments. It was felt that sites already identified in the legacy Plan should be considered before major new developments are approved in advance of the new Plan. Following the relatively recent development at Meadow Wood which added 10% to the number of houses in the village this new proposal would add a further 10% and Councillors revisited their real concerns about the ability of the local infrastructure to cope with developments of this size. Water supply and waste-water disposal were highlighted as particularly vulnerable. Further discussion was deferred to Agenda Item 8(b) – Other Planning Matters.

iv) Other matters:

- The 20-m.p.h. initiative goes to the Locality Board in a couple of weeks as part of the implementation phase.
- W&FC is looking to support the development of small community sites to encourage the growth of pollinators as part of its green agenda.
- 'Children Playing' signs are under discussion and might be of value in Levens.
- Cllr. Battye is concerned about the number of pubs that have closed or are under threat in the locality and is looking at whether W&FC can provide any means of support.

c) **Police:** The local Newsletters have been circulated as published. The Clerk had received a note from PCSO Park to say that she was monitoring the parking of vehicles and occasional obstruction of the road by the garage at Gilpin Bridge and also that she had clarified the Police understanding of the requirements for dogs to be on leads on public roads.

84/25 Finance

a) **Receipts and Payments to 31 December 2025:** Receipts and payments since the last meeting were noted on the bank reconciliation (circulated). Receipts amounted to £4,949.54 primarily via £4,886.62 refunds from The Community Project. There was also an unidentified credit receipt of £50.00 and the Clerk will seek the source of this. Payments totalled £2,704.85 - all of which had been previously approved.

b) **Payments Required:** The following payments made by agreement between meetings were **Ratified**:

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| i) Levens Methodist Church – Room Hire April 2025-March 26: | £ 225.00 |
| ii) Armstrong Watson – VAT admin fee Q2 2025-26 | £ 150.00 |
| iii) M R Curry - Salary November (PC: £408.80; LCP: £203.50; Charity: £13.96;
Expenses: £16.14; Mileage: £21.60): | £ 664.00 |

The following payments were **Approved**:

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| iv) M R Curry – December (PC: £387.82; LCP: £129.90; Charity: £69.80;
Mileage: £13.50): | £ 601.02 |
| v) HMRC – PAYE/NI Q3 2025-26: | £ 621.85 |
| vi) CALC – Training costs: | £ 42.00 |

c) **Bank Reconciliation and Ring-Fenced Funds:**

- i) Bank Reconciliation: The bank reconciliation at 31 December (previously circulated) showed a balance of £25,634.40 as evidenced by the bank statement. Unpresented cheques amounted to £225.00p. The Chairman was **Authorised** to sign the bank statement.
- ii) Ring-fenced funds: The R-F funds remain at £6,919.28, split between Christmas Funds (£2,479.25), woodland management (£2,200) and CIL funds (£2,240.03). As a result of discussion about woodland management, it was **Agreed** to proceed with thinning work opposite the new village hall and on several other sites to be funded from the larger of the ring-fenced CIL funds.

d) **Budget 2026-27:** The Clerk produced a budget review to 31 December with projections to the end of the financial year. This formed the basis for a draft budget for 2026-27 which had been circulated. After consideration, a balanced budget of £17,685 was **Approved** which included £16,174.00 precept from W&FC. This will be requested.

e) **Internal Audit:** The appointment of Jean Airey as Internal Auditor for 2025-26 was **Approved**.

f) **Bank Mandate:** The Chair reported that finalisation of electronic banking remains the subject of ongoing work.

g) **Governance**

- i) Assertion 10: Cllr. Rogerson has set up a compliant email address for the Clerk. A further meeting between the Clerk and Cllr. Rogerson will be held to set up addresses for Councillors and to deal with other technical requirements of the Assertion. All necessary policy documents had been prepared and will be uploaded as part of the process.
- ii) Freedom of Information Policy: a revised draft FOI Policy, circulated in advance of the meeting, was **Approved**.
- iii) Safeguarding Policy: A revised Safeguarding Policy prepared by Cllr. Forshaw was **Approved**.
- iv) Reformatting Policy Documents: Proposals for the reformatting of policy documents submitted by the Clerk were **Agreed**.

85/25 Levens Community Project:

a) **Levens Project Advisory Group:** Cllr. Mason reported on the PAG meeting held on 06/01/2026 as follows:

- i) Sale of Plot 3, Church Hill: This site remains off the market. Cllr Mason is to liaise with Armitstead Barnett to agree future plans for selling the site.

- ii) Underhill:
 - Foundation slab: Tony Hills (TH) has sent out invitations to tender for the laying of the foundation slab. The Clerk will advise W&FC of this next step.
 - Electricity supply: The Project solicitors will act in relation to the Wayleave agreement. The trench will be dug as soon as contractor availability allows; Cllr. Mason will confirm the size of the duct required and liaise with Cllr. Rogerson regarding the B4RN connection.
 - RPA Grant: Cllr Mason confirmed receipt of a grant from the Rural Payments Agency for the rebuilding of the degraded roadside boundary wall against the new orchard and the affordable housing site. Quotes were being sourced and work will commence as soon as possible.
 - Water charges: The Clerk will provide details of the meter serial numbers to Cllr. Willacy to secure up to date readings.
 - Addresses: The Clerk will submit new proposals to the W&FC Street Naming Section.
- iii) New Village Hall: There has been no recent work on site to report. Most of the timber stored on site has now been removed by the contractor who had originally purchased it.
- iv) Project Update (Village Hall): TH has submitted an updated application for Building Regulations. The Clerk will request a copy of the new application. Once approved, Building Regulations will enable the preparation of a Bill of Quantities on which updated build costs can be based.
- v) Finance Review: The bank reconciliation at 23 December 2025 showed funds-in-hand in the current account of £28,345.28. Funds in the Deposit Account at 31 December stood at £1,490,672.95. The current interest rate is 1.47%. Savin Brow Quarry Charity funds amounting to £1,232.15 have been transferred out of the Deposit Account to the Levens Charity account.
- b) **To Approve payments:** The following payment made between meetings to Tony Hills was **Ratified**:
 - i) T. Hills: Architects Fees – Building Regulations: £ 1,440.00

86/25 Planning Applications:

- a) **New Planning Applications Received:** No new planning applications had been received since the last meeting.
- b) **Schedule of Planning Applications:** Updates to the Planning Schedule to 07 January 2026 had been circulated. The following were of specific note:

PC Ref	Application No.	Location	Proposal	Outcome
29	Lakesway Holiday Park	Sampool Lane Levens LA8 8EQ	Erection of leisure and spa facility	ACON -10/12/2025. It was Agreed to check the details of this consent in the context of the two applications that had been submitted for the site and the associated upgrade of passing places on Sampool Lane
8.	2025/1913/PIP	Rockfield Stables, Levens LA8 8NU	Permission in Principle (PIP) for residential development	PIP had been approved on 18/12/2025. The Chair of the Parish Council had presented its objections to the Planning Committee. Any proposed development will still have to go through the full planning process.

- c) **Other planning matters:**
 - Land off Greengate, Levens, LA8 8EY:** Further to the detailed discussion at 83/25(b)(iii) it was **Agreed**:
 - i) Following the public consultation held by the Alderley Group earlier in the day, the Clerk will draft a note to be sent to both the authors of the new Local Plan and to Development Management expressing concern about the proposal, particularly on issues with local infrastructure.
 - ii) Consideration will be given to setting up a local survey to gather residents' feedback on the proposal.
 - iii) Individual Councillors will make further enquiries of W&FC as appropriate.

87/25 Levens Charity

- a) **Savin Brow Quarry Charity:** Councillors noted the Clerk's detailed report advising that all Savin Brow Quarry (SBQ) assets had now been transferred to the Levens Charity and that the Charity Commission had been requested to remove SBQ from the Register.
- b) **Funds for reinvestment:** Further to the Clerk's report identifying options for the reinvestment of capital assets amounting to £6,472.47 from the closure of SBQ investment funds (£3,278.50) and the closure of a Levens Charity Investment fund (£3,193.97), it was **Agreed** to reinvest the capital sum in the M&G Charity Multi Asset Fund. The Clerk will make arrangements for this.

88/25 Local Clothes Bank: Closure of the Salvation Army clothes bank due to unprofitability was noted.

89/25 Open Actions Not Covered Elsewhere on the Agenda

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

- i) **Levens Lane footpath:** The Locality Board is to meet soon to assess the outcome of the Feasibility Study and agree next steps.
- ii) **Traffic Management in the village:** The white lining work is scheduled 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.
- iii) **20-m.p.h. Initiative:** Implementation remains with W&FC as work in progress

b) Other Highways Matters

- i) Flooding at Quags Farmhouse: Cllr. Battye confirmed that the work to unblock the drain had been completed some weeks ago and that this had been acknowledged as a Highways issue. Resolution of the problem had been largely due to pressure exerted by the Parish Council.
- ii) 'Welcome to Levens' signs: The Clerk will test Highways response to the introduction of bespoke village signs.

c) Parish Assets and Land

- i) Parish Online: The Clerk reported on work to develop the potential of the platform for the management of Parish land. Expenditure on HMLR documents within the current budget was **Approved**.
- ii) Maintenance Work Required: It was **Agreed** that Cllr. Mason should commission Adam Kirk to undertake woodland work for environmental and health and safety benefit. This work will be paid for from the larger of the CIL balances available. Work on the development of a new Maintenance Schedule was noted.
- iii) Community Orchard and Roadside Boundary: Already noted at 85/25(a)(ii).
- iv) Street Light Agreement – A revised Agreement amending the original was awaited from W&FC.
- v) Allotments: One tenant has still not paid and it was **Agreed** to terminate the Agreement with her if necessary. In response to Cllr. Battye, Cllr. Mason **Agreed** to progress the new water pipes previously agreed and funded from Cllr Battye's Locality Grant.
- vi) Gilpin Bridge Footpath – Investigations are ongoing to identify and involve the W&FC Footpaths Officer to consider the apparent diversion of the public footpath.

d) Levens Parish Emergency Plan (LEAP): Cllr. Forshaw reported that his bid to the Community Foundation had been successful and they will award a grant of £1,672 for the purchase of equipment to be used in the event of an emergency (torches, high-viz clothing, walkie talkies etc). Councillors congratulated him on this work which had included the revision of the Safeguarding Policy (previously approved at 84/25(g)(iii)).

e) Defibrillator: It was Agreed that Cllr. Burrow should register interest with BT in the take-over of the public telephone box for use as a defibrillator base (at a cost of £1.00 for registration). This will trigger a survey of use and local consultation to confirm the availability of the facility.

90/25 Correspondence Received: Other than the routine receipt of communications from regional agencies, (circulated as appropriate) the following correspondence was noted:

- 11/11/2025: Carolyn Keavan confirming the date of the Levens 10k run as 20 May 2026
- 13/11/2025: Colin Turner via the website enquiring about progress with the drain at Quags Farm / Barn, Cotes. A positive response had been provided.
- 28/11/2025: W&FC promoting the launch of its Nature Recovery Fund offering grants of between £5K and £20K for qualifying projects. Deadline 30 January 2026.

91/25 Future Agenda Items: Follow-up on the current Agenda items but also to include:

a) Development at Pigwilly Lane

92/25 Date of the Next Meeting:

The next meeting of the Parish Council will be held on Tuesday 10 February 2026 in the Methodist Church, Levens.

The meeting closed at 9.54 p.m.

Signed (Chairman) Date.....