

Caldbeck Parish Plan update - Consultation Results December 2019

The Parish Council asked all parishioners for their opinions on a number of important issues, delivering papers to some 300 properties and making documents available on line. Consultation responses were handed in to the village shops (for which much thanks), some handed to Parish Councillors and passed to the Clerk at the Parish Council meeting on 2 December, some sent by post to the Clerk and others emailed. Only the Clerk has read the responses and has collated the results. Some respondents underlined their wish that their responses remained anonymous.

235 responses were received. The Parish Council is delighted with the response rate and the time taken by many parishioners to include detailed comments. These will help the Parish Council in setting priorities and taking action for the benefit of the community.

The electoral roll made available for the May 2019 local elections showed 581 parishioners, 400 in Caldbeck (and surrounding hamlets) and 181 in Hesket Newmarket (and surrounding hamlets). Some parishioners may not be on the electoral roll, for example those owning second homes. But the 581 figure is useful to have in mind when considering the response rate and also the proportions living in Caldbeck 69% and Hesket Newmarket 31%.

235 responses is 40% of the May 2019 electoral roll figure. 64 of the 235 responses (27%) were from parishioners who included Hesket Newmarket in their address. Other responses may also be from Hesket Newmarket but a house name only was not sufficient to record the parishioner as living in Hesket Newmarket. However, it seems there is a reasonable coverage of responses from both Caldbeck and Hesket Newmarket.

Responses were received from 158 properties. There were 300 properties listed on the May 2019 electoral roll which may exclude some second homes. Because of priority work on preparing for the General Election, Allerdale Borough Council was not able to provide a list of all properties on which Council Tax is charged. We cannot be definite but it would appear that we have received responses from parishioners living in around 50% of all properties.

The results are discussed below.

1. Street Lighting

There are some 50 street lights in the Parish currently owned and maintained by Allerdale Borough Council. Allerdale had planned to pass all responsibility for street lights to Town and Parish Councils from April 2020, but it has now had a re-think. It is to charge Councils for electricity for street lighting from April 2021 but will continue to maintain and repair the street lights. The annual electricity charge is estimated at £30 per light: if we keep all the lights the annual cost is some £1,500. We can say 'No' in which case the lights will go unlit and we can ask for some lights to be removed if thought unnecessary. The Parish Council has already made a budget provision for street lighting as Allerdale's changes have been mooted for some time.

Q.1.1 Do you wish to keep all the present street lights with the Parish Council paying for the electricity used? Yes 80% No 20%
Q.1.2 If you do not wish to keep all the present street lights, which one(s) do you want to see removed? A number of suggestions have been made for removing some street lights away from the centres of villages. Comments were also made about both orange lights and brilliant white lights adding to light pollution and there was a call for street lights to be switched off at 12:00pm, some parishioners preferring an earlier 'lights out'.
Q.1.3 Would you prefer to see all the street lights removed? Yes 11% No 89%

Whilst a small minority were strongly in favour of removing all lights, a large majority of parishioners would prefer to retain street lighting (all street lighting 80% and some street lighting 89%). With Allerdale charging for electricity from April 2021, there will be time to review the street

lighting inventory and decide street light by street light whether it should be retained. The review should also consider the bulbs fitted and agree when street lights should be lit and turned off.

2. Public Toilets

The Public Toilets in Caldbeck are owned and maintained by Allerdale. Allerdale is to cease the service and has offered to transfer the toilets to the Parish Council. Allerdale will upgrade the facilities prior to transfer. The Parish Council would be responsible for the cleaning/running of the facilities and general maintenance. The alternative is the public toilets are closed. The present cleaning and maintenance costs are estimated at £1,500 a year which is not in the budget and would have to be added to the Parish precept, part of your Council Tax bill.

Q.2.1 Are you in favour of the Parish Council taking over the provision of the Public Toilets in Caldbeck?
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Yes 76% No 24%

Q.2.2 Would you like the Parish Council to explore further the provision of public toilets in Hesket Newmarket which would need funding?
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Yes 30% No 70%

There is strong support to retain public toilets in Caldbeck. Some parishioners questioned the current location of the public toilets and whether it would be worth considering a site for new facilities which might be more convenient, for example by the car park. Given that Allerdale has agreed to refurbish the existing facilities prior to their transfer, the Parish Council would need to consider an alternative site as a matter of urgency.

There was little support for the provision of public toilets in Hesket Newmarket. A number of parishioners referred to the village shop and Old Crown facilities, as well as the Chapel. When updating the Parish Plan, the Parish Council had thought more might be done to publicise the provision of such facilities following discussions with interested parties. The Parish Council may want to consider whether further steps should be taken to draw attention to facilities, particularly in the event of the Parish Council taking over the car park and having the opportunity to provide local information at the car park when requesting voluntary donations.

3. Caldbeck Green

Cumbria County Council owns Caldbeck Green and pond but the Parish Council maintains them. It manages a grass cutting contract, the current 3 year contract running from 2018 to the end of 2020. The annual cost is £2,000 and the County Council contributes £860.

In the Summer, representations were made to the Parish Council about the timing of the cuts, with changes proposed to promote biodiversity. The Parish Council decided that the current arrangements should continue, in part because representations were made that the area from the car park and around the pond should be kept tidy and accessible for people to enjoy, and in part because delaying the cut as requested would also necessitate heavier machinery which could damage the Green as has happened in the past.

But there may be scope to consider leaving some smaller areas of the Green for a later cut (with grass collection) to promote biodiversity. Such areas would need to be small enough to be strimmed, avoiding the need for heavier machinery and the risk of damage. There may be extra costs if the contractor's time increases.

Q.3.1 Are you in favour of keeping the current arrangements for cutting Caldbeck Green?

Yes 78% No 22%

Q.3.2 Would you like to see some areas away from the pond/car park left for a later cut to promote greater biodiversity?
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Yes 68% No 32%

The results show a large majority in favour of no change (78%) but also a significant majority in support of promoting biodiversity (68%), with many parishioners agreeing with both questions. A possible way forward would be to consider whether there is scope to continue with the

arrangements for the majority of the green but see if there are some well defined areas that could be managed in a way that encourages biodiversity. When the Parish Council discussed Caldbeck green at meetings in the Autumn, a suggestion was made to form a working group drawing interested parties together and taking advice from our contractor on what might be possible and any cost implications. The Parish Council may wish to reconsider this suggestion.

4. Heskett Green.

The Parish Council maintains Heskett Newmarket main village green and carries out some maintenance of grounds around the car park. The land all belongs to the Lake District National Park Authority (National Park). The main green is cut some 12 times a year at a cost of £900.

Q.4.1 Do you think the current grass cutting arrangements for Heskett Newmarket Green and car park area are satisfactory?

Yes 93% No 7%

Q.4.2 If No, please explain why?

Concern about grass clippings not being collected
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This question attracted a very high level of support, 93% satisfied with the current arrangements. However, a number of people, including some expressing overall satisfaction, were concerned that grass clippings were untidy and asked if clippings might be collected. The Parish Council would need to discuss this possibility with our contractor, together with the cost implications.

Some concerns were expressed about the failure of the National Park to maintain its land and why maintenance costs had fallen to the Parish Council. The National Park has contributed £50 a year and we have had some discussions with the National Park about its contribution. The National Park would cut the green much less frequently than is the Parish Council's practice and we are of course in discussions with the National Park regarding the sale of the green, along with other land.

5. Caldbeck/Heskett Newmarket Lonning Footpath

The main community wish in the Parish Plan 2005-2015 was to provide a direct footpath alongside Caldbeck/Heskett Newmarket Lonning, linking the two villages. This attracted the most support at the time of the original Plan but has proved very difficult to progress.

As a result of a generous donation, the costs of constructing a footpath are available, including the cost of land purchase at £10,000 per acre. The donation is expressly for the footpath and does not cover any legal costs relating to a Footpath Creation Order and any disputes arising.

The ongoing costs of maintaining the footpath and cutting hedges are not covered by the donation. A budget provision of £300 was made in 2015-16 and sums transferred to an earmarked reserve. On establishment of the footpath, the reserve would be used in the first instance but a budget would be required longer term, reinstating the £300 earlier budget.

A new route was agreed in 2016 but there have been changes in minds. Mediation by Mike Johnson, County Councillor, has not succeeded.

The National Park and County Council have visited Caldbeck and looked at alternatives, including upgrading the existing footpaths via Matthew Rudding. Whilst possible, both the National Park and the County Council saw drawbacks with any upgrade: the footpath crosses some fields rather than sticks to field boundaries and an improved surface might well interfere with farming operations, upgrades would be costly, and there was a concern that the extra length would prove unattractive compared with the direct Caldbeck/Heskett Newmarket Lonning route. They both recognised the advantages of the original design, aiming to follow the Lonning, and expressed a preference for a direct footpath along the full length of the Lonning, keeping to one side of the lane.

But such a footpath requires the consent of all landowners which we do not have, and the County Council is unwilling to use its powers and issue a Footpath Creation Order without worst case legal costs being covered, estimated at £30,000. The Parish Council would have to raise funds to meet worst case legal funds and work closely with other organisations - Allerdale has offered support.

The original intention was to establish a footpath that would be used by pedestrians, be wheel chair friendly, and bicycles would also be allowed by licence. If a Footpath Creation Order is required, the footpath would be designated as either a footpath or a bridleway, the latter would allow bicycles and horses as of right.

Q.5.1 Do you want a direct footpath, which can also be used by wheelchairs, along Caldbeck/Hesket Newmarket Lonning? Yes 72% No 28%
Q.5.1.1 Do you want bicycles to be permitted to use the footpath? Yes 52% No 48%
Q.5.1.2 Do you want the footpath created as a bridleway which would allow horses as well as bicycles? Yes 29% No 71%
Q.5.2 Do you at present walk along Caldbeck/Hesket Newmarket Lonning between the two villages? Yes 30% No 70%
If Yes how often? A range of responses given from Occasionally to Weekly
If not why not? 'Too dangerous' was the most common comment with 'Better alternatives' also cited
Q.5.3 Would you use the footpath if it were created? Yes 69% No 31%
If Yes how often? A range of responses given from Occasionally to Daily
Q.5.4 Would you be in favour of the Parish Council lobbying the County Council to use its powers to issue a Footpath Creation Order? Yes 52% No 48%
Q.5.5 Would you be willing to support the legal costs involved with a Footpath Creation Order? Yes 31% No 69% Suggested contributions £6,190
Q.5.6 If establishing the full length direct footpath were not possible, would you use alternatives, eg:
Putting in a part path where landowners are in agreement; Yes 55% No 45%
Other options? Improve existing footpaths; widen lane; extend speed limits and enforce them
Q.5.7 Do you wish the Parish Council to abandon pursuit of the footpath and return the donation? Yes 29% No 71%

Overall the results show support for the footpath with 72% wanting a direct footpath linking the villages and a similar figure (71%) not wanting the Parish Council to abandon the footpath and return the donation. (Questions 5.1 and 5.7)

There are concerns about potential conflicts with users - walkers, cyclists and horses. There is a 52:48 majority in favour of allowing bicycles but a clear majority against a bridleway (29:71). (Questions 5.1.1 and 5.1.2)

30% of responders currently walk along the lane. If there were a footpath, 69% of responders state they would use it (some specify for cycling). Responses on expected frequency of use show significant increases compared with the present position. (Questions 5.2 and 5.3).

As regards what actions might be taken to try to establish the footpath, there is a 52:48 majority in favour of the Parish Council lobbying the County Council to use its powers to issue a Footpath Creation Order. 31% of respondents stated that they would support legal costs subject to detailed information and an assessment of legal risks. 35 respondents gave an indication of the contribution they might be prepared to make and this totalled £6,190. Others at this stage did not wish to indicate a figure. (Questions 5.4 and 5.5)

A significant number of comments were made about the need for agreement with all parties and concerns that action should not be taken to seek a Footpath Creation Order. There was majority support for a part footpath where there is agreement (55:45) but concerns as to whether the footpath would emerge on the lane. A number of comments were made about the existing footpaths and whether some improvements to these would be better, both via Parson's Park and Matthew Rudding. And there were also comments on the desirability of extending the 30 mph limit along the lane and enforcing the speed limit. Other safety suggestions included reducing the heights of hedges at blind corners. Some respondents considered the lane should be widened and a pedestrian path provided along the length of the lane. (Question 5.6 and see Annex at end of paper)

Alongside consideration of possible lobbying action to seek a Footpath Creation Order, it is important to highlight the safety concerns presented by Caldbeck/Hesket Newmarket Lonning. Of the 161 parishioners who said they did not walk along the Lonning, 96 parishioners (60%) highlighted the danger from the road. One comment summarises the risk: 'All it takes is for one accident to put things in perspective'. (Question 5.3 and see Annex at end of paper)

The Parish Council will need to look very carefully at the support for a direct footpath and safety concerns alongside the concerns held by a significant number of parishioners (48%) about pressing the County Council to use its Footpath Creation Order powers.

6. Purchase of National Park land - Hesket Newmarket Green and the village car parks

The Parish Council has offered to buy the land in the two villages which belongs to the National Park, including the car parks in each village and Hesket Newmarket Green, so as to protect the assets for the benefit of all parishioners for generations to come. Following completion of the land purchase, the Parish Council would take over responsibility for the full maintenance of the car parks. Currently voluntary contributions are collected at Caldbeck car park which forms part of the National Park's general income and which is not necessarily used in the Parish. The Parish Council would continue to request voluntary contributions in Caldbeck and would propose to introduce similar arrangements at Hesket Newmarket car park. We expect that monies raised from voluntary contributions would cover the costs of maintaining the car parks. The land purchase price is £10,000 plus costs, reflecting the fact that most of the land is registered common land. The Parish Council will need to finance the purchase through grants and other fund raising activities.

Q.6.1 Are you in favour of the Parish Council purchasing the National Park land?
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Yes 82% No 18%

Q.6.2 Do you support the proposed arrangements for voluntary contributions for using the car parks?

Yes 96% No 4%

Q.6.3 Do you support extending the Hesket Newmarket car park if planning and other arrangements were possible and funds were available?

Yes 77% No 23%

The results show strong support for the Parish Council to complete the purchase of surplus land from the National Park. A number of responses against the purchase made the point that the National Park ought simply to gift the land to the Parish Council, particularly as the Parish Council has been undertaking most of the maintenance of the land.

Voluntary contributions for both car parks received the highest level of support (96%) in the whole consultation exercise.

Once arrangements have bedded in and there is a better understanding of income and maintenance costs and demand for car parking, the Parish Council will be in position to see what might be possible, including regularising the legal position of the existing car parks. A number of comments were made about the lack of parking in Hesket Newmarket and the difficulties presented by cars parked on the lanes around the green.

7. Employment of a part time Parish Lengthsman

Parish Councils are encouraged to take more direct steps to look after local verges, drains and gullies. Some Parish Councils employ part time lengthsman to undertake this work, which gives more immediate direct control over routine maintenance of verges and the roadside. Lengthsmen can readily report more significant problems to Highways authorities. The annual costs for employing a lengthsman one day a week are estimated at £4,000 a year.

Q.7 Are you in favour of the Parish Council employing a part time lengthsman?

Yes 68% No 32%

There is majority support for a lengthsman although there are some concerns as regards what benefit will be provided for the whole Parish, particularly those in hamlets and a test period was thought sensible. Other suggestions included making more use of volunteers.

8. Budget Implications

The Parish Council has already made a provision in its budget for some of these services and is planning a 5% increase in its precept in 2020-21 and 2021-22. But these increases leave the Parish Council some £5,000 short a year if all these services are to be provided - no provision has been made to date for any lengthsman. Funding the shortfall is equivalent to an additional 40% increase on the precept. A Band D property in the Parish presently is charged £37.34 a year towards the Parish Council precept. So if a 50% increase were applied by the Parish Council, the rate on that Band D property would rise by £18.67 to £56.01.

Q.8.1 Are you in favour of the Parish Council increasing the precept to pay for street lighting?

Yes 68% No 32%

Q.8.2 Are you in favour of the Parish Council increasing the precept to pay for public toilets?

Yes 63% No 37%

Q.8.3 Are you in favour of the Parish Council increasing the precept to pay for a lengthsman?

Yes 62% No 38%

The results show good majorities for increasing the precept. Rarely do people wholeheartedly support the idea of paying more for services and percentages of 60% plus can be taken as a green light should the Parish Council wish to go ahead with providing these services. A number of comments from those saying 'no' to an increase in the precept are criticisms of Allerdale for its decision to cease providing services. Some have suggested that Allerdale should be reducing its part of overall Council Tax as it is no longer to provide these services.

Paper prepared by Simon Smith, Clerk to Caldbeck Parish Council

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Annex: Comments noted on the footpath

Many respondents included detailed comments. The comments below illustrate key concerns regarding the footpath.

Concerns regarding lobbying

If landowners don't support Heskett Lonning, look at Parson's Park with disabled access to woodland, utilising grants

Given landowners' opposition, better to abandon the footpath

Too much ill feeling over footpath

A direct footpath is very important but would prefer agreement - part path to encourage landowners to join up the parts

There are better walking routes which could be improved/signed

Footpath would be nice but not value for money

Try to find agreement/mediation for footpath and avoid legal cost

Footpath contentious - consider upgrading other paths

Concerns regarding safety

Parishioners were asked whether they walked along the Caldbeck/Heskett Newmarket Lonning and 161 said they did not. When giving reasons for not using the Lonning, 96 parishioners (60%) highlighted the danger from the road. 'Too dangerous', 'Traffic', 'Unsafe' were the most used explanations. 22 parishioners (14%) referred to 'Better alternatives'.

Illustrative comments include:

All it takes is for one accident to put things in perspective

Heskett Lonning is not safe for pram/push chair

Path needed for walkers, cyclists and more riders - the lane is unsafe.

Other comments in support of the footpath

Fund raising for legal costs

Footpath would be good - raise its profile and crowd fund