

Longsleddale Parish Plan

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Longsleddale Parish Plan

1. Introduction

1.1 The Place

Longsleddale is a parish in the ward of Whinfell, the district of South Lakeland, the county of Cumbria, and it is in the Lake District National Park. It is bounded by the parishes of Over Staveley and Kentmere to the west; Shap Rural to the north; Fawcett Forest and Whitwell & Selside to the east; Strickland Roger to the south.

The parish is an area of 2717 hectares, encompassing the upper valley of the River Sprint, 8 miles long, 2 miles wide, ranging from SD5299 to NY4607, from Garnett Bridge in the south to Harter Fell in the north. Longsleddale is a non-nucleated village, the 30 houses being scattered over 4½ miles, each sited above the flood plain, but where there is water from spring or stream all year round. The centre of the community, with Church and Community Hall, is at NY50029. Longsleddale has no parish council, but has a well attended Parish Meeting twice a year.

Ubarrow Peel Tower is the earliest building still standing, and several houses date from the 17th century. There has been little new building in the 20th century, but some sympathetic additions and renovations, and a few barn conversions. Most houses are built of stone and slate, and fit harmoniously into the rural landscape. This one of the few totally unspoilt valleys in the Lake District.

The houses in the parish are between 5½ miles and 10 miles from the nearest town, which is Kendal. There is just one road in the parish, a C-classified, single track with width restriction, no-through-road running parallel to the river; this road is a turning north off the A6 between Kendal and Shap. In the past, the valley was well used by drovers on the route north to Galloway and the route west to Ravenglass. Today, the road carries only local traffic, but that is considerable, all types of vehicles, livestock and pedestrians.

All the land in the parish is over 130 metres above sea level. Except for the narrow southerly border, where the road enters, the parish boundary is defined by high land between 300 and 774 metres, the watershed of the River Sprint. The growing season is short and the weather can be harsh: some sheep are moved to lower pastures for the winter, even north to the Eden Valley near Carlisle. Rainfall is high, averaging 2000-2300 mm (80-90 inches) per annum. The river rises fast and floods the fields regularly, and several times a year the road becomes impassable. More snow falls here than in Kendal.

The landscape can be considered as three types: meadows and improved pastures in the valley bottom alongside the river; the steep sides of the valley with significant areas of woodland; rough pasture on the fell-tops. Some areas of woodland are designated SSSI, as is most of the River Sprint

below Sadgill. The verges and some of the meadows have special status and the appropriate management.

Geologically, the southern part of Longsleddale, which includes most of the houses, is on sedimentary rock (Silurian period, Ludlow series) forming a soft pastoral landscape. The northern part is on Borrowdale Volcanic Group lavas and tuffs (Ordovician period), bare and rocky. Between these, from Stile End to Stockdale, a narrow band of Coniston Limestone Series is exposed.

1.2 The People

The census returns for 2001 records 73 inhabitants. The age range in 2009 is from 2 to 82, with about 18 people aged under 21. Between 2004 and 2009 five babies were born in the valley.

It is interesting to compare with earlier times. The census for 1841 records about 160 inhabitants; however nearly 100 of these were aged under 21, servants and labourers as well as farmers' children. The adult population was not very different then from now. Going back further, the Chapel records for Longsleddale between 1670 and 1812 show a fairly consistent rate of 6 baptisms per annum.

The number of households has changed little in the last 150 years, from 28 in 1841 to 30 in 2001. Early records show all households engaged in farming. Now there are fewer than ten farms working all the land in the valley; however, a significant proportion of the land belongs to non-resident landowners. Hill sheep farming is still prominent in the parish, and more than half the population have close family ties with the farmers. Other residents have a variety of occupations, some based in Kendal, others further afield, some working from home, and others are retired. There are very few second homes and most adults are long-term residents. Their children may leave, but some have returned here to bring up their own children. The community is so small, so well defined geographically, and connected by a single road, that everyone can treat it as an extended family, and most choose to do so.

1.3 Drawing up the plan

A committee was set up by the Parish Meeting with six members to represent a cross-section of the community. It met several times to discuss ideas, with each member considering a different aspect of the plan.

Because opinions could be collected informally, and are expressed clearly by so many at parish meetings, it was decided just to distribute a very simple questionnaire only to those who do not attend meetings, and aimed particularly at young members of the community:-

Questionnaire

1. What do you most like about living in Longsleddale?
2. What do you least like about living in Longsleddale?
3. If you could realistically change one practical thing about living in the valley, what would that be?

Please tick one box on each line

Age under 20 20-35 over 35

Do you often attend the twice a year valley meetings Yes No

(Optional)

Name

Address.....

Although only six younger people responded to the questionnaire, there was a consistency of response with a liking of the safe and peaceful community and the level of community spirit. Lack of both mobile telephone signal and fast broadband connection were the main concerns although lack of affordable housing was also mentioned. Arranging a suitable mobile phone signal was thought to be the most realistic thing to change.

A draft plan was put before the Parish Meeting in September 2009, and amendments were made in response. A revised plan was circulated in the valley and to South Lakeland District Council, Cumbria County Council, and the Lake District National Park Authority for comment, before being signed off by the Parish Meeting in September 2010.

2. The Plan

2. 1 Vision

We must do our best to maintain Longsleddale as small, active rural community, in a valley of exceptional beauty and character.

Longsleddale is primarily an upland sheep farming area, producing high quality food, and maintaining the environment, including wildlife habitats and landscape features. It is essential that a viable living from farming with stewardship can continue, and that young people are encouraged to enter farming.

We are proud of the valley's strong, cohesive, caring and self-reliant community. We intend to maintain our norm of self-help and initiative and prefer to make our own decisions wherever possible. We have chosen not to merge our parish with others, and traditionally we have chosen not to use the Parish Precept to raise funds, and this should continue to be our aim. We are a signatory to the Parish Charter and will continue to meet its obligations. We have benefited substantially from the Neighbourhood Forum, and will co-operate with Local Area Partnerships but we have reservations about the creation of a further layer of bureaucracy, particularly when it cuts across Lake District National Park boundaries. We will therefore keep our continued support under review.

We do not wish to see any significant change in the appearance of the valley. Longsleddale should continue to develop organically as it has in the past. Traditional farm buildings should not be allowed to decay and therefore must be available for other uses. We accept that we live with minimal infrastructure, no mains water, no sewerage, no public transport. Self sufficiency in energy is an aspiration, provided all environmental requirements are met.

We have no shop, post office or pub but rely on larger villages and towns to provide these, as well as most leisure and many social activities. We want the community hall and church to maintain their central role in valley life as a venue for our parish activities, which are always well attended. We must ensure that the children living here continue to be involved in them when they become young adults, and that they are able to remain valley residents if they choose.

Communication is important. Within the valley we have an effective forum through our Parish Meetings, the Community Hall Committee, and the Parochial Church Council. We now have our own community website at **www.longsleddale.co.uk**. However, some of the services provided to us need to be improved. The valley road is our transport lifeline and its proper maintenance is crucial. There is no mobile phone reception and broadband does not reach every house.

The above issues are developed in more detail in the following sections of this plan.

2.2 Planning

The Lake District National Park Authority (LDNPA) is the planning authority for the parish and therefore nothing in this document can remove their statutory rights and obligations. However, we believe that input by local residents should have more influence on planning decisions than in the past, in particular by adhering to the principles detailed below, and not relying on previous precedents.

The first planning principle is that any development should maintain the distinctive character of the valley. Construction should be in random stone and slate as the material of choice for dwellings, although rendering may be used in keeping with the existing adjacent construction. Wood cladding is only appropriate for some farm buildings. New farm buildings are occasionally required to maintain the commercial viability of the existing enterprise, and they should be of a size consistent with current hill-farming use, and blend into the environment. The building of houses by outside interests and the significant enlargement of existing settlements are unlikely to be acceptable. Other building proposals should be considered by the parish on their own merits, in particular on the contribution they would make to the second planning principle.

The second planning principle is to ensure the continuation of a sustainable rural community. This includes allowing the conversion of older existing but redundant farm buildings for other suitable commercial uses in order to support traditional hill farming by resident farmers. The affordable housing needs of the parish have been met over recent years by a number of holiday units in traditional buildings being converted back into full time accommodation for younger families, which we see as a positive development. There may be scope for creating some more accommodation for holiday visitors, using existing buildings and run by local resident householders. There may also be a need to accommodate elderly relatives, or farm workers. The conversion of existing buildings to workshop units, combined workshop and dwelling units is welcomed if they provide employment for members of the community, and if the activities generated are in keeping with the infrastructure of the valley. Although this second principle is agreed, it is thought unwise to specify now what might, or might not, be considered suitable in future, so each proposal would need individual consideration.

The clerk to the parish should continue to be notified in writing of all planning applications for the parish. In turn, valley residents will be notified of the basic information by email to give them chance to comment. We expect individuals to comment to LDNPA on any significant development. More weight should be given to individuals directly affected by the proposed development. The parish, rather than individuals, will only express a view if a majority of the residents on the electoral register who attend the properly constituted meeting agree an opinion. In that case, the LDNPA should do their utmost to conform to the parish's wishes. In expressing such a view, the Parish will try to avoid internal conflict and is unlikely to comment in cases where strong counter views are expressed.

2.3 Community and Visitors

We are a small self reliant community in favour of local action wherever possible. Although the houses are scattered, good neighbourliness is the norm. Every household in our parish subscribes to the award winning monthly Church and Community News, which covers Skelsmergh, Selside and Longsleddale. Newcomers to our parish are welcomed in this magazine, are visited by local people, and invited to join in valley activities. Obviously the community is too small to provide many of the activities required by different ages and interests, but Grayrigg Young Farmers, for example, provides a good focus for all youngsters. Local events are very well attended but we would like to engage the interest of more of the young adults.

We are committed to keeping the Community Buildings in use and in good repair, with continued improvements to ensure they remain the centre and meeting point of the community. Time and skills are donated by residents, and funds are raised at local events and through a quarterly coffee morning held in Kendal.

The church is open every day, and we expect this to continue. All denominations are welcome, and services are held twice a month. The PCC manage the church and their regular meetings are fully attended. There is a rota for flowers and cleaning, and the churchyard is maintained by having Boon Nights when required. In 2009 over £40,000 was raised by donations from every household in the parish, and from friends from all over the country, to re-roof and repair the church. More than half the residents, whether church-goers or not, were involved in the redecoration.

We have a Community Hall committee which meets regularly. We would like to see this hall used more and it will be advertised on our website.

We welcome visitors to the valley every day. We appreciate their courtesy and tidiness. They usually come by car which they can park at the church or at Sadgill Bridge, to walk in the valley or on the fells. Funds from LDNPA have allowed residents to undertake various work in the parish, including the provision of seats and picnic tables at strategic positions. Several residents offer weekly accommodation, and demand for this can exceed supply in the summer months.

The toilets are always open and we have a rota of local people for daily cleaning; we welcome the current level of financial support given for the toilets by the LDNPA and expect it to continue.

2.4 Roads, Verges, Hedges and Tracks

The single track no-through-road from the A6 is the lifeline for the valley, well used by all residents and by the farmers to move equipment and livestock between the fields they farm, which may not be contiguous. Flooding of the road is a fact of life and reasonable preventive and maintenance measures should be continued. Parish residents do their best

to keep ditches clear and the river bank secure. We have an excellent in-valley snow clearing service which needs continued support.

Access to the valley and within the valley at all times is of paramount importance. The patching and resurfacing of the road in 2010 has been very welcome. Certain parts of this road will continue to be susceptible not only to erosion but also to collapse, and long term solutions may be needed. We value the work undertaken by the Highway Stewards and hope this will continue. However, the general maintenance system has often been bureaucratic and inefficient, with poor response in mending potholes and delivering salt.

Signage on the road should remain unintrusive and no further signs should be erected unless approved by the Parish Meeting. However, certain signs are badly worn and damaged e.g. passing places and posts with light reflectors, and should be repaired and properly maintained. There is a width restriction on the road already but further traffic movement restrictions are not appropriate. We do not want "quiet lane" status because it would make the road more dangerous by increasing recreational use.

The majority of the valley is a Cumbria County Council special verge area which we support. We already protect some species by manually "flagging" them during cutting time, e.g. bell flowers at Dale End, and we will continue to do this. Due to road safety and visibility issues, we would like the annual verges cutting in the first week of July, rather than at a later variable time, as is the current arrangement. We would be prepared to take responsibility for such cutting ourselves with the appropriate financial transfer to a local organisation. Local landowners have responsibility for the hedges; they are generally well maintained and contribute to the aesthetic appeal of the area. Farmers and landowners may need financial assistance to repair and maintain dry stone walls and hedges.

There are no pavements beside the road but footpaths and bridleways are sign-posted and accessible. The unmade-up road towards Gatescarth between Sadgill and the fell gate suffers from erosion and should be maintained in a reasonable state by the County Council. The byway beyond is only occasionally open through to Haweswater. The one from Stile End is unsuitable for long wheel base vehicles at Sadgill. These byways become eroded under heavy rain and heavy usage; their repair is the responsibility of LDNPA. The Green Road Code for motorised recreational vehicles which restricts the number travelling together, requires them to keep to the track, avoid wet weather and darkness, is regrettably often ignored. Future use should be monitored.

2.5 Transport

Personal transport is a major expense for everyone; people of limited means will find it difficult to live here. Bus passes for the over-60s are of little use to us. The nearest useful public transport is now 10 miles from the furthest houses; the bus service along the A6, advertised on the Transport Map, consists of one very early bus to Penrith but without a return journey.

Ownership of at least one car is essential in each household, and usually more than one is needed for a family group. We need them to gain access to shops, post office, pubs, sporting and cultural activities, extra-curricular activities at school, as well as personal visits. Young adults take a driving test as soon as they are eligible. Houses in the parish itself are scattered over 5 miles, so we have to use cars within the valley too. Those with limited mobility may be housebound.

The Rural Wheels scheme is very welcome but it is limited to weekdays 9am-5pm, it must be preplanned, and under-16s must be accompanied.

We understand that it is not economic to re-introduce the bus service in the valley. However, costs and time restrictions for parking in Kendal have a disproportional effect on us; parking in Kendal town centre from the morning into the evening is particularly difficult. This discourages the use of public transport for longer journeys, as does the heavy parking charge at Oxenholme station.

We expect some concessions to those in our position such as cheaper, and perhaps extended, parking in the Kendal car parks. We also require more flexible school transport, see under "Education".

2.6 Electronic Communications

We wish to encourage people to work from home where possible, thereby reducing commuting time and carbon footprint, and enhancing community life. This can only happen with improved communication services; they are poor and do not meet modern expectations. This is also a significant issue for both younger members of our community and for visitors.

Broadband is not yet available to every house in the parish, and some users experience slow speeds. We expect this to be remedied soon in line with Government Policy.

Mobile reception is non-existent. We require mobile phone reception throughout the valley. This would also support emergency situations; much of the activity in the area is out of doors, not only by farmers, but also hikers, climbers, bikers, gill-scramblers and canoeists who may require assistance.

2.7 Energy

The valley is connected to the electricity network. Wood, coal and oil are also used for heating. There is no piped gas supply in the parish.

From time to time, utility providers undertake repairs or replace cables and wires. We would expect underground cables to be used in future when low voltage lines are replaced or extended, and when there is any significant proposed replacement or extension of over-head lines. This will not only

improve the visual amenity but also improve the relatively poor reliability of the electricity supply in our remote location.

Self-sufficiency in electricity over the year would be a desirable target for the parish. Providing there is likely to be no significant long-term visual, aural or environmental impact, the parish would normally support micro-generation hydro-electric schemes. The LDNPA should enforce their policy of using existing buildings where possible to house turbines. We would prefer to see the completion of existing schemes (at Docker Nook and Kilnstones) before proceeding with further developments. There also needs to be community involvement in such schemes through the Parish meeting and its officers. Large wind turbines are visually unacceptable but if a non-intrusive visual position can be found, small, individual wind turbines may be acceptable.

2.8 Other Services

As householders we are already individually responsible for our water and sewerage. We are realistic about what can reasonably be provided to a small non-nucleated rural village such as ours, but we do not want to see any reduction in the limited local services we currently receive. We have an effective valley forum through which any proposed changes to services can be discussed and we welcome co-operative arrangements with service providers. In addition, all authorities should be made aware that decisions made about services outside the parish can have a very significant impact on us.

2.8.1 Emergency Services. We wish to be reassured that none of the emergency services will be moved away from Kendal. We appreciate the supply of smoke alarms by the fire service, and their efforts to commission vehicles which will be able to reach our houses. We value the work of Kendal Mountain Search and Rescue Team. But we are worried about delays in calling the emergency services due to a lack of mobile phone signals here. The slow speed of travel on our road is unavoidable, but response times will be further lengthened because of the extra demands on ambulances due to the erosion of hospital services in Kendal.

2.8.2 Health. Other hospital services should be reinstated at Westmorland General Hospital in order to avoid long journey times for those requiring regular out-patient treatment and the inconvenience caused for visitors to in-patients.

2.8.3 Education. We want to preserve the current arrangements for our primary school-children to attend the excellent small rural primary school in Selside, with free transport provided. But we are concerned that inappropriate catchment areas together with inflexible transport rules may be used to effectively exclude other local country children from this school, so that it might cease to be viable in future, despite its popularity.

Older children are granted free transport only to attend Queen Katherine School, but there are circumstances where Kirkby Kendal, the other

secondary school in Kendal, is preferred, for example, to avoid a change of school on moving house, or to allow siblings to attend the same school.

If country areas are to remain as viable and vibrant communities then the needs of families living there, in particular farming families, should be taken into account. In view of the absence of public transport, we expect spare places in existing vehicles to be made freely available immediately to such children who can be picked up en route. In the longer term, we hope mutually satisfactory arrangements can be introduced so that parental choice becomes a reality without putting an unreasonable extra burden on Education Authority transport provision.

2.8.4. Refuse. It is important to us that the recycling collection point for plastic, cardboard etc at Morrisons, and the facility at Canal Head, Kendal are maintained, to complement the kerbside collection we already have.

2.8.5 Post. Our nearest post office is many miles away. We ask that the current daily postal service is retained, collecting as well as delivering our post. It is helpful to have continuity, a postman who becomes acquainted with the area.

2.9 Wildlife

The parish is rich in wildlife, supported by a large number of hedgerows, stone walls, woodland, river, open fell and pasture including Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) and County Wildlife Sites. It is a tribute to the farmers in the parish that such diversity has survived.

We would hope to maintain the existing broad mix of land usage and encourage landowners to:-

- maintain existing dry stone walls.
- maintain hedges through laying.
- manage existing woodland and pasture.
- plant new hedges and in-fill old ones.
- minimise the use of herbicides and pesticides.
- maintain the standards required for the continuation of SSSI and County Wildlife Sites.

Preliminary surveys of bats, birds and of the Churchyard have been undertaken and a more comprehensive one of the plants within the roadside verge that revealed 136 non-woody species. These surveys should be updated and the data used to prepare plans to maintain or increase bio-diversity.

We would hope residents would do their best to encourage native species of plants, birds and animals and particularly those that are relatively rare, by:-

- culling grey squirrels as long as reds are present in the parish.
- minimise interference with the habitats of otters and crayfish.
- where practicable, encourage the wide variety of birds through providing nesting sites and winter feeding.

Some things are outside our control. We ask that environmental and other agencies support conservation in our parish by:-

- taking effective action in controlling grey squirrels at Garnet Bridge so that they cease to threaten the red squirrels further up the valley.
- ensuring that the regeneration of native woodland does not involve the destruction of what we have, such as felling the small plantations of "non-native" European larch. Such drastic action reduces the chance of the red squirrels which live there to compete against the intrusive "non-native" greys, as well as reducing the visual diversity in the valley.
- enforcing restrictions on dogs on right-to-roam land, and educating their owners, because of the threat they pose to ground nesting birds, pregnant sheep and lambs, and cows with their calves.