

LEVENS PARISH COUNCIL NEWSLETTER – SPRING 2024

CHAIRMAN'S COMMENTS

Welcome to this first Parish Council Newsletter of 2024. It seems a long time ago but I would like to thank all those involved in the erection and decoration of the Christmas Tree on The Green. It was good to be able to have a "Switch-on" gathering which everyone seemed to enjoy. Thanks to all who contributed to the Christmas Fund. The cost of a real tree is a concern and how we deal with this is being considered.

On the 12th February Tender Documents for the building of the New Village Hall and the four affordable homes were sent out to contractors. This is a key milestone in the Levens Community Project and the significance of this cannot be overstated. Very many thanks to all those people who have worked over the last 10+ years to reach this moment.

A speed limit of 20mph in our Village has been regularly mentioned over the years. Westmorland and Furness Council – the new Council who replaced SLDC and Cumbria CC – have instigated a process where Parish/Town Councils can express an interest in participating. We have submitted our Expression of Interest and await developments. One thing that will certainly have to happen is public involvement: be that Meetings, Surveys, Questionnaires etc. Obviously, we will keep you updated.

In the future, proof of identity will be required when we go to vote. The next election (for the Police, Fire and Crime Commissioner) will be on the 2nd May. Please just bear this in mind when you go to vote.

Finally, the Annual Parish Meeting will be held on Tuesday 19th March at 7.30pm in the Village Institute/Hall and I hope you can come.

Roger Atfield – Chair, Levens Parish Council

Levens Community Project

As we write, there is exciting news from the Project as invitations to tender (ITTs) for the construction phase of the new Village Hall and the affordable houses at Underhill have just been issued to a number of building contractors. After years of planning, fund-raising and more recently ground clearance and preparation, this is a truly significant milestone in this remarkable community-led project. Contractors have 6-weeks to respond to the ITT, at the end of which a selection process will identify the preferred contractor(s) and - critically - the build-costs associated with the developments. The Project has done extraordinarily well in raising the funds required, with all but two of its plots of land successfully sold for self-build (and one of those currently under offer) and a number of grants secured. Costs have undoubtedly risen since the first estimates were prepared, however, and the Project has commissioned its own estimator to provide a guide of what to expect. This professionally sourced data will also enable the Project to prepare a bid for a significant sum to the Community Ownership Fund which will require robust financial information and evidence of cost management.

Greening Levens

The Parish Council supports raising awareness of climate change and biodiversity loss in Levens through this local informal group. Topics at recent monthly meetings have included hearing from the National Trust about its work on Sizergh toward net zero; from the Lowland Curlew Recovery Group about increasing breeding success in the Lyth Valley and Cumbria Action for Sustainability's Retrofit Made Easy. There'll be a business meeting shortly to plan more meetings over the next few months, possibly on Planting for Pollinators and Active Travel, as well as activities in Great Big Green Week at the beginning of June. All are welcome to come to meetings: contact janetmbattye@gmail.com

20-mph Speed Zone

Levens Parish Council has worked hard over recent years to improve road safety in the village, especially in the vicinity of the school. As Sole Trustee of the Levens Charity it has invested in speed indicator devices and is currently working with Highways Officers for additional safety measures and a possible footpath on Levens Lane. Late in 2023 Westmorland and Furness Council (W&FC) launched a scheme to enable local communities to apply for 20-mph zones on roads in suitable locations. The focal point for the scheme is the local Parish Council which must pass a resolution expressing interest in the scheme, but even then, success in securing speed restrictions is not guaranteed and is subject to proposals meeting a number of criteria. One of the requirements for a successful outcome is evidence of public support and when W&FC announced the scheme there was immediate interest from individuals in the Parish. An informal petition was set-up on the local Facebook page and representations in favour of a scheme were also made direct to the Parish Council by correspondence and via public participation at its November meeting. As a result, the Parish Council formally expressed an interest in exploring the scheme and resolved to submit an application, which it has now done. If the application is successful, W&FC will work closely with the Parish Council and will require robust evidence of support from residents, without which the scheme will not proceed. At this stage feedback, though predominantly in favour, is informal and not based on a substantive survey of views. W&FC will help with formally assessing support and details of the proposals will form part of public survey. At this stage, the Parish Council is awaiting the initial response to its application and, if positive, will proceed to working up details and assessing public support. Residents will be kept fully informed of progress.

Other Highways Matters

As advised last time, don't forget that the Highways Section of Westmorland and Furness Council (W&FC) maintains a system that enables anyone to report issues with local roads and paths - so if you spot a problem do go to: <https://www.westmorlandandfurness.gov.uk/parking-streets-and-transport/streets-roads-and-pavements>.

Coronation Community Orchard

The Green Canopy Scheme was set up to encourage community tree planting initiatives as part of the Platinum Jubilee celebrations in 2022. Levens Parish Council as Sole Trustee of Levens Charity, successfully registered a plot of land owned by the Charity immediately to the south of the affordable homes to be built at Underhill. On the back of this, it has now been invited to apply for a grant of up to £15,000 from the Coronation Community Orchard Fund to establish a community orchard on the site. Success in securing funding is not guaranteed and will depend on the quality of the application - preparation of which is currently underway. If successful, grant support will include funding for boundary improvements, ground works and preparation, purchase and planting of trees, tree guards, irrigation systems and facilities for public access and enjoyment. We should know in the next couple of months whether funding has been secured.

Handyman

The Parish Council is pleased to announce that it has engaged Andy Brayshaw to undertake maintenance work on its behalf. Andy already does work for several local parishes and is skilled in a variety of work including mowing and strimming, cutting back and clearing, low level tree work, maintenance of amenity sites and asset repair. He has a full range of equipment and powered machinery. Andy will be asked to maintain local verges and assets such as the Brigsteer Road picnic site (where plans to tidy up the boundary walls are soon to be completed). It is also hoped that he will be able to help with and look after the proposed Coronation Community Orchard mentioned above. We look forward to Andy starting in the near future.

Parish Woodlands

Residents will have noted the work done on Parish Council woodland at Cotes as flagged up in the previous Newsletter. To recap, this work was not commissioned by the Parish Council (which is not allowed to fell trees within a set distance of power lines) but was undertaken as part of its maintenance responsibilities by Electricity NorthWest Ltd (ENWL). The growth of trees into and over power lines was widespread as thinning and cut-back work had not been possible in recent years, with Covid being an additional barrier to work. This had resulted in a considerable backlog of work for ENWL generally and it is indicative of the importance they attached to the situation at Cotes that they prioritised this work. The resultant thinning was therefore extensive, but welcomed by the Parish Council as necessary and will benefit the woodland eco-system. Unfortunately, bad weather prevented the removal of much of the timber, but plans are in hand to finalise the work and to arrange for the disposal of saleable timber. The Parish Council has also commissioned work along Lowgate as part of its ongoing woodland management.

To further assist its management of the woodlands that it owns, The Parish Council is about to engage an arboriculturist to update the existing Tree Health and Safety Report. Its woodlands were surveyed in 2020 and a report published as a result. Some work was undertaken, but once again Covid impeded the implementation of most of the recommendations. With the continuing spread of ash die-back in mind it is now prudent to review the Report and to identify any specific trees that are in need of attention.

Emergency Plan – Volunteer Coordinator Required!

The idea of a community-based emergency plan is to ensure that there are facilities in place to support people should events in the wider environment (such as flooding, storm damage or cuts in energy supply) have negative impacts on local communities and particularly vulnerable people. A group of local volunteers representing different relevant community assets has looked at the guidance provided by Action for Communities in Cumbria (ACT) and the Cumbria Association of Local Councils (CALC) and feels that the preparation of a plan is both desirable and achievable. It must, however, be a plan that is owned by the community itself – one which makes provision for those organisations or individuals who can provide facilities and assistance to be able to do so in a coordinated way and the group has launched a plea for a committed volunteer to work with it to lead the production of a plan. Details are already on the village Facebook site and will soon be on the website or might be requested from the Clerk via levens.parish@gmail.com.

Levens Annual Parish Meeting – 19 March 2024: 7.30 p.m. at the Institute

Under the provisions of the Local Government Act 1972 it is a legal requirement for parishes to hold an annual meeting between 1st March and 1st June. The Annual Parish Meeting is not a meeting of the Parish Council; indeed the Parish Council itself is not legally bound to organise the meeting, though most Parish Councils, including Levens, traditionally accept the responsibility for doing so. Where there is a Parish Council, the Chair of the Council presides and the agenda must include reports on parish council business over the previous 12 months, including finance. Significantly, however, the meeting also provides a chance for parishioners to catch-up on local matters and to hear about the activities of voluntary or local community groups. It often invites a guest speaker to give a short presentation on a topic of local interest. It will invite all active clubs and societies to the meeting and provide the opportunity for them to give a (short) summary of their activities. The Annual Parish Meeting is a great event that helps to display and reinforce the vibrancy of the village. Further details of the 2024 evening will be publicised - wine and nibbles are offered!

Levens Parish Council 2023-24

Councillor	Address	Tel.	Email
Roger Atfield (Chair)	The Old Court, Church Rd, Levens, LA8 8PU	015395 61574	rogeratfield@btinternet.com
Roger Mason (Vice-Chair)	Heaves Farm, Levens, LA8 8DU	015395 60200	roger@heavesfarm.co.uk
Susan Bagot	School House, Church Road, Levens, LA8 8PU	015395 60588	sbagot@schoolhse.co.uk
Helen Burrow	Davlen Fold, Brigsteer Rd, Levens, LA8 8NT	015395 61082	helenburrow20@gmail.com
Janet Battye	Inglewood, Cinderbarrow, Levens	07711 583013	janetmbattye@gmail.com
Kevin Holmes	Field Place, Levens, LA8 8EJ	07773 453548	kevinrhomes0@gmail.com
David Rogerson	16, Nethercroft, Levens, LA8 8LU	015395 61628	davidirogerson@btinternet.com
Mark Willacy	Hundred Acre View Church Rd LA8 8PS	07786 080893	mark@dhwillacy.com
Clerk	Address	Tel.	Email
Martin Curry	18 Barn Holme, Kendal, LA9 5LP	07388 920410	levens.parish@gmail.com

Councillor, Westmorland and Furness Council: Cllr. Janet Battye, Inglewood, Cinderbarrow, Levens LA8 8NX. Mob: 07711 583013. Email: janetmbattye@gmail.com

Police: PCSO 5233 Jayne Park. Email: jayne.park@cumbria.police.uk

Parish Elections

Elections to the Parish Council will be held on 02 May 2024. Details of the election process will be published when available.

Parish Council Meetings 2023-24

Meetings are held on the second Tuesday of most months in the Methodist Church Meeting Room commencing at 7.30 p.m. unless otherwise indicated / notified. Matters relating to Parish Council meetings including Agendas and Minutes are posted on the Parish Council Noticeboard and on its webpage: www.levens.org.uk/parish-council. All are welcome to attend and there is an item for public participation on every Agenda.

The following dates are scheduled for meetings in the current Parish Council year:

12 March

09 April

The first meeting of the new Parish Council year will be held on 14 May which will be the Annual Parish Council Meeting (not to be confused with the Annual Parish Meeting to be held on 19 March (see the earlier article in this newsletter). The Chair and vice-Chair of the Parish Council will be elected at this meeting and a new meetings calendar for the 2024-25 year will be confirmed.

The Parish Council was once again delighted with the success of the Christmas event and thanks all concerned whether for organising or attending and contributing.

For other sources of local information do please check out our official website at: www.levens.org.uk. There is also a local Facebook Group where items of local interest are discussed - just search for 'Levens Village Community'.