

Levens Parish Council

Minutes of the Ordinary Meeting of the Parish Council held on 09 January 2024 in Levens Methodist Church commencing at 7.30 p.m.

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

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

78/23 Apologies for Absence: All Councillors were in attendance and no other apologies had been received. At this first meeting of the calendar year, the Chairman wished a Happy New Year to all present.

79/23 Declarations of Interest: No matters were declared.

80/23 Minutes: It was **Resolved** that the Chairman be authorised to sign the Minutes of the Ordinary Meeting of the Council held on 14 November 2023 as a true record.

81/23 Public Participation: No members of the public were present.

82/23 Reports:

a) **Reports from Councillors attending meetings:**

i. Following a meeting of the A590 Working Group before Christmas, Cllr. Burrow commented that a recent fatal accident in the vicinity of the Bridlecroft junction had highlighted the importance of leaving no stone unturned in continuing efforts to secure improvements. Other methods of traffic calming such as average speed cameras could be considered. Cllr. Holmes mentioned that during the recent road closure due to the fatal accident, police were routing vehicles, including HGVs, via the Lyth Valley roads, including over the weight restricted bridge, which is a further issue that will need to be resolved.

ii. Cllr. Atfield reported that he had attended a 'Meet the (Westmorland and Furness) Officers' virtual event coordinated by CALC on 12 January. 44 representatives were present though none from Barrow. Finance officers confirmed that Council Tax will rise by 2.99% and Adult Care by 2%; the 2nd homes premium is not to be introduced until 2025-26. Highways officers responded to questions on winter weather arrangements. Apparently Levens is classed as being on a bus route hence the recent gritting, though a correspondent had asked why Underbarrow had not been included and had noted that some grit bins needed replenishment. It was **Agreed** to put these matters on HIAMS but to advise that any Parishioner can and should put highways issues or concerns on the system themselves at:

<https://www.westmorlandandfurness.gov.uk/parking-streets-and-transport/streets-roads-and-pavements>.

It was noted that grit is supplied for use on roads and pavements, not private driveways and paths.

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

i. Consultation on the 2024-25 budget is underway and booklets explaining proposals are available. In answer to a query, Cllr. Battye confirmed that there were no general charitable donations offered by W&FC other than to budgeted initiatives or through the Member Locality Grant.

ii. The Boundaries Commission will be conducting a review of Ward boundaries and Councillor numbers working on a general principle of 2,700 residents per ward.

c) **Police:** Recent editions of Focus had been circulated, but there had been no items of specific relevance to Levens.

83/23 Finance

a) **Receipts** 01 November – 31 December 2023: Cllrs. noted receipt of a Wayleave receipt from Electricity NW Ltd (Church Road - though it is not clear what precisely this relates to): £ 13.46

b) **Payments:**

i. Councillors **Ratified** the following payment agreed by email and subsequently paid in December 2023 (which included payment at the new national rate and back-pay):

M R Curry: Salary November 2023 - (PC: £491.75; Project: £443.26; Charity: £86.80;

Expenses: £4.15; Mileage: £21.60)

Total: £ 1,047.56

The following payments were **Approved:**

- ii. M. R. Curry: Salary December 2023 – (PC: £231.46; Project: £224.08; Charity: £26.08; Mileage: £16.20) Total: £ 497.82
A further payment of £0.09p is required to correct a previous underpayment.
- iii. HMRC: PAYE etc. Months 7-9 (October – December) £ 623.30
- c) **Bank Reconciliation and report on Ring-Fenced Funds:** Councillors noted the reconciled bank balance of £14,062.87p (£13,962.87 after unrepresented cheques) held by the Parish Council on 31 December 2023 and the Chairman was authorised to sign the bank statement. 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).
- d) **Budgets**
 - i) 2023-24 Budget Review: The Clerk had completed and circulated a budget review to 31 December with projections to the final outturn at 31 March 2024. Income projections show a surplus above budget of approximately £5,400.00 including increased refunds from HRMC (VAT) and salary refunds from the Project. The key variances were explained and justified and when stripped out of the projected outturn leave a core income projection very close to budget. Expenditure is projected to be overspent by approximately £1,500 largely due to a final capital payment of £1,100 for the new Noticeboard. All other variances are minor and explicable and there is no case for an Exception Report to address any negative trends. Cllrs **Agreed** that current budget performance was satisfactory.
 - ii) 2024-25 Draft Budget: Using the projections for 2023-24, the Clerk had circulated a draft budget for 2024-25 including the Precept requirement. The draft budget was scrutinised, and it was **Agreed** to increase the allocation for training by £100 to £200. Rental income from land and car parking will remain the same but the 2024-25 demand will carry a notice that the annual rents are to be increased in 2025-26. On this basis, the budget was provisionally **Agreed**.
 - iii) Precept Demand 2024-25: In the provisionally agreed draft budget the precept demand is £14,700 (£14,442 in 2023-24). W&FC will pay a further £352 Council Tax Grant, but Councillors noted that this is likely to be the final year that this grant is to be paid. W&FC have indicated that the traditional Precept demand form was no longer in use and that a letter / email stating that the budget had been approved and the precept requirement agreed was sufficient. This however left doubt as to the status of the amount required for street lighting and the Clerk undertook to clarify this. Subject to confirmation on this point, the provisionally agreed budget may need to be amended and it was **Agreed** that the final budget would be approved by email in time for submission to W&FC on 31 January 2024. The final outcome will be reported and ratified at the February meeting.
 - iv) Internal Auditor - 2023-24 Accounts: The proposal to invite Jean Airey to conduct the internal audit was **Approved**.

84/23 Levens Community Project

- a) **Levens Community Project Advisory Group (PAG):** It was noted that there had been no meeting of PAG in advance of the Parish Council meeting in January and that the next meeting will be held on 16 January. Cllr Mason presented a brief report from a meeting held on 05 December, the minutes of which had been circulated. Main items of report were:
 - i. **Sale of Plots:**
 - Plot 1, Cotes: Since the December meeting, ENWL have requested approval to re-route cabling over / under Parish Council land. Approval was given for a draft wayleave. This work should pave the way for the removal of overhead wires at Plot 1 and the adjacent trees with ash die-back. A site meeting with Mr Huddleston is being arranged.
 - Plot 3, Church Road: There is no movement on the sale of this plot. The Project will look for renewed focus on marketing in the near future.
 - ii. **Underhill:**
 - Supply of services: TH had been requested to accept the quote from ENWL.
 - iii. **New Village Hall:** Ground works were all but complete and the amount of stone / hardcore was being significantly reduced. The sale of stone / hardcore continues.
 - iv. **Tender Packs:** Tony Hills (TH) had advised that comments from the Project Group were being incorporated and both tender packs should be ready for final approval in mid-January, following which Invitations to Tender (ITT) could be issued.
 - v. **Project Management and Review of Finance:** PAG is aware that despite nearing the original target for fund-raising, Covid and other issues have increased the overall costs of the construction phase. The Project has been successful in having an Expression of Interest accepted enabling a bid for grant to be submitted to the Community

Ownership Fund. This is a potentially major source of funding but the bid requires the submission of robust financial data. It had always been intended to let the contractors indicate the level of cost via their tenders, but there is a question as to whether a detailed cost plan is required in advance of this. Members of PAG had met informally with a local Quantity Surveyor (QS) on 19 December to discuss aspects of Project Management and he had proposed a number of options for consideration. These included the appointment of a QS or commissioning an estimating company to provide a cost plan as well as the use of independent value engineering to modify specifications if necessary. PAG is to discuss the overall financial situation and the options available to it at its meeting on 16 January.

- vi. Community Ownership Fund: The Clerk reported that he completed several sections of the full application, and this remains work in progress. Some of the upcoming sections, particularly on finance, are challenging and support will be required.
- vii. Investment of Cash Reserves: The Clerk reported that balances at 31/12/2023 were:
 - Current Account: £15,632.09
 - Deposit Account: £1,311,574.17

b) **Payments Required:** There were no payments requiring approval.

85/23 Planning Applications:

a) **Schedule of Planning Applications:** Updates to the Planning Schedule on 09 January had been circulated and the following were noted:

PC Ref	Application No.	Location	Proposal	Status
43	SL/2022/0074	Levens Lane	New footpath	Extant to 31/03/2024. Cllr. Battye confirmed that the Locality Board will consider this towards late January.
23	2023/1029/FPA	Arleybank LA8 8PD	Porch ext & associated works	Resolved to make No Objection . Comments to be submitted by 24/01/2024
25.	2023/1139/FPA	Bridge End G'age LA8 8EL	Var of Cndtns + demolition of existing house	Resolved to make No Objection . Comments to be submitted by 25/01/2024
26	2023/1169/FPA	Whinthwaite Hse LA8 8NU	Single storey detached ancillary building	Resolved to make No Objection . Comments to be submitted by 11/01/2024

b) **Other Planning Matters:**

- i. **Shepherd's Mill:** The Clerk reported that he has advised W&FC of the intention to submit a new S215 Notice. The Senior Manager – Housing & Standards Services had replied that in her view there was no action that Housing Standards could take, but that she had referred the matter to the Legal Team for an opinion. The possibility of raising a Freedom of Information request was mentioned. In the meantime, W&FC had offered Cllr. Battye a cross-Council meeting which she in turn had mentioned to Cllr. Burrow and it was felt that this offer should be followed-up .

86/23 20-mph Speed Limit: The Clerk confirmed that since the last meeting in November, W&FC had issued detailed guidance on how to apply for a 20-mph zone(s) together with an application form. He had completed this as far as he was able and circulated it for comment, but was unable to add in the entrance points to the 20-mph zone as this needed to be agreed by the Parish Council. Cllr. Battye undertook to prepare an initial map of proposed locations and circulate for comment.

The application also needed to demonstrate the extent of public consultation undertaken and the level of support evident. It was agreed that though useful, the Facebook survey was only indicative and would not stand as a full consultation exercise. The same would likely be true of the Parish Magazine and the website. The use of a questionnaire was considered and it was **Agreed** that the Clerk should ask W&FC if there was a standard form or template that could be used for this purpose.

87/23 Christmas 2023: The Chairman noted that the switch-on had been a really good event and thanked Cllr. Burrow and her team for organising it. Cllrs Burrow and Rogerson reported that the various attractions including the Brownies and refreshment strands had all enhanced the event. Feedback had been very positive. After expenses, the event had raised approximately £776 net (to be confirmed) via direct donations or Just Giving. Several donations had been made including to the Village Shop for the provision of electricity. The current supplier of the tree will not be able to supply one for 2024 and a tree will need to be procured from another source. This is a big issue as the Milnthorpe tree was reputed to have cost £1,500. Ideas are being considered for a suitable arrangement for the 2024 event.

88//23 Parish Council Elections - May 2024: The Clerk reported that W&FC have not yet provided further information on the process, but it is understood that this will be forthcoming.

89/23 Open Actions Not Covered Elsewhere on the Agenda

- a) Levens Traffic Management: The following reports were noted:
 - i) Levens Lane footpath: To be considered by the Locality Board later in the month.
 - ii) Traffic Management within the village: Proposals from W&FC are still awaited including plans for road safety around the school and particularly at the top end of Levens Lane around the entrance to the Playing Fields. Cllr. Atfield added that the flashing lights are still not working in a synchronised manner. Cllr Battye noted these continuing frustrations and will feedback concerns to highways officers.
 - iii) Winter gritting and road clearance arrangements: Correspondence had been received about the non-gritting of Underhill compared with other village roads and the need to replenish grit bins. These observations have been acknowledged and it was agreed to place the matters on the HIAMS system and that individual parishioners should also be encouraged to use the system.
- b) Woodland management: The following reports were noted:
 - i) Work done by ENWL: The Electricity Board had completed extensive thinning on Parish land at Cotes to clear overhead power lines from encroaching trees. A considerable amount of timber has been left on site, some of which has been removed without permission. Cllr Mason will consider how best to formalise the removal and sale of timber.
 - ii) P. Capstick re trees at Checkmate: The Clerk has written to P. Capstick to explain that the contractor had attended site pre-Christmas, but the weather had been too bad to commence work. He has committed to return early in the New Year.
 - iii) Tree Health and Safety – The Clerk has sent briefs to two contractors inviting them to respond with proposals to re-survey Parish woodlands.
- c) Parish Assets and Land:
 - i) Brigsteer Road Site: This remains to be progressed.
 - ii) Jubilee Orchard: An expression of interest has been submitted to W&FC to secure an opportunity to apply to the Coronation Community Orchard Fund for grant support to develop the facility.
- d) Handyman: Andy Brayshaw remains interested. It was **Agreed** that the Clerk will coordinate a meeting between him and Cllrs. Holmes and Mason.
- e) Parish Website: Cllr. Atfield will discuss further with Tom Hecht.
- f) Levens Greening Campaign: Cllr. Battye reported that an events programme was being prepared for 2024 and that initiatives will include promotion of the thermal imaging programme. CALC is hosting an online session on 25 January on what Parish Councils can do to mitigate climate change and biodiversity loss.
- g) Parish Emergency Plan: The Clerk is liaising with Cllr. Rogerson about an item on Facebook to encourage a local leader to come forward to help the initiative.

90/23 Correspondence: Items on the Schedule of Correspondence were noted and particularly from a local resident asking for a new village noticeboard, improved access to the noticeboard at the Hare and Hounds and the possibility of switching off streetlights between 11.00 p.m. and 5.00 a.m. Advice was given to the Clerk who will respond to these enquiries. An email from Carolyn Keavan advising about the planned Levens 10k event on 22 May 2024 was noted. Thanks from those in receipt of grants / donations were also noted.

91/23 Future Agenda Items:

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

92/23 Date of the Next Meeting: The next Ordinary Meeting of the Parish Council will be held on Tuesday, 13 February 2024 in the Levens Methodist Church.

The meeting closed at 10.03 p.m.

Signed (Chairman) Date.....