

Levens Parish Council

Minutes of the Ordinary Meeting of the Parish Council held remotely by the use of audio-visual technology on 13 October 2020.

Present: Cllrs. R. Atfield (Chairman), S. Bagot, H. Burrow, K. Holmes (and as District Cllr.), D. Rogerson, R. Mason, M. R. Curry (Clerk); County Cllr. J Bland; and 2 members of the public.

29/20 Apologies for Absence: Cllr. R. Johnston, District Cllr. B Rendell

30/20 Declarations of interest: Cllr. S Bagot referred to planning applications SL/2020/0644 & 0659 in relation to Levens Hall and agreed to make no comment.

31/20 Minutes: It was **Resolved** that the Chairman be authorised to sign the Minutes of the Ordinary Meeting of the Council held on 08 September 2020 as a true record.

32/20 Public Participation:

- a) Mrs J Battye stated her full support for the Levens Community Project but wondered if additional detail could be made more widely known. For instance parishioners might appreciate information on when the building work on the new village hall was likely to start. Cllr. Mason responded that Covid 19 had disrupted communications somewhat with the cancelling of the Annual Parish Meeting and Parish Council Newsletters. However there were plans to issue an edition of the latter. He said that whilst the tender packs for prospective contractors were nearly complete there were still numerous pre-construction details to confirm. A best estimate at this stage is that building works will commence mid-summer 2021 for a 9-12 month build period. Cllr. Burrow made the point that building work on the Underhill plot may commence beforehand but that merely reflects the availability of funding specific to affordable housing.

33/20 Reports:

- a) **Reports from Councillors attending meetings:** Cllr. Atfield reported on the CALC AGM held remotely on 26 September. The speaker had been from Buckinghamshire Council talking on their move to a unitary council. This was relevant to Cumbria as the County Council has made its proposals to Government, though a plan for a Morecambe Bay Area authority supported by 3 local District Councils has also been submitted. Progress will be monitored. Cllr. Rogerson reported on an SLDC briefing on 17 September on their Customer and Locality Services initiative. This service remains under development but includes links to local planning applications and waste collections. Parish Councils are encouraged to open an account via <https://selfservice.southlakeland.gov.uk/home>.
- b) **Police:** No report had been received, but Cllr. Holmes confirmed that the service was short-staffed due to illness. The Clerk confirmed that he had sent through details of an apparently abandoned car at Cotes which was registered as SORN'd.¹
- c) **District Councillor:** Cllr. Holmes reported that a full and very long meeting of the District Council had been held on 06 October when the main topic of discussion had been SLDCs response to the concept of a unitary authority. SLDC supported the Morecambe Bay Area proposal. Cllr. Holmes also reported that green bin collection was now back to fortnightly across the District. More widely, considerable problems remained with anti-social behaviour notably around parking, waste and social distancing.
- d) **County Councillor:** Cllr. Bland reported that whilst United Utilities had instructed their contractors that the 3-way lights at Levens Bridge should not be used, their contractors had not implemented the order. Traffic management had been chaotic at times and, using Highways powers, he had now instructed that the system must not be used again. On a footpath and possible cycle track down Levens Lane to Levens Bridge, he had not heard further from officers involved, but was expecting initial drawings soon. On Levens village, he undertook to request a response from Mo Dooz on possible plans for traffic management. Finally, he reported that Cumbria County Council was expecting ministerial response to CCC's submission in favour of a unitary authority in early December which would also comment on the Morecambe Bay Area proposal.

¹ SORN – Statutory Off-Road Notification – parking such a vehicle on a public highway is illegal.

34/20 Finance

- a) **Receipts:** Councillors noted the following receipts in the period 09 September- 30 September:
10/09/20 – Levens Charity (refund costs of work at Brigsteer Road) £1,607.05
- b) **Payments required** – The following payments were **authorised**:
- i. M R Curry - Salary etc. Sept 2020 (PC £268.78 / Project £545.91/Charity £5.25 + mileage & expenses) £ 844.93
 - ii. HMRC: PAYE return Q2 (July-Sept) 505.38
 - iii. Mr A Banks: repair PC noticeboard; strimming; professional indemnity 626.50
 - iv. Cllr H Burrow: Christmas decorations (from Xmas fund) 25.17
 - v. J Metcalfe for work on Brigsteer Road site (paid by Levens Charity) 450.00
- c) **Bank Reconciliation and report on Ring-Fenced Funds:** The reconciled balance of £27,477.91p at 30/09/20 was noted. Councillors also noted the Clerk's report on ring-fenced funds, leaving the Parish Council with an underlying balance of £14,960.91p. A further £3,203.00 is held as ring-fenced funds for specific Parish Council purposes.
- d) **Request for Donation - Great North Air Ambulance:** It was **Resolved** to make a grant of £100 to each of the two Air Ambulance Services serving the district.
- e) **Annual Governance and Accountancy Return (AGAR):** Following submission of the annual accounts in July, nothing further has yet been heard from the external auditor.
- f) **VAT:** Following registration for VAT it was **Resolved** to request Dodd & Co to submit the first quarterly return due by 7 November and thereafter for the Clerk to submit returns. The Clerk will continue to make VAT refund claims as usual. It was **Agreed** that the Clerk would discuss the benefits of putting the Parish Council accounts on Xero with Jan Mason.
- g) **Clerk's Appraisal:** It was **Resolved** to increase the Clerk's pay to Point 22 of the NJC scale for 2020-21 with effect from 1 April 2020 and to Point 31 in respect of wages paid for work on Levens Community Project (the latter recouped via Capacity Building Grant).

35/20 Levens Community Project

- a) **Levens Community Project Committee:** Councillors noted the Minutes of the Project Management Committee held on 06 October and in particular:
- i. Completion of tree work at Cotes
 - ii. Two quotes have been received for groundworks at Cotes and a third is due. Those received are:
 - L and W Wilson - £83,252.54.
 - Thacker - £45,835.00By the use of a more local option for the deposit of surplus fill, compliant with regulations, the price can be reduced by up to £20,000. There is also the possibility of winning good quality building stone from the site for resale at £50 per tonne. It was **Resolved** to award the contract to Thacker's, subject to receipt of the third quote. When received, this will be circulated and if less than Thacker's, a further resolution will be made by email. It was agreed to give general and specific notice of the intended works to immediate neighbours.
 - iii. Following discussion between Tony Hills and the planning section at SLDC, final drawings for houses at Church Hill have now been completed. The Clerk undertook to circulate these to Councillors for comment before instructing Mr Hills to submit to the Planning Officer for the award of detailed planning consent.
 - iv. UU have approved the technical specifications for the sewer diversion at Underhill which can now be incorporated into a Sewer Diversion Agreement under S185 of the Water Industry Act 1991. A draft Agreement will be drawn up and put to our solicitors.
 - v. At the new village hall site, Graham Schofield is completing his design for the rear boundary wall with the use of gabions.
 - vi. At Levens Institute, it was **Agreed** to use Capacity Grant to re-submit the elapsed plans for development of the 3 affordable units.
- b) **Payments Required:** The following invoice was **approved** for payment:
- i. Sept 20: Envirotech – Survey newts (Cotes), bats (Institute): £264.00
- c) **Overview of Financial Position:**
- i. The Project bank balance was successfully reconciled as at 23 September with a balance of £735,407.22p. It was noted that a VAT refund of £11,079 was due.

- ii. Councillors noted a high-level budget prepared by the Clerk which projected the overall financial status of the Project. It was noted that areas of expenditure were likely to be revised upwards as tenders for build elements were received. Conversely, property values have increased and there is evidence of significant demand for houses in Levens which strengthens the income side. Options for fall-back funding if required were noted and it was **Agreed** that the overall Project finances remain stable.
- d) **Investment of Funds:** The Project Coordinator reported on unsuccessful efforts to engage with HSBC, but that this would remain work in progress.
- e) **External Funding:**
- i. Funding Agreement (FAG) for Community Led Housing Fund grants: Cllr Mason reported that the FAG with SLDC had been agreed in principle by Wrigleys (Project solicitors). At the Project Committee's request, Wrigleys had met with Committee Members and explained the key terms and conditions of the Agreement which is complex and places obligations on the Parish Council. Having answered queries, Wrigleys advised that the grant agreement and the security are not unduly onerous or unusual and that they are comfortable with the PC entering into the arrangements; and that from a legal standpoint the documentation is acceptable. The Project Management Committee had considered this on 06 October and recommended that the document be signed. After discussion, the Parish Council **Resolved** to sign the Funding Agreement.
 - ii. The balance of the LIPs grant (£20,000) for groundworks at the village hall site has been applied for. A bid for funding support from SLDCs Climate Change Community Fund has been made for a low/zero carbon ventilation system.

36/20 Planning Applications:

- a) New Planning Applications: The following new planning applications notified via SLDC since 09/09/20 were considered:

Application No.	Address	Proposal	Applicant	Type & Status	Comments
SL/2020/0644	Levens Hall LA8 0PD	Repair works, North Tower	Mr R Bagot	Listed Build consent	No Objection
SL/2020/0660	19 Meadow Wood LA8 8EY	Veranda to rear	Mr S Baker	Lawful Dev Cert	No Objection
SL/2020/0659	Levens Hall LA8 0PD	Repair works to central chimney	Mr R Bagot	Listed Build consent	No Objection
SL/2020/0697	4 Greengate Levens LA8 8NF	Demolish attached garage. Erect side extension	Mr & Mrs Kitchen	Full Planning	See comment below
4 Greengate Levens: Concern was expressed about the scale of this proposal and other issues including parking. The Clerk was instructed to draft and circulate a letter of objection for approval.					

- b) To note Planning Applications determined since last meeting

Application No.	Address	Proposal	Type & Status	Decision noted
SL/2020/0288	Spout House, Levens LA8 8PA	Extensions & alterations	Full Planning	ACON 16/07/20
SL/2019/0735	Plot of land adjacent to The Langdales	Erection of dwelling house	Reserved Matters	ACON 25/09/20. See comment below
The Parish Council noted with regret approval of this application given its previous objection and that of a neighbour, both of which were based on matters of policy. The Clerk was instructed to draft and circulate a letter articulating the PC's concerns with a specific request that these be answered.				
It was also noted that digging out had commenced at the Lakesway Caravan Park and it was agreed to check if work on providing passing places had been completed as required.				

- c) To note planning applications still to be determined

Application No.	Address	Proposal	Applicant	Type & Status	Comments By
Church Hill proposed development for Levens Parish Council					

37/20 Councillor Vacancy: Councillors **Agreed** to advise SLDC of the caused by the resignation of John Fitch and request the appropriate public notice.

38/20 Parish Council Newsletter: The Clerk was asked to construct a list of suggested items (to include: Brigsteer Road site; Christmas event proposals; update on the Project; use of noticeboards) and circulate. Councillors will give thought as to how a news update might be distributed, possibly by

home design and print with circulation from certain outlets e.g. the shop, the website and noticeboard.

39/20 Christmas Events: It was acknowledged that an event similar to 2019 was out of the question given the Covid 19 situation. However, it was agreed that an effort to bring some festive cheer would be appropriate. Cllr. Burrow reported that a tree was planned and would go up in mid-November whilst a decorative theme based on ribbons and bows with rainbow colours would deliver a message of hope. Other initiatives were being considered and a further report would be given at the next meeting.

40/20 Open Actions Not Covered Elsewhere on the Agenda:

- a) **Highways Defect Report:** No updated report was available for consideration.
- b) **Levens Traffic Management:** Mr Dooz at Cumbria County Council had not yet provided an update on plans for Levens. Cllr Bland had agreed to contact him.
- c) **Levens Lane Footpath:** Cllr. Bland had reported on this earlier (see 33/20(d) above).
- d) **Maintenance Plan and Woodland Management:** It was agreed that a request for the lowering of beech trees on the Brigsteer Road site to enhance the view should be refused. The Health and Safety Report from Andy Banks was still awaited. A notice prepared by the Clerk relating to damage to trees on Parish Council land will be re-drafted.
- e) **Parish Land:**
 - i. Brigsteer Road site: Work is now complete and it was **Agreed** to consider a low-key opening event to publicise the facility. A disclaimer notice would be prepared and the Clerk will add the site to the Asset Register and discuss with the insurers.
 - ii. Allotments: Cllr Mason reported that new deer fencing had been installed, and that a note of costs was awaited.
 - iii. Registration of land at Cotes: The Clerk is now checking the archives for information on historic rental payments requested by the Land Registry
 - iv. Parish Hedge, Hutton Lane: A date for this work has not yet been set.
- f) **B4RN:** Cllr Rogerson reported that progress to link households continues. Cllr Mason reminded B4RN that water pipes run down both sides of the road to Lord's Plain. The Clerk confirmed that he had received a cheque for £1,500 as an anonymous donation for B4RN work. The Parish Council has agreed to administer this as a ring-fenced sum on behalf of B4RN.
- g) **Post-box:** Cllr. Rogerson reported that repair work was confirmed but might take a little time.
- h) **Coronavirus and Business Continuity:** Given the likelihood of Covid 19 restrictions being in place for some time to come, it was **Agreed** that the Parish Council should take an annual subscription to the Zoom meeting platform. It was also **Agreed** that notices of meetings would clearly state that meetings were to be held by Zoom and that members of the public were welcome to join by submitting a request for the relevant link from the Parish Clerk.

41/20 Correspondence: Councillors noted items of correspondence received. There were no items of correspondence requiring specific comment or attention. The Chairman confirmed that he has ordered a Remembrance Day wreath on behalf of the Parish Council. Cllr Bagot undertook to confirm what arrangements were being made to mark the occasion on Sunday 8 November.

42/20 Future Agenda Items:

- The Christmas Event

43/20 Date of the Next Meeting: The next Ordinary Meeting of the Parish Council is on Tuesday 10 November 2020 to be held as a remote meeting unless otherwise publicised.

The meeting closed at 9.47 p.m.

Signed (Chairman) Date:.....