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1.0 General

This is the writer's second AGM and covers a full year from May 2023. The report includes a lot of detail, probably more than an AGM usually requires. However, it is included to make two important points.

Firstly, on occasion we, that is the PCC has been accused of doing nothing worthwhile. This form of comment is always via social media and although it says more about the poster than it does about the PCC, it does cause some angst amongst our members. The detail here surely buries those comments stone dead. Allied to these comments is the occasional complaint that we haven't taken a particular action that the poster would have liked to see. Assuming that the poster is eligible to be a member of the PCC, they are welcome to join us and work free for the community. We should take heart from all the supportive verbal feedback that we hear day in and day out.

The second point relates to the community council system itself. Peebles CC receives £1,501 per annum, with only Galashiels and Hawick receiving more at nearly £2,000. Communities such as Walkerburn receive just short of £700, which the writer would argue is still too little by a long way. Our population is approaching 10,000 and Walkerburn is a tenth of our size but receives 50% of our funding. Our funding has deteriorated year on year from an equivalent today of around £2,100. If the reader considers the size and complexity of Peebles, and that de-facto our community council is a poor replacement for a town council, then the support we have is pathetic. The average cost of a secretary today in Scotland is £28K per annum. Our secretary works three days a week for an honorarium of a few hundred pounds. If we don't have a volunteer, we don't have a secretary and then we don't have a community council. Someone in government, local and national wants to think about this and with some urgency.

It is impossible for this writer not to follow a trail. How much does local democracy cost in the Borders and how much in the country for a year? A little rounded up research gave less than £60,000. There are 68 community councils. Applied to the 1,200 in Scotland this gives a rough estimate of less than a million pounds for the year. Of course, we are a low population here and the average may not be very accurate. However, it's almost certainly less than three million. So much for local democracy! Did those councillors who made the recommendations to SBC for another 10% fixed for three years after a hiatus since 2009 actually discuss anything of substance, or did they just decide 10% sounded like a nice round figure? Councillors should be on our side, the side of the voters, and although they have difficult decisions to make can they really defend such a position?

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2.0 Our team

We have had a very busy year, as always and our team has done sterling work. I would like to thank, Anne Snoddy and Fiona Richardson, without whom we would not be able to function and Graham Mackie as Treasurer and as my backup. These three along with the writer form the core group who have structured all our meetings over the last twelve months. In addition, we should not forget Jennifer Graham who oversees our social media. There are more to thank and that also deserve the thanks of the community, and these will be noted later.

It has not always been the case, but I would include our elected SBC councillors as an integral part of the team, and they also deserve our thanks for the way that they work together despite different political allegiances and with us for the benefit of the community.

Finally, relating directly to our team, we have some long-standing members who have left us, or are leaving us and these are;

- Chris Forsyth
- Julie Shearer
- Sophie Hamilton
- John Crawley

All of whom we recognise as having given great service to the town over the years.

We also welcome our new supporters James McMordie, and in particular our two associate members Kerrie Guiney and Shelia McKey who bring us the views of the tradespeople of the town.

3.0 Our work

3.1 General

Our team has worked to capacity over the last year. It must be remembered that all are volunteers and try to the best of our ability to represent the wants, needs and aspirations of the community. This is not easy. Many in the community have no idea we exist and many who do are indifferent to us until they need help, or something goes wrong. We must continue to work on this to strengthen our abilities.

Our meetings have been hampered to a degree by having to use temporary venues until we can return to the Burgh Hall.

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In terms of activity, the writer can only use personal examples for the level of meetings. There were at least 120 meetings logged in the writer's diary for the year. These do not include other team members meetings.

We are constantly involved with identifying, reporting, and hopefully having fixed numerous items needing maintenance, repair, and resolution. Most issues are resolved, but those that aren't remain on our radar and are not forgotten. There have been three walks around the town with councillors, SBC officers and our members. A very quick trawl through the writer's records pulled out more than 50 items and these include:

- The damaged wall by Tweedbridge Court adjacent to the River Tweed.
- The Flood at Rosetta Road
- Maintenance of the Tweed Bridge
- Maintenance of the Edinburgh Road bus stop bench
- Reporting pavement defects allegedly causing an accident.
- Issues in Venlaw woods
- Issues relating to access to the Cross Kirk
- Inaccurate signage
- Potholes
- Waste collection issues, etc, etc.

Our work also includes miscellaneous issues such as taking up the cause of trying to stagger chemists lunch times, which we failed to achieve. We also identify good practice, such as the improvement in service in the "Medical Hall" and provide a note of recognition if we think one is due. We also strongly supported a parent over a school bus issue with SBC.

We have represented residents to SBC on making the road crossing at Glentress safer and similarly discussed the Eddleston Water pathway including an extension of the 40-mph speed limit.

On flooding we have finally persuaded SBC to provide more sandbags and we strongly support the new Tweeddale area Partnership Flood group led by Colin Kerr of Walkerburn.

3.2 Peebles High School

We continued to be involved with the Peebles High School new build in association with the Parents' Council and we pushed for the Equality Impact Assessment which was belatedly completed. In December 2023, a new SBC policy was then introduced, and it would be reasonable to conclude that we may have influenced this. The new "Integrated Impact

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assessment” is excellent, although we have written to the SBC CEO with a few limited comments. We also, through our meetings picked up on and supported a disabled access issue.

3.3 Peebles Youth Voice – Youth Issues

The youth shelter in Victoria Park has been completed and feedback from teenagers is positive. A small amount of social media posts were negative. However, it is important to remember that two events were held in Victoria Park to sound out the level of support. This support for both the shelter was roughly four for every one against, an 80% majority in favour. It is also important to remember why this initiative was started and that in other parts of the U.K. such initiatives have reduced antisocial behaviour by a measurable amount. Negativity and inertia breed problems, they never solve them. PCC has also been supportive of the Street Pastors and again feedback from the community is positive and how could it not be. Our member, Malcolm Bruce deserves our thanks for his work on this project. Nor should we forget Iain Gibson, who although not a PCC member has put in hours of work to support Peebles Youth Voice.

In respect of the youth shelter, we have received the following:

“Bonnyrigg and District Community Council congratulates Peebles and District Community Council for its part in the planning and opening of the “Beckton Chatshak” Youth Shelter in Victoria Park, Peebles on March 27th this year, takes note of the preparation paper “ Proposed Teen Shelter in Victoria Park” as published online for the shelter and wishes all success for the Shelter in meeting its intended role and purposes as therein expressed.”

*Kind regards,
Dan Lennie
Chair, BDCC*

3.4 Parking

Our thanks go to George Ramsay and Scott Watson for giving their time to supporting the parking group and its deliberations. Whilst we did not all agree with the final outcomes, the project identified that the Common Good was not receiving income from the Greenside car park, that the car parks needed remarking, with an added benefit of 8 more spaces in Kingsmeadows and that additional signage directing visitors to the car parks would be beneficial. Outstanding now is the question of motor homes and campervans.

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3.5 Peebles in Bloom

Last year's Peebles in Bloom competition was a great success and our thanks go to Gill MacDonald, for leading the team. Once again to Anne for providing unparalleled support and to Fiona Richardson. Thanks also go to George and Scott for the teas and to everyone else in the team who provided support. The only negative was the poor acoustics in the Burgh Hall and hopefully, they will be resolved for this year's event.

3.6 Place Making and the Town Action Plan

This planning initiative is the result of two related things. One is an update of the original Peebles Town Action Plan that was constructed some years ago by the Community Trust and Community Council including the involvement of several other organisations such as the Peebles Civic Society. The second driver is the legislation enacted by the Scottish Government for communities to produce "Place Plans" which councils such as SBC must consider when producing their own plans and when approving development. The original Peebles town Action Plan was generally considered a success. Volunteers from many areas within the community led by Crick Carleton have given thousands of hours of their time freely to this project. Recently, consultants were chosen by the working group, and they work for the town team and not for SBC. Their job is to try and obtain more feedback from those who haven't so far had an opportunity to have their say, to validate the work that has already been done in the town and finally to help produce a professional document that will be hard for SBC to ignore. Communities in Scotland have often had little say in their own affairs in the past. Councils made the decisions and we had to live with them. We cannot guarantee how successful it will be, but can anyone realistically argue that we shouldn't try? PCC has representation on the place making team.

3.7 Annual Litter Pick

Again, this was very successful with more than 50 bin bags of rubbish collected. A very similar amount to last year. Alan Mackenzie deserves our thanks for leading on this and thanks also are due to the Callants, Gutterbluids, Peebles Business and Retailers Association, Cllrs Tatler and Pirone, and local school students for their help. Campbell Johnstone of SBC also provided excellent support.

3.8 Town Bus Project

Gill MacDonald has put in a lot of work with a view to creating an improved service for Peebles. However, there has been little progress on the town service. Publication of the current bus timetables which was

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the main outcome of the survey is still outstanding. There has been a lot of discussion about adjusting the timetables and this has been discussed constantly with Barc and SBC agreeing on an action to review this but over a year later there is still no progress.

3.9 Chambers Institution Trust

Our thanks go to Sam Coe for leading on this project for PCC. Sam has accepted the Chair of the Beneficiaries Group and being a retired architect is ideal for the role. Sam is also our link with the Civic Society. This is a massive undertaking, but oh so worthwhile. The Beneficiaries Group membership is open to anyone with strong views and/or expertise, but it is the view of those who live in the old Peeblesshire district who will be the final arbiters of how the buildings evolve.

3.10 Planning

- Challenged SBC over the use of the wrong slate on the Chambers Institution.
- Written to SBC Planning regarding traffic issues on Rosetta Road.
- Written supporting a Tree Preservation order at Kingsmeadows House.
- Written objecting to 3 planning applications at Kingsmeadows House
- From the September open forum. Residents from a particular street raised concerns over a planning application and PCC then raised an objection to support them.
- There was much more.
- We thank Michael Marshall for taking over this important task.

3.11 Web Site

Thanks to Michael Marshall again for construction of the excellent new Website.

3.12 The PCC Survey

Thanks go to the team who led on this project which links well with the place making. The team devoted 15 person hours to this not counting the planning and organisation. Essentially there were two questions. What 3 things do you like about Peebles and what 3 things could do with improvement. There were approximately 100 respondents with 541 separate responses.

Top 3 responses 64% likes (community, thriving High St, environment being top) 29% could be improved (potholes, over-development, and poor parking). 7.5% of improvement feedback need better facilities for

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young people. Of course, this only produces the extremes of feeling on both counts, but none the less is indicative.

We love our thriving High St. However, if we look at many towns and villages, their High Streets are in poor shape, if not dying completely. If we say that we love it and then ignore it, we will lose it. We need tourists to come and use our shops. We need to be tourist friendly or lose what we hold dear. Peebles is prized for its community. There is no community if people don't join it. Just the other day a discussion with the Place Making consultants highlighted just some of the activities available, in this case for kids, all run by volunteers. There are just as many groups for adults. However, volunteers are thin on the ground and whether it is the Christmas Lights, the U3A or indeed this PCC, they will all die without support, and the population will cry shame! And who can they blame when there are no Christmas lights or U3A, or us, but themselves.

3.13 Miscellaneous

- Support to Gypsy Glen hill race.
- Attendance and support to the Tweedale Area Partnership.
- Review and comment on windmill proposals.
- Destination Tweed and the Innerleithen road crossing. 2 meetings with the project manager, Marina Piper, three onsite meetings and a presentation and discussion in PCC meeting.
- Representation on the Common good
- Representation on the NHS Community Hospitals group and a strong argument presented for renewal of the minor injuries' unit.
- Engagement with the public through the PCC survey, PHS Freshers Fair and a volunteer fair
- Peebles Life articles
- Possible disbursement of (circa £600) funds
- New equal Opportunities Policy for PCC
- Review new SBC draft Guidelines and make recommendations. Challenge SBC on their response which was full of errors and consequently received an apology.
- Conduct a survey on the Three fish at the Eastgate. This elicited the best response ever to a survey run by PCC.
- Considered an approach relating the accession of David 1 of Scotland the throne.
- Keeping up an overview of the Old School House at the foot of School Brae.
- Keeping up an overview of the Victoria Park Centre.
- Keeping up an overview of the Baptist Church building/
- Keeping up an overview of the potential for CCTV in Peebles. This is a possibility, although we had previously been told by the authorities, when under the previous Chair that it was definitely not possible.

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- Build out for busses in the High St near the west end for disabled passengers.

Peter Maudsley
Chair
Peebles and District Community Council