**Minutes of the Annual Parish Meeting of Dean Parish Council held on Monday 12th May 2025 at 7.00pm in the Kirkstile Village Hall.**

Present: Mr. Hayman, Mr. Chittenden, Mr. Ferguson, Mr. Scott, Mr. Haslam, Mr. Worsley, Mr. Thomas, Mr. Agnew, Mrs. Moore, Mrs. Pallister, Mrs. Holmes. Rev. Morgan, Parish Clerk, was also in attendance.

**1/25 Apologies for absence** were received from Mr. Smith and Mr. Semple.

**2/25 Approval of Minutes**

On the motion of Mrs. Moore, seconded by Mrs. Pallister, the minutes of the meeting held on 13th May 2024 were approved and signed.

**3/25 Approval of Parish Council Annual Accounts**

The Clerk presented the accounts and questions were invited. It was agreed that a budget line for Defibrillators be added for the next financial year (2025/26).

On the motion of Mr. Chittenden, seconded by Mrs. Holmes, the annual accounts for the year ended 31st March 2025 were approved.

**4/25 Chairman’s Report**

On the proposal of Mr. Ferguson, seconded by Mr. Scott, the following report was received:

1. **Solar Farm and Battery Energy Storage System (BESS) developments**

Dean Parish Council’s work during the year was dominated by proposals for two major solar energy and battery storage projects:

* Dean Moor Solar Farm (which had already held two rounds of public consultation during 2023-24), a proposal by Firma Energy and ib vogt for up to 150MW of solar/battery energy on a site of around 276 hectares (682 acres) between Gilgarran and Branthwaite; and
* Lostrigg Solar, a new 100MW solar/battery development proposed by RWE for 417 hectares of land (1,030 acres) between Little Clifton and Branthwaite.

Taken together, the two schemes could lead to the developments stretching north-to-south from a point near Bridgefoot to Fultons Garage at Dean Cross – an area far larger than the entire Lillyhall industrial area.

The successful collaboration with Distington Parish Council in responding to the Dean Moor project led us to set up a similar joint working group with Little Clifton Parish Council to respond to the Lostrigg project. Thanks to Dean councillors Mike Smith and Jeff Ferguson in particular for leading and co-ordinating this work, and to Tim Chittenden, Valerie Pallister and our Clerk Rev Judith Morgan for their ongoing support.

A particular challenge has been to press the developers to provide a level of community benefit that adequately reflects the transformational nature of these projects for our parishes. We were pleased to receive support from Josh MacAlister MP in making this case, leading to Dean Moor increasing their offer from £200 to £300 per MW of installed generating capacity per year, but this still falls short of the £400 per MW per year being offered (at the time of writing) by RWE. To put both into perspective, the Potato Pot Wind Farm at Branthwaite pays £2,700 per MW per year.

During the year the Dean Moor scheme was reduced in scale through the removal of the BESS component, but concerns remain about the proximity of the solar array to Fultons Garage. The developer has now submitted an application to the Planning Inspectorate for a Development Consent Order.

RWE plans to submit a consent application later in 2025, but recent changes in planning legislation to ‘speed up’ the approval of infrastructure projects (through the introduction of the new Planning and Infrastructure Bill) mean that this application may now be considered by Cumberland Council rather than the Planning Inspectorate.

Dean, Distington and Little Clifton Parish Councils will continue to work together to represent the interests of our communities as the projects progress.

1. **Parish / community plan**

The arrival of the solar and battery projects highlighted the need for us to have a coherent, ambitious and forward-looking parish / community plan, and a number of Dean councillors held an initial informal workshop to discuss how this should be developed. This will be an action for 2025-26.

1. **217 bus service**

Following continued lobbying by the 217 Bus Group, led by Dean councillor Gillian Moore, with support from Dean, Lamplugh and neighbouring parish councils, and Josh MacAlister MP and Cumberland Councillor Andy Semple, we were delighted that Cumberland Council’s review of bus services concluded with an announcement in March 2025 that the weekly 217 bus route through the parish will continue operating.

The announcement was as follows: *“Cumberland Council is delighted to announce that Route 217 (Frizington – Lamplugh – Dean – Cockermouth) will continue operating, until a pilot scheme is established.*

*“Thanks to the £5 million in funding secured by Cumberland Council from the Department for Transport in November 2024, this route is now financially sustainable, ensuring long-term viability and reliable service for passengers. This extension ensures that residents along Route 217 will continue to benefit from reliable and accessible public transport, improving connectivity across communities.”*

We await further detail on the pilot scheme and hope that, in time, our communities will benefit from an enhanced bus service, providing a transport lifeline for residents.

1. **Sewage pollution in our water courses**

In 2024-25, the publication of a national Sewage Map by the Rivers Trust led us to discover that untreated sewage is being discharged into watercourses in our parish from storm overflows, including into Black Beck (spilling from Pardshaw treatment works), Near Stock Beck (from Dean waste water pumping station), River Marron (from Branthwaite pumping station), Far Stock Beck (from Deanscales pumping station) and Dubbs Gutter (from Eaglesfield waste water treatment works).

By far the largest discharges were occurring from Eaglesfield and Deanscales, and Dean Parish Council asked United Utilities what action they would be taking to reduce this unacceptable level of sewage pollution. Representatives from the company attended a council meeting to describe improvement works at Eaglesfield and Deanscales that were planned for coming months.

During the year United Utilities updated us that improvement works were under way at both sites, and we look forward to improved figures in future showing a reduction in sewage spills into our water courses.

1. **Broadband**

Fibrus and its contractor Viberoptix have begun installing infrastructure throughout the parish to facilitate the roll-out of full-fibre broadband to local residents and businesses.

Dean Parish Council welcomes the provision of fibre to our communities, but we have been very concerned about the sudden installation of wood poles without any consultation, when previous telephone / broadband lines were installed in underground cable ducts. Many local residents attended the January meeting of the Parish Council in Eaglesfield to voice their objections to plans for a buried chamber with manhole cover on the edge of the village green, and residents in Deanscales were dismayed at the sudden installation of a wood pole on their village green.

Fibrus engaged with us and we are pleased they have begun developing alternative solutions in these two locations, and has provided a number of maps and notices that we have shared on our website <https://www.deanparishcouncil.com/>

It appears that Fibrus had believed that Cumberland Council would consult parish councils on the plans and notices, but Cumberland Council did not do so.

Dean Parish Council now engages directly with Fibrus and will continue to do so as the installation programme continues. We remain concerned about the potential cutting of trees to facilitate the ‘stringing’ of lines between wood poles, as well as wanting to minimise the increased ‘wirescape’ in our villages and any inconvenience to local people.

1. **Website and policies**

Many thanks to Councillor Ian Haslam and our Clerk, Rev Judith Morgan, for their work in creating and populating the new Dean Parish Council website, and to Councillor Tim Chittenden for all his hard work in developing / updating the council’s suite of policy documents so all are fit for purpose.

**5/25 Cumberland Councillor’s Report**

The following report was received from Cumberland Councillor, Mr. Semple:

I’m sorry I cant be with you at the meeting this evening. In my role as Chair of Cumberland Council I am in Liverpool for the Duke of Lancaster’s Regiment Heritage Event.

Two weeks ago, at the Annual Meeting of Cumberland Council I was elected again by my fellow councillors, to be Chair of the Council. From the beginning, the role of the Chair has been designed not to be purely a “mayoral/representative” one – so for example there is no chain of office to be worn (that does cause a few problems now and then when I’m standing in front of the Mayor of Carlisle and his mace and sword bearers!). Rather, the intention is to ensure business like consistency in how we conduct proceedings at Full Council meetings; I must say we in Cumberland are lucky to have a group of very experienced councillors from all political groups and I can also honestly say it is a pleasure to work with them. So its my privilege to represent everyone – as I am in Liverpool – in the non-political role of the Chair.

**Lakes to Sea Community Panel**

The Community Panel met for the final meeting of the fiscal year, in Ireby. It was also the first meeting where we had a section for public participation. The former county Area Local Committee set up did not allow for public participation so we have now changed that. The good citizens of Ireby turned up in good numbers and we had a really good discussion about saving the local pub and the need for a bus service from Ireby.

We agreed two investments from Cockermouth South: £3,762 towards renovating the toilet facilities in Brigham War Memorial Hall and £2,000 towards replacing the woodburning stove in the Pardshaw Quaker Centre – as they open up to the community for its use.

I’m really pleased about how much the Community Panel has backed village halls and this year we have supported the village halls of Blennerhasset and Baggrow, Lorton, Brigham and last year there was a significant investment in Bothel village hall.

**217 bus route**

This much valued local bus service was “an agenda item” for some time as you know and despite my certainty it would be supported there is always a little twinge of doubt if the “unexpected” happens. So its great to see the 217 up and running and we are using this service as a bit of a rural pilot to help us shape other community and rural routes.

**Cumberland Audit Committee**

There was a Special Meeting of Cumberland Council held on 2 April. All the details about the External Auditors (Grant Thornton) Annual Report and their statutory recommendations can be found through browsing for the minutes of that meeting and their report is included. There was an enormous challenge to get the legacy councils accounts sorted (in one council’s case no accounts had been signed off by the auditors for four financial years), not helped by a shortage of qualified accountancy staff. By its nature, an auditor’s report is to a great extent backwards focused and to reassure you the council has already implemented almost all of the Grant Thornton recommendations and a full team is now in place. And the council is in the process of recruiting and appointing an independent chair of the Audit Committee – someone who is not a councillor with any vested interest. I am pleased to join the Audit Committee for this year and look forward to working with colleagues in a cross party partnership to help ensure financial stability for the council.

As ever, please email or ring me anytime for further information or advice.

**6/25 Open Forum**

There were no members of the public present.

The meeting closed at 7.09pm.

Signed: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ Chairman Date: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_