

Levens Parish Council

Annual Parish Meeting 2022

MINUTES of the Annual Parish Meeting held on Tuesday 08 March 2022 at 7:00 p.m.

Present: Cllr R. Atfield (Chairman), 6 other Parish Councillors, County Cllr. J. Bland, M. R. Curry (Clerk), and 8 residents.

Introduction: Cllr. Atfield welcomed participants to the Annual Parish Meeting for 2022. He referred to the introductory note on the Agenda which said: It is a legal requirement to hold a Village Meeting once a year between 01 March and 30 June which the Parish Council has traditionally organised on behalf of the Parish. In addition to delivering the legal requirements, it has also arranged for feedback from village organisations and invited a guest speaker. The last 'usual style' meeting was held in 2019. Due to Coronavirus the meeting in March 2020 was cancelled and in 2021 a legal dispensation allowed a reduced meeting to be held via Zoom. Since May last year that dispensation has ceased and we must hold meetings face to face. When the Parish Council discussed the 2022 meeting lingering concerns about Covid-19 remained and there was still uncertainty about when final restrictions would end. As a result it was agreed to remain cautious and to hold a much reduced event commencing immediately before the March Parish Council Meeting at 7 p.m. This meeting will deal only with the legal requirements, but in time the Parish Council will consider whether we can all get together later in the year to 'catch up' on what our village organisations have been doing and perhaps link it with a guest speaker or other updates.

1. **Apologies:** Cllr. S. Bagot (testing positive for Covid).

2. **Approval of the Minutes of the 2021 Annual Parish Meeting**

The Minutes of the meeting held on 13 April 2021 had been posted on the Parish Council webpage and circulated to attendees. In the absence of comment, it unanimously **Resolved** that the Chairman sign the Minutes of the meeting held on 13 April 2021 as a true record.

3. **Chairman's Report**

Cllr. Atfield's full Report is attached as part of these Minutes at Annex 1. In it, he acknowledged a wide range of activities and initiatives that the Parish Council has been involved with over the previous 12 months. A summary of his Report is as follows:

- Parish Elections held the previous year had resulted in no change in Membership of the Council. He thanked District Councillors Kevin Holmes and Brian Rendell and County Councillor Jim Bland for their attendance and advice over the previous year.
- The Community Project continues to make good progress with the sale of plots and work commenced on the 4 affordable houses at Underhill. Councillor Mason will give a more detailed report.
- The B4RN broadband project is approaching its conclusion with nearly 300 properties now connected. He expressed thanks and admiration for the determined efforts of local volunteers to achieve success in this community initiative.
- He reviewed a number of events and achievements during the previous year including:
 - Continued engagement with the A590 Working Group (with thanks to Cllrs Burrow and Holmes for representing the PC on this);
 - The development of the Greening Campaign initiated via SLDC under the local leadership of Cllr. Battye;
 - Ongoing efforts to calm traffic speed within the village with associated efforts to create a footpath down Levens Lane;

- Parish Councillors had been pleased to see that the old Carpet Shop is under offer pending sale and thanks were expressed to Cllr Burrow for working closely with the current owner and SLDC;
- The Christmas event 2021 had once again been a success and thanks were expressed to all involved, whilst the return of the repaired post box to Nelson Square was welcomed;
- Events to look forward to include a beacon to celebrate the Queens’s Platinum Jubilee on 02 June and the creation of a small orchard as a lasting commemoration of the event; also a re-designed Parish Council webpage to be launched by the end of March.
- Looking further ahead, the Chairman referred to local government changes creating two unitary councils out of the old Cumbria County Council and stressed the intention of the Parish Council to remain apolitical.
- Finally, Cllr. Atfield thanked his fellow Councillors for their contribution to the village and Martin Curry, Clerk to the Council, for his continued work on its behalf.

4. Financial Report: Years Ending 31 March 2021 and estimates to March 2022

The Clerk reported on audited figures for the 2020-21 financial year and gave a unaudited update to the Year End March 2022. His detailed Report and accompanying spreadsheet is attached as part of these Minutes at Annex 2. In summary, and having highlighted a number of areas of interest from the audited accounts, he reported that the 2021 financial year was completed satisfactorily, though the accounts remained complex as a result of increased activity within the Levens Community Project. He also reported that the estimates for the year ending 31 March 2022 appeared to be satisfactory giving no cause for an exception report, though still subject to internal and external audit. There were no questions on the Report.

5. Report from The Levens Community Project

Cllr. Mason gave an update Report on the Project which is attached to these Minutes. In response to questions from the floor, Cllr. Mason confirmed that tenders for the construction of the affordable houses at Underhill will be going out soon once the infrastructure work is completed. The original estimate for the build of the new Village Hall was £1.2 million, but that this will have increased by an unknown factor as a result of Brexit, Covid and potentially current events in Ukraine. He confirmed that there are no known obstacles to the sale of the two remaining plots of land at Cotes and Church Hill.

6. Public Forum

The following comments were raised from members of the public:

Mr. Watson asked if there was any sign of the commencement of works at Sizergh Fell Quarry - Cllr Mason replied that Cubby’s Ltd had been appointed to commence the construction work and that a start had been anticipated in the early New Year. As far as is known no start has yet been made.

The Chairman thanked all present for their attendance.

The meeting closed at 7.45 p.m.

Signed.....(Chairman) Date:

Chairman's Report April 2022

It was in 2019 – 3 years ago – that we held the Annual Parish Meeting “in person” so to speak. Tonight we are meeting in person but with an Agenda limited to our legal responsibilities. As I said in our latest Newsletter, the Parish Council hopes that as 2022 progresses and “normality” returns (we hope) we may later in the year organise a meeting where we can all get together in a more traditional way.

The Parish Council Election due last May was not needed as there were only eight candidates and those were the existing Parish Councillors who I am pleased to say have continued to serve us with no personnel changes. Parish Councillor, Kevin Holmes, is also one of our District Councillors. Brian Rendell – another District Councillor for our area and Jim Bland our County Councillor usually attend our monthly meetings and we thank them for their help and guidance. We also thank them and Councillor Kevin Holmes for the small but useful grants they are sometimes able to give us for specific events which benefit our village.

The Levens Community Project continues to move on and work is currently underway at the site of the four affordable homes at Underhill. As you will see from tonight's Agenda, a more detailed report will be given a little later.

Broadband For Rural North known as B4RN is not a Parish Council project but we assisted a little at the start as we have said before. The Parish Council notes with admiration all the work our local B4RN volunteers have done during the last twelve months. The vast majority of people who wanted to join are now connected. If you have received your £150 dig grant, perhaps you could consider donating some of it to the Levens Charity. If you already have; then thank you.

Two of our Councillors regularly meet with neighbouring Parishes and representatives from National Highways regarding the A590. Other Councillors are involved in the Levens Community Project in various ways and Parish Councillor Janet Battye has taken the lead on the “Greening” campaign instigated by SLDC. Woodland Management is another area which the Parish Council wants to progress. Finding people who are suitably qualified and insured and who charge a reasonable rate is proving difficult. If you know anyone you think could help then please give us their details – unfortunately we are unable to provide a “finder's fee”!!

Items regularly on our monthly Agenda are, you will not be surprised to learn, traffic, the old carpet shop by the bus stop and a footpath down Levens Lane. The Speed Indicating Devices or SID's by the Playing Fields / School Entrance may remind vehicle users to slow down but those in control do not all act on this reminder. As a Parish Council one option open to us is to try to obtain a 20 mile an hour limit for the whole village. However, most of the traffic in the present 30mph area probably does not exceed that limit but almost certainly travels faster than 20mph. The question to be asked therefore is if there was a 20 mile per hour limit would people abide by it? May I suggest that those of you who drive, try and stay under 20mph next time you drive from home to work or vice versa for example or indeed whenever you drive in our village and let us know your thoughts / reactions etc. As I am sure you have noticed the old carpet shop is under offer and thanks to Councillor Helen Burrow there was a drop in event a couple of weeks ago where the proposed plans were on show. This is the best position we have been in for some time and let us hope for a conclusion everyone can enjoy. The footpath down Levens Lane is under active discussion and a Planning Request has gone into SLDC. I must emphasise however, that a lot of things have to happen over which the Parish Council has no control. Last year I mentioned that the post box by Nelson Square had been removed for repair. It was beyond repair and a brand new box on a post has been installed on the Nelson Square triangle of grass opposite the Church. I am sure you will agree with me that

the Christmas Tree on the Green by the bus stop was really impressive this last Christmas. The Parish Council thanks both District and County Councillors for their donations to help purchase the lights and we thank Parish Councillor Helen Burrow and her team of technicians for facilitating this spectacle. An amount of £481.27 was raised for King's Food Bank in Kendal, so thanks to all who contributed.

In June this year, to celebrate HM the Queen's Platinum Jubilee there will be the lighting of a beacon up at Hyning on the 2nd June. More details nearer the time. As a more permanent celebration the Parish Council hope to create a small orchard on land at Underhill as part of the Green Canopy which the Queen has suggested as an appropriate means of celebrating this unique event.

As I am sure you know, Cumbria as an Authority will cease to exist on 1st April next year. This local Government re-organisation is on one hand, very simple, but on the other hand, extremely complex. As of now we do not know what effect these changes will have on Parish Councils but I will assure you that we will continue to operate on an apolitical basis as we always have. We want to do the best we can for our village irrespective of who might think they are in charge of a level of Government above us.

As I mentioned in my report last year, several Councillors are involved in updating the village website and I am pleased to say that in conjunction with Tom Hecht, who lives in Levens, the re-design, making it more reliable and accessible by portable devices, is due for release in the next few weeks.

Finally, I wish to take this chance once again to thank my fellow Councillors for everything they do; for the hours they spend on Council business both at our meetings and on emails in between, but also for the time they spend attending other events which concern us. I personally thank them for allowing me the privilege of being their Chairman. A Parish Council cannot exist without a Clerk and in Martin Curry we are extremely fortunate to have a very capable person who is unfailingly polite, cheerful and from my position as Chairman, a pleasure to work with. On behalf of the Parish Council I therefore wish to thank you Martin for all your endeavours, advice and patience – both with the Parish Council and with the Levens Community Project.

Ladies and Gentlemen that is my report.

LEVENS ANNUAL PARISH MEETING – 08 MARCH 2022 FINANCE REPORT 2020-21 & PROJECTIONS 2021-22

One of the key requirements of the Annual Parish Meeting is to provide a report on Parish Council finances and this is usually based on the last audited set of accounts, which at this stage relates to the financial year ending 31 March 2021.

The results of audit for 2020-21 were made public, initially on the noticeboard and have been and will remain on the website for many months now. Whilst external auditors do not usually conclude the final audit until September, the reporting period is nonetheless, by this stage, virtually year old. For that reason, it has been the custom in recent years to provide a report on Parish finances for the current financial year, but with an important caution that they are as yet unaudited and financial transactions relating to this financial year will continue well into April. The figures for 2021-22 are therefore presented as indicative only.

So, distributed is a spreadsheet headed Summary Receipts and Payments 2020-21 (Audited) & 2021-22 (Projected).

There are 7 columns on the spreadsheet as follows:

On the left are the budget heads broken into receipts and payments; the next 3 columns to the right (Budget/Actual/Difference) relate to the audited figures for 2020-21 whilst the final 2 columns (Budget/Projected) relate to the current financial year and are presented for information only.

There are several complexities in the PC accounts of which the two most notable are:

1. The significant level of financial transactions associated with the Levens Community Project. The Project is run as a Parish Council Project and its accounts are considered by audit as part of the overall PC account, though the intention is that this is a cost neutral project as far as “core” Parish Council finances are concerned. As such it is managed through a separate PC bank account and its transactions are, as far as possible, kept separate from the core Parish Council financial activity on which the Precept is based. A brief report on Project finances is presented later on and the figures on the spreadsheet before you relate primarily to mainstream PC business.
2. There are self-balancing funds within the Parish Council account which are there because as part of its service to the community the PC is able to facilitate the transfer of funds on behalf of organisations which do not have the administrative frameworks to manage funds for particular projects. This is seen in the receipt of grants for initiatives such as B4RN and Levens Good Neighbours where funds have been received by the Parish Council and either passed on to the group concerned or used to pay costs on its behalf.. Cumbria County Council also has a capital project fund from which payments are periodically made. These too are outwith “core” PC financial activity and have (mostly) been stripped from the figures presented tonight.

For anyone wishing to view the PC accounts in more detail, they are on the Parish Council website for the current and previous years.

And so to the figures presented tonight are firstly for 2020-21 and comments are as follows:

On receipts, you will see that actual receipts were £20,539.67 compared with the budgeted figure of £15,434 – a positive difference of £5,015. In the column headed ‘Diff’ are asterisks against some of the figures that explain the higher receipts than expected. These are as follows:

First asterisks against Other Grants – an unbudgeted figure of £250 from SLDC Members Grant from Cllr Holmes towards the new Noticeboard at Cotes;
Second a payment in from Levens Charity towards the improvement work at the old Women's Institute site on Brigsteer Road paid for initially by the Parish Council
And thirdly, Miscellaneous or Other Income at £3,599.05. I don't like big figures in Miscellaneous budget heads but in that year it was unavoidable. The explanations include a donation paid to us in error (£120) subsequently contra'd out in expenditure; payment of agreed woodland work received from residents (£620); £1,950 grants / donations towards B4RN and Levens Good Neighbours subsequently paid on and finally £864 unbudgeted income from the first Levens Christmas event held in 2020.

Turning now to the Expenditure side, you will note that there is an overall overspend of £1,831 reported and again this is explained mainly by the budget heads with asterisks: Firstly an under-budget figure for Clerk's salary; increased audit fee - though this is balanced by a reduction in grants paid out during the year; a significant underspend on maintenance and repairs, but an untidy set of Miscellaneous payments - the bulk of which was £1,900 paid out for work at the Brigsteer Road site – but you'll remember the corresponding receipt from the Charity which largely balanced this off. Other costs here included posts for the mounting of the Speed Indicator signs (£147) and the payment out of £150 to Levens Good Neighbours after receipt of a Member's Grant from Cllr. Brian Rendell.

The gross balance on the year therefore was a surplus of just over £3,200. However £1,800 of which were donations received for B4RN but not claimed during the year in question reducing the surplus to £1,400 of which a further £864 was 'windfall' generated from the Christmas event and ring-fenced for its future development. The net surplus for the year therefore stood at around £550 which I propose to you as a satisfactory outcome.

Moving across the spreadsheet now to 2021-22 I stress again that these figures are indicative only pending final confirmation that allocations to budget heads are correct and subject to internal and external audit. However, on the face of it the indications are that there are no areas of particular concern and again asterisks against the projected figures highlight a few lines worth mentioning. On receipts £750 from Cllr Holmes member budget was towards new Christmas lights (a further £250 was pledged by Cllr Bland from his CCC fund) and Cllr Holmes has also made a grant of £500 towards the costs of tackling ash die-back. This disease is spreading throughout our woodlands and is likely to involve considerable work and expense in the coming years. There is also an additional £500 showing as received from the Charity which is in respect of costs incurred for administration of the Charity.

On the expenditure side, Covid continues to impact PC work to an extent – no training events have been attended. Audit fees were reduced this year though room hire costs reflect the subscription to Zoom technology (though this will be reclaimed from the Project). Finally, the capital costs of the new noticeboard at Cotes are reflected in these figures.

As with the previous year, I anticipate that the overall income and expenditure figures for PC activity in the current year will be satisfactory.

And the final part of my report relates to the Project finances. The account covers the period from 2012 up to the last entry on 18 January 2022 with a reconciled running balance currently standing at £1,037,446 held by HSBC. Total income shows as £1,385,129 with expenditure of £348,319. The Project is complex as are its financial

transactions which are too detailed to report on in detail here. However the Project retains accountants who oversee and advise on financial management and the Project accounts are audited annually as part of the PC audit process. The accounts are currently available to view on the Parish Council webpage. A new webpage is to be launched very shortly where the accounts will be easier to read.

With that, I am happy to take any questions.

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LEVENS PARISH COUNCIL - SUMMARY RECEIPTS & PAYMENTS 2020-21 (AUDITED) & 2021-22 (PROJECTED)

	2020-21			2021-22		
	Budget	Actual	Diff	Budget	Projected	
RECEIPTS						
Precept and Co. Tax Grant	13,165.86	13,165.86		13,651.00	13,651.00	
Co. Tax Grant	363.14	363.14		345.00	345.00	
Community Project Grants & Other Income	0.00	0.00		0.00	0.00	
Other Grants - SLDC Member Grant (N'board)	0.00	250.00	***	0.00	750.00	***
Allotment Rent	315.00	297.50		315.00	315.00	
Land & Parking	315.00	314.61		315.00	290.00	
Xfer from Levens Charity Account:	500.00	1,607.05	***	500.00	1,000.00	***
VAT Refund 2020/21	600.00	942.46		700.00	500.37	
Misc / Other Income	175.00	3,599.05	***	20.00	55.70	
Sub-total	15,434.00	20,539.67	up 5015	15,846.00	16,907.07	up 1061
TOTAL RECEIPTS	15,434.00	20,539.67		15,846.00	16,907.00	
PAYMENTS						
Salaries, Travel & Training	5,000.00	5,469.68	***	5,637.00	5,600.00	
Travel				200.00	112.00	
Training				300.00	0.00	***
Postage, phone, b'band & office allwce	450.00	306.49		300.00	345.12	
Stationery, office supplies & printing	450.00	0.00		650.00	550.00	
Insurance	400.00	400.96		450.00	380.00	
Audit	500.00	900.00	***	900.00	547.00	***
Subscriptions	285.00	327.35		350.00	353.00	
Website Costs	200.00	207.00		220.00	220.00	
Room Hire	150.00	131.12		150.00	243.70	***
Grants	2,820.00	2,400.00	***	2,550.00	2,514.00	
S. 137	30.00	30.00		30.00	35.00	
Election Costs	0.00	0.00		0.00	100.00	

Mtnce & Repairs	1,000.00	118.50	***	500.00	500.00
Woodland, grass cutting, gritting	1,500.00	1,503.20		900.00	900.00
Footway lighting	1,384.00	1,384.21		1,343.00	1,343.13
Land Registration	100.00	100.00		100.00	30.00
Allotment Rent	315.00	315.00		315.00	315.00
Defibrillator	150.00	0.00		150.00	292.80
Miscellaneous	100.00	2,357.75	***	100.00	100.00
Capital Costs new noticeboard, Cotes	0.00	708.75		0.00	503.00
VAT	600.00	605.00		700.00	655.18
TOTAL EXPENDITURE	15,434.00	17,265.01	o/s 1831	15,845.00	15,638.93
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