

Levens Parish Council

Minutes of the Ordinary Meeting of the Parish Council held on 10 January 2023 in Levens Methodist Church at 7.30 p.m.

Present: Cllrs. R. Atfield (Chairman), S. Bagot, J. Battye (and as Shadow Councillor Westmorland & Furness Council [W&FC]), H. Burrow, K. Holmes (and as SLDC District Cllr.), R. Mason, D. Rogerson, M. Willacy.

In Attendance: W&FC Councillor S. Bavin; M. R. Curry (Clerk) and 1 member of the public.

89/22 Apologies for Absence: County Councillor J. Bland had sent his apologies.

90/22 Declarations of interest: None declared.

91/22 Minutes: It was **Resolved** that the Chairman be authorised to sign the Minutes of the Ordinary Meeting of the Council held on 08 November 2022 as a true record.

92/22 Public Participation: No matters were raised.

93/22 Reports:

a) Reports from Councillors attending meetings:

Cllr Atfield had attended a Zoom meeting on liaison with the new W&FC hosted by CALC on 16 November. The leader-designate, Cllr J Brooks had answered questions. There would be 150 parishes in the new Council area and there was a pledge that W&FC would not increase pressures on Parish Councils. The levying of election costs was being reviewed. He had also attended an on-line training course on Carbon Literacy organised by CALC on 01 December.

b) **Police:** No report had been received from the Police.

c) **District Councillor:** Cllr. Holmes reported on the outcome of an appeal to the Planning Inspectorate in respect of SLDCs failure to respond to a planning application at the Langdales within the prescribed time. This had found in favour of the applicants and re-stated various conditions attached to the planning consent. These included conditions for vehicular access and for the treatment of the boundary hedge situated on the southern boundary of the site. This is to be retained and not be removed or reduced in height unless written approval is given by the Local Planning Authority. The reasons given included:

2) In order to protect neighbouring residential amenity;

4) In order to preserve the neighbours living conditions.

Otherwise, Cllr Holmes reported that SLDC was focused on the transition process to the new W&FC but continues with business as usual.

d) **Shadow Councillor, W&FC:** Cllr Battye reported that the pace of transition had increased with 85% of staff positions allocated. Decisions were also being made about the composition of Committees. A draft budget is being presented to the Shadow Council next week. Consideration is being given to the restoration of the Council Tax Grant usually awarded to Parish Councils within the precept process, but currently in abeyance. She believes that there is a good chance that this will be restored and will push for that outcome.

e) **County Councillor:** In the absence of Cllr Bland there was no update from the County Council.

94/22 Finance

a) **Receipts 01 October – 31 December 2022:** The Clerk reported that no income had been received during the period.

b) **Payments Required:** The following payments were approved:

i) M R Curry – Salary: December 2022: (PC: £117.09; Project £280.50; Charity £42.84; Mileage £23.40):

£ 463.83

ii) The following payment already made (as agreed by Parish Councillors by email in the absence of a meeting in December) **was Ratified:**

M R Curry – Salary November 2022 (PC: £294.82+back-pay of £148.40; Project £187.82+BP £79.60; Charity £117.80+BP £16.60; Mileage £27.30; Expenses – Zoom Subscription paid out of pocket £83.93):

£ 956.27

iii) HMRC - PAYE/NI due Months 7-9:	£ 505.89
iv) SLDC - Street lighting (as per precept £1,738.39) & Parish Election costs (£100):	£ 1,838.39
v) CALC - Carbon Literacy Course (R Atfield) 01/12/2022:	£ 35.00
vi) Cllr R Atfield – Reimbursement for cost of Remembrance Wreath:	£ 30.00
vii) Mitchinsons Accountants – Annual Declaration to the Pension Regulator:	£ 60.00

- c) Bank Reconciliation and report on Ring-Fenced Funds:** Councillors noted the gross reconciled bank balance of £20,692.75 held by the Parish Council at 31 December 2022. They also noted a statement of ring-fenced funds showing a balance of £4,534.97 due to Cumbria County Council leaving a net balance of PC funds of £16,157.78 (of which there were ring fences in favour of woodland management of £2,500.00 and for the Christmas event of £997.74).
- d) 2023-24 Budget and Precept:** The Chairman confirmed that he and the Clerk discussed the fine detail of the budget and precept bid as agreed at the last meeting. The draft budget (as slightly amended from that which had been presented in November) had been circulated to Members who confirmed that they had had the opportunity to review the figures. It was noted that the net result of the budget was an increase in the precept required, but that this was largely due to the withdrawal of the Council Tax Grant as previously discussed. The increase in the costs of street lighting was noted with some concern. Parish Council footway lighting costs had increased from £1,343.00 in 2021-22 to £2,071.00 in 2023-24 (54% over three financial years) and those for District Council owned footway lighting from £1,790.00 to £2,762.00 over the same period (a similar percentage increase). Cllr Holmes commented that the Clerk at Hevesham had secured a reduction in costs through the use of LED bulbs and it was agreed to check this out with him. Following that piece of information gathering it was **Resolved** to write to SLDC with these observations and request a justification for the costing basis and respective increases. Some questions for clarification were raised on other lines in the draft budget but no changes made. A proposal to accept the budget for 2023-24 was made by Cllr. Holmes, seconded by Cllr Mason and unanimously **Approved**. It was further **Resolved** to submit a bid to SLDC for precept in the sum of £14,421.00 in line with the approved budget.
- e) Parish Council ICT Requirements:** The Clerk confirmed that following further work he had circulated a report recommending that Levens Parish Council join a three-way initiative with Helsington and Crosthwaite. This would be to procure a shared ICT package including laptop, monitor, printer and support package with security and back-up. He had been reassured that with password protection and up to date security software, there should be no greater chance of Levens data being hacked or corrupted through the shared use of a single laptop. Furthermore, this approach would unlock funding of £1,000 via Cllr Holmes's Member budget on condition that the funds were applied to all three Parish Councils as a cost efficiency saving to the public purse. This, together with £500 from Capacity Grant to acknowledge use of ICT resources by the Project would lead to a cost neutral situation for all three Parishes, but with Levens owning a 50% stake in the products (which should be depreciated over a 5-year term). On procurement, the Clerk reported that Fieldgate Data Services of Barrow were already supporting several local Parish Councils and had offered the most comprehensive package including supply, installation and set-up for a VAT inclusive total of £1,470 including a two-year support package. Helsington and Crosthwaite had confirmed the proposal and it was **Agreed** to authorise the Clerk to purchase the package subject to reporting back on any significant variation of costs.
- f) Management of PC Finances (banking arrangements):** The Chairman has not yet had a response from Lloyds to his request for a face to face meeting, but continues explore best options to put to Members.

95/22 Levens Community Project

- a) Levens Community Project Advisory Group (PAG):** Cllr Mason presented a brief report from a meeting held on 06 December. Main items of report were:
- i. **Sale of Plots:** Plot 1 at Cotes has attracted some interest but no offers have yet been received. Plot 3 at Church Hill has been the subject of a material start in liaison with Building Control in order to preserve the existing planning consent. A reduction in the

purchase price on a ‘take it or leave it’ basis had been put to the current prospective purchaser, but he has come back to request a further reduction. It was **Agreed** that no further reduction would be offered and to instruct Armitstead Barnett (A-B) accordingly, to remove the Under Offer board and to put the plot back on the market. An expression of interest has been made by another party and it was **Agreed** that A-B should explore this direct.

- ii. **Works: Underhill and the New Village Hall:** Current ground works at Underhill have been completed, but further infrastructure work such as the running of services to site remains to be done. Tim Thacker has submitted an invoice for the work completed so far (see below) and this has been paid and refunded from the Infrastructure Grant award. Work on the perimeter walls at the new Village Hall site continues and is looking very good. It is expected that this work will be finished by the end of March.
- iii. **Electricity Supply at the New Village Hall:** The question of energy and water supply remains to be determined and the Project has sent a letter to the Vicar requesting his support to get Diocesan approval for these to be laid under the Church yard. Cllr Bagot offered to discuss this with the Vicar at an upcoming meeting and the Clerk was requested to forward his letter of request to her.
- iv. **Tender Packs:** Tenders for the construction phase at both Underhill and the Village Hall remain held back pending determination of optimum energy requirements and in particular the integration of renewable energy into the scheme. Tony has indicated that it could be advantageous to issue the tender packs for Underhill and the Village Hall together.
- v. **Community Housing Fund:** The Clerk is to write to Bruce Johnson to try to secure additional Infrastructure Grant for the initial works on the Village Institute.
- vi. **The Supply of Accountancy Services:** The Clerk reported that he is still waiting for the Engagement Letter from Armstrong Watson and intends to write again to request a response.

b) Payments: To Ratify payments as recommended by PAG:

Following recommendation from the Project Advisory Group several payments had been approved by email and paid. The payments were as follows and were **Ratified**:

Milne Moser (Solicitors) – Legal costs incurred, abortive sale of Plot 3 Church Hill:	£ 1,446.00
M R Curry: Refund expenses for SLDC Bldg Regs, Plot 3 Church Hill:	£ 300.00
J Thacker & Sons: Interim Payment, infrastructure work Underhill:	£ 72,343.00

96/22 Planning Applications:

- a) **The Schedule of Planning Applications:** Updates to the Planning Schedule at 09 January had been circulated and were noted. The only application requiring attention was:

PC Ref	Application No.	Location	Proposal	PC View
23	SL/2022/1084	9 Greengate, LA8 8NF	Demolition of existing side extension & erection of a 2 storey side & single story front & rear extensions	Resolved to submit: No Objection

b) Other Planning Matters:

- i. **Local Plan Review:** The Clerk confirmed that he had spoken to SLDC’s lead Officer on this who confirmed receipt of the Parish Council submission under the recent consultation which ended on 10 November 2022. Responses are to be published relatively soon.
- ii. **Shepherd’s Mill:** Cllr Burrow confirmed that new windows were being installed. The position regarding Council Tax and planning permission was unclear. The Clerk reported that he had written a request to SLDC’s Enforcement Team for a formal update on the request for a S215 Notice under the Town and Country Planning Act.
- iii. **The Langdales:** The update on this property had been given at Item 93/22(c). Future planning applications would be monitored in the usual way.

97/22 Community Emergency Plan:

The Clerk reported that he had come close to getting sufficient representatives together in mid-December – but not quite enough. He had completed and circulated a draft Plan and it was **Agreed** to try for a meeting later in January.

98/22 Levens Charities: The Clerk has had discussions with Investment Managers and received forms for the closure of investment funds if required. The formal engagement of Armstrong Watson (Accountants) was awaited before seeking their advice on the principle of realising investments. The Clerk will confirm the total amount received from B4RN.

99/22 Road Gritting in Adverse Conditions: Councillors reviewed the unsatisfactory situation arising from the recent spell of hard weather which had left residents snow-bound and village roads ungritted. Cllr. Battye was trying to elevate Levens' position on the priority list and it was agreed to liaise with Crosthwaite as to how they are planning for a future event. Cllr Mason said that he had a possible contractor from Kendal in mind but issues relating to public liability insurance, costs and approved status needed to be checked. Cllr Battye undertook to try to get the approval process streamlined.

100/22 Open Actions Not Covered Elsewhere on the Agenda

- a) **Levens Traffic Management:** The Clerk confirmed that he contacted Helen Karaasian who will provide dates for an on-site meeting towards the end of the month / early February. Cllr Rogerson received **Approval** to contact Pandora for maintenance work on one of the SIDs.
- b) **Levens Lane Footpath:** The Clerk had spoken to Carol Last at County Hall who confirmed that the funding allocation for this financial year had been diverted to other projects because of the likelihood that the Levens initiative could not be completed by the end of March. The Project is still live however and will require a bid for funds to the new Council. With regard to the planning consent it was **Agreed** to ask Tony to clarify matters with SLDC.
- c) **Parish Noticeboard:** The Clerk had presented three options for suppliers and negotiated a heavily discounted price of £2,000 (ex VAT) from a local company for a favoured board. It was **Agreed** to proceed with this with a request for an anthracite coloured frame and a shaped header board to carry the Parish Council name.
- d) **Woodland Management:** Further efforts to engage a woodland contractor are required and Cllr Rogerson provided details of a tree surgeon for the Clerk to follow-up.
- e) **Parish and Other Land:**
 - i. Maintenance Services: Job descriptions are required for the two respondees to the advert for a maintenance post that had been previously advertised and interviews to be set up.
 - ii. Brigsteer Road site: The site is badly in need of strimming and tidying. Cllr Mason will remind the stone-wallers at the Village Hall site to provide a quote for the work to the boundary wall.
 - iii. The Clerk reported that after more than 15 months he had finally heard from HMLR in respect of the registration of land at Cotes. They have raised queries on the application.
- f) **Levens Greening Campaign:** In view of an evident loss of voice, Cllr Battye said that she would prepare a full update and report for the next meeting.
- g) **Christmas Event:** Cllr. Burrow reported on many positive comments and compliments for the tree – including from Cllr Bland who was very satisfied with the lights that his grant had helped procure. Donations to Just Giving had amounted to £435 and other donations are likely to take the figure to around £550. It was proposed to top-up the ring-fenced event fund to cover the costs of trees and then to propose some small donations to benefit local causes such as the establishment of the Community Orchard.

101/22 Correspondence: Items on the Schedule of Correspondence were noted. In response to the enquiry from Mr Carrington-Birch, it was agreed that the Parish Council was not in a position to provide the sort of assistance to a local business that was suggested. Cllr Battye publicised an open evening promoting the work of KEY in Milnthorpe on 17 January.

102/22 Items for Local Media: Cllr. Burrow undertook to contact Naomi Capstick to discuss the placing of items of interest in Westmorland Gazette.

103/22 Future Agenda Items: Items on the current Agenda will be followed up.

104/22 Date of the Next Meeting: The next Ordinary Meeting of the Parish Council will be held on Tuesday, 14 February 2023 to be held in the Levens Methodist Church.

The meeting closed at 9.58 p.m.

Signed (Chairman) Date:.....