

Levens Parish Council

MINUTES of the Ordinary Meeting of the Parish Council held on 08 April 2025 in Levens Methodist Church commencing at 7.30 p.m.

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

In Attendance: M. R. Curry (Clerk) and nine members of the public.

134/24 Apologies for Absence: Written apologies had been received from Cllr. Forshaw.

135/24 Declarations of Interest: No declarations of interest were tendered and the Clerk reported that no requests for dispensation had been submitted.

136/24 Minutes: The following minor amendments to the draft Minutes previously circulated were noted:

125/24(c): The ring-fenced funds total was corrected to read "£6,865.46"

127/24: The introduction was corrected to read "Cllr. Mason reported..."

130/24(a)(iv): Cllr. Rogerson's name to be added

130/24/(a)(v): Insert *average* in third sentence to read: "Work on the installation of "average speed..."

Following approval of these amendments, it was **Resolved** that the Chairman be authorised to sign the Minutes of the Ordinary Meeting of the Council held on 11 March 2025 as a true record.

137/24 Public Participation: On behalf of a number of Parishioners, a resident expressed concerns about Planning Application 2025/0538/LDPR for a Lawful Development Certificate for the proposed use of a dwelling house at 1, Vicarage Road, Levens as a care home. The Chairman thanked the resident for his observations and confirmed that they would be taken into account when the application was considered at Item 8 of the Agenda.

138/24 Reports:

a) Reports from Councillors attending meetings:

- i. Cllr. Atfield reported his attendance at a Teams briefing session on the Devolution Priority Programme held on 02 April. The presentation explaining the proposal for a new strategic authority headed by a Mayor has subsequently been circulated to Councillors and the full case is on the W&FC website. The Chairman expressed his own views on the proposal, and it was **Agreed** that individual Councillors would contribute to the consultation (which runs to 13 April) independently should they wish.
- ii. Cllr. Battye reported that she had attended a recent meeting of the Playing Fields Committee which had included an update on the facilities development programme.

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

- i. The Local Government Boundary Commission for England (LGBCE) review of electoral arrangements for Westmorland & Furness Council continues and a consultation is running to 12 May (<https://www.lgbce.org.uk/all-reviews/westmorland-and-furness>)
- ii. The Community Governance Review is also ongoing with a proposal to bring forward the date of Parish elections from 2028 to 2027 in order to synchronise the date across the region. A consultation is running until 06 May and is at <https://consult.westmorlandandfurness.gov.uk/westmorland-and-furness-council/community-governance-review/>.
- iii. The Waste and Recycling Services review has circulated an invite to an engagement session to be held on April 24. This will discuss an Engagement Framework for future community discussions on this and other initiatives.
- iv. Lighting Policy – A new Policy on the ownership and management of streetlights has been agreed by W&FC and issued to Parish Councils. The Clerk confirmed that this had been received but too late for inclusion on this Agenda. The matter will be considered at the next meeting and W&FC has confirmed that a response after the May meeting will be acceptable.

c) Police: The most recent editions of the Focus Newsletter had been circulated otherwise there were no matters of direct relevance to Levens.

139/24 Finance

a) Receipts: Councillors noted the following receipts for the period 01– 31 March 2025

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|--|----------|
| i. 10/03/2025: Tenant - Allotment Rent 2024-25: | £ 20.00 |
| ii. 16/03/2025: D Rogerson – Receipts Christmas Event 2024 | £ 723.28 |

b) Payments: The following Payments were **Approved:**

- i. M R Curry: Salary March 2025 - (PC: £451.00; Project: £197.07; Charity: £58.23; Charity balance: £163.34; Mileage: £21.60; Expenses: £42.05; Broadband allowance: £90.00; Work from home allowance: £120.00) Total Due: £1,143.29
- ii. HMRC: PAYE etc Months 10-12: £ 671.42
- iii. Reimbursement for hosting fee levens.org.uk: £ 36.07
- iv. Levens Village Hall: Room Hire – Annual Parish Meeting £ 12.00

The question of the honorarium for Tom Hecht in relation to administration of the website was raised and it was **Agreed** to place this on the Agenda for the next meeting.

- c) **Bank Reconciliation:** The Clerk presented the bank reconciliation for the period 01-31 March 2025 which showed a net balance of £18,567.54 (after unrepresented cheques) and the Chairman was authorised to sign the bank statement. An associated note on ring-fenced funds in the sum of £7,198.74 was **Approved**.
- d) **Bank Mandate:** The bank mandate submitted to HSBC had been returned once again. With the introduction of Dual Control on digital banking (whereby two signatures can be required for authorisation of transactions) it was **Agreed** to begin the process of moving banking to the electronic framework.
- e) **Annual Governance and Accountability Review (AGAR) 2024-25:** The Clerk confirmed that notification of the requirement to start the process had been received and that arrangements were in hand to commence the internal audit. **Approval** for the commission of external assistance with the procedure was confirmed.

140/24 Levens Community Project: Before reporting on a meeting of the Project Advisory Group (PAG) held on 01 April, Cllr. Mason expressed his regret that he had been unable to attend the Annual Parish Meeting at which the management of the Project had been challenged. He stressed that he was always available to answer any questions about the Project and that all decisions were taken in public by the Parish Council at its meetings. He then reported as follows:

- a) **Plot 3, Church Road:** The plot remains off the market for the time being and plans are underway to produce a visual representation of the planned house for inclusion on a sale board.
- b) **Underhill:**
 - i. **Water Supply:** United Utilities have now made the water connection to the four standpipes that had been installed.
 - ii. **Electricity Supply:** It was noted the Environment Agency was now actively considering the application for a permit and their fee of £221.00 had been paid in order to expedite approval.
- c) **New Village Hall:** There had been no new recent works to report.
- d) **Appointment of Contractors:** The procurement process remains ongoing and a further quote for the main build is still awaited. Further to previous agreement, Tim Thacker will commence work on the retaining wall as part of the pre-construction phase.
- e) **Finance Report:** The Clerk presented a bank reconciliation for the 'working' account which included income of £2,364.00 from the sale of stone and expenditure of £9,871.80 of which £9,866.40 was payment for the water connection to Underhill. The reconciled figure in the account at 23 March 2025 was £20,455.50 and the Chairman was authorised to sign the bank statement. The balance on deposit at 31 March 2025 was £1,507,837.87.
- f) **Project Management:** Liaison with Tony Hills will take place once the current procurement process is concluded.
- g) **Feedback from the Annual Parish Meeting on 18 March 2025:** A letter received from a member of the public encapsulating issues raised at the Annual Parish Meeting had been received and circulated. This had included a request for a public meeting to discuss the Project. Councillors were clear that all the questions raised could be satisfactorily addressed and that many of the answers were already in the public domain either through open discussion at Parish Council meetings, regular updates in the Parish Council Newsletter or on the website. No decision had been made to shelve the affordable homes in favour of the village hall, but the terms of the original Section 106 Agreement make it imperative that the village hall is completed before August 2027 which adds a degree of priority to securing a favourable construction contract. It was **Agreed** nonetheless that whilst there should be no decision on agreeing to a public meeting at this stage, it would be an appropriate response to arrange a meeting with the correspondent to explain more fully the current position to her and correct some of the inaccurate assumptions. It was also **Agreed** that a Question-and-Answer page should be prepared for the Project page on the website.
- h) **Payments Required:** The following payment was **Ratified:**
 - M R Curry: Refund of out-of-pocket BACS payment to the Environment Agency: £ 221.00

The following payment was **Approved**:
M R Curry: Expenses for stationery purchased

£ 20.15

141/24 Planning Applications:

a) **Schedule of Planning Applications**: Updates to the Planning Schedule on 08 April had been circulated and were noted. The following were of specific note:

PC Ref	Application No.	Location	Proposal	Status
43.	SL/2022/0074	Land to NE Levens Lane	New footpath	The Clerk has requested an extension to 31 December 2025 to enable the feasibility study to be completed.
29.	2024/0232/FPA	Lakesway Holiday Home & Lodge Park	Erection of leisure and spa facility building and associated infrastructure	The application was approved by the Planning Committee on 09 January, but the decision is still showing as pending.
47.	2024/2242/FPA	Fiddlers Croft Church Road	Removal of Condition 9 – habitation of lower ground floor	A written representation to the Planning Inspectorate reinforcing the previous submission of No Objection has been submitted.
48.	2024/2299/FPA	Land adjacent to the Langdales	Erection of a 2-storey extension as an amendment to previously approved plans.	The case is to be heard by the Planning Committee on 24 April and it was Agreed to make representations on the basis that the proposal is not a minor material amendment.
49.	2025/0538/LDPR	1 Vicarage Road, Levens LA8 8PY	Lawful Development Certificate for use of a dwelling house as a care home	See below:
<p>1, Vicarage Road, Levens: It was noted that such an application does not usually go through public consultation but that the planning authority can take feedback from the local community. Councillors considered the application in depth and invited members of the public who were in attendance for this item to contribute. Concerns were raised about the appropriateness of this development including that the young people (who could be aged anywhere between 11 and 18, who are likely to rotate regularly and who may not be accustomed to small rural environments), and their shift-based, non-residential carers may not be able to truly integrate into the local community. The size and layout of the house was questioned and its corner location with increased traffic movement by carers and support staff was mentioned as a road safety matter. It was felt that additional pressure on the local school might lead to the possible exclusion of the children of long-term residents. The Cllr Battye confirmed that in her role as a W&F Cllr she will be submitting a case for the Council to resist this application based on existing case law from elsewhere. It was Agreed that the Clerk will draft a letter requesting W&FC to resist this application and to circulate this for approval.</p>				

b) **Other planning matters**: No other planning matters were raised

142/24 Open Actions Not Covered Elsewhere on the Agenda

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

- Levens Lane footpath**: Cllr. Battye is expecting to meet with the consultants in the coming days and will see the Report, though it is not yet available for wider distribution. She will press the Council as to their proposals for taking this matter forward and will report back to the next meeting.
- Traffic Management within the village**: Cllr. Battye has requested an additional cone to reduce the space between them and will ask for an update on progress with the initiative.
- 20-m.p.h. Initiative**: W&FC hosted a Levens-specific briefing on the process via a Teams meeting on 01 April which was attended by Cllrs. Atfield, Battye, Burrow and Rogerson. W&FC will coordinate public consultations which will be informal (between 04 June – 18 July and to include a drop-in session at the Village Hall (Institute) with plans, maps etc) and a formal consultation probably in October. Questionnaires will support the consultations which will be publicised including in the Parish Newsletter. Cllr Battye will use the Great Big Green Week event on 07 June to promote this initiative. Further details will be discussed at the next meeting.

b) **Woodland Management**: Trees in poor condition on the western side of the junction of the A590 with Church Road have been raised with the land agent at Dallam and they have indicated a willingness to discuss those of their trees that might pose a risk later in the year. In the meantime, those outside the Dallam boundary have been reported to W&FC Highways on HIAMS.

c) **Parish Assets and Land**

- Brigsteer Road Picnic site**: Work on the walling was commenced on the previous Monday. A draft text for an information board has been approved but design is now to be considered. It was **Agreed** to investigate whether any technological enhancements could improve the existing photographs to make them more usable and to advertise for any relevant photos in the next edition of the Newsletter.

- ii. **Coronation Orchard:** The ground has been levelled, rolled and seeded; some fruit trees have been obtained via the South Lakeland Orchard Group for planting immediately with further planting in the back-end. Cllr. Mason stressed that this project remains very much work in progress. The unstructured growth of sycamore saplings through the roadside wall has been removed to enable an application to the RPA for a Capital Grant Scheme (to reinstate the roadside boundary wall). Additional environmental gains will be built into the scheme and could include new hedging. Design elements for the entrance between the site and the affordable houses plot will be considered.
- iii. **Allotments:** The Clerk reviewed the renewal of allotment tenancies and confirmed that rent invoices have been sent out. He had clarified the VAT position in a note on 11 March and it was **Agreed** to consider the implications at the meeting in May.
- d) **Parish Emergency Plan:** Cllr. Forshaw had submitted his apologies, and his update will be presented to the next meeting
- e) **Annual Parish Meeting:** Councillors were pleased to note a good turn-out and particularly from village organisations - representatives of which had given positive updates on their activities. Otherwise, this item had largely been dealt with in relation to the Project as discussed earlier in the meeting.
- f) **Dog-Fouling:** Cllr. Mr. Battye will contact the newly appointed officer to arrange a meeting with Councillor Burrow to discuss the progression of this matter.

143/24 Correspondence Received: Other than the routine receipt of communications from regional agencies, including various dates for engagement meetings on current initiatives (circulated as appropriate) the following correspondence (excluding items discussed in the meeting) was noted:

- a) 08/04/2025 from R. Jones: Recording thanks for the grant of £700 to the Levens Methodist Church for hosting the peripatetic post-office service.

144/24 Future Agenda Items:

- a) Follow-up on the current Agenda items but also to include:
- b) Levens Parish Website
- c) The Allotments
- d) Response to W&FC Street Light Policy
- e) The 20-m.p.h. initiative

145/24 Date of the Next Meeting:

The next meeting of the Parish Council will be its Annual Parish Council Meeting to be held on Tuesday 13 May 2025 in the Methodist Church, Levens.

The meeting closed at 9.40 p.m.

Signed (Chairman) Date.....