

Levens Parish Council

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

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

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

106/24 Apologies for Absence: Written apologies had been received from Cllr. Mason.

107/24 Declarations of Interest: There were no declarations of interest or requests for dispensation submitted.

108/24 Minutes: It was **Resolved** that the Chairman be authorised to sign the Minutes of the Ordinary Meeting of the Council held on 14 January 2025 as a true record.

109/24 Public Participation: There were no representations made from the floor.

110/24 Reports:

a) Reports from Councillors attending meetings:

- i. BT Digital Voice Switch-over: Cllrs. Rogerson and Atfield had attended a webinar hosted by BT in late January when plans for the closedown of BT lines in late 2025 / 2026 were outlined. Connections thereafter would be via plug-in to a router. Properties with B4RN, which amount to approximately 60% of the properties in the village, will be unaffected. More information on this will be rolled-out in the coming months.

b) Westmorland & Furness Council (W&FC): Cllr Battye reported as follows:

- i. As part of its mission to plant a quarter of a million trees over five years W&FC has launched its Community Tree and Hedgerow Planting Grant which aims to boost community involvement in tree planting. Grants start from £2,000, with a minimum requirement of 50 trees (which can include a mix of trees and hedgerows) and trees can be planted up until March 2026. Applications are open until Monday 10 March 2025.
- ii. Cllr. Battye has attended training on W&FC's Local Plan which is under development. It addresses the new planning framework and includes a target to build 1,330 new houses per year across its region. There will be a 'call for sites' and it is anticipated that there will be a list of proposed development sites by the summer at which stage the local community will be consulted. Cllr. Holmes said that in any consultation the Parish Council must ensure that the capacity of the local infrastructure, which is already stretched, is taken into account. Cllr. Burrow advised Councillors that the open fields on the west of Brigsteer Road and those behind the properties on the eastern side have already been purchased by Oakmere Homes despite the fact that development of these has been rejected three times at public enquiry.
- iii. W&FC's draft street lighting policy which was flagged up at an online briefing event attended by Parish Council representatives on 10 January continues to be developed; the waste and recycling review continues, and the Council is launching a review of parking facilities across its region.

c) Police: Cumbria Constabulary has confirmed that it does not have the capacity to enable PCSO's to attend Parish Council meetings but Cllr. Battye said that there is lobbying to try to secure a couple of attendances per year. The Force has however released its Neighbourhood Policing Pledge confirming its commitment to support community liaison in the delivery of Neighbourhood Policing. The Pledge includes a requirement for local Neighbourhood Policing Teams to engage better with local Councils and has committed to twice yearly virtual meetings with parish councils. In response to a request for named representatives, the Parish Council was pleased to nominate Cllrs. Forshaw and Battye to engage on its behalf. The most recent editions of the Focus Newsletter had been circulated otherwise there were no matters of direct relevance to Levens.

111/24 Finance

No written report had been circulated as the bank statement had only been received that afternoon - as a result of which the Clerk gave the following verbal report:

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

- i. 10/01/2025: Electricity Northwest Ltd – Wayleave payment £ 117.31
- ii. 16/01/2025: Project Refund (Firewood, salary, VAT, Audit) £ 6,516.75

b) Payments:

The following Payments were Approved:

- i. M R Curry: Salary January 2025: (PC: £467.20; Project: £369.25;
Mileage: £32.40):

£ 868.85

- c) **Bank Reconciliation:** Due to the lateness in receiving the bank statement, the Clerk had not prepared a written bank reconciliation for the period 01 January – 31 January 2025. However, a verbal reconciliation based on receipts and payments against the opening balance at 01 January was **Agreed**. The closing balance of £22,413.10 as at 31 January 2025 was accepted and the statement signed by the Chairman. Ring-fenced funds remained at levels previously reported.
- d) **Precept:** Based on the budget for 2025-26 as approved at the January meeting, the Clerk confirmed that he had submitted the request for precept to W&FC in the sum of £15,741.00.
- e) **Annual Governance and Accountability Report (AGAR) 2024-25:** It was **Agreed** to review Governance documents at the March meeting of the Parish Council
- f) **Bank Mandate Update** – The Chairman reported that the form required to update bank mandates had been completed with all details of signatories. The form was passed to the Clerk for submission.

112/24 Levens Community Project: A meeting of the Project Advisory Group (PAG) had been held on 04 February and in the absence of Cllr. Mason the Clerk reported as follows:

a) Project Updates:

- i. **Plot 3, Church Road:** It was **Agreed** to withdraw this from the market for the time being and put it back on in the Spring when the sale price would be reviewed. Consideration will be given to commissioning a site board with an illustration of what the built property could look like.
- ii. **Underhill:**
- Water connection: UU have confirmed receipt of the fee for connection as previously agreed. The stand-pipes need to be on-site by 10 March for inspection and Cllr Mason is liaising with Tim Thacker on this. Connection will take place sometime after UU inspection.
 - Electricity: The Environment Agency has acknowledged receipt of the method statement for the laying of the duct for the electricity supply and the Project is now awaiting for them to issue a permit for works in proximity to the Catchwater Drain which is classed as a Main River.
 - Addresses for the proposed houses at Underhill: The potential addresses submitted to the Street Naming and Numbering Section at W&FC have not been approved. New proposals around the theme of 'Blossom' were suggested. It was **Agreed** that the Clerk should organise a meeting with W&FC to discuss this further. Cllrs. Burrow and Holmes will attend. It does not now seem that confirmation of addresses is required for the water connection.
- iii. **New Village Hall:**
- The independent structural engineer commissioned by the Project to review structural design has reported back on options for the retaining wall, drainage and roof purlins. However, given that the original design was by R G Parkins, he had recommended that sign-off on amendments should remain with them. Tony Hills has gone back to Parkins and they have responded positively to initial proposals.
 - Sales of stone: Sales continue at an encouraging rate.
- iv. **Appointment of Contractors:** The appointment of contractors remains to be confirmed pending the review of structural requirements.
- v. **Finance Report:** The Clerk had reported that at a little over £18,000 the reconciled balance in the 'working' current account remained appropriate for day-to-day requirements. Funds in the Deposit Account were £1,500,525.91 at 23 January. A meeting had been held with W&FC Housing Development Officer on 29 January when the position regarding funding for the affordable houses had been reviewed. The Project has contributed substantial match funding to get the Underhill site to its current position where the ground works are all but complete. Funds currently secured for Underhill and the Institute site amount to a little half a million pounds, but more will be required to ensure completion of both components. The W&FC Officer has understood the position and undertook to explore additional avenues for support.
- vi. **Project Management:** It was confirmed that discussions will be had with Tony Hills to confirm the terms and conditions of his engagement during the construction phase.
- vii. **High Sheriff's Shield Award:** The date for the presentation is 28 February at the Institute when several other Awards to recipients will be made. The High Sheriff's Office has asked if light refreshments might be provided at its cost (tea and biscuits) and it was **Agreed** to get confirmation of the number involved and that the Institute kitchen will be available.

- b) Payments:** Based on a recommendation from PAG, payment of the following was **Approved:**
- i. Paul Snape – Provision of Engineering advice: £ 280.00

113/24 Planning Applications:

a) **Schedule of Planning Applications:** Updates to the Planning Schedule on 11 February had been circulated and were noted. The following were of specific note:

PC Ref	Application No.	Location	Proposal	Status
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.
48.	2024/2299/FPA	Land adjacent to the Langdales	Erection of a 2-storey extension as an amendment to previously approved plans.	The PC is concerned that the application is not a minor material amendment and submitted an objection on 28/01/2025.

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

114/24 20-m.p.h. Scheme for Levens: Councillors noted that following a meeting of South Lakeland Locality Board on 29 January 2025, Levens was selected as one of the identified schemes to be progressed in 2025/26 as outlined in an email circulated to Councillors on 06 February. W&FC has proposed a meeting with representatives of the Parish Council on 01 April at 10.30am to discuss proposals and next stages in the process. This does not imply agreement to a scheme and the point was strongly made that consultation with the local community is essential to gauge support before any scheme is implemented.

115/24 The Annual Parish Meeting: It was noted that in accordance with precedent this will be held one week after the Parish Council meeting in March i.e. on the 18 March. Possible speakers to the meeting were discussed including a representative from BT on the digital voice switchover, or from W&FC to talk about waste and recycling services. Cllr Forshaw agreed to give an update on the Emergency Plan and village organisations will be approached for the usual contributions.

116/24 Open Actions Not Covered Elsewhere on the Agenda

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

- i. **Levens Lane footpath:** In his absence, it was noted that Cllr. Mason had met with Charlie Ebbrell of Pell Frischmann who were the consultants appointed by W&FC to conduct the feasibility study into the Levens Lane scheme. Having visited the site and also looked at issues of traffic management around the junction with Church Road, the consultant is currently preparing his report. A new resident has written to ask if there is a possibility of this scheme progressing and has been updated.
- ii. **Traffic Management within the village:** As agreed at the previous meeting, it was noted that the Clerk had forwarded updated details of the layout of cones to Helen Karaaslan and also that Guy Paton had made a strong representation about the issue on behalf of the residents adjacent to the area of concern. He had received the following response (paraphrased): "We are monitoring the no parking cones and the impact. To implement the keep clear markings would require funding. I have listed this for consideration of future funding. The list of current requests is far greater than the funding available. Once it has been determined which request can be funded in financial year 2025-2026 I will update Councillor Janet Battye. This is likely to be in March."
- iii. **Road Safety Improvement Scheme:** Cllr. Battye said that she had been requested to submit bids for up to £50,000 under a Road Safety Improvement Scheme initiative by W&FC. As a result of discussion, Cllr Battye will submit the following bids:
 - A passing place in the vicinity of Guy Paton's house
 - Road safety improvements around the school
 - Repainting of faded Slow and other road markings
 - Children Playing signs including at Meadow Wood and on Greengate.
- iv. **Recent Road Works and Works on the A590:** It was noted that the anticipated resurfacing works around the village had been completed. The stretch of the A590 between Brettagh Holt and Junction 36 of the M6 is subject periodic to overnight closures and work on the installation of average speed cameras from Brettagh Holt westwards continues.

b) **Woodland Management:** Cllr Holmes reported on the Woodland Health & Safety Report (previously circulated) and highlighted several recommendations for work. None of the work required was urgent and there was no agreement to commission any immediate work. When work is undertaken, it was agreed to consider thinning the trees over the wall opposite the new village hall site. The lopping of a large number of roadside trees at the A590 junctions at Heaves and Church Road was noted and felt that this had probably been done by contractors working on A590 improvements. Trees on the western side of the junction of the A590 with Church Road were noted as growing in permanently wet ground with some in poor condition and several leaning towards the road. It was **Agreed** to write to the Agent for the Dallam Estate to request a site meeting to discuss this.

c) Parish Assets and Land

- i. **Brigsteer Road Picnic site:** The walling is due to be completed in March. A draft text for an information board has been prepared and will be circulated when refined. Hedging this site was suggested as a possible bid into W&FC Community Tree and Hedgerow Planting scheme.
 - ii. **Coronation Orchard:** The levelling of the site is expected to be completed in the next few weeks. The RPA Capital Grant Scheme (for boundary walling) may be re-opened in the near future. Cllr. Mason has been in conversation with the South Lakeland Orchards Group who have offered a selection of free trees. An offer of native damsons from Cllr. Holmes was appreciated.
 - iii. **Allotments:** The Clerk confirmed that he had communicated with the allotment tenants, and most have replied confirming their intention to continue during 2025-26. One tenant has terminated her lease, and the waiting list will be consulted. Improvements to the water supply to individual plots are due to be implemented and number of requests were raised including getting notice of shoot dates and the possibility of getting the adjacent field topped to reduce the thistle burden. An incident of theft from the site was noted. The Clerk **Agreed** that he would revisit the VAT question for the benefit of Members.
- d) Electric Vehicle Charging Points:** There has been no further update on this scheme, but the Parish Council has submitted its Expression of Interest and stated its support in principle. It is watching for further developments.
- e) Parish Emergency Plan:** Cllr. Forshaw outlined his progress in developing the Levens Emergency Action Plan (LEAP) and had circulated a draft for comment. The plan included the identification of Places of Safety and had identified key members of the community with relevant qualifications. The plan divides the community into zones with representatives for each zone. A possible relationship with the three electricity zones was discussed as was the desirability of securing a backup generator for the new village hall. Cllr. Forshaw said that some funding will be required, particularly for an Emergency Red Bag and will provide further details. Cllr. Forshaw will give an update to the Annual Parish Meeting on 18 March. Cllrs. congratulated Cllr. Forshaw for this work and looked forward to further developments. Progress on this will feature in the Spring edition of the Parish Council Newsletter which will also contain items on dog-fouling, the 20-m.p.h initiative, the Project, Levens Lane and the Orchard.
- f) Brigsteer and Underbarrow Bridges:** By way of update, it was confirmed that the Brigsteer Bridge had re-opened to weight restricted traffic on 31 January and it is hoped that the Underbarrow Bridge will follow suit in the next few weeks.

117/24 Correspondence Received: Other than the routine receipt of communications from regional agencies (circulated as appropriate) the following correspondence (excluding items discussed in the meeting) was noted:

- a) A letter from a resident advocating a single night switch-off of streetlamps to promote dark skies (as agreed as an event in Ambleside and Grasmere). This will be picked up by Cllr. Battye.
- b) Verbal observations on the apparent increase in dog-fouling around the village and surrounds – it was **Agreed** to support Cllr. Burrow's suggestion to set up a working group to address this problem. Cllrs Rogerson and Homes agreed to join this. Cllr. Battye will confirm the name of the W&FC Officer with the remit to work on this.
- c) Cllr Holmes produced a note confirming Andy Brayshaw's prices for maintenance work in 2025 and it was agreed to re-appoint him to the post.
- d) A letter from a resident offering sources for defibrillators and cost packages was noted. Cllr. Burrow is looking at this via the British Heart Foundation.
- e) Cllr. Forshaw related verbal comments about the untidy condition of the Heras fencing around the Project site at Underhill. It was **Agreed** that should be addressed as part of the work to install water stand-pipes on-site and at the Orchard.

118/24 Future Agenda Items:

- a) Approval of Governance documents
- b) Otherwise, follow-up to the current Agenda items.

119/24 Date of the Next Meeting:

The next Ordinary Meeting of the Parish Council will be held on Tuesday 11 March 2025 in the Methodist Church, Levens.

The meeting closed at 9.46 p.m.

Signed (Chairman) Date.....