

Chair Report for May 2025 Peebles Community Council AGM

1 General

Our community council has had another very busy year. When serving the community of a small town of circa 9,000 people and being a member of the wider community of Tweeddale, it is bound to be busy. In a report such as this it is not possible to record all that we do nor thank everyone who may deserve a mention and so this report identifies those items that I consider are most important and then as an appendix I bullet a list of things that we have become involved with, and which is by no means complete.

I have been privileged to be your Chair and to be directed by you, our members, and I must give our team thanks for the support shown over this last year. This community council may be able to exist without the support of Anne as secretary and Fiona as minute secretary, but we would be immeasurably poorer without them. They are an inspiration. We must thank Graham, our Vice Chair and Treasure, another vital task. We are now fortunate to have had Michael Marshall take on the role of Planning Convener and for him to have taken the lead on windfarms, something I will come back to later. Nor can we forget Gill for taking on the leadership of the Peebles in Bloom competition. No easy task. We must also recognise our teenage member, Josh for devoting some of his time to help our community, for that is what we do, we help our community where we can. My apologies for not mentioning each and every one of the team, I know each person plays an important role in supporting us.

We have been fortunate over my tenure as Chair to survive as a community council. Many CCs come and go, and there is always a concern that we may lose a key member or just not recruit enough volunteers to carry on. The community owe a debt to each of our members for their service. Further, we are fortunate in two other ways. In the time that I have been a Chair we have always been civil to each other, we have listened to all points of view and there has never been a falling out. I know from meeting with other CCs that this isn't always the case elsewhere. It says a lot for our group. Secondly, our councillors are an integral part of our team and I for one am pleased to work with them.

2 Peebles in Bloom

We do many different tasks in our community council. However, I would say arguably that none is more important than our annual competition and prize giving. This event showcases our community council. It is a vast undertaking for such a small group. Many of our gardeners love it and perhaps it does make some people put in just a little more effort and in doing so brightens our town that little bit more. Gill and her team deserve our thanks and that of the community.

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3 Place Making & Town Action Plan

PCC cannot take credit for this, nor to be fair can PCT even though both were represented on the group. The whole credit for this rests with Crick Carleton. Undoubtedly, it would not have happened without him and his expertise made this a high-quality document. However, Crick stepped down at the end of December and in doing so left a vacuum to fill. What a waste if the work he led sits on a shelf gathering dust. This cannot be allowed to happen.

Michael called a meeting of (let us call them) the supporting cast! There was no Chair and there were two important subjects – The Town Team and the Windfarm monies. No single existing body can adequately represent the whole town democratically. We, PCC try and so does the PCT, but we need much wider representation now that money may be involved. We also need a leader for the town Team and ultimately, we need a Town Manager. That initial meeting agreed to reach out, to advertise for new members representing other bodies to come forward. There was no response whatsoever. On the subject of windfarms this loose grouping echoed what the PCC has formally decided, namely, to negotiate the best deal we can for the community. In the absence of an actual Chair, the meeting did work surprisingly well.

At this point and in the absence of anyone else, I have stepped in to pull a meeting together. I have reached out directly to representatives of the town's youth, the food foundation, the traders, the Callants, Guiterbluids, and others to add them to the existing group. I will chair this meeting on 12 May and hopefully, we will move forward. We need to, the SBC report on Live Borders, notes that they will talk to the Town Team. We need a cohesive team for them to talk to. I should not be the Chair of this group, it is for someone else to step up to the mar!

4 Windfarm Monies

I have said many times that I did not personally want any accountability ever again after losing it when I retired. As Chair of our community council, I have responsibility, but very little accountability. Our Grant is minimal. Windfarm money unavoidably brings with it, accountability. Michael has arranged for legal advice and for a grant to pay for it. He has studied this subject to a high degree. He has also been a motivator in getting those CCs who are affected by this subject and whose interests overlap to communicate and hopefully work together. This work is continuing.

5 Chambers Institution Trust

It is important to note the excellent work being done by Sam Coe in Chairing the Beneficiaries Group and in working with councillors and officials to move

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this project forward. There is little doubt that this community council under the leadership of the last Chair acted as a catalyst to kickstart this project.

6 Concern about Vapes

Significant concern was registered relating to the possible sale of illegal vape products and the possible marketing targeting underage users. PCC wrote to more than a dozen public figures including politicians, SBC's Chief Executive and the Chief Constable. Many responses were fairly bland and highlighted the new legislation progressing through Westminster with support from all parties across the U.K. One politician, met with me online and appears to be much more proactive than the rest. The May monthly report provides more details.

7 Planning concerns

PCC wrote to SBC highlighting a number of concerns relating to the planning process and possible gaps in the knowledge of planning committee members. A meeting was scheduled with the SBC CEO but has unfortunately had to be cancelled.

8 Area partnerships

SBC dropped a recent bombshell to the effect that area partnership are to be abolished with immediate effect. I wrote to SBC to express concern and a meeting was scheduled with the SBC CEO but has unfortunately had to be cancelled.

9 Live Borders

SBC dropped a recent bombshell to the effect that consultants had been commissioned to write a report with recommendations for cost savings in Live Borders. I analysed this report and wrote a critique of it. I also attended a meeting of the Drill Hall committee and attended a public meeting called by councillors. A meeting was scheduled with the SBC CEO at which this would have been raised but this has unfortunately had to be cancelled.

10 The Old School House – School Brae

This subject has been on our radar and that of the Civic Society for years and recently Malcome Bruce decided to research the subject, arguably doing more in a few days than SBC had achieved in some years. Malcolm and I also met with local relatives of a previous deceased owner. Following these initiatives, PCC wrote to SBC, and this resulted in a Teams meeting with SBC's CEO and Legal department. This was a productive meeting and SBC and PCC agreed to work together. Another meeting is scheduled.

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Appendix 1 – Samples of subjects discussed since the last AGM

Many issues repeat monthly and are omitted from this list. The list is only to show examples and is not to be considered close to being complete.

May 24

- Commenced looking at windfarm income
- Supporting Rose Park wall repairs
- Pursuing solution for the Old School House
- Chambers Institution
- Pushing for CCTV
- Considering possible repairs to the fish fountain

June 24

- Arranging hustings for the General Election
- NHS Community Hospitals Review
- Baptist Church Hall - Tweed Valley Community Collective
- SBC working party on non-financial support
- Flood Group – support over purchase of walkie talkie radios
- Support to Kingsland School parents on the safety of the Glasgow Road
- Arrange for cleaning of High Street bus shelter
- Greenside parking fees – misappropriation of funds to SBC rather than Common Good
- New video projector and screen
- Ewan Irvine Plant Hire – Supporting planning appeal

July 24

- Children's cemetery trees in need of pruning

August 24

- Live Borders opening times for Library and Swimming pool
- Dog fouling
- Public toilets – cleaning and closures
- Various repairs
- Minor injuries unit – fighting NHS for re-instatement of Haylodge

September 24

- Trade waste storage on high street – Inappropriate and a hazard.
- Fought the planning application for container storage yard at South Parks
- Peebles High School parking issues

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October 24

- Kingsmeadows planning application - Objection
- Tourist signs

November 24

- Letter to Costa regarding poor maintenance
- Wildflower, etc. planting - Haylodge
- New paths through Haylodge Park
- Gold plaque on post box missing
- Chase SBC on need to top up graves suffering from subsidence
- Street cleaning improvements needed

December 24

- Old schoolhouse tree in roof
- Suggested names for development at Tweed bridge
- Dave Hodson presentation on youth Action TYA
- There had been a meeting earlier in the week where the Kingsmeadows House section 42 application was refused. PCC presented at the committee hearing
- Horsburgh Ford letter to developer
- New litter bin at Kingsmeadows/Glensax Roads

January 25

- River Tweed Trail, Haylodge Park paths and the wall. Wildflowers

February 25

- One Stop Convenience Shop and Vapes
- Caledonian Court onsite meeting

March 25

- Redundant street signage
- Eastgate Theatre
- Town action plan
- Roads and potholes
- Community Action Teams
- Ballantyne Place – supporting residents over possible development
- Baptist Church building
- 4 CCTV units for SBC and possible use in Tweeddale
- Spigot mortar anti-tank gun emplacement
- Gypsy Glen Hill Race