

Levens Parish Council

MINUTES of the Ordinary Meeting of the Parish Council held on 10 March 2026 in Levens Methodist Church commencing at 7.30 p.m.

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

In Attendance: M. R. Curry (Clerk). No members of the public were in attendance.

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

107/25 Apologies for Absence: Written apologies had been received from Cllrs. Mason and Rogerson.

108/25 Minutes: It was **Resolved** that the Chair be authorised to sign the Minutes of the Ordinary Meeting of the Council held on 10 February 2026 as a true record.

109/25 Declarations of Interest and Requests for Dispensation: No declarations of interest were submitted and no requests for dispensation had been received.

110/25 Public Participation: In the absence of members of the public, no matters were raised from the floor.

111/25 Reports:

a) Reports from Councillors attending meetings: No external meetings had been attended by Parish Councillors.

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

- i) Darren Martland has been appointed new Chief Constable for Cumbria Constabulary
- ii) The Council is proposing the introduction of new regulations in relation to parking on pavements.
- iii) The Council is looking at implementing provisions of the Renters Rights Act (major provisions taking effect 01 May 2026). It is also planning to use new powers from government to get unused buildings back into productive use. This might have implications for the Old Carpet Shop and Cllr. Battye will refer to W&FC's Empty Property Officers.
- iv) The Council has launched a consultation on amendments to its Homes to School Transport Policy which runs to 21 April 2026. Following on from this, there was discussion about the capacity of Levens Primary School in the context of potential new housing developments and Cllr Battye undertook to provide the current capacity figures for general information and awareness.
- v) The amount of dog litter in and around the village is once again of increasing concern. Cllr Holmes cited incidents that he had witnessed of (unidentified) individuals apparently allowing fouling. Cllr Battye said that Dog Wardens will respond and encouraged all residents to report issues to the them. W&FC has produced a Report Card for use in this context.

c) Police: The local Newsletters have been circulated as published. PCSO Park has advised that she will be holding a local surgery outside the Village Shop from 10.30 to 11.30 on 28 March.

112/25 Finance

a) Receipts and Payments: Receipts and payments for the period 01 – 28 February 2026 were noted on the bank reconciliation (circulated). Receipts amounted to £1,187.18 being £500 via Cllr Battye's Member Grant from W&FC (towards costs of white lining) and £687.18 receipts from the 2025 Christmas event.

b) Payments Required:

To **Approve** the following payments:

- i) M R Curry – Salary February 2026 (PC: £335.43; LCP: £60.63; Charity: £38.44; Broadband Contribution (£72.00); Office Allowance (£150.00); Expenses: (£6.96); Mileage: £21.60):
Total: £ 685.06
- ii) NWA Professional – Submission of capital grant application (boundary wall, Underhill) £ 300.00
- iii) No additional payments required had been advised since publication of this Agenda.

c) Bank Reconciliation and Ring-Fenced Funds:

- i) Bank Reconciliation: The bank reconciliation at 28 February (previously circulated) showed a balance of £25,893.58 as evidenced by the bank statement. There were no unrepresented cheques. The Chairman was **Authorised** to sign the bank statement.
- ii) Ring-fenced funds: The R-F funds have increased to £9,278.46 with the receipt of £687.18 from the 2025 Christmas event taking them to £3,166.43. Otherwise, funds remain as before: woodland management (£2,200), CIL funds (£2,240.03) and LEAP Grant (£1,672.00).

- d) **Bank Mandate:** The Chair reported that he is trying to resolve outstanding matters with HSBC as work towards establishing the electronic payments system continues.
- e) **Audit Procedure 2025-26:** The Internal Audit will take place in late-April.
- f) **Governance - Practitioners Guide – Assertion 10:** Councillors noted the Clerk's written thoughts on compliance with Assertion 10. New/revised Policies on Freedom of Information, IT and GDPR were prepared by the Clerk, approved and uploaded to the website by Cllr. Rogerson. However, an issue exists with meeting accessibility requirements. PCs have strict legal obligations to comply with WCAG 2.1 AA accessibility standards but the generic statement on the individual pages of the community website does not make that commitment and is not consistent with the approved and uploaded Accessibility Statement on the PC Policies page. Furthermore, as a result of technical issues, the creation of compliant email addresses for the PC has not progressed. Under current regulations, both these issues need to be resolved by 31 March 2026 and will be subject to audit scrutiny. Tom Hecht (designer/technical support for the community website [of which the PC pages are a part]) has moved away and is no longer involved. As mandated at the February meeting, the Clerk met with A2A (IT Consultants, Milnthorpe) for a view on how the PC might proceed. The Clerk expressed his view to them and at the PC meeting that the www.levens.org website is attractive and informative on many aspects of village life including the work of the PC and a credit to its designer and those associated with its maintenance over recent years. However, the advice is that if PC pages are part of a community website, then the entire website must meet WCAG 2.1 AA standards and if not the PC should leave that site and build a new one that is compliant. A2A measured the accessibility status of the Levens website at between 60-66%. The Assertion 10 target is 100% and the generally acceptable standard is around 90%+. In his report, the Clerk expressed concerns that the PC would not meet the required compliance for both accessibility and email addresses within a required timeframe. He outlined options including the engagement of A2A who provide technical support for over 15 local PCs and have supported transition to Assertion 10 requirements for most of these. They have quoted costs for supporting Levens PC being a redesign element of £600 + VAT and annual hosting and domain costs at £100 + VAT.

Councillors noted that Cllr Rogerson had circulated a written response querying the observations about the accessibility statements and expressing some concern about proposals to establish a standalone website. Particular implications for the future of the community website in relation to costs and management were understood and acknowledged and would need to be addressed. However, Councillors also recognised the legal imperatives facing the PC and the need for an immediate resolution and for a long-term sustainable management framework.

As a result of this discussion, Councillors Agreed to engage A2A to:

- i) Establish a compliant and accessible stand-alone website for the PC and to provide the ongoing technical backup for this service.
- ii) Secure .gov.uk (recommended) as the domain name for the Levens Parish Council website.
- iii) Secure .gov.uk email addresses e.g. clerk@levens-pc.gov.uk or for councillors: an.other@levens-pc.gov.uk and complete the transition to the new addresses.

And:

- iv) In response to the Clerk's concerns that there should be discussion with Cllr. Rogerson, that the PC Web Team should meet as possible to discuss this outcome.

113/25 Levens Community Project:

a) **Levens Project Advisory Group:** In the absence of Cllr. Mason, the Clerk reported on the PAG meeting held on 03/03/2026 as follows:

- i) Church Hill: Plot 3 remains off the market for the time being. Discussions on next steps will be held with Armitstead Barnett.
- ii) Underhill:
 - Foundation slab: Two tenders for the laying of the foundation slab have been received. A third is awaited. The Clerk will advise W&FC of this next step.
 - Electricity supply: Arrangements for the Wayleave Agreement are underway. The trench for the supply duct will be dug as soon as contractor availability allows.
 - The RPA grant for the rebuild of the roadside boundary wall has been confirmed and work will begin as soon as contractor availability allows.
 - The proposed addresses for the 4 new houses have yet to be submitted to W&FC.
- iii) New Village Hall: There has been no recent work on site to report. There have been some minor sales of stone since the last meeting. The outcome of the updated application for Building Regulations is awaited. As soon as these are received further discussion as to build-costs and options will proceed.

iv) **Project Communication:** The website will be updated with the current position on all aspects of the Project.

- b) **Finance Report:** The bank statement at 23 February 2026 showed funds-in-hand in the current account of £12,618.22 taking into account a transfer out to the deposit account of £15,000. Funds in the Deposit Account at 28 February stood at £1,505,672.95.
No invoices were due for payments.

114/25 Planning Applications:

- a) **Schedule of Applications:** The Planning Schedule to 09/03/2026 had been circulated. There were no substantive updates to applications still under consideration. The following new planning application was considered:
2026/0384/Hou: **Yew Tree Cottage, Levens LA8 8PN:** Proposed alterations to existing single storey extension - roof and internal layout; addition of stair window to western elevation. Circulated 02/03/2026. It was **Resolved** to submit **No Objection**.
- b) 2025/2178/OPA – **Levens Beck LA8 8PN:** W&FC's decision to refuse this application was confirmed. It was not possible to show conclusively why this had initially been reported as approved though the refusal might be connected to the subsequent objection from United Utilities.
- c) **Other planning matters:**
- i) Greengate, Levens: It was noted that the development proposal might now be for 58 houses. It was anticipated that a planning application will be submitted in late March / early April.
 - ii) Nanny Pie Lane: W&FC Enforcement have allocated Case Number ENF/2025/0322

115/25 Levens Charity

- a) **Re-investment of Capital** – The Clerk confirmed that £6,500 had been invested in the M&G Multi Asset Fund
- b) **Clerk's hours 2025-26:** The Clerk presented a statement of hours worked on behalf of the Charity in 2025-26 (3 hours estimated for March 2026) totalling 45.50hrs paid at the PC hourly rate. Gross amount paid is £794.88 (correcting the Agenda figure of £816.72). The Clerk is paid a minimum of £600 p.a. therefore there is no balance due to be paid.
- c) **Payments to Approve:**
Following a review of reimbursements of salary payments made by the Charity to the PC, payments for the following years were **Approved:**
- i) Reimbursement of Clerks salary to Levens Parish Council 2024-25 £ 600.00
 - ii) Reimbursement of Clerk's salary to Levens Parish Council 2025-26 £ 794.88

116/25 **Annual Parish Meeting (APM):** It was **Agreed** that the Annual Parish Meeting will be held on 19 May 2026. The usual Notice and invitations will be issued nearer the time. Some ideas for the format of the meeting were discussed but final details will be confirmed at the April meeting of the Parish Council.

117/25 **Newsletter:** The Chairman confirmed that content for the Spring Newsletter needed to be with the Clerk by the end of the following week for submission to the printers in time for distribution towards the end of the month. A number of items were agreed for inclusion and relevant Councillors were asked to submit copy on these.

In relation to the Newsletter, Councillors made observations about how the work of the PC might be better communicated to parishioners. It was felt that on a number of occasions PC initiatives had been made to appear to be the success of the Liberal Democrats (Lib-Dem) in their newsletter, thus diminishing the hard work and effort by Parish Councillors and other members of the community. Cllr Battye responded that she was bound to promote her activities as Ward Councillor in order to make it clear where she stands on certain issues. However, she felt that the PC might get its message across better if it adopted a newsletter in a different style such as that produced by Arnside (a copy of which she had previously tabled).

Councillors discussed this in greater depth and cited a number of examples where in their view the impression had been given that local achievements were as a result of wider political activity rather than actions taken by the PC. Councillors felt that its contribution to local initiatives must be fully reflected in any third-party reports. The generally understood proposition that the PC acts on an apolitical basis was strongly reasserted and stressed that great care must be taken to guard against conflicts of duty and interest. In response to a direct question as to whether her political allegiance and as an elected member of W&FC was causing a conflict of interest with PC business, Cllr Battye denied that it did and said that she had taken note of what had been discussed.

The Chair concluded the item at that point noting that the concerns had been raised and discussed.

118/25 Brigsteer Road Picnic Site: Cllr. Battye raised the recent Planting for Pollinators Scheme from W&FC and suggested that the Brigsteer Road Picnic Site might be an appropriate location. The scheme would include a soil analysis conducted by W&FC. Several positive responses were given together with ideas on how the site might be managed to make the most of this initiative and there was agreement in principle. It was stressed that if any site meetings were to be held, representatives of the PC should be in attendance. It was **Agreed** that Cllr. Battye would source and send details for further consideration.

119/25 Open Actions Not Covered Elsewhere on the Agenda

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

- i) **Levens Lane footpath:** Cllr. Battye is still waiting to meet a senior Highways Officer to assess the outcome of the Feasibility Study and agree next steps.
- ii) **Traffic Management in the village:** Following a response from Highways enclosing their most recent plan, it was **Agreed** that the specifications are now correct and that the Clerk will confirm this with them. Cllr. Battye reported that Levens Lane is due to be resurfaced in June and that the white lining would be done after that work, though she is pushing for the timetable to be brought forward. As part of this discussion, it was noted that passing places on Underhill are being used for parking and although this has been reported in HIAMS, nothing has happened. It was **Agreed** to report this to the police. The matter of parking at Gilpin Bridge remains of concern and the Clerk will reinforce the original observation to the police together with a photograph.
- iii) **20-m.p.h. Initiative:** Cllr. Battye reported that the scheme will be implemented soon – possibly after Easter in the new financial year.

b) Other Highways Matters: Cllr. Holmes reported as follows:

- i) All the road-edge drains on the A590 have been cleared recently.
- ii) The number of empty alcohol bottles in the ditch on Sampool Lane appears to have diminished but Cllr. Holmes will continue to monitor the site.

c) Defibrillator: The 90-day consultation period is continuing, and developments will await the outcome.

d) Levens Emergency Action Plan (LEAP): Following the receipt of grant from the Cumbria Foundation, Cllr. Forshaw will now purchase the emergency kit. His expenses will be reimbursed from the Fund against receipts.

e) Parish Assets and Land

- i) Community Orchard: Cllr Mason is arranging for the planting of the final trees and completion of this project by the end of March.
- ii) Street Light Transfer Agreement: The signed copy has been delivered to W&FC.
- iii) Allotments: Arrangements for the renewal of tenancy agreements are in hand.

120/25 Correspondence Received: The routine receipt of communications from regional agencies had been circulated as appropriate. Councillors were reminded of the following items:

- A consultation on the re-introduction of the white-tailed (sea) eagle to Cumbria remains open to 30 March
- The strategic Cumbria Combined Authority has been formally launched
- CALC have announced a partnership pilot project on resilience which is open to willing participants. Cllr. Forshaw noted this.
- The Police Fire and Crime Commissioner's Office has launched its Community Fund offering grants of up to £2,500 for projects designed to mitigate anti-social behaviour.

Other than the above, no correspondence had been received from individuals except as might have been part of earlier Agenda items.

121/25 Date of the Next Meeting:

The next meeting of the Parish Council will be held on Tuesday 14 April 2026 in the Methodist Church, Levens.

The meeting closed at 10.10 p.m.

Signed (Chairman) Date.....