

# Levens Parish Council

## Levens Community Project: Parish Council responses to questions from members of the public

The following questions have been extracted from recent correspondence received by the Parish Council in relation to the Levens Community Project.

### **Q1 (the following questions/comments are all very similar in nature and have therefore grouped together)**

- a. Do we as parishioners have access to costings for the new hall and estimates of how much each plot of land might be expected to raise?
- b. We would like to see a full costing for the proposed new village hall, also to see that this costing has been rigorously tested independently. Also a cash flow forecast for the running and upkeep of the proposed hall for say the first five years of its use.
- c. No costings have been published to show why three building plots are required at Cotes. Given the substantial impact on local residents in this area, has the Council considered whether the overall budget could be achieved with fewer plots at Cotes?
- d. The Parish Council is considering the sale of these [Cotes] plots before confirming the location of the allotments or affordable housing.
- e. The budget cost of relocating allotments to Cotes has not been published.
- f. Whilst I understand that some aspects of the overall budget may be commercially sensitive, this should not prevent outline costings being published for the consideration of local residents.
- g. Is there a preferred order for disposing of these Parish assets or will developers be allowed to 'cherry pick' available sites?

**A1.** See separate sheet.

**Q2.** Who is responsible for any shortfall in funding or in the running costs: the parish council members individually or the parishioners of Levens

**A2.** In terms of funding the development, the Parish Council will not pursue this project unless it is absolutely confident that sufficient funds can be raised to make the project viable.

**Q3.** Does the Parish Council have a mandate to raise and spend three quarters of a million pounds?

**A3.** A parish council has a right to sell the assets that it owns, if it believes that this is for the overall benefit of the community. Levens Parish Council believes strongly that it has a responsibility to maximise the utility of its assets for the maximum overall benefit of the Levens community.

**Q4.** The original draft plan relating to building in Cotes on the land adjacent to Wayside showed the development ending mid-way along the wall of the 'Box Tree' but the plans shown at the Open Meeting on July 30<sup>th</sup> show the boundaries extending considerably further down the road.

**A4.** The plans shown at the July 30<sup>th</sup> meeting were unfortunately incorrect. The development would extend no further than the end of Box Tree wall.

# Project Costs and Funding

## Project Phases

### Phase 1

- Build a new village hall (build commencing 2015)
- Convert the Institute into 3 affordable flats for the elderly (2016)

### Phase 2

- An option to build two or three affordable homes at Underhill, suitable for families (2016/17)

## Phase 1: Summary of Development Costs

At this stage, only indicative costings are available for construction of the proposed developments. These show that:

- Construction of the new village hall is expected to cost approximately £1 million.
- Conversion of the Institute into three affordable flats for the elderly is expected to cost approximately £200,000.

With allowance for cost increases, the overall costs are therefore anticipated to be approximately £1.3 million.

## Phase 1: Funding the Development

### Design and Construction

The Parish Council has been and continues to work to the principle that the whole of the project must remain cost neutral to the parish. Costs incurred have until recently been wholly covered by previously-obtained grant funding. To cover future funding requirements, the Council has applied to the Homes and Communities Agency for £50,000 (and has been given verbal assurance that this funding will be forthcoming). In addition, the Council is investigating whether a portion of the funds contained within the existing Levens charities (approximately £100,000) can be utilised to support funding the project. The Council is therefore confident that sufficient funds can be raised to cover costs incurred prior to the sale of any assets.

The Parish Council has taken advice from a number of specialists, to gauge the likely value of the various plots of land owned by the Council. This information is considered commercially sensitive, but a number of things are clear:

- The sale of Sizergh Fell Quarry is the Council's first priority. However, the sale of quarry on its own is unlikely to be sufficient to fund the development.
- It is therefore likely that land at Cotes will need to be sold. The indication is that, with the sale of Sizergh Fell and up to three plots at Cotes, there will be sufficient money raised to fund the development.
- The Parish Council confirms that developers will not be allowed to "cherry pick" plots.

## Running Costs

- The new village hall and the Institute conversion into flats, will both be designed to be eco-friendly and with low maintenance costs.
- The Parish Council have visited Chipping village hall, which is very similar in size to that proposed for Levens. The hall at Chipping breaks even and is self-sufficient.
- For Levens, additional income will be generated by the letting of the affordable flats at the Institute.
- The Parish Council are therefore confident that the combined village hall + Institute flats will provide a sustainable income.

## **Next Steps**

### Phase 1

- Firm costings for the development are expected to be available by early next year.
- But the overall viability of the project will only become clear when Sizergh Fell Quarry and the land at Cotes are offered for sale. This is anticipated to be in mid-2015.
- Only then will it be able to be confirmed whether, in addition to the sale of Sizergh Fell Quarry, one, two or three plots of land at Cotes need to be sold to fund the development.

### Phase 2

- Phase 2, the construction of 2 or 3 affordable homes for families, is an option which the Parish Council is considering.
- A number of factors will need to be considered, including:
  - o The funding remaining following the completion of Phase 1.
  - o Whether the Council considers it appropriate to sell the land on Church Road currently used for allotments, to provide additional funding.
  - o If the Church Road allotment land was sold, what alternative arrangements for allotments would be provided.
  - o The cost of relocating allotments and/or provision of alternative allotments.
- Because of the uncertainties, the Council considers it premature at this stage to make any decisions on Phase 2. An appropriate timescale to give consideration to Phase 2 is mid-2015, when the Phase 1 financial situation will be far clearer.
- With this in mind, the Council has extended the tenancy agreements for the allotment holders until end April 2016.

10 Sept 2014