



Settlement Focus Group Meeting

9 Sept, 6.00–7.00pm, Burgh Hall

MEETING NOTES

Attendees:

Peebles & District Community Council - Michael Marshall & Peter Maudsley (**Chair**)

Peebles Drill Hall Management Committee - Clare Swann & Nigel Young **Les Turnbull**

School's Out Peebles - Laura Milton & Denise Little

Catriona McAllister – Live Borders

Kenny Harrow - SBC

Jen Bond - SBC

Cllr Marshall Douglas - Elected Member

Cllr Robin Tatler - Elected Member

	Item
1	INTRODUCTION / OVERVIEW: Catriona commenced the meeting with introductions around the table and referencing the Integratis report, which reviews leisure and sport facilities across the Scottish Borders, including libraries, museums, and community centres. The meeting's focus was specifically on the future of the Drill Hall and Gytes Leisure Centre in Peebles. Catriona emphasised that no final decisions had been made, and the purpose of the meeting was to better understand the community impact of these facilities. Live Borders, manages these amenities on behalf of the Scottish Borders Council. It faces significant financial challenges, particularly due to rising utility costs. Catriona highlighted the necessity for increased income generation and cost savings, leading to discussions about a potential Community Asset Transfer of some facilities, including the Drill Hall in Peebles.
2	GENERAL USE OF THE BUILDING: Catriona wanted to understand how the Drill Hall is used and what it means to the community and any subsequent impact upon the community should the Drill Hall be closed. Members of the Community Council present expressed surprise and disappointment that that the Integratis report suggested that the Drill Hall has no benefit whatsoever to Live Borders, noting the complete lack of any evidence presented to support the statement. and that the Gytes could be converted and repurposed, noting again the complete lack of evidence presented together with a bland statement that the change would raise an additional £300K per annum at a conversion cost of £2M. As an example, concerns were raised about the inefficiency of the Drill Hall's heating system, suggesting that better management could have saved significant funds. Looking at what cuts can be made should not be the first consideration. The Community council members stated that the COSLA report highlighted that, on average, Scotland's councils have reduced funding for culture and leisure by 23% but SBC have reduced funding to LB by around 50% when factoring in inflation, hence it is a self-inflicted injury. The last Live Borders financial report and the June 2023 consultant report identified



	that Live Borders would run out of money within a year. Questions were raised as to why this situation had not been addressed sooner and why communities should be unfairly penalised as a result. Catriona posed the question of whether the services currently provided at the Drill Hall could be relocated elsewhere such as the Gytes. Clare Swann Laura Milton responded that certain programmes, such as ‘School’s Out’, could not operate from the Gytes and relied on the Drill Hall. She argued that the loss of the Drill Hall would have a profound effect on childcare availability, employment, and the local economy. Clare Swann explained the Drill Hall offers many vital types of support groups for the community from all ages.
3	VALUE ASSESSMENT – BUILDING VS SERVICE: The building is important to the community and the management committee would be concerned about any move to Gytes or the School. The Drill Hall is ideal for the groups who use it. Concerns that Aging well sports clubs, Lunch Clubs, etc could not all fit at the school and the school has a lack of suitable storage.
4	ALTERNATIVE VENUES: Alternatives such as selling the Drill Hall and making better use of the Gytes and other local amenities, noting that the new high school offers some limited similar facilities. It was highlighted, that apart from the lack of suitable storage, there were also issues of capacity and opening hours, e.g. the school would have to be open until 23:00. Clare countered that the Drill Hall should be retained while the Gytes could be sold transferred as CAT due to range of current Gytes Users having expressed interest. She explained that Peebles creates a number of nationally recognised sports stars Due to high quality/well managed sports clubs and that services offered at the Drill Hall should not be diluted. Clare also questioned the lack of fundraising roles and support from Live Borders and SBC. Catriona clarified that both organisations do secure grants. She acknowledged that she fully understands the value of these assets to the community and stated again that “together we need to work out how to preserve the services”. Catriona stated that Live Borders needs to increase income and that the main difference between Live Borders and other trusts is that most leisure trusts had already heavily invested in health and fitness before covid. Peter identified that prices had not been reviewed in line with inflation and that some provision was not charged for at all. Further, that LB had been tasked with doing more and more at the same time as the management fee from CBS was being cut. It was asked why Live Borders could not charge for museums and Catriona explained that legally they are not allowed to charge for museums and libraries. Councils have a statute requirement in Law to provide these free of charge. However, it was noted that some mechanisms may allow this under a change of emphasis to tourism.



	Clare noted that the flood plain has always been an issue but asked why as a tourist destination water sports are not more available which could easily increase revenue. Clare highlighted the Drill Hall's high footfall (over 1,000 per week). The question was asked why we cannot reduce the number of Museums. This reads as if Clare asked this question, which she did not. PRM agrees with Clare Catriona explained that museums are challenging to move as many are location or building related. Approx. £27 million worth of museum items are currently stored in cupboard. Clare asked why we were not loaning these exhibits to other museums in order to generate revenue. Catriona explained this does happen but often it is an exchange and not income generating.
5	FUTURE USE: Catriona said that there had been discussions around CAT transfer and asked what the feelings were around this. Concerns were raised about the sustainability of potential local management groups. Community councils were used as an example as they ebb and flow, closing and opening and losing and gaining management skills. Reports, such as "challenges in community ownership" from the Scottish Community Alliance were highlighted., with fears that local groups might struggle with resource and the legal and operational responsibilities. Clare reiterated again that the Drill Hall is in good condition. It provides essential services such as childcare. It is very important to the community, providing important community services. She stressed the need for support from Live Borders and SBC. Catriona said that CAT transfer is common. Peter referred the meeting to reports that identify a mixed success with CATs. There are community operations models where assets or HR are not transferred. Community Council members echoed concerns about the community's ability to manage health and safety, fire safety, and other statutory requirements without professional support. Clare said that Live Borders have nothing much to do with the Drill Hall. It is harder for them to be involved than not. But volunteers cannot take responsibility for say, property fire safety, cleaning toilets etc. The management committee do not support a CAT transfer. Clare asked about the true costs of repairs and maintenance, stating that Live Borders and SBC give different figures. The group discussed the need for rigorous compliance processes, with Live Borders supporting the community in meeting all regulatory obligations. Catriona emphasized that she is aware that there is no interest in CAT transfer.



	A CAT Lite option was discussed that would see all costs and income met by the Management Committee. The concept of a grant being provided may decrease over time as the income improves. This model was considered manageable by the volunteers and people agree they would like to understand more about how this could work. Clare stated again that the council keeps saying that repairs and maintenance costs are huge, but neither give actual figures. Clare stated that SBC, Live Borders and the community need to work together. She pointed out the level of fear within the community around the current situation. The drill Hall is not in bad condition. We know what happens there is required by the community. The building is important, a good location etc. It is clear that the community is not interested in CAT transfer. But there is interest in a partnership this is clear to all involved. Clare asked whether there was a date for a conclusion, is the Drill Hall safe? Catriona stated that the team was still reviewing the consultation process. The Chair of the community council echoing feedback from both local people and from other community councils informed the meeting that the online questionnaire was considered seriously biased. Questions such as would you like cuts to services or higher taxes or would you prefer CAT left respondents little real choice. The questionnaire will not give a true picture as the multiple-choice questions do not allow preferred answers. Drop in and focus groups give rich qualitative data. Clare concluded that a lot has been learned, and more people are now volunteering. This is a real opportunity to work better. Catriona acknowledged that the value has been highlighted. The impact is greater than just money. The community council Chair stated that this situation is not considered the fault of Live Borders but that of SBC trying to cut costs significantly more than its peer group. Further, that the Integratis report highlighted a serious deficiency in oversight. Catriona stated that Live Borders has a genuine gap in funds and needs to invest to increase income. She aims to demonstrate and build trust as this is essential going forward.
6	OTHER COMMENTS: Peebles Community Council presented Catriona with their report on the Integratis findings, their submission to the Live Borders consultation and a financial analysis. The meeting wished Catriona well in what is considered a very difficult job Meeting concluded at 19.40 hrs.