

Introduction

This paper is designed to give members of the Kentmere Parish Meeting an outline of changes that have taken place in local government which offer the community an increased voice and participation in the services which they receive. Up to the present we have not been represented in this discussion arena and now is a very good time to correct this position. The paper concludes with a proposal open to the Meeting to vote upon.

So what are these changes?

The changes originate from various Government White Papers in 2007 and 2008 which led in the Autumn of 2008 to a Cumbria initiative called the South Lakeland Sustainable Strategy 2008-2028. This action introduced a concept of three tiers of government - Parish, District and County - working together to deliver improved co-ordination of services, partnership working and the involvement of communities.

To achieve the objective in practice, the SLDC set up groups of parishes, taken to be 'like-minded' with 'similar' interests, to form Local Area Partnerships (known as LAPs). There are eight LAPs within the ambit of the SLDC, and Kentmere falls within the Upper Kent LAP (known as UKLAP). Within the Upper Kent LAP there are 14 parishes - Burneside, Docker, Fawcett Forest, Grayrigg, Lambrigg, Longsleddale, New Hutton, Old Hutton & Holmescales, Skelsmergh & Scalthwaiterigg, Stainton, Staveley-with-Ings, Whinfell, and Whitwell & Selside.

The members of the Upper Kent LAP were invited to start to formulate their position in late 2009 so that the objectives of improved delivery of service could be achieved. The UKLAP has met on seven occasions since that time.

What areas of influence are intended to be give to Parishes under the LAP

Inevitably, as a new concept in local government the exact way in which the strategic partnership will work is evolving. From previous experience of local government by the participating organizations, the following were identified as areas where community input would be effective:-

- Minor highway maintenance issues
- Maintenance of appearance and cleanliness
- Running community facilities
- Shared use of community buildings.

The Upper Kent LAP balloted its members on their interests and expanded the above list to cover highway maintenance and traffic issues, broadband reception, housing, planning, parking, transport provisions, public toilets, post offices and climate change – a wide range of topics.

There may be views within the electorate about the importance of the subjects under discussion and even the principles of the overall concept, but the most important underlying feature of the LAP involvement is its ability to deliver. The primary purpose is to increase efficiency in delivering services and to this end, £23167 was given directly to the parishes within the Upper Kent LAP last year. The funding came partly from the SLDC (the LAPs are effectively sub-committees of SLDC) and Cumbria County Council.

It should be appreciated that this is not 'new money' but a distribution in accordance with community wishes as opposed to central policy. Unfortunately, Kentmere was not represented last year so did not receive any of this money.

It is to be noted that the Upper Kent LAP does not replace the Neighbourhood Forum (NF), but this latter assembly may be absorbed in time. The NF is available to any member of the public but the LAPs are essentially sub-committees of the SLDC and CCC and as such attended by 'elected' members, although, like parish council meetings, the public can attend as observers.

Useful references to the Upper Kent LAP, its profile, terms of reference, action plan and minutes of meetings, can be found on:-.

http://www.southlakelandsp.org.uk/local_area_partnerships/upper_kent_lap.aspx

What effect will this have on the Parish meeting?

The effect of the LAP upon the Parish Meeting is best seen in terms of the consequences of not participating. It appears that the Parish can opt out as it effectively has so far.

The direct consequences of opting out are two fold:

- Firstly, we will not have a voice to claim any part of the funding made available or influence its allocation.
- Secondly, and it would seem more importantly, attempts to find funding from other sources within local government will not be fruitful. In short, it is a case of being a participant in the LAP or having no voice.

Further secondary consequences of not participating can be identified. Changes in local government yet to come such as within the Localization Bill now going through the House of Commons will most likely be devolved through the LAPs in some way. As you will no doubt have read or heard, one of the aspects of the Localization Bill likely to affect local communities is participating in the planning process, giving, for example, the parish the power to write its own 'neighbourhood plan' which could possibly deal with parking and other green space issues.

By not keeping up with what is going on under the auspices of the LAP, we would also fail to keep abreast of developments not merely in local government, but also in wider strategic benefits. The studies and initiatives with respect to broadband services are a good example of this. If we do not contribute to the present initiatives we are likely to be cast into the wilderness with no way forward.

Unseen benefits can also accrue from the regular contact with the representatives of SLDC, CCC, and in particular our Councillor, all of whom attend the LAP meetings.

Conclusions and suggestions

From the above it seems that a compelling case can be made for Kentmere to participate in the LAP meetings. As there are several of these meeting a year, the intensity of action is greater than can be accommodated by the two meetings a year of the current Kentmere Parish Meeting.

A parish meeting has very wide powers to regulate its own business. Indeed, apart from having to have the minimum two meetings a year (one being the annual meeting to take place within a prescribed period), to not start meetings before 6 o'clock p.m., to give due notice to the electors of the parish of a meeting and to elect a chairman, there is little else defined.

Unlike a parish council, where the elected members act and take decisions as representatives of electors, a parish meeting is a body of electors (of the parish) which itself has the power of decision. A parish meeting may appoint committees of electors to discharge any its functions, but the chairman and any such other officers

appointed by the parish meeting do not have such powers without agreement of the parish meeting. In essence those of the electoral role present at a properly notified parish meeting are the will and body corporate of the electorate of the parish. (except when a ballot is demanded, in which case all the parish's electorate become the body corporate for the ballot).

The effectiveness of the Parish Meeting largely depends on being able to perform in the arena of local government such as is represented by the UKLAP. To actively participate with the UKLAP, or any other local government initiative, suitable representation from the Kentmere Parish Meeting will be required; two informed representatives would normally be expected to attend LAP meetings, although observers are permitted.

The conclusion therefore is a suggestion to introduce a structure to the Kentmere Parish Meeting which can lead to better engagement and interaction of the community with the Upper Kent LAP.

Proposal

Currently there is one chair of the meeting and only slight devolution of the meetings functions. For one person to hold the job is an onerous task; it has not been easy to persuade folk to take it on in the past. The structure of a single chair was no doubt both effective and sufficient in the past when the local government acts first came into being in the last decade of the 19th Century. The number of parishioners determined whether a Parish Meeting should exist or a Parish Council, the latter having a much more involved structure in the matters of local government.

Although we are still of the size not required to have a Parish Council, the advantages of a wider involvement of active members cannot be denied. It would help to spread and maintain the community participation. Such a principle has already been practiced to some extent in our parish over the last few years with the appointment of a Finance Officer (Iain Johnston) and a 'Highwayman' (Hilary Fry). A possible new structure for the Parish Meeting could draw on the advantages of a 'council' by widening the structure below the chairperson, taking advantage of parishioners expertise and interest, but not having to formalise that structure to comply with local government rules for Parish Councils. The resulting benefits would be :-

- A lessening of the direct burden on the chairperson.
- The principle of the existing democratic process of the Parish Meeting would not be altered, even though the communication method might change on some issues.
- A greater use of individual expertise in the valley. This would result in a more studied approach to issues by appropriate persons. Finance, Planning, Highways and Broadband etc are examples of the specialist matters worthy of individuals taking the lead as elected committee members.
- Committee members could meet more frequently than twice yearly. They could disseminate information and prepare papers for the Parish Meetings, or LAPs, thus expediting action. This would be made even easier using the email list and distribution system recently set up in the community to help to keep parishioners informed.
- More parishioners would be involved so the parish is more likely to have a united case for such changes that can be advanced at the LAP, SLDC or CCC.
- alternatives would be available to represent the parish at meetings such as the LAPs (where informed specialists would be needed to promote our position) or if the usual attendees were indisposed.

This paper concludes with proposals for Vote.

Proposed motions for vote at the Kentmere Parish Meeting of 16 May 2011 by the undersigned.

Proposal 1

A committee comprising the following offices be elected from the Members of the Kentmere Parish Meeting to administer its day-to-day affairs, with authority to explore issues which they consider relevant to, or have been raised by, the Parish and Parish Meeting :-

**Chairman
Vice chairman
Clerk**

Together with 3 other elected representatives to perform specific roles as determined by the committee, all being elected annually at the same time as the chair

Proposals 1

Proposed by : Robert Courtier



Seconded by : Jackie Bettess

Proposal 2 (if the first Proposal is carried)

That members of the committee of the Kentmere Parish Meeting, the chairman excepted, shall take responsibility for specific roles allocated by the committee as may be required by the business of the time, which roles shall be published on the Parish website.

For the present time these roles are :-

- **Parish Website/broadband coordinator**
- **Accounts administrator**
- **Highways coordinator**
- **Planning notices coordinator**

Proposed by : Max Biden

Seconded by : Iain Johnston