

Peebles & District Community Council

Chairman's Report – September 2025

1.0 General

By the time the September meeting takes place, I should have had my hip replacement operation. This will put me out of action for some weeks and probably for the October meeting as well. However, I will still be responding to emails and where necessary should be able to entertain meetings at home.

Peter

2.0 Meeting with SBC CEO

The cancelled meeting scheduled between SBC's CEO and your Chair took place on 26 August. David Robertson was generous with his time, allowing the meeting to extend to 90 minutes. Following the meeting, I emailed as follows:

Good morning, David

Thank you for your time on Tuesday. I hope you found it worthwhile. At least I think we had a fair exchange of views and perhaps have a better understanding of the issues from our differing perspectives.

As you may imagine my Live Borders response took some time to research and put together. I hope that you have had time to consider it. It may provide a slightly different perspective to that provided by officers. If you would like, I can now provide you with an electronic copy.

My offer stands of meeting with the new CEO of Live Borders and providing some help if that would be considered useful. The same applies to any important community issues such as replacements for the SBCCN and Area Partnerships. I suspect the former was dropped because we gave the meeting a hard time. Taking the line of least resistance should never be the first choice of any executive. Solutions are all that count.

Perhaps, most importantly, was my message that SBC are in danger of losing communities completely unless a new and effective communications strategy is formulated. Taking just the 18-month hiatus in the SBCCN project as an example. Apart from the fact that it is a ridiculously long period of inertia for any management process, companies are built in less than half the time, it is half the life span of a community councillor, so that those who initially engaged may not be there later. There probably would be no handover process and if there was it would certainly be negative. Another loss for the democratic process. Food for thought?

Once more, thank you for the time. I know how valuable that is and appreciate the meeting all the more for that

Peebles & District Community Council

Chairman's Report – September 2025

At the time of writing, there has been no response to this email, and the offers made have not so far been taken up.

To recap on the subjects for discussion. They were.

- The Old School House on Tweed Green. At this time, this is still a good example of how SBC and a community can work together for mutual benefit.
- Planning issues and concerns relating to the work of the Planning Committee
- Area Partnerships
- Live Borders
- Engagement

Hard copies of the Live Borders report and of this Chair's August report were presented. All the subjects were discussed in detail and there were areas of agreement and understanding.

Notwithstanding any areas that we did agree upon, it is impossible to know what if anything was achieved. This is because unlike a company where the managing director does have the power to command, a council doesn't appear to work like that for several reasons. Anything strategic needs discussed with the senior personnel, who then need advised by officers and then it ends up being discussed and voted on by councillors. With (apparently) 600 subject areas (I was guessing circa 150) just about everyone has to rely on officers who hopefully do know their subjects but may not be strategic thinkers. All this is more complicated because councils evolve, learn and modernise extremely slowly. Firstly, just due to the process they have to go through and secondly because culture change is difficult in any organisation and more so in a civil service environment – See "Yes Minister". A lack of money doesn't help either!

3.0 Tweeddale Area Partnership

Accepting that the Area Partnerships are now gone, it was pointed out that a report was issued by the Director – Resilient Communities on Area Partnerships dated 14 December 2023. Section 1.8 stated:

*It is proposed that, building on the engagement carried out by SCDC [Scottish Community Development Centre], the public consultation **and what is working well elsewhere**, officers explore further a model whereby Area Partnerships are moved out-with the Council's Scheme of Administration to become unincorporated bodies – becoming community led with membership decided by the community [This an acceptance that some regions are working well, why not the Scottish Borders? Why do SBC not learn as indicated?]*

Peebles & District Community Council

Chairman's Report – September 2025

This does not identify a possible need to abolish the Area Partnerships. It states that SBC should learn from best practice elsewhere. Section 1.6 states

There are a wide variety of arrangements across Scotland, and many other local authorities, in a similar way to Scottish Borders Council, have used organisations such as SCDC to carry out discussions with communities in order to develop action plans for specific areas. In particular, **East Lothian is seen as an exemplar of community led Area Partnerships.**

Your chair noted that he had discussed the East Lothian model with John Curry (Director) some years previously and that everyone seemed to think that it was a good model to consider. The CEO responded that this could still be a possibility. However, your Chair indicated that to adopt it was easier if the Area Partnerships had been retained, that starting from new would take time which experience showed was usually a long time and that the writer agreed with one of our councillors who considered “that the baby was being thrown out with the bathwater”.

It was acknowledged that Tweeddale operated better Area Partnerships than other areas, but that the other Partnerships did not work effectively. Therefore, something had to change. Strengthening the system and the potential connection with the SBCCN was discussed without agreement.

4.0 Illegal Vapes and Tobacco

Discussed once more with PC Beaumont amongst other issues. This will be reported on in October's report. The meeting with PC Beaumont was very satisfactory and the questionnaire that he has issued can provide him with strong arguments to tackle those areas of concern that the public may have. The additional PC, Ryan starts after his holidays in about two weeks' time.

5.0 Meetings Attended Since August Meeting

14.08.25	PCC Meeting
21.08.25	Iain Dempster (Guildry). Guildry considering joining PCC and Town Team
	Peebles in Bloom
23.08.25	Attended Drill Hall exhibition
26.08.25	SBC CEO
04.09.25	PCC Pre-meeting
08.09.25	Police – Garry Beaumont
09.09.25	Live borders consultation meeting

Peebles & District Community Council

Chairman's Report – September 2025

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

Noting last month's report. This was all discussed with SBC's CEO. It was strongly suggested that SBC is losing the communities. Where a working group or project is set up, community council volunteers sign up to it and do some work and then nothing is heard for months - this is soul destroying for all those who have invested their time. No wonder communities are disengaging. Shortage of staff, hardworking personnel trying to do their best, etc. was all discussed. There is no argument from your Chair on these points. However, two items of importance emerge. Firstly, that time management is not difficult. A work organiser holds tasks and as they age, this is picked up and action taken. Secondly, that once poor communications and unsatisfactory actions have broken something, then it is a herculean task to put it back together or effectively replace it.

7.0 Place Making – Town Action Plan

No change at this time.

8.0 Live Borders

All the relevant points were raised with the SBC CEO and again your Chair volunteered his time to meet the Live Borders CEO and possibly provide some free support and similar for other important issues.

Peter Maudsley
Chair
Peebles and District Community Council