

Levens Parish Council

MINUTES of the Ordinary Meeting of the Parish Council held on 12 March 2024 in Levens Methodist Church commencing at 7.30 p.m.

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

In Attendance: M. R. Curry (Clerk) and 1 member of the public.

110/23 Apologies for Absence: Apologies had been received from Cllrs Bagot, Burrow and Rogerson.

111/23 Declarations of Interest: The following Declarations of Interest were noted:

- a) Cllr. Willacy in respect of a planning application for Levens Shop
- b) Cllrs Atfield, Battye and Holmes in respect of any matters to do with the Playing Fields
- c) Cllr. Battye in respect of the request for grant for the Levens Art Trail

112/23 Minutes: It was **Resolved** that the Chairman be authorised to sign the Minutes of the Ordinary Meeting of the Council held on 13 February 2024 as a true record.

113/23 Public Participation: No matters were raised by the public.

114/23 Reports:

- a) **Reports from Councillors attending meetings:** There were no reports submitted.
- b) **Westmorland & Furness Council (W&FC):** Cllr Battye reported as follows:
 - i. The road repair programme continues and is focusing on the repair of pot-holes.
 - ii. The 'Nature Conversations' initiative led by CALC and W&FC as circulated to Councillors on 20 December continues and it is hoped that Parish Councils will engage.
 - iii. W&FC is aspiring to work in a community focused way enabling communities to participate in the decisions which affect where they live and the services they use. Consultants are facilitating the initiative and Parish Councils will be invited to join workshop sessions as the scheme develops.
- c) **Police:** Recent editions of Focus had been circulated, but there had been no items of specific relevance to Levens. It was noted that there had been a break-in at Lord's Plain Farm on 13 February.

115/23 Finance

- a) **Receipts** - Cllrs. noted the following receipts in the period 01 February – 29 February 2024:
 - i) Allotment Rents for 2023-24: 3 x £17.50 £ 52.50
 - ii) A donation from the estate of the late Kathleen Dawson to Levens Charity £ 126.70
As sole Trustee for the Charity, the Parish Council acknowledged with thanks and appreciation this donation which has been paid into the Charity account. Trustees will make recommendations on how the donation might be used.
- b) **Payments:** The following payments were Approved:
 - i) M R Curry: Salary 2024 - (PC: £381.31; Project: £203.70; Heat & Light annual allowance: £190.00; Broadband annual allowance: £50; Mileage: £10.80): Total £ 835.81
 - ii) Printing Plus: Spring Newsletter £ 154.30
 - iii) Tom Hecht: Website domain costs £ 244.80
 - iv) Levens Art Trail: A request had been received for a grant to support the production of wooden display screens. This was discussed in some detail and the Clerk was asked to request more information on the status of the event, plans for storage of the boards, and other matters. It was **Agreed** to defer a decision until this further information had been received.
- c) **Bank Reconciliation** and report on Ring-Fenced Funds at 29 February 2024: It was noted that the balance brought forward at 31 January was shown as £13,034.36 when the correct figure from the bank statement was £13,134.35. After receipts and payments, the reconciled figure was **Agreed** at £12,241.18 with the net figure after unrepresented cheques being £12,141.18. The Clerk asked for assistance in requesting those with unrepresented cheques to bank them as soon as possible in the current financial year. They also noted a statement of ring-fenced funds showing sums in favour of woodland management (£1,600.00) and for the Christmas event (£1,381.26).

116/23 Levens Community Project

- a) **Levens Community Project Advisory Group (PAG):** There had been no meeting of PAG in February pending receipt of the Tenders but Cllr. Mason reported updates as follows:

- i. **Sale of Plots:**
 - Plot 1, Cotes: Sale is proceeding. Queries raised about the culvert are to be routed through the respective solicitors.
 - Plot 3, Church Road: An offer of £120,000 has been received but it was **Agreed** that this was not sufficient and should be declined.
- ii. **Underhill:** It was noted that Tony Hills had been instructed to formally accept the electricity quote of £42,092.11 + VAT received on 23 October 2023 as approved by the Council at Minute 68/23(a)(ii). Tenders are expected back by 04 April 2024.
- iii. **New Village Hall:** The sale of stone / hardcore continues. Tenders are expected back by 04 April 2024.
- iv. **Tender Packs:** Councillors were pleased to note that invitations to tender had been sent out to 5 contractors on the previous day, with a return date of 25 March.
- v. **Project Management and Review of Finance:** Following the detailed financial review reported at the previous meeting the cost estimate procured externally is awaited.
- vi. **Community Ownership Fund:** A new Expression of Interest is required following a revision of the Fund framework and this is to be submitted as soon as possible.
- vii. Investment of Cash Reserves and Funds held in HSBC current account:
 - Funds in the Investment (Deposit) Account as at 29 February 2024 were £1,307,611.18. This takes account of £5,000 paid out on 10 February to support the current (operating) account.
 - Funds in the current account as at 23 February 2024 were ££8,969.69. This will increase pending receipts from Capacity Grant and income from the sale of stone.
- b) **Payments Required:** The following payments were **Approved**:
 - i. Levens Parish Council: Refund VAT paid to Project but due to PC:
Q2 2023-24 (250.00) Q3 (£168.00) £ 418.00
 - ii. Levens Parish Council: Refund salary due paid by PC for Project;
(funded from Capacity Grant) Refund for the period 25/03/2023 – 27/02/2024 £3,658.00
 - iii. Armstrong Watson: Fee for submitting VAT Returns Qs 1,2 & 3 2023-24 £ 450.00

117/23 Planning Applications:

- a) **Schedule of Planning Applications:** Updates to the Planning Schedule on 11 March had been circulated and the following were noted:

PC Ref	Application No.	Location	Proposal	Status
28.	2024/0046/FPA	1 Low Pastures Levens LA8 8QH	Int & ext alts incl single storey ext to W with glazed roof terrace over. Single story ext to E elevation & alts to driveway.	Objection submitted 14/02/2024
29.	2024/0232/FPA	Lakesway Holiday Home & Lodge Park	Erection of leisure and spa facility building and associated infrastructure	Circulated to Councillors 20/02/24 & 07/03/2024. For the primary reason of inadequate access on Sampool La., and environmental considerations, it was Agreed to Object
30.	2024/0246/FPA	Field parcel at High Barns Levens LA88EG	Earth Banked Slurry Store with HDPE liner and floating cover	No Objection , but not believed to be within the Parish boundary
31.	2024/0361/FPA	Levens Village Shop Levens LA8 8ND	1 st floor extension to provide additional holiday accommodation to support the shop business	See below
2024/0361/FPS – Levens Shop: Cllr. Willacy stood down for this item. Cllrs. understood that the proposed extension was to support the existing business and had sympathy for the economic case. It was felt however that the proposed extension was a little out of proportion and that the proposed finish was not in keeping with the rest of the building. After consideration, which included a proposal that the external cladding might be painted black to match the roof, Councillors did not feel that the issues raised were sufficient to object, but that Planners should note the points raised and consider whether conditions on external finish should be made.				

- b) **Other Planning Matters:**

- i. **Shepherd's Mill:** Cllr. Battye reported that she is still seeking a meeting with the Valuation Section and the new Empty Homes Officer when appointed.

118/23 20-mph Speed Limit: It was noted that W&FC had acknowledged receipt of the Levens application for a 20-mph zone within the village which would be considered by the Locality Board towards the end of April.

119/23 Parish Council Elections - May 2024: Councillors noted that nomination packs had been issued and that the period for submission opens on 20 March and closes on 05 April. Councillors wishing to stand should complete their nomination papers and the Clerk will hand deliver these to W&FC.

120/23 The Annual Parish Meeting (APM): Plans for the Annual Parish Meeting were in hand. Posters had been distributed and the Agenda publicised. Village organisations had been invited to attend and present short reports on local activities. A speaker from Cumbria Constabulary will attend to talk about aspects of fraud.

121/23 Allotments:

- a) Rent Increases:
 - i. Levens Hall to the Parish Council: Levens Hall Estates have advised the Parish Council of a proposed rent increase of £40 p.a. The previous lease expired in 2021 and a new one has been prepared for April 2021 to March 2026. The rent increase is proposed to take effect from 01 April 2024. The increase was **Approved** though it was noted that the draft lease required amendment to reflect the new annual sum to be paid of £432 (including VAT).
 - ii. Parish Council to Tenants: Following the proposed increase from Levens Hall an increase to tenants to £40 per full plot and £20 per half plot was **Approved**.
- b) Review of Plots and Tenants: Following several tenants giving notice to vacate, the Clerk has completed a review of plots and tenants. All vacated plots have now been filled either by existing tenants moving from half plots to full ones or by new tenants from the waiting list. All rents are up to date. New Tenancy Agreements and invoices will be sent out in April 2024.
- c) Work Required: Cllr. Mason has been on-site and noted a number of works required including water supply which he will attend to.

122/23 Open Actions Not Covered Elsewhere on the Agenda

- a) Levens Traffic Management: The following reports were noted:
 - i) Levens Lane footpath: A meeting between W&FC Highways with Cllrs. Battye and Mason is to be held.
 - ii) Traffic Management within the village: The Clerk confirmed that he had written to James Thompson of W&FC Highways about the proposals for road safety around the school and other areas of the village. A reply is awaited.
- b) Woodland management: The following reports were noted:
 - i) Recent work by Adam Kirk: Cllr. Mason confirmed that following work on Lowgate, Adam Kirk will attend to tidying work at Cotes including the stacking of saleable lengths of timber and laying of brash in rows. The rate is £30 per hour and this work was **Approved**. It was noted that following ENWL work there were still some overhanging trees in the vicinity of the Stainton and Thacker properties.
 - ii) Tree Health and Safety - Update Survey: Treescapes Consultancy will commence survey work in the coming weeks.
- c) Parish Assets and Land:
 - i) Brigsteer Road Site: Cllr. Mason has met James Senior on-site and plans for the repair and corner work on the northern boundary stone wall have been agreed.
 - ii) Jubilee Orchard: The Clerk confirmed that a full application for grant from the Coronation Community Orchard Fund is nearly complete and will be submitted by the closing date of 15 March. Other sources of funding are being investigated.
- d) Parish Council Newsletter: The Chairman confirmed receipt and distribution - although initial delivery had been to the wrong address, and it had not been printed on the specified colour. Otherwise, the content contained a good mix of items, and he thanked the Clerk for coordinating this.
- e) Handyman: Andy Brayshaw had been advised of his appointment and will respond to further instructions for work.
- f) Councillors noted the thanks received from Sheila Watson on the reinstatement of the village board and in turn passed on its thanks to Cllr. Willacy for attending to this.
- g) Parish Website: Cllr. Atfield is liaising with Tom Hecht on this matter.
- h) Levens Greening Campaign: Cllr. Battye outlined upcoming events including a recycling event and litter picking on 13 April and plans for the Great Big Green Week in June.
- i) Parish Emergency Plan: Cllr. Rogerson reported that a request for a volunteer leader has been posted on Facebook and work continues to put an item on the website.

123/23 Correspondence: In addition to the routine circulation of matters from CALC and other Agencies, a Schedule of Correspondence had been circulated and the following items (not otherwise dealt with in the meeting) were noted:

04/03/2024: W&FC giving notice of footpath closure and response from the Open Spaces Society inviting PC view – It was noted that this work had been completed.

08/03/2024: A telephone call from Mrs Pooley requesting the possible siting of a commemorative bench in memory of her son. It was **Agreed** to suggest that a bench in the new Orchard might be a suitable location and the Clerk was asked to liaise with her on this.

124/23 Future Agenda Items:

- a) Matters that might be advised prior to the next meeting; otherwise follow-up to the current Agenda items.

125/23 Date of the Next Meeting:

In a change to the normal sequence of meetings, the next Ordinary Meeting of the Parish Council will be held on Tuesday, 16 April in the Levens Methodist Church.

The meeting closed at 9.40 p.m.

Signed (Chairman) Date.....