

Peebles & District Community Council

Chairman's Report

March 2024

1.0 Tweeddale Area Partnership (TAP)

The last meeting was on 06 February. This meeting was notable for the result of two out of the four funding applications applicable to our area. The funding committee recommended a stay on one until further information was received and an award of 50% of the requested sum on the other. The writer and the SBC councillors all argued for the full sum to be awarded on both and this was carried. The four awards for our area were.

- Tweeddale Youth Action- £2,337.25- for graphic design support for their pizza project
- Greener Peebles- £5,000- for a replacement Poly tunnel.
- Oor Space Youthy- £7,014- for core staffing costs
- Peebles Scout Group - £3,000- to refurbish their outdoor meeting area.

Next meeting is Tuesday 19/03/24.

2.0 Street Pastors

In parallel with training local people to become Streetpastors, Borders Streetpastors has been continuing a monthly patrol in Peebles with the opportunity for interested local folk to participate with them as observers. Based on the training received and participating as observers, applications to become Streetpastors are now being submitted and processed and the hope is that within a few months this will have allowed a Peebles team to be formed which can undertake patrols fortnightly. We strongly support this initiative.

3.0 Flood Risk

The writer attended another meeting of the Tweeddale Area Flooding Subgroup of the TAP in Innerleithen. The meeting was attended by a large delegation from the Fire and Rescue Services. The organisation and equipment available was described.

The application for a Grant erroneously applied for under the umbrella of the PCC has been withdrawn and new sources of funding will be sourced. The application had been for capital items. However, the small print identified that the fund approached did not cover capital items.

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4.0 Meetings Attended this Month.

06.02.24	Tweeddale area Partnership
08.02.24	PCC Meeting
12.02.24	Iain Gibson
15.02.24	Flood Group
21.02.24	Placemaking Team meeting
27.02.24	CIT Beneficiaries meeting
28.02.24	Joe Wilton – Meeting on the Common good
29.02.24	PCT / Youth Action meeting
29.02.24	SBC Planning meeting with Ian Aikman (Michael Marshall attended for PRM)
05.03.24	Pre-meeting meeting

5.0 Scottish Borders Community Council Network (SBCCN).

Nothing further heard. The minutes of the previous meeting were issued by SBC and were an accurate record of the points raised.

6.0 Road Maintenance

There has been a significant amount of comment in the press relating to potholes and the PCC has been contacted directly by members of the public. The writer understands the financial constraints that SBC are under and that this is a nationwide issue and not just related to the Scottish Borders. However, No one can be ignorant of the terrible state of our roads and that includes SBC councillors and officers. They like us must drive on the roads themselves.

This is not just a cost item for SBC or indeed a potentially expensive damage item for us. It is very much also a health and safety item for the public at large. The photo is not an isolated case. It is very much the norm, even on the main roads. We pride ourselves that we are a cycle friendly region. However, the worst road damage is usually near the verges. This creates a serious hazard for cyclists and motorcyclists.



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As motorists we are spending more time looking at the road surface and dodging the holes than concentrating on other road users. In wet weather, the surface water may or may not hide a deep hole. The writer has driven on third world roads and some of these are far superior to ours here in Tweeddale and beyond. The writer personally would accept a council tax increase if it resolved this very serious issue, although he recognises that not everybody would agree.

7.0 Equality Impact Assessment

At the last meeting it was suggested that we invite the responsible person for equalities at SBC to come and talk with us so that we can better understand the requirements and how SBC manages this. Councillor Tatler has forwarded the email chain to us. This indicates that there is no one position that oversees this area. The writer has sent the following questions by email. It is likely that there will be additional comments in due course.

Am I correct in picking up from the emails that there is no single person with overall responsibility for "Equality"? Presumably therefore, the same is true for "Disability" as they are inextricably linked?

Who oversees the management of equality and diversity? The "Equality, Diversity and Human Rights Policy" is all HR based. There appears no responsible person or role overseeing the policy. The author is the HR department, and the assessors are all HR. The policy statement is all HR. the statement is also all staff related.

The email chain appears to suggest that there was a role and that it has been discontinued. Was this the "Equality Champion" as noted at 7.2.2 in the policy? When was this position discontinued?

If the policy noted above does not provide a foundation for the "Equalities Impact Assessment" which legally should have been complied with in advance in the high School build project, then what does? As it wasn't done in advance as required then has a nonconformance been raised in the SBC Quality system? Who owns the NCR if one has been raised? What is the target completion date?

8.0 Honoraria Payments

At the last meeting we considered the response from Jenni Craig, (SBC Director - Resilient Communities), to our concerns relating to several areas but the honoraria in particular. To recap; this letter basically informed us that the new draft wording was no different from the original published wording and to prove the point, included a transcript of the original. Your Chair was tasked with going back and querying this. Miss Craigs letter contained several large errors and inaccuracies, and these were identified in our response. On 13 February we received an apology including the following text "I would like to stress that it is not the intention to stop payments that are being made to Peebles Community Council's secretary". One of our councillors did think that the issues were down to "semantics" which of course is related to the meaning of words. Semantics is usually taken as being

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trivial. The wording suggested in the draft was clear and definitive "It cannot be appropriate for these kinds of payments to be made from the SBC annual administrative grant". Semantics, it was not!

9.0 Council Plan – Draft from April 2024

On 14 February we were copied with the council plan for comment and were given only three working days in which to consider it before the deadline for responses. Notwithstanding this we managed to produce a five-page analysis. Following this we have had several useful exchanges with Alexandre Bell, who is Corporate Policy Advisor for SBC. Some of his feedback is copied below. This is only a snapshot. However, the writer takes this at face value and considers the interchange to be positive.

First of all, we would like, once again, to apologise for the very late distribution of the draft Plan. We really appreciate you and Peebles and District CC taking the time to provide us with detailed feedback in such a short amount of time. Going forward, we fully intend on ensuring that our engagement process gives communities more time to feed into our Council Plan.

I have forwarded your comments to relevant services for consideration, either for integration in the Council Plan or within their delivery plans. I have also notified our Community Engagement team of your suggestion of building a skills directory to better enable partnership work with local Community Councils.

Having your feedback on this front is really useful to our planning process going forward, as it highlights that we should consider being more specific when it comes to articulating actions in the Plan.

Regarding actions related to young people, we will be adding an action pertaining to the construction of a youth shelter in Victoria Park, this was also raised by local members. Re. the young people engagement strategy, I can confirm that it will involve voluntary groups as well. I have also been in contact with the communities Team regarding the sustainability of funding for voluntary groups working with young people. They have highlighted those organisations like Tweeddale Youth Action, are sustainable, receive support from SBC, have also created service level agreement with the school, and are developing a social enterprise to make them less funding reliant in the future. However, we recognise that while we already provide funds to youth organisations, the landscape across the community sector is very challenging. Unfortunately, given a difficult fiscal context, what we can provide is limited. In general, I would fully agree that long-term sustainable for community groups is essential for community empowerment. This is an issue which we have been systematically raising when engaging on the topic with Scottish Government.

Beyond, this, there are several items which you have raised as part of the response which have been actioned or will inform our processes going forward. In particular, the point mentioned on domestic rates has been flagged up to relevant officers and is being considered.

Regarding a GANTT chart, it's a good idea. Internally, we have been looking at a number of management tools which would sit underneath the Council Plan and track delivery in a uniform manner. There are challenges in how we capture the breadth of what we are doing and update it as efficiently as possible, and this is something we are planning on focusing on this year. This

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might include publishing some of it online to better show the public what we are doing on a day-to-day basis, depending on feasibility etc.

10.0 Placemaking

The writer continues to be a member of the town action plan and placemaking team as led by Crick Carleton. Recently, consultants have been engaged, the fees being picked up by SBC. The consultants' responsibilities are not to re-invent the work done by the team but to fill some gaps in groups that the team hasn't managed to reach adequately such as young people and those with voices that are less well heard. The work will then be validated, and suitable systems/materials developed to share findings with the public. Finally public consultations will be held face to face and online to ensure that the work done meets the approval of the majority in the town. Our team and others will be able to contribute before the plan is issued. It is recognised that Peebles is one of the leading towns in the Borders in doing this work and progressing the "Placemaking" concept. Recent feedback from SBC demonstrate that this document is unlikely to sit on a shelf gathering dust but will be used in future town planning going forward.

Additionally, the writer and Crick Carleton met with Iain Gibson and SBC youth officers supported by SBC Placemaking personnel to consider the youth needs in Peebles. The results of this and similar meetings are fed into our teams planning and into SBC's.

11.0 Camper Vans and Parking in General

Recent initiatives from the police in the High Street certainly seem to have had a positive effect and produced more parking spaces as traffic is forced to move on. Parking is easier and the writer would expect that this would have a small positive effect in income for the High Street shops.

In relation to the existing car parks, there is no change, in that on some days the Eastgate/Edinburgh Road and Greenside car parks are full. These issues have been discussed in depth by the parking working group which has now wound up. However, the problems will not go away and as more development takes places, such as March Street Mill, parking will get worse.

This month we received the following from a member of the public:

Hi, a friend with a motorhome recently wanted to visit Peebles for the weekend, and was surprised to learn there is nowhere that they can park overnight now since both camping/caravan parks closed to campervans/motorhomes? I know there's mixed opinions of such things, but generally there's a great group of folks that like to travel the country and find places to park up and eat and enjoy the local area. Pubs often do offerings where 'park on our car park' if you have one meal with us - and don't offer toilet/grey waste facilities but enjoy increased footfall. Are there any plans/opportunities to promote folks allowing camping overnight? I know in Biggar, the primary school

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car park has maybe 10 - 15 free campers there at the weekends, and they use the local toilets (pay to enter) but also spend a lot of money in the shops/bars/restaurants. Some places are trying to introduce 'aires' like they have in France and Germany and now the NC500 are looking at doing similar to encourage folks to camp responsibly in controlled areas rather than 'wild camp'. And provide water/ litter disposal facilities. Just a thought. Thanks. Jan

Internal team communications produced the following:

This is an interesting question and one that we would do well to have a policy on across the Borders, not just in Peebles.

Fife, for example, have designated spaces in most of their car parks, including some right on the coast, for overnight stays. A charge of £10 per night is collected via the parking machines and is no doubt policed in the usual way.

Kingsmeadows Car Park recently painted out two motorhome spaces in the middle section but of course this is a free car park so no ability to collect fees is available. Hay Lodge is the same and I don't think an option exists within the published parking charges at East Station Car Park, though I have seen motorhomes parked overnight in all three. Indeed, I recently spoke to a couple who had driven from Fort William in their small camper to attend a show at the Eastgate Theatre. They intended to sleep overnight in the East Station Car Park and drive home the following day having spent money on tickets for the show, preshow drinks and a meal and possibly breakfast the next morning.

Returning to the free car parks in Peebles I saw in another post recently that signs are still displayed at a Kingsmeadows stating no overnight parking, despite there being painted spaces for motorhomes. I haven't checked to see if there is or is not a sign. Of course, we recently developed a new parking policy for Peebles but as far as I know it didn't include any reference to motorhome parking. Personally, I can't see what harm campers or motorhomes are doing by stopping overnight in any of our car parks as long as they are not causing an obstruction. As you say in your note, chances are they will spend money locally and spread the word about what a great place Peebles is to have a stopover. If fees were introduced like those in Fife it would create another small income stream. SBC could assist by adding grey water disposal facilities on the outside of all their public loos, as already exist for example on Arran. This would discourage irresponsible dumping down street drains, etc. I have also seen such facilities with a pay by card facility in the Highlands, so again an income stream could be developed.

The writer suggests that a councillor takes ownership of this issue, and we try and find a solution. The two texts in blue provide a good foundation to move forward on. Certainly, the town should be as tourist friendly as we can make it. Camper vans are widely used, particularly amongst foreign tourists and a lack of facilities drives them away. Further, we have noted instances of camper vans parking where grey water and worse has been dumped, once in Kingsmeadows car park and also at the Sware.

Peter Maudsley
Chair
Peebles and District Community Council

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