

Levens Annual Parish Meeting 2026

DRAFT MINUTES of the Annual Parish Meeting held in the Levens Village Hall on Tuesday 19 May 2026 at 7:30 p.m.

Present: Cllr D. Forshaw (Chairman), M. R. Curry (Parish Clerk and Notetaker). 21 residents (including 6 members of the Parish Council) were in attendance. Cllr. J. Battye was also representing Westmorland and Furness Council (W&FC).

1. Welcome and Introduction

Cllr. Forshaw welcomed everyone to the Annual Parish Meeting for 2026. He explained that Cllr. Roger Atfield had stepped down as Chair of the Parish Council and that he was honoured to have been elected as the new Chair at the Annual Parish Council Meeting held on 12 May.

He paid tribute to Cllr. Atfield's 14 years of dedicated service as Chair, acknowledging his significant contribution to the Parish Council and the local community. He also expressed his appreciation for the continued commitment and hard work of his fellow Parish Councillors and the Clerk.

Cllr. Forshaw reaffirmed his commitment to serving the local community and outlined his intention to strengthen engagement with residents. This would include introducing informal drop-in sessions with Parish Councillors and developing a question-and-answer section on the Parish Council website to encourage greater communication and transparency.

He concluded by thanking everyone for attending, noting that those present represented a broad cross-section of village life and community activity.

2. Apologies

Apologies had been received from Cllr. K. Holmes, Alice Sharples, Hugh Connor, Revd Tiras Dainty-Share, Leonie Darch, Rosie Brown, Richard Jones, PCSO Jayne Park, John Wood

3. Minutes of the 2025 Annual Parish Meeting

The Chair noted that the Minutes of the 2025 Annual Parish Meeting had been published on the Parish Council website well in advance of the meeting, with a summary also circulated alongside the meeting papers. The Chair invited a proposer and seconder for their approval, and the Minutes were approved unanimously.

4. Chairman's Report for the 2025-26 Parish Council Year

As the Immediate Past Chair of the Parish Council for the 2025–26 year, Cllr. Roger Atfield presented his Annual Report, which is attached as Annex 1 to these Minutes.

At the conclusion of the report, Alan Miller proposed a vote of thanks to Cllr. Atfield in recognition of his outstanding service and dedication to the local community during his tenure as Chair. The proposal was warmly received and endorsed unanimously by those present.

5. Finance Report for the 2025-26 Parish Council Year

In his role as Clerk and Responsible Finance Officer to the Parish Council, Martin Curry presented the Finance Report for the 2025-26 Parish Council Year. This is attached as Annex 2 to these Minutes.

6. Levens Community Project Report

Speaking from the floor, Cllr. Mason presented the Levens Community Project Report for 2025–26. He began by expressing his sincere condolences, on behalf of the Project Advisory Group and the Parish Council, to Mike Dyer and his family following the recent tragic loss of Jenny Berge, whose commitment and contribution to the Levens Community Project had been greatly valued.

The remainder of Cllr. Mason's report is attached as Annex 3 to these Minutes.

7. Update from Westmorland and Furness Council

Cllr. Janet Battye spoke in her role as W&FC Ward Member for Levens and Crooklands and gave an overview of the work of the Council generally and this is attached at Annex 4. In relation to Levens specifically, she mentioned:

- The implementation of a 20-m.p.h. zones in Levens in the Summer
- Pothole repair, resurfacing work on Levens Lane and white lining, also in the Summer
- Actions to try to manage dog-fouling including the issue of a report card to help residents provide information to the Dog Warden

- Grants of £500 each for improvements to the water supply at the Allotments and towards white-lining to manage parking at the narrow section at the top end of Levens Lane.

8. Reports from Village Organisations

The Chair was pleased to introduce representatives from a number of village organisations who gave an update on their activities over the previous 12 months. Summary reports are included as part of these Minutes at Annex 5.

9. Public Forum: Comments and Questions from residents on village matters

The Community Project:

During the question-and-answer session, a resident asked whether there was a timetable for the completion of the new village hall.

Responding on behalf of the Project, Cllr Mason explained that updated information was awaited from the newly appointed principal designers. However, he confirmed that the hall must be completed within the next two years, otherwise Westmorland and Furness Council could invoke a penalty clause requiring the payment of a substantial sum towards the provision of affordable housing. He added that it was understood the Council would be unlikely to enforce this clause provided the village hall project was clearly progressing.

There was also discussion about the possibility of reducing construction costs by redesigning the building as a single-storey hall. Cllr Mason acknowledged that this remained an option but said the intention was first to establish the likely cost of delivering the original design before considering any changes.

A further question was raised about funding for the refurbishment of the former Institute building. Cllr Mason replied that strategic planning for the project's funding requirements was continuing, with the immediate priority being the construction of the four houses at Underhill.

Village Noticeboards:

In response to comments about the condition of the village noticeboards, Cllr Forshaw confirmed that the Parish Council would investigate creating a suitable access platform in front of the noticeboard at the Hare and Hounds. The Council would also review the condition of the noticeboard near the village shop and consider any necessary improvements.

Parish Council Website and Email Addresses: Speaking as Clerk to the Parish Council, Martin Curry confirmed that as the result of government regulations, the PC website had been detached from the Community website and was now operating as a stand-alone site under a new address:

www.levens-pc.gov.uk. He thanked both Tom Hecht and David Rogerson for the design and

maintenance of the community website which will continue to be supported by the Parish Council.

For the same reason, individual Councillors addresses have also changed for the purposes of Parish Council business and follow the general pattern of any.councillor@levens-pc.gov.uk. The general PC email address is now: clerk@levens-pc.gov.uk

In conclusion, the Chairman thanked everyone for their contributions and all present for their attendance.

The formal meeting closed at 9.48 p.m.

Signed.....(Chairman)

Date:

CHAIRMAN'S REPORT MAY 2026

Welcome to this Annual Parish Meeting which will follow the usual format of linking the legal requirement of a village Annual Meeting with learning what various village organisations have been doing in the last year. Less than two weeks ago there were local elections taking place in various parts of England as well as in other parts of the UK and it seems we will all be suffering the repercussions for weeks or months to come! Westmorland & Furness were not involved this time but will be holding their local elections in May next year. During the last year W&F and Cumberland, the new Unitary Authorities set up 3 years ago, agreed to create a Cumbria Combined Authority which will have a mayor who will be voted for as part of next year's elections. I make no further comment.

Levens Parish Council meets once a month on the second Tuesday, other than in August and December, in the Methodist Chapel and at every meeting there is an opportunity for all residents to attend and speak or raise questions. The last Parish Council Meeting on Tuesday last week was the Annual Parish Council Meeting and after 14 years as Chair I stood down, and Councillor David Forshaw was elected as Chairman. As I was Chair during the last year it was agreed that I would give this report.

This last year has seen progress on various subjects concerning our village. The legal actions to create a 20mph speed limit in our village have been completed and new signs should be fitted soon. The installation of a white line where the no parking cones are by the Playing Fields to improve traffic flow has been agreed. This stretch of road is scheduled to be resurfaced this year, and the line will then be painted. The Parish Council thanks Councillor Janet Battye for her Members Contribution of £500 towards the cost of the lining. The Levens Lane footpath has made its way onto the W&F Capital Programme, and we also thank Councillor Battye for her endeavours in achieving this result.

The water supply to the site of the four homes at Underhill has been installed and the ducting for electricity, which will go along the edge of the Coronation Orchard, will be dug in during the summer. The foundation slab for the homes will also be laid in the near future. We will hear more about the whole Project later this evening. Some 20 trees have been planted in the Coronation Orchard, and we thank Councillor Roger Mason for all the work he has done at this site including obtaining grants for a new dry stone roadside wall and fencing on the other three sides. On the old W.I. site on Brigsteer Road, the dry-stone wall on the northern boundary has been completed. A sign explaining the history of the site has yet to be commissioned.

For those of you who read our three times a year Newsletters will know that the existing defibrillator on the front of this building has almost come to the end of its life and a proposal is to purchase a new defibrillator and install it in the telephone box by the bus shelter. The three-month consultation period by BT has recently ended with no objections to the removal of the phone having been received. We now have to agree terms and timings with BT. The Levens Emergency Action Plan – LEAP has come on in leaps and bounds in the last twelve months, and Councillor David Forshaw has obtained grants, purchased equipment and started to arrange training. So, thanks are due to David, and I think he will expand further a little later in this meeting.

I know I say this every year, but thanks must go to Councillor Helen Burrow for being the main organiser of the Christmas Event near The Green and the bus stop. She is ably assisted by Councillor Dave Rogerson and a team of elves who erect the tree and deal with all the lights etc. This event last Christmas seemed as successful as usual, and everyone present enjoyed themselves from what I could see.

Back in January Alderley Homes had a drop-in session revealing a plan to build fifty plus homes on land behind Greengate. The overwhelming responses they received and the litany of reasons for those responses was not what they were expecting I suspect. The indication given was they intended to submit a Planning Application at the end of February but at the time of writing this Report nothing appears to have been sent to W&F. However, a group of interested parties in the village has been set up and notices are on display around the village. There is also an online survey, details of which are on letters sent to every house in the village from both Councillor Janet Battye, W&F Councillor for this Ward, and from the Parish Council as an extra newsletter.

During the last year W&F have announced that they will charge for collecting garden waste in the green bins from the end of June. The cost will be £60 per bin, and stickers will be sent to you to put on the back of the bins. From the 29th June – no sticker no collection. So, you need to register your agreement and make your payment as soon as possible. You should have received a W&F leaflet about this change in the last couple of weeks. Responsibility for all of our street lighting has now been taken over by W&F. As mentioned last year we

registered an interest in Electric Vehicle charging points and Councillor Dave Rogerson conducted a virtual tour of the village with someone from W&F discussing possible locations. We await any further developments. As you may know the Parish Council website is currently part of the Levens Village website and we Councillors use our own email addresses. Central Government has decided that Town and Parish Councils must now follow new rules which mean the Levens Parish Council must now have its own stand-alone website and email addresses must end in “.gov.uk” which we have to pay a fee to use! We have contracted with A2A in Milnthorpe to provide the Parish Council with a new website and this is in the final stages of development and implementation. They have many local Parish Councils on their books and are aware of what is required and what cannot be allowed. We will keep you advised as to when the actual change will take place but hopefully it will be in the next few weeks. The village website will continue as it is but the link to the Levens Parish Council will be a link to the new website rather than as a part of the village website.

As mentioned earlier, Parish Councillor Janet Battye is also the Councillor for this Ward on the W&F Council, and I take this opportunity to thank her for the work she does for us at W&F and for keeping us updated on what W&F are doing.

Finally, I cannot end this my last Annual Report without thanking all my fellow Councillors for their support over the years. I feel privileged to have held the position of Chair and wish Councillor David Forshaw all success in taking over the role. Many subjects are discussed by Councillors between Parish Council meetings and attendances by Councillors at other events also take place; be that online or in person. So, thank you all. As a Parish Council, Levens Parish Council has to have a Clerk who in our case is also the Responsible Finance Officer. As I have said before we are fortunate to have Martin Curry in those roles. In addition to the legal and business aspects Martin does a lot of work in the background. At all times he is conscientious, cheerful and unfailingly polite and on behalf of the Parish Council I again place on record our thanks to you Martin for all your endeavours, advice, patience and work you do for the Parish Council, Levens Charity and the Levens Community Project. It is more appreciated than we probably show you. In conclusion I take this chance to personally thank you Martin for a very enjoyable working relationship with you over the years you have been Clerk. You have kept me on the straight and narrow and I have appreciated your wise counsel on many occasions so a sincere and heartfelt “thank you”.

Ladies and Gentlemen that is my last Report.

Roger Atfield – Immediate Past Chair, Levens Parish Council

LEVENS ANNUAL PARISH MEETING – 19 MAY 2026 FINANCE REPORT for 2024-25 & 2025-26

As many of you will know, it is a legal requirement for parishes to hold a meeting once a year between 01 March and 30 June.

Although this is not a meeting of the Parish Council, one of the requirements is that it will provide a report on Parish Council finances which is usually based on the last *audited* set of accounts. Due to previous Annual Parish Meetings being held earlier in the year - usually in March – accounts for the year in which the meeting was held had not been finalised. As a result, it has been the habit to provide a report for the year previous which are, by the date of the APM virtually one year old. That report was then supplemented by a brief indicative report on Parish finances for the for the year in which the APM was being held.

However this year, this APM is taking place later in the year allowing the presentation a of report on the most recent financial year – in this case for 2025-26. Having said that, there was no formal report on the 2024-25 financial year and so I will start with that as follows:

Firstly the External Auditor's Report for 2024-25 said:

"In our opinion. The information in sections One and Two of the annual governance and accountability return is in accordance with the proper practises and no matters have come to our attention, giving cause for concern that relevant legislation and regulatory requirements have not been met.

Minor matters not affecting our opinion:

The Council should keep its reserves under review and ensure that they have sufficient general reserves to cover expenditure. Best practise suggests that this should be at least three months expenditure as a minimum.

We note that the minute reference on Section 2 is missing a digit from the reference and should read 23/25viii. Whilst we do not consider this to be a reportable issue (given that users can clearly get to the correct minute) the council should ensure that references are transposed carefully as they are required to be correct.

We note that the contact e-mail address used to submit the Council's AGAR and supporting documentation does not appear to belong to the Council. The Practitioners Guide states that every authority should have an e-mail account that belongs to the Council and to which the Council has access. For example: clerk@levens-pc.gov.uk. From 1st of April 2025 this became a mandatory requirement, and the Council will need to consider whether it is fully compliant."

This comment is in relation to the introduction of what is known as Assertion 10 which is essentially a new requirement relating to accessibility, digital and data protection and includes the revision and upload of a number of policy documents to the Parish Council website. However, there are also requirements for the PC website and for individual email addresses. I need to explain this so that parishioners can understand the changes and will know where to find information relating to the Parish Council.

To meet this requirement, and there will be censure and potential penalties for not so doing, the website must meet accessibility standards and have an approved www. address. Accessibility relates to the design of the website so that such things as colour, layout, font type and size are presented in as inclusive a way as possible to ensure that those with disabilities in the broadest sense have the best chance of engaging with the website. The site should also be accessible in its entirety on a mobile phone.

The Parish Council website is currently nested as a series of pages in the Levens Community Website and at this point I want to pay tribute to Tom Hecht, the original designer, Cllr David Rogerson who has acted as liaison link between the PC and the website and to the several volunteers who are also connected with it. In my view, the Levens Community website is really attractive and looks positive and dynamic.

It does not however meet the strict accessibility guidelines and therefore, by implication, nor does the PC element of it. As a result, a new stand-alone website has been built for the Parish Council which will be formally launched in the coming days, and which will contain all information relating to the PC when the transition is complete. Its address is www.levens-pc.gov.uk which meets compliance requirements. The PC will continue to sponsor and support the Levens Community website in its current form minus the Parish Council element.

Email addresses must also now conform to Assertion 10 and be standardised with an acceptable address. Individual email accounts such as gmail, yahoo, hotmail, btinternet addresses are no longer acceptable and all

Councillors now have a .gov.uk address. This too will be formally launched in the coming days. The Parish Council address for general correspondence will be clerk@levens-pc.gov.uk.

So, back to the accounts. With the exception of minor observations, which were reported to the Parish Council, the External Auditor issued their certificate confirming that parish council finances were managed satisfactorily in 2024-25. The green columns on the paper circulated detail income and expenditure for the 2024-25 year.

Income: You may note that income received was nearly £6,200 above the predicted budget (line 16).

Primary drivers for this were:

Line 3: £ 385.00 (Project contribution to audit costs)
Line 4: £ 2,062.00 (Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) payment stemming from new builds in the village);
Line 5: £ 500.00 (W&FC members grant)
Line 9: £ 512.00 (higher VAT refund)
Line 11: £ 1,250.00 (sale of wood)
Lines 13 & 14: £ 1,484.00 (unbudgeted income from the 2023 and 2024 Christmas events)

Expenditure

The first thing to note is that there was an underspend on the year of just £249 below budget. Rather than go through individual lines I am simply going to report that this was a case of minor variances balancing each other out.

Significant underspends are noted in salary payments (line 19), grants awarded (line 31) and woodland management (line 37). A major overspend is noted at line 47 relating to Other Expenditure. As a rule, I would prefer not to see any significant expenditure under Other Expenditure and in this case two payments totalling £2,315 could legitimately have been allocated to woodland management – which I have just noted as a significant underspend. One of these items here was a payment for a Tree Health and Safety Survey and it remains important that the Parish Council continues to monitor trees on its land to demonstrate due diligence as far as possible. These were spends however which came out of reserved funds earmarked for woodland management rather than for the budget allocation. Either way, it doesn't really matter where the funds were taken from and it remains the case that the parish council needs to be financially prepared to sustain costs of future management.

2025-26

Turning now to the 2025-26 financial year, highlighted in blue on the sheet. This is, of course, for the financial year just completed and on which I am not usually able to report. However, whilst the External Audit has not yet been completed, the Internal Audit has and the conclusion was as follows:

"I can conclude and report that the Council's control systems are efficient and effective and give the appropriate level of confidence that the financial statements and reports reflected true and accurate account of the council's finance and governance records."

On income you will note an excess of income over budget (line 16) of £3,517. This is accounted for by an unbudgeted contribution towards audit costs by the Project (line 3) ; a W&FC members grant award of £500 (line 5) and grant received of £1,672 from Cumbria Foundation (line 6) towards the costs of purchasing emergency equipment under the LEAP (Levens Emergency Action Plan) Scheme. A further £687 was received via the 2025 Christmas event (line 14).

On expenditure, there was an underspend on the year of £2,206 against the budget. In very general terms much of this can be attributed to the fact that the 2025-26 grant to the Playing Fields was not paid in year and there was no spend on woodland management. Couple this with a payment for audit that was £666 over budget (but recovered from the Project as reported under income) and the underspend is explained with minor variations contributing to the final balance.

And now, turning to the Project for the two years in question, the first thing to report is that the 2024-25 transactions were posted on the Community website approximately 12 months ago and all transactions are shown there. This information has been transferred to the new website.

The income for that year was £296,942 which included £160,846 proceeds from the sale of Plot 1 at Cotes, £42,092 Infrastructure Grant from Westmorland & Furness Council and £27,529 from the sale of stone.

The expenditure for the period was £293,530 which included £215,000 transferred to the Deposit Account, £50,000 for the electricity connection at Underhill and a further £10,000 for the water connection.

The end of year balance in the current account was £20,455 and the balance in the Deposit Account was £1,507,837.

The income and expenditure figures for 2025-26 have now been finalised and will be posted on to the new website in the course of the next few days. On the current account, the income was £79,541 against expenditure of £87,091. Income included a transfer in of £50,000 from the Deposit Account in addition to grants received, VAT refunds and receipts from the sale of stone.

Expenditure was £87,091 which included £30,000 transfer back to the Deposit Account and £49,000 for the retaining wall at the new village hall.

The end of year balance in the current account was £12,905 and the balance in the Deposit Account was £1,511,260.

And finally, I should briefly mention the status of the charity accounts managed by the Parish Council as Sole Trustee of both the Levens Charity and the Savin Brow Quarry Charity. The end of year figures for the Levens Charity have yet to be finalised but are expected to have an overall value in the region of £165,000. This value requires little direct management as assets are in investment funds managed by fund managers, but the Charity Trustees do review investments periodically.

The Savin Brow Quarry Charity, which had identical objectives to the Levens Charity has now been wound up and its assets of approximately £3,000 have been transferred to the Levens Charity.

Martin Curry, Clerk and Responsible Finance Officer to Levens Parish Council
19 May 2026

PROJECT REPORT TO THE ANNUAL PARISH MEETING - MAY 2026

Good evening, ladies and gentlemen: I am Roger Mason and Chair of the Project Advisory Group who meet on the first Tuesday of every month with everything we discuss going forward for approval at the following open Parish Council Meeting.

I know you will have seen the lack of activity on the New Village Hall site but that doesn't mean to say we aren't progressing. We have in the next two years to build the new hall and this achievable.

We seem to take one step forward and think we are about there and then get a knock back. We have always been advised that we need to have a sole builder who can keep things moving and provide the necessary warranties to build the hall. When the quotes came back from the initial tendering process, we expected them to be higher than first calculated because of world events, but they were far above this and not justifiable.

Originally our architect expected the builder to calculate the mechanical engineering systems, including wall installation thicknesses and the like and this has led to builders over egging of the price.

We are now looking at a different tack and are dealing with a firm called ACS. ACS have a full range of specialists including quantity surveyors and building regs specialists and are not a one-man band. They are putting together a bill of quantities and a schedule of works. They are also putting together a cost plan and looking how to value engineer the build. They are due to bring their findings to our next meeting on June 2nd. There are also dealing with SBEM calculations (Simplified Building Energy Model) and applying for up-to-date building regs. They are looking to incorporate SIPs panels (Structurally Insulated Panels) into the build to reduce costs and believe they can reduce the total original build cost by 25/30%.

Once these are available we can put out all the individual aspects of the build for tender to local builders, joiners, roofers, plasterers electricians and plumbers etc.

Once we have these we can then look at affordability and if necessary look at a slightly different design to put everything on one floor reducing the need for a lift and stairs but giving a larger footprint with less car parking spaces.

Until the information comes back from ACS we cannot make this decision. ACS could Project Manage and sign off the build.

On a more positive note we have received tenders for building the floor slab at the four affordable houses at Underhill including drainage and sewer connections. The water connections and meters are already in place, and the electricity ducting is due to be put to the site. The electric supply is agreed and paid for, and the way-leaves are currently being put in place. The funding for the slab is part of the grant received from Homes England via Westmorland and Furness council. This funding is allocated to the housing and cannot be used for the NVH.

Once the slab is in place it covers us from any future hike due to building regs design or cost of the whole build. The building regs are currently being finalised and once these are in place the slab can be constructed.

Roger Mason
May 2026

REPORT FROM WESTMORLAND AND DISTRICT COUNCIL – Levens Annual Parish Meeting May 2026

Cllr. Janet Battye, W&FC Ward Member for Levens and Crooklands gave the following report:

I have continued to try to work closely with the Parish Councils in my ward, to share information with them about the services and plans of Westmorland and Furness Council:

Changes within W & F: **Miranda Cannon** joined us in January this year as the new Chief Executive, on the retirement of Sam Plum, the first C Exec of the new Council. Miranda came to us from Salford Council and lives locally. Her major tasks in this first period are to reshape the Management of the Council both to take us into the second phase of the new Council but especially because of the reduction in government funding; and to lead “transformation” of the new Council for which she is promoting the principles of W & F being community focused; digitally enabled, and financially sustainable, with an emphasis on developing prevention services so that people can stay healthier, safer and more independent for longer.

Speeding traffic: This is a continuing concern through the ward. The second year of 20mph speed areas will come into place shortly: in my ward this includes Heversham and Levens. Consultation is now starting on a third round. I am supporting Preston Richard Parish Council asking for 20mph on Low Park and in the village of Endmoor but that will now be for a future scheme, and with their continuing concerns about speeding on the A65 through Endmoor; and Helsington PC are asking for a 30mph limit in Brigsteer village (where there is currently no speed limit other than the national 60mph).

Potholes, resurfacing roads and white lines: I encourage Parish Councils and local people to report problems on HIAMs on the Councils website, as well as reporting them myself. Several roads are included in the maintenance programme for the coming year: Levens Lane in Levens, part of the Crooklands to Milnthorpe road. I’m also asking for some other stretches to be resurfaced: Beathwaite Close/Greengate Crescent in Levens. Please let me know of others causing concerns.

Streetlighting: W & F are now completing the transfer of these assets from PCs to their ownership to make it easier to maintain and replace them when necessary

Dog fouling: W & F now has two Officers working in this problem and they are visiting to both remove any that they find and put posters up reminding people to take it away. They will take enforcement action if notified: preferably by email: locality@westmorlandandfurness.gov.uk

Waste recycling and collection: The new service has finally been agreed with the new recycling collection (two smaller bins and paid-for green waste collection) planned to start from June onwards. This will harmonise the service across the whole of W & F.

Electric vehicle charging: W & F have funding to help install public EV charging points, aiming for all Council car parks to have them by 2030, and to increase them at partner sites (Town/Parish Council, and community groups). I’ve been encouraging W & F to look at village halls in this ward because there are no Council car parks. Some PCs have already responded.

Local Plan: W & F is now required to find sites for 1,330 houses/year and is just completing the second “call for sites”. Assessments will start later this year. I’m aware that several sites have been put forward around the ward which makes me concerned about the future of “villages” as we know them, with poor access, limited infrastructure (gas, electricity, water/sewerage) and bus services. My preference is for the continued use of small-scale “brownfield” and in-fill sites. In briefing sessions, I continue to ask about local housing needs.

Planting for pollinators: Part of the local Nature Recovery Strategy, W & F is working with Cumbria Wildlife Trust to plant up more small areas around villages etc and I’m pleased that some PCs are looking at this.

Current public consultation: A Place called home: your living choices in later life. To help W & F ensure that there’s the right mix of housing and support for us as we get older.

Home to School Transport: The policies need to be reviewed and revised but some of the services are “discretionary”. This budget is considerably overspent, so W & F is having to re-examine how it provides these services because of the reduction in government funding.

Locality Board: In South Lakeland, we’ve been looking at developing local youth work (through the CYP working group), climate change and nature recovery (with grants for solar panels for village halls), and Highways services. Small grants will continue to be available next year.

Councillor grants: Last year, I gave £500 each towards white-lining a passing place on Levens Lane by the Playing Fields (Levens Parish Council) and a SID at Gatebeck (Preston Patrick Parish Council) to help enforce a 20mph limit.

Lead Member for Children’s Services: For this important role, I am a member of Cabinet. Current developments include **Children’s Rights** aiming for W & F to become child-friendly, giving children and young people a voice in developing services. I’m particularly interested in a child’s right to play.

Education Sufficiency: With decreasing numbers of children locally (so increasing vacancies and budget deficits), W & F is looking at schools and the need for SEND services (esp. in light of government proposed changes).

School Governors: There’s a “Local Authority Nominated” governor on most school governors and we’ve changed the system to encourage more local people to be interested in doing this.

Care sufficiency: The growing success of Best Start Family Hubs, early prevention and support for families, is leading to a reduced number of cared-for children and we’re planning to help more families care for their own children (Kinship care), more foster parents and local children’s homes. There’s also more long-term help for Care Leavers.

Apprenticeships: W & F now has 164 apprentices at all levels, linked with training, across most services. 38 have completed recently and more are being recruited. This helps to meet skills shortages across W & F and provide good work/career opportunities to local people.

Devolution: Finally, to note that Cumbria Combined Authority has now started, with Mayoral election planned for May 2027.

Reports from Village Organisations

St John's Church: The Revd Bryan Kerr spoke of the privilege of serving Christ in Levens through regular worship and by providing a special place for significant life events such as christenings and weddings. He emphasised the Church's commitment to being at the heart of the community, working in partnership with organisations including Levens Good Neighbours and the local school. St John's is also collaborating with other Christian groups, particularly the Methodist Church, including the organisation of a Whit Sunday/Pentecost Picnic.

Bryan expressed his gratitude to the many volunteers who support the life of the Church, especially those who care for the church building, which remains an important focal point of the village's cultural heritage. Looking ahead, he highlighted plans for Levens 200, marking the 200th anniversary of the church's foundation. The celebrations will culminate on Advent Sunday 2028, and he warmly invited local residents to contribute ideas, memories, or other support to help make this milestone a memorable community occasion.

Levens Methodist Church: The Revd Tiras Dainty-Share was unable to be present but had submitted the following report:

The Church continues to serve the community in a number of ways.

Due to declining attendance and fewer volunteers, the coffee shop alongside the Post Office has reduced its opening from three days a week (Monday, Wednesday and Friday) to Mondays only. This ensures we can reliably open, which was not always possible previously. The situation remains under review, and we would be open to increasing availability again if there is sufficient demand and support.

We are continuing to develop the Community Garden behind the church, with the aim of creating a peaceful and welcoming space for all. Recent improvements include better accessibility through a new pathway and the installation of a living willow dome. The next stage will involve planting and building raised beds, in consultation with Cath's Garden Plants.

Our regular groups continue to meet. Levens Warblers gather on the 2nd and 4th Mondays of each month from 10:30am–12pm. All are welcome, regardless of singing ability, and sessions (£2, including refreshments) offer an opportunity to sing and connect. The songbook has recently been revised. Levens Little Larks meets during term time on alternate Tuesdays from 9:30am–11am. At £1.50 per family (including refreshments), it provides a friendly space for young children and their parents/carers to play, sing and socialise.

We are pleased to continue hosting several community groups and feel privileged to offer this to the village.

We also work closely with St John's Church, sharing a joint service on the second Sunday of each month, alternating between buildings. We have 3-4 communion services followed by afternoon tea throughout the year. This Sunday (24 May) we are having a Pentecost Picnic and Praise service, 4:00pm–5:30pm, in the school playground (with the Methodist Church as a wet-weather backup). All are warmly invited to bring a picnic and something to sit on. There will be a short act of worship with time for games and sharing food together.

Levens Arts and Film Society: Hugh Connor was not able to attend but had submitted the following report:

We staged 5 shows in 2025, 4 of which were organised through Highlights Rural Touring Scheme. The 5th concert was through Hugh's links with the American music scene. The shows mostly sold out and raised £1125 for village hall funds. Unfortunately, for family reasons, Hugh has had to withdraw from the leading the LAFS team after 14 years. We are carrying on with a skeleton crew in 2026, but we really need some more help in organising these wonderful shows. Any offer of help, no matter how small, would be welcome.

Dreamtime Fellrunner: A poetic, witty and moving exploration of Dr. Julie Carter's running exploits on Lakeland fells.

Hattie Whitehead: Hattie fronted the 7-piece Joni Mitchell tribute band, Hejira, at The Brewery Arts Centre in April 25. She performed as a duo with Loz Garratt at Levens Village Hall. Hattie was on lead vocals & guitar and Loz was on bass, keyboards & backing vocals.

Martha Spencer Trio: We were lucky to catch this Appalachian string band on their European tour, featuring Martha Spencer of the legendary White Top Mountain Band from Virginia. We even had audience members from Scotland for this show.

Medusa String Quartet: Nominated for Instrumental Group of the Year at the Canadian Folk Music Awards. Medusa are an amazing group of virtuoso musicians with some fascinating vintage instruments.

Rioghnaigh Connolly: BBC Radio 2 Folk Singer of the Year 2025, Rioghnaigh is from County Armagh and now based in Manchester. She is a flautist and singer with a beautiful voice and an hilarious stage presence.

Ladies of Levens: Leone Darch was unable to attend but had submitted the following report:

Ladies of Levens continues to meet on the 25th of each month with a mix of talks, activities and outings. This month we are holding a Four Tea Party [coffee morning] in the Institute on Bank Holiday Monday 25 May from 10 - 11.30 to raise vital funds for St John's Hospice...everyone is welcome!
We have welcomed several new members this year and have a strong membership but the group will close permanently after November's meeting unless anyone steps up to run it as Leonie, Jo & Naomi are finishing after 15 years.

Levens Youth Group: Rosie Brown was unable to attend but had submitted the following report:

Levens Youth Group was set up by Kent Estuary Youth with the support of local council funding in 2022. We continue to be supported by Westmorland and Furness to help deliver the club through the year. We run the group, which is free to attend, on a Tuesday during term time 4.45-6.30pm at the village hall. Activities range from crafts, games, sports and cooking depending on the interests and needs of the young people. Group chats, individual support and the freedom to invent their own games are currently an important part of activities, with ideas for future projects being discussed. We are a small but needed group who welcome new members age 11-14 yrs.

The Police: PCSO Jayne Park was unable to attend but had submitted the following report:

Jayne will advertise further dates for drop-ins at the shop in due course. She provided a breakdown of 78 reported incidents over the last 12 months of which road related incidents (10) and highway disruptions (19) and miscellaneous (13) were the most recorded.

Jayne urged residents to consider installing a camera doorbell to protect your property and to put up CCTV signage. There is a QR code that can be scanned to register ring doorbells on our system so we can go straight to these addresses for CCTV enquiries. I will put this code on the village notice board.

The bike marking held at the store has been successful. There will be another event soon or come along to a drop in as we usually have the stickers with us. I am pleased to report that there has been no reported youth ASB in the area.

Further to e-mails received from Cllr Battye and residents I have looked at the position of the vehicles parked at the Lloyds showroom. At the times I have attended, which are varied, I have been able to identify any issues that would concern the police. If there are ongoing concerns these can be taken up with the Highways dept who may have a different view when applying their regulations. Also, from Cllr Battye questions about dogs being on leads. Dogs should be on leads if they are walked next to carriageway, but this was an isolated incident and both parties concerned were spoken to.

We are waiting for new CALC (Cumbria Association of Local Councils) meetings to be set up now that funding is confirmed. Members of local councils will be invited to attend these online meetings to report on issues in their parish. Just a reminder though that any intel or concerns and crimes can be reported at the time on 101. Crime in progress 999.

Levens Village Hall: Alan Miller reported that the Village Hall continues to be well used and the Trustees are now running not only LAFs events but a series of evenings usually driven by our very own Vanessa such as the disco and curry and quiz nights - any other suggestions let us know. The Trustees have been working on ensuring that we are compliant with Health and Safety and Fire Regulations - we recognise the impact of removing the curtains and we are looking at ways to manage this without incurring too much expense as we are obviously hoping to get to the new hall.

We are upgrading the technology so expect to see better microphones, payment systems and potentially an online booking system

The Committee is looking for some new Trustees and big thanks were extended to those long standing Trustees standing down.

Levens Playing Fields: Cllr Battye gave a report on the Playing Fields. A transcript of the report will be added here.

The Tuesday Club: Shela Watson reported on another successful year for the club with a full programme of events, visits and presentations. She thanked all members who had helped with setting up and clearing the hall at meetings, making cakes and serving drinks. New members are always welcome to the regular meetings on the second Tuesday of each month.

Levens Greening Group: Cllr Battye gave an update on Greening Group activities and a transcript of the report will be added here

B4RN: Cllr. Rogerson reported that it was now 10 years since Barry Forde visited Levens and inspired the formation of the local B4RN Group. Since then and based largely on voluntary input there are now 398 local properties linked into the B4RN ultra high-speed broadband network. New properties remain welcome to join the scheme and a further 4 are currently being connected,

LEAP (Levens Emergency Action Plan): Cllr. Forshaw reported that the local Emergency Plan is developing well with a network of volunteers engaged. Emergency equipment has been purchased with the help of the Cumbria Foundation. Training days for volunteers are being organised and Cllr. Forshaw extended his thanks and appreciation to all involved.

DRAFT