

Peebles & District Community Council

Chairman's Report - September 2024

1.0 Peebles Town Action Plan (Place Planning)

The draft place plan and town action plan is almost complete and ready to issue to PCC members. Members will have a month to digest it, and we will vote to accept or reject it in its entirety. A great deal of work has gone into this as led by Crick Carleton of the PCT. It reflects the feedback gained from circa 300+ members of the public and input from representatives of PCT, PCC, PCS, Citizens Advice and others. As such, PCC members are not voting on individual items of content, there will be few if any, who agree with everything, we are voting on the quality of the document and on its suitability as an overall plan going forward.

2.0 NHS – Community Hospitals Review

The following sent to NHS Director Dr Tim Young

I took an action at our last monthly meeting to keep the issue of “Minor Injury Care” and car parking at Haylodge on the radar. Consequently, it seemed a good idea to copy you with my last report in which I address these items in section 2.0. I know that you considered the minor injuries worth at least having an overview. Following the meeting in which I raised this issue, it was on the agenda for a meeting that was subsequently cancelled and then was left off the agenda to be considered elsewhere. I was told that I would be kept informed. I haven't heard anything since. Indeed, the community hospitals working group meetings have been cancelled for several weeks running.

The next meeting of the PCC is Thursday, and this is what I shall be reporting to the committee. I think you will agree that an information vacuum is not beneficial.

It is of course difficult for me to take a balanced view, snapshots in time leave much information missing and in something as complex as the NHS this is even more difficult. Further, not being an NHS professional doesn't help. However, having been a director or senior manager in complex organisations and having had budgetary responsibility of circa £130M (today's figures), I just get an uncomfortable feeling. Particularly so with the minor injuries issue.

It was a pity from my perspective that your former CEO retired as we had a very good meeting with him and saw his attempts to engage with the public as very positive. Perhaps the new CEO, would also be reaching out when he has had time to settle in?

3.0 Tweeddale Area Partnership

The last meeting was 20 August and included a community conversation with each table chaired by an SBC officer or a councillor. The community

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conversation on the writer's table eventually produced some useful items. However, it got off to a very shaky start. The two councillors had not been made aware that one of them was expected to lead. The information sent out in advance was, we were told old and not for discussion. There was some dissent as this did seem to require feedback and feedback was provided anyway. Please see email circulated by our secretary 13.08.24. However, we eventually got going and await the minutes of the meeting and the feedback from the consultation.

4.0 Baptist Church Hall – Cleland Site

No new information.

5.0 Meetings Attended This Month

12.08.24	Peebles in Bloom meeting
15.08.24	Peebles in Bloom
19.08.24	Iain Gibson
20.08.24	Tweeddale Area Partnership
02.09.24	PCC Pre-meeting meeting
03.09.24	Meeting with AS and public regards waste in the street
05.09.24	Flood group

Missed four meetings due to workload – PCC and personal.

6.0 Working party on non-financial support to community councils

No change – Are SBC are still working on it?

7.0 Peebles Youth

The situation is not good. We are all aware of the progress that was made, and this progress was due to the excellent work that was done by Malcolm Bruce and by our previous Chair as PCC members. Credit also goes to Iain Gibson without whose efforts, little would have been achieved. "Oor Space Youthy" owes a lot to Tyne Lovell-Henderson. However, she has taken a youth worker post in Galashiels. She sent her thanks for our support. Clare Swann also of OSY sent us the following message.

[Good morning, Peter](#)

[First apologies if you read about it yesterday on Facebook! Summer for me as you know is my busiest time and as a result, I have not yet had the chance to speak to the small group of people, such as yourself who have supported and helped us over the past 3yrs face to face. Whilst the constant grappling for funding hasn't helped unfortunately it is not](#)

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the only reason for this decision. Health, family, work and everyday life pressures have taken their toll on us all. We will be hosting our AGM mid-September in which you will be invited. I will be in touch again soon. Thanks for everything Peter it really does mean the world.

The above relates to the cancellation of OSY Juniors (Friday), OSY Seniors (Saturday) and the youth Café (Monday and Thursday) due to funding cuts. Clare and Tyne are/were stalwarts of youth support. Morale is apparently not high.

We also received the following from Iain Gibson

Dear Peter,

It is with considerable regret that I write to advise you that as of August 31st Peebles Youth Voice has been disbanded. On the Group's behalf I wish to thank you and your fellow PCC members for the support you have given the Group. It is my personal belief that the needs which led to the Group coming together remain and I hope that in the future some alternative avenue can be found to further this purpose.

Best regards,
Iain

Arguably, as support for young people falls away, whether it be financial support from government and local government or just support from good people dropping off due to age, multiple pressures of home and work or just the lamentable apathy of the population at large, we can expect a rise in ASB, bullying, etc.

At least feedback from Street Pastors demonstrates one success that is being maintained.

8.0 Live Borders

Our secretary sent an invitation for the CEO of Live Borders to attend a PCC meeting and identified the concerns that have been raised with us relating to opening hours of the swimming pool and library. The initial response has not been encouraging. Live Borders still have a succession of interim CEOs. Obviously not ideal. Apparently, Live Borders is to become a single person trust, whatever that implies. The respondent also did not agree that the hours were poor. However, we demonstrated the facts by return and have had little other than an acknowledgement.

The following is an extract from our last email on the subject:

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Dear Sheila

We thank you for your response to our Secretary's email and we note with some concern that Live Borders appears to continue to be without a permanent CEO for the foreseeable future. Without, a permanent CEO going forward it is almost impossible to plan effectively and to have true agreement on policy decisions. Strategic decisions taken before a new CEO is appointed, will very likely make it more difficult to attract a person to the post. Relating to this, please could you explain what is meant by a "single membership trust"

In relation to the central issue that is concerning some people in Peebles, the opening hours of the Library and Swimming Pool, it may be helpful to refer you to an extract from last month's Chairman's report which is appended to this email. Factually, our facilities opening hours do not appear to be as user friendly as those used in the comparisons. In fact, reviewing additional facilities such as Dunbar and Peterhead, these also have more user-friendly hours.

Most local authorities provide mobile library services, and we do not disagree that these are a most welcome resource for those communities served. However, we don't understand where the 160 hours in your response comes from as the library in the Chambers Institution is open for less than 40 hours per week.

Received from a member of the public:

I was glad to see you discussed the issue of Peebles swimming pool opening hours in the minutes from your last meeting. This has been a concern of mine for some time and while weekend afternoons were mentioned, I'd also like to highlight a lack of evening swimming sessions. I'm a mum to 2 small children and before having children I swam 2/3 times a week at Peebles pool later in the evening and I was shocked that there is only 1 evening a week with a late lanes swimming session. I emailed the pool manager asking if they could confirm this and unfortunately it is the case with no plans to change. I'm unable to swim mornings, daytime or early evening due to having young children, my only free time is after they've gone to bed. Comparing this to timetables in similarly sized towns like Penicuik and Crieff, both pools have several evening swimming sessions available every night. I know of many family/friends who also have difficulty finding convenient times to use the pool due to work schedules and childcare. All of whom rarely visit and will not consider a membership due to the timetable.

As your chair has previously noted; the management of these facilities may be creating a self-fulfilling prophecy and the longer it continues, the harder it will be to turn around.

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9.0 Trade waste

Our secretary and your Chair met with members of the public who have concerns about trade waste being stored at a location on the High Street. We are awaiting further information, and your Chair will then take a view on what action is appropriate. However, having had two arson incidents over the last few years, and a potential for an increase in ASB, a routine storage of flammable waste in a High Street location does appear to cause a hazard.

10.0 Planning

Our Planning convener's draft planning report for this month identifies a number of important items and highlighted, three of them for discussion. The writer proposes that the windfarm issues be left to Michael and Malcolm to oversee. Patently, if a windfarm is built in our area, then Peebles must receive a fair share of any payments that may be made. The two items requiring discussion are:

Ewan Irvine's appeal following SBC's rejection of his planning application. At our last meeting, we agreed to support the appeal. However, that was prior to an in-depth analysis of the Planning Officer's report. Our Planning Convener, who is unfortunately on Holiday has provided a detailed and accurate report of the facts. The issue is to debate the item again with you, the PCC members who are now more fully informed. A letter of support is drafted and is appended to assist members.

And

Land West of Tweedview, South Parks Industrial Estate, Peebles. Formation of commercial storage yard. Your Chair has mailshot the residents of the affected area for feedback as per the appended letter. There is an element of divergent views on this item and consequently, we will need to debate it.

Reference the new trails at Glentress. Michael had no time to analyse them before his holiday and this writer hasn't either. It is suggested that we consider it by email later in the month.

Peter Maudsley
Chair
Peebles and District Community Council



*Community Council
of the
Royal Burgh of Peebles & District*

08 September 2024

Planning Department
Scottish Borders Council
Council Headquarters
Newtown St Boswells
Melrose
TD6 0SA

Dear Sirs

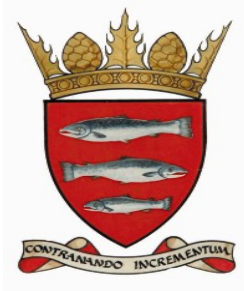
Letter of support

Reference: Appeal on Decision 23/00524/FUL – Whitebridge Park, Peebles

Peebles Community Council (PCC) strongly supports Irvine Plant Ltd in their application for retrospective change of use and this subsequent appeal of the decision to refuse. Although the decision is technically understandable, it appears that it was made on limited grounds and did not consider the wider issues and mitigating circumstances which in this case are of considerable importance.

The Company

Irvine Plant limited is a well-regarded contracting company operating out of its yard at Whitebridge Park, Peebles. The company bought the premises from a local joiner and building contractor seven years ago and its operations on this site had never generated any complaints from either the local population to the company or to SBC or from SBC itself. Access is directly from the B7062, Peebles to Cardona Road via a wide entrance with excellent visibility. The company provides unique services to Scottish Borders Council including snow clearing, as well as to other councils and the public. As well as employing 14 permanent staff and up to six others part time, it is important to note that the company has a policy of employing young people and providing training for them that results in nationally recognised Qualifications. The company presently employs three young people under 20 and in the last 5 years, Irvine Plant Limited have spent circa £20,0000 on staff training and development. For



example, in June last, 11 employees were provided with emergency first aid courses.

Peebles Demographics

Although the Peebles “Place Plan” is still in draft form and is yet to be approved by SBC and published it has identified the following which strongly bear on this issue.

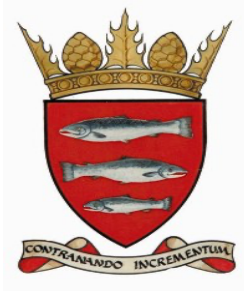
- Peebles has a need to increase employment within the town and to generate quality jobs with higher-than-average incomes.
- Peebles is very limited in its employment opportunities
- Peebles youth urgently require opportunities for local employment and advancement.
- Peebles requires more land for a wide mix of industrial uses, but this land is not easy to find and is certainly not currently available.
- Limited job opportunities in Peebles drive people out of the area and increase commuting and car use.

Officer’s Report and Decision to Refuse.

In considering the planning history, it is important to note that the site in question is separate from Cavalry Park and that Cavalry Park’s class 4 status has been subject to many planning approvals for different classes of business. Cavalry Park is also home to Stanley Brash Construction and all construction companies have plant and machinery. Changes of use in Cavalry Park have and continue to set a precedent.

The fact that planning permission for houses was refused some time ago is immaterial and the fact that the application for workshops in 2007 was against recommendation is also immaterial. The application was approved and by implication the planning officers’ recommendation was judged incorrect at that time.

The visual impact noted has been discussed widely amongst Peebles residents recently and the majority of feedback has been positive. Only two respondents demonstrate concern over traffic. Most people consider that the site is ideally situated for this business, not visibly a problem and that little would be needed



to shield it further from view. There are many worse farmyards visible in the countryside. Much has been made about the site detracting from the attractive nature of the entrance to the town. This B Road is not a major entrance to Peebles and isn't of visual note anyway. The officer's report states: *The nature and scale of activity associated with a builder's yard and plant hire business is not one which is appropriate to the rural character of the area. Those developments are instead reasonably suited to sites within the settlement envelope.* The former point we have argued against and the latter, we disagree with completely.

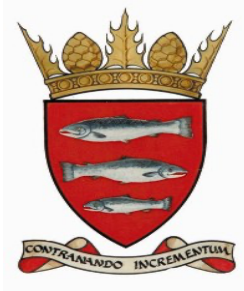
The officer's report also states: *The applicant has not advanced any economic or operational need for this location, nor has it been demonstrated that there are no suitable alternatives allocated in the LDP or identified in the employment land audit. We will consider these points later.*

The Planning officer states that the "site is greenfield". Patently, this is not correct as it was originally approved for a joiner's business and buildings have stood there for approximately 20 years. Visually, the impact claimed in the report appears exaggerated and could well be mitigated.

Conclusion

It is unfortunate that the company and its legal advisors did not identify the class designation issue when the site was purchased. All the present difficulties stem from this. Indeed, had the company not applied for the construction of storage bins and in so doing demonstrated "good faith", then the issue would have remained unknown and in less than three years' time would have been outside the 10 years limitation. The officer's report identifies that the woodland removed amounted to 0.2Ha which is tiny, less than half an acre. The woodland removed included some diseased unsafe broad-leaved trees and scrub. There is no argument that any legislation was breached with the removal of the trees. There is still a woodland barrier between the site and the river Tweed.

We do not say that all the issues identified in the officer's report are incorrect, many are. However, it should be possible, working with the company to provide mitigation and indeed improvements. We believe that approval with suitable conditions is the pragmatic and sensible approach, particularly when the wider implications are considered. Should Irvine Plant hire be forced to vacate this site, then it is very unlikely that any mitigation measure will be taken, and the site will likely remain derelict.



Peebles has few major employers and with around twenty jobs being tied to this company, then Irvine Plant Ltd, can be considered a major employer. Few local companies recruit young people or spend significant monies developing and training them. This company does. This company provides vital services to Scottish Borders Council and reacts quickly to emergency call outs. The existence of the company and its support to SBC has allowed SBC to reduce its permanent staff roll and equipment pool and thereby create substantial savings. The company has invested in snow clearing plant specifically to provide support to SBC in winter. It is not an exaggeration to say that the company plays a vital part in the local economy. The company also provides assistance to SBC and the local flooding resilience group and with the known flood risk, this is deemed essential.

It is also worth noting the part plays within the local community in its support for charitable causes and events as per the appendix.

The decision to refuse the application means that the company must relocate or close. There is nowhere suitable in Peebles or its surrounding area to relocate to. It is this writer's understanding that if upheld, the ruling may be a death sentence for the company. The site, far from returning to woodland will very likely stand empty and visually deteriorate. The judgement, far from making an improvement will damage employment, reduce youth opportunity, cause difficulties for volunteer groups such as the Beltane and put additional pressure on SBC, and achieve little of value. An approval with conditions, can protect these important benefits and just as importantly, reduce the visual impact further, enhance the wildlife corridor and generally improve the ecology of the area.

Yours Sincerely

Peter Maudsley
Chairman



Appendix

List of charitable sponsorships provided by Irvine Plant Ltd in the last year.

DRAFT

