

Levens Parish Council

Minutes of the Ordinary Meeting of the Parish Council held on 14 November 2023 in Levens Methodist Church commencing at 7.30 p.m.

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

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

62/23 Apologies for Absence: Apologies had been received from Cllr. S. Bagot

63/23 Declarations of Interest: Cllrs. Atfield, Battye and Holmes declared interest in relation to any matters concerning Levens Playing Fields.

64/23 Minutes: It was **Resolved** that the Chairman be authorised to sign the Minutes of the Ordinary Meeting of the Council held on 10 October 2023 as a true record.

65/23 Public Participation: Mr. L. Harris spoke in support of the opportunity to achieve a 20-m.p.h. speed limit for areas of the village and had been pleased to note previous considerations on this and other traffic matters by the Parish Council. Mr. Harris advised Councillors that following the announcement of the new Policy by W&FC he had undertaken informal local consultation including a petition on Facebook which had attracted 107 responses and intends to conduct a limited door to door survey. He is also interrogating data from Strava which presents information from cycling activity. Whilst the hard data base is still limited, responses so far had been overwhelmingly supportive of a local speed reduction, and he offered the opinion that there was a groundswell of sympathy for the initiative. He also suggested that the Parish Council should liaise with W&FC to achieve better lit access routes to the new village hall. The Chairman thanked Mr. Harris for his presentation and stressed that the Parish Council needs to consider the stages in the process and must be seen to be consulting with the whole community. Cllr. Burrow added that the Parish Council has been promoting traffic management schemes for a considerable length of time and that group cycling activities are a particular hazard. The Parish Council is currently waiting for a meeting with officers from W&FC to discuss further schemes that might be implemented.

The Chairman confirmed that the 20-m.p.h. initiative will be discussed as a full Agenda item later in the meeting.

66/23 Reports:

a) Reports from Councillors attending meetings:

- i. Cllr. J. Battye reported that Levens Playing Fields were finalising details of their social and fund-raising initiatives for 2024 including the Marquee Dance.
- ii. Cllrs. Burrow and Holmes reported on a recent meeting of the A590 Group where National Highways (NH) discussed progress with plans for improvements at Junction 36, Brettagh Holt and Meathop. NH confirmed that their priority is regional strategic routes including the M6 and A66 as well as the A590, but that their other priorities will have an impact on full aspirations for the latter. As a result, there are local concerns about plans for improvements at Gilpin Bridge which are still only at Stage 1 in a 7-stage process and where costs are estimated to be in the region of £25 million. The A590, including Gilpin Bridge, remains a priority for W&FC and this will be reinforced to NH. In the meantime, the A590 Working Group will explore every avenue to unlock plans for this stretch of the road as happened at Greenodd.

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

- i. The Highways Strategic Board is looking at Electric Vehicle Charging points and considering the funding required to increase facilities.
- ii. The Council is undertaking a strategic assessment of the condition of its Region as part of which Cllr. Battye recently hosted a visit to the area by Sam Plumb, the Chief Executive of W&FC. The latter expressed interest in the condition of the Old Carpet Shop.
- iii. W&FC is planning a community consultation on its Climate Action Plan.

c) Police: Recent editions of Focus had been circulated, but there had been no items of specific relevance to Levens. Local police however have indicated an interest in motor-cycle activity in the village.

67/23 Finance

a) **Receipts** 01 October – 31 October 2023: Cllrs. noted that there were no receipts during the period.

b) **Payments Required:** Cllrs. **Approved** payment of the following:

- i) M R Curry: Salary October – (PC: £333.54; Project: £201.45; Charity: £128.40;

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| Expenses £16.00 (stamps); Mileage: £27.00) | £ 706.30 |
| ii) Cllr. R Atfield: Expenses Remembrance Wreath
(Councillors noted a personal contribution to the overall cost of the wreath) | £ 20.00 |
| iii) Printing Plus: Autumn / winter Newsletter | £ 154.30 |
| iv) Levens Methodist Church – Room Hire (to the end of the Financial year) | £ 280.00 |
- The Clerk reported that he had received an annual renewal reminder for the Zoom subscription and following his recommendation it was **Agreed** not to renew this facility.
- c) **Bank Reconciliation and report on Ring-Fenced Funds:** Councillors noted the reconciled bank balance of £16,321.57p held by the Parish Council on 31 October 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 (£1,501.26) – totalling £3,101.26.
- d) **Local Government Services Pay Agreement 2023:** Cllrs. noted the recently published pay agreement amounting to an increase of £1.00 per hour backdated to April 2023. The Clerk will make the necessary adjustments through his timesheets and payroll.
- e) **Budgets**
- i) 2023-24 Budget Review: The Clerk had completed and circulated a budget review to 31 October with projections to the final outturn at 31 March 2024. Income projections show a surplus above budget of approximately £1,000.00 largely down to increased refunds from HRMC (VAT) and from the Project. Expenditure is projected to be overspent by approximately £3,000 but this figure will be reduced by further refunds from the Project. All variances are 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 submitted a draft budget for the 2024-25 which will, when approved, determine the Precept for the following year. Cllrs. agreed with his assessment that with 5 months still to go in the current financial year, the draft budget will be better assessed and approved at the January meeting when the Precept will also be determined prior to the usual submission deadline of 31 January. The revised draft budget may have to take into account early costs for commencing the 20 m.p.h. initiative and additional costs for woodland management. It was **Agreed** confirm the draft budget at the meeting on 09 January 2024.

68/23 Levens Community Project

- a) **Levens Community Project Advisory Group (PAG):** Cllr Mason presented a brief report from a meeting held on 07 November. Main items of report were:
- i. **Sale of Plots:**
 - Plot 1, Cotes: Our solicitors have been pressing for exchange and completion on 25 November, but this has been deferred until two trees with ash die-back are felled. This work is anticipated to happen on the 26 November when Electricity North West (ENW) will be clearing power lines of trees and overhanging branches.
 - Plot 3, Church Road: There is no movement on the sale of this plot.
 - ii. **Underhill:**
 - Tender Pack: Tony Hills (TH) has forwarded the draft tender pack to PAG and comments are being collated in advance of a meeting with him to confirm final content.
 - Supply of services: ENW's original quote has been significantly revised by re-routing the supply through Parish Council land. Efforts have been made to reduce the cost further, but the figure stands at £42,000 (which is covered by Infrastructure Grant). Councillors **Agreed** that this quote should be accepted.
 - iii. **New Village Hall:**
 - Tender Pack: TH has forwarded the draft tender pack to PAG and comments are being collated in advance of a meeting with him to confirm final content.
 - Boundary walls and other groundworks: These are almost finished. A discussion took place about the finish to be used on the top of the rear wall. Suggestions included concrete, matting and gravel, or a finish similar to a living roof.
 - Supply of Services: The quote received from United Utilities for water supply has increased from £948 to £3K. Cllr. Mason has raised this with TH but has not yet had a response.
 - iv. **Accountants:** There had been no developments to report. Some questions remain to be asked on accountancy services.
 - v. **Community Ownership Fund (COF) and Community Led Housing:** PAG had considered a written report of a meeting held on 31/10/2023 involving Owen Malton, Mike Dyer and the Project

Coordinator, which had focused on the need for detailed financial information for the COF application. This had highlighted the need to re-write the Business Plan and identified the following issues which will be raised with TH:

- Whether to appoint a Quantity Surveyor, in order to ascertain the likely costs of building the NVH as soon as possible and whether TH could do this.
 - To clarify TH's costs going forward pre and during construction.
 - To discuss TH's role as Project Manager
- vi. Investment of Cash Reserves: The Clerk reported that the issue with HSBC had been resolved. Balances at 31/10/2023 were:
- Current Account: £8,023.05
 - Deposit Account: £1,306,065.89
- b) **Payments Required:** There were no payments requiring approval but the following payment having been approved by email was **Ratified:**
- i. Spatial Data Ltd: Survey and Drawing Work, Village Hall site £ 240.00

69/23 Planning Applications:

- a) **Schedule of Planning Applications:** Updates to the Planning Schedule on 13 November had been circulated and the following were noted:

PC Ref	Application No.	Location	Proposal	Status
12	SL/2023/0563	Bridge End Garage LA8 8EL	Discharge of Conditions 4,5,6,7,12,13 & 16	Matters are non-material. No date for determination advised. No Objection
17	SL/2023/0690	Moorcroft Cottages LA8 8EP	Variation of approved plan.	No date for determination advised. No Objection.
18	SL/2023/0776	7 Greengate Crescent LA8 8QB	Single storey rear extension	Validated 26/10/23. No date for determination advised. No Objection
19	TR/2023/0161	1 Low Pastures, Lowgate LA8 8QH	Reduce yew tree(s) and remove branches	TPO - Validated 30/10/23. No date for determination advised. No Objection
20	SL/2023/0673	7 Dove Cottages, Sizergh LA8 8DY	Single story rear garden room extension	No date for determination advised. No Objection
21	SL/2023/0674	7 Dove Cottages, Sizergh LA8 8DY	Single story rear garden room extension	Listed Building consent: No date for determination advised. No Objection

b) **Other Planning Matters:**

- i. **Shepherd's Mill:** Cllr. Batty reported that she was in communication with a Revenues and Benefits Manager at W&FC and they are to review the situation in six months. It was **Agreed** to continue to press for a resolution with a new Section 215 application and a request that W&FC require work to be done within a specified time as possible routes. Cllr. Batty will keep the issue live.

70/23 Levens Charities:

- a) Half-year Report: At their meeting on 17 October, the Trustees had received the Half-year Report which indicated that Levens Charity had a gross fund value of £158,889 at 30 September 2023. The Investment Policy was reviewed and found to be stable at the present time. The Parish Council as Sole Trustee **Agreed** a recommendation from the Appointed Trustees that funds be left in situ for now but subject to careful monitoring to ensure that there are no significant dips in value.
- b) B4RN Donations and Gift Aid: The Secretary had reported net income of £12,151.25 from the voluntary donation initiative which included £790.03 received from HMRC from the gift aid scheme. The Sole Trustee **Agreed** a recommendation from The Appointed Trustees that it should write to the key members of the B4RN local group with a letter of appreciation and a request that this be passed on to all involved.
- c) Grant Applications: The Appointed Trustees had taken representations from members of the Playing Fields Committee and considered the application in detail. The Appointed Trustees had not felt comfortable in supporting the Phase 1 proposals for the MUGA and there had been reservations particularly in respect of reducing the number of tennis courts, but it was agreed that it was for the tennis fraternity to lobby on that point if it felt strongly enough. The Appointed Trustees however recognised the scope and ambition of the overall Project and felt able to recommend the award of a grant of £5,000 towards Phase 2 of the Project (infrastructure and access improvements) subject to the following conditions:
- i. Sight of the completed plans for the overall Project
 - ii. Confirmation that internal governance procedures had been complied with
 - iii. Sight of competitive quotes for Phase 2 of the Project.

The Sole Trustee accepted this recommendation and **Approved** and award of £5,000 in principle subject to satisfactory responses to the stated conditions

71/23 20-m.p.h. Speed Limit: Councillors considered the Speed Limit Policy Statement recently produced by W&FC and particularly Policy 2.8 which specified the criteria required for 20-m.p.h. proposals. It was considered that Levens would meet the required criteria. It was known that there has to be a Motion agreed by the Parish Council expressing interest in commencing the process and that it should lead in providing robust evidence of public consultation. There was however a lack of detailed information about some aspects of the scheme including likely costs. Cllr. Battye confirmed that the Locality Board has funds to support applications, but that there would be an expectation that Parish Councils will contribute to the costs. Evidence to date, both from the presentation made earlier in the evening and in letters submitted to the Parish Council, indicated that there was sufficient support to warrant the Parish Council submitting an Expression of Interest. **A Motion to express an interest to W&FC was proposed by Cllr. J. Battye, seconded by Cllr. H. Burrow and passed unanimously.** It was **Agreed** to seek more details on the process, timescales and costs and also to explore whether questionnaire templates already exist for use in a public consultation exercise. Other matters relating to road safety were also discussed and it was **Agreed** to put some of the improvement proposals onto the HIAMS system as a back-up to ongoing discussions with Highways officers.

72/23 Christmas 2023: Cllr. Burrow reported that the tree had arrived and would be erected on the Green on Saturday 18 November prior to decoration. The formal switch-on will be on Sunday 26 November at 5.00 p.m. and will be publicised locally. A licensed mulled wine outlet will be available along with a pizza van. Levens School will also be providing refreshments as a fund-raising opportunity. There will be live music and the Brownies are to sing. An arrangement to reimburse the Shop for electricity consumption has been agreed on the same basis as last year.

73/23 Elections May 2024: Councillors noted that Parish Council Elections will be held on 02 May 2024. W&FC is communicating with Clerks on arrangements to be put in place.

74/23 Open Actions Not Covered Elsewhere on the Agenda

a) Levens Traffic Management:

- i) Levens Lane Footpath: Cllr. Battye reported that W&FC have committed to producing a feasibility report and a local meeting to include representatives from the Parish Council is to be held. Cllr. Battye will keep Councillors informed of developments.
- ii) Traffic Management within the Village: Cllr. Battye reported that Helen Karaaslan has produced an initial plan, but it doesn't address all the proposals that have been made, most notably in relation to children or families crossing the road to get to the school. Cllr. Battye is now pressing HK for a meeting to discuss the plan locally and in particular with representatives from the school. The Chairman commented that the flashing warning light on Bell Hill now appeared to be working, but intermittently and he will check this out.
- iii) Winter gritting arrangements: The Clerk reported that he and Cllr. Battye together with the Clerk from Heversham had attended a Teams meeting with Highways Officers that morning. Brief notes from the meeting had been circulated. Highways had explained the Priority ranking scheme which placed Levens in Priority 3 meaning that local roads would be treated so long as resources allow after Priority 1 and 2 roads had been attended to. There is no provision for priority treatment in localities with a bus route or school. Parish Councils are enabled to secure local resources to treat roads and clear snow, but Highways have produced a list of criteria that should be adhered to. Cllr. Mason will explore possibilities with local contractors.

b) Woodland Management:

- i. Cllr. Mason reported that Russell Boow is now out of action through injury but Adam Kirk (who removed the leylandii hedge on Hutton Lane) has offered two days before Christmas to address issues at Checkmate, clear street lamps and cut back roadside trees opposite the new village hall site. His estimate for this work is £500 for the two days and the Clerk confirmed that there is budget provision for this. It was **Agreed** to give him the go-ahead and to advise Pam Capstick accordingly.
- ii. Cllr. Holmes reported that he had dealt with several wind-blown trees recently including two that had fallen into the road adjacent to the A590 junction. It was **Agreed** to request Highways deal with trees on this site via the HIAMS system. John Morris has also removed a wind-blown tree from the road at Underwood.

iii. Tree safety: The Clerk reported that he has spoken to three potential surveyors and is sending a brief of the work to be done in order to get quotes for the work.

c) Parish Assets and Land:

- i. Brigsteer Road – Securing quotes for the northern boundary wall remains work in progress.
- ii. Jubilee Orchard – The Clerk reported that he had started an Expression of Interest to the Community Ownership Fund to try to secure grant support for the initiative.

d) Handyman: The Clerk has spoken to two contractors and the one who works with Arnside seems very positive. A site meeting is to be arranged.

e) Website: The Chairman is to confer with the Clerk on next steps

f) Levens Greening Campaign: Cllr Battye confirmed that a number of recent events had been well attended and appreciated. More are due within the winter programme and plans for the spring and summer including the Great Big Green Week are being worked up.

g) Parish Emergency Plan: The Clerk confirmed that a meeting had been held on 25 October. It was **Agreed** to put details of this on Facebook and the Website with a view to finding a local leader for the initiative.

75/23 Correspondence: Items on the Schedule of Correspondence were noted and other than those matters raised in the meeting no further action was required.

76/23 Future Agenda Items:

- a) 2024-25 Budget and Precept.

77/23 Date of the Next Meeting: The next Ordinary Meeting of the Parish Council will be held on Tuesday, 09 January 2024 in the Levens Methodist Church.

The meeting closed at 10.19 p.m.

Signed (Chairman) Date.....