

Peebles & District Community Council

Chairman's Report – April 2025

1.0 Tweeddale Area Partnership

At our last meeting this report identified your Chair's concerns with regard to changes to the Tweeddale Area Partnership. It appears these fears were underplayed. The Tweeddale Area Partnership has been abolished along with the rest of the area partnerships. The remnant of the area grant funding, after substantial cuts is being handed to Scottish Borders Community Action to manage as 50% seed funding to be met by additional grant applications if they are available.

At the (very) last TAP held on 25 March 2025 in the Burgh Hall, Stuart Bell, ex Tweeddale councillor and present Clovenfords community councillor highlighted the SBC proposal to close the area partnerships which was for discussion at the next day's SBC council meeting. Mr Bell appeared incensed by the proposal as indeed is your Chair. Much of what was written in last months report was highlighted at the TAP meeting by this writer and the councillors present at the TAP appeared in favour of maintaining the status quo. One observed that SBC were in danger of "throwing out the baby with the bath water". Indeed, the baby has definitely gone completely down the plughole! This decision has killed the mechanism of the Area Partnerships stone dead and has done so without introducing an alternative and without ensuring a smooth transition. We all know the speed that SBC are capable of working at – somewhere between that of a snail and a tortoise and there is likely to be a hiatus for a considerable time rather than just for some months.

Personally, your Chair considers that this is so badly thought through, that the director responsible for the proposal should reconsider, but of course that will never happen. The proposal is one thing; that the elected representatives of the community should vote it through demonstrates to this writer at least either a lack of understanding of the big picture, or a lack of concern for the public interest. However, the excuse for such a move was apparently that the system wasn't working and to be fair to SBC, there is a lot of truth in this. Tweeddale was apparently working reasonably but even so it could have been much better, the other four areas were apparently less effective. Your Chair considers the cause was a combination of poor direction from SBC and the apathy and insularity of some community councils. This could have been addressed if the will had existed. According to Peeblesshire News, there is a councillor, Caroline Cochrane, who is SBC's executive member for community and partnership development. I wonder how long this position has been filled. Isn't it rather strange that there has been no interaction with PCC considering our reputation for being a very proactive CC and one of the largest in the Borders.

To recap - An extract from the March report is repeated below.

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Extract from March Chair Report

In the last report your Chair identified that he does have a perception that SBC has improved in its interface with the communities **[No longer]**, but that it had a long way to go. Sadly, so far as TAP goes, this appears to be taking a large step backwards. Placing a moratorium on further grants this financial year and not running the balance forward into the next, weakens the TAP a little. However, the proposal to take a new approach whereby a reduced level of Council funding for the TAP will be used to bring in match funding from other sources to support local priorities and projects, will more seriously weaken it.

Malcolm Bruce commented as follows: “Speaking as someone who has applied for funding from many sources over the years, sometimes successfully, sometimes not so much, I think this is perhaps an oversimplified proposal. I can see many groups seeking funding from outside sources available on the expectation that match funding will then be available from Community Funds only to find it isn't for whatever reason. This would leave groups working twice as hard to find a match funder from another source which not all funders want to be potentially placing the project in jeopardy. I get that money is tight, but I am not sure if this is the best way to share it around. I think I would prefer to know how much is available as Community funding and make it available as full grants. Once it is gone, it is gone.

We all know how difficult it is for PCC to attract a full and effective team. Your Chair's contacts with other CCs shows that it is at least as difficult if not more so for them. As it stands, Scotland has arguably the worst local democratic deficit in Europe **[SBC has just made it worse]**. Regionalisation and the demise of real “**local**” authorities, such as a Town council have exacerbated this, as has the erosion of community council finances, with only one grant increase of 10% in 15 years. Also, changes in society that reduce for want of a better expression, neighbourliness also has a negative effect. This at a time, when the Scottish Government wish to see communities take more responsibility individually and also to participate in budgeting. Community councils must be strengthened if they are to step up to the mark and they must have a strong voice if they are to be heard. Individually, we have little say and thus a body such as the SBCCN (Scottish Borders Community Councils Network) is a necessity. Such a body doesn't just pop up like a mushroom, it requires management and a development plan. There is only one mechanism that has any chance of making it work and that is by using the Area Partnerships as a foundation and this requires a strong Area Partnership helping to pull together stronger CCs. Five years ago, Area Partnerships appeared to be failing and then we did see an improvement [locally] after the last council elections. However, the new proposal will weaken the TAP and consequently make it almost impossible to resurrect the SBCCN or indeed help to make a local Tweeddale working group.

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[The TAP has gone and with it any opportunity to rebuild the SBCCN in the short term].

2.0 Illegal Vapes and Tobacco

Following our last meeting in March a letter was sent to the following VIPs and their responses as received by the time of this report are described in the table below.

	Recipient	reply	Description
1	David Mundell MP	√	Supportive of our position
2	David Robertson CEO SBC	√	Thank you for your email regarding the concerns about illegal vapes and tobacco in our community. I appreciate you bringing this issue to our attention. We will follow up on the concerns raised and get back to you as soon as possible with our response.
3	Jackson Carlaw MSP		
4	Alex Cole-Hamilton MSP	√	I certainly share your concerns here and will fold into my continuing discussions with Ministers.
5	Russel Finlay MSP	√	Supportive
6	Kate Forbes as Deputy first Minister	√	Automated response
7	Christine Grahame MSP		
8	Rachael Hamilton MSP		
9	Craig Hoy MSP	√	Telephone meeting booked
10	Oliver Mundell MSP	√	Standard response
11	Willie Rennie MSP		
12	Anas Sarwar MSP		
13	John Swinney MSP	√	Automated response
14	Jo Farrel – Chief Constable		Passed on by GB our local PC
15	Stuart Fletcher – Police Area Commander		Passed on by GB our local PC

Without going into detail. Gary Beaumont our local PC has this very much in mind and hopefully he will be given the support that we all believe this issue deserves.

3.0 Baptist Church Hall – Cleland Site

At the time of writing, no new information received by the writer. Councillor Tatler appears to have some positive information. Hopefully, he will feel able to share this with our team.

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4.0 Meetings Attended This Month

13.03.25	PCC Meeting
18.03.25	Caledonian Court drop in (took a supervisor around the poor signage)
24.03.25	Eastgate drop in on the arts (Seriously amateur event) Fraser Morrison
26.03.25	Area Partnership
27.03.25	Special CC meeting on windfarms and place making
01.04.25	Ian Gibson
02.04.25	Gordon Harwell – Chair of Eddleston CC
05.04.25	Representing CC at Bowling Club extension opening

5.0 Working party on non-financial support to community councils and the working party on the Community Councils Network.

No update from SBC on the working group on non-financial support. The SBC Lead on this is Clare Malster. This project was initiated by the council's executive committee on 14 May last year and was expected to take 6 to 12 months. When it is considered what the level of workload would be on such a project and where we currently are with it, the writer's observations regarding SBCs speed of management in section 1 are rather reenforced.

There is no update on the SBCCN. It is unlikely that there will be in the near future.

6.0 Tweeddale Area Flood Advisory Group

The 2-way radios are due to be delivered around about now for disbursement to the affected groups (those with a significant flood risk). I have volunteered to run some simple training for the users which should take less than 15 minutes. For interest my competence to do this is based on (although to be fair, some is now out of date):

- Restricted certificate in radiotelephony
- Civil Aviation authority (Offshore Radio Operator) Restricted
- Management of Major Emergencies (offshore installations)
- SQA Qualified Assessor
- CIPD Qualified Trainer

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7.0 Place Making – Town Action Plan

The community council's article in Peebles Life gave information on the status of the Town Plan and the Place Making. It requested feedback and also for interested parties to come forward as volunteers. At the time of writing there have been no responses. It is now for the team that Crick Carleton put together to agree on who should be invited directly to join the group. This expanded group need to elect a leader and then going forward there is a requirement for a written agreement that links the organisations within Peebles together, so that there is broad church of agreement. The writer believes that the new Town Team requires a minimum input from

- Peebles Community Council
- Peebles Community Trust
- Peebles Civic Society
- Peebles Traders Association
- Youth Leaders
- Elected Councillors (Robin Tatler as lead)
- Pensioners
- Disability Groups
- Sports
- Citizens Advice
- Secretariat provided by SBC or Borders Community Action?

This group would oversee a Town Manager if one can be recruited and would interface with various agencies on behalf of its members who represent the community.

Peter Maudsley
Chair
Peebles and District Community Council