

~Upper Liddesdale & Hermitage Community Council

Ordinary Meeting 13th February 2025

Draft Minutes

Meeting was held at Hermitage Hall.

Those attending:

Councillors: Watson McAteer, Annette Smart

Community Councillors - Geoffrey Kolbe (GK) Chairman, Rosemary Webster (RW) Vice Chairman, Martin Steed (MS) Treasurer. Lynda Graham (LG, co-opted)

Members of the public - 10

Meeting started at 19:00hrs

1. Apologies for Absence

Councillor Jane Cox, Community Councillor Ian Hunter

2. Approval of the Minutes of the Ordinary Meeting 14 November 2024

MS proposed that the minutes were a true and accurate record of the meeting. The motion was seconded by RW. There were no dissenters and so the motion was carried.

3. Matters arising,

a. Fibre Optic Cables: GK reported that he had not been able to obtain any more information about when the fibre would be connected to the properties. He assumed that it would be later this year.

b. Railway Heritage Center, Resilience Shed: GK reported that the resilience shed at the top end of Hermitage valley now had been funded and was going to be constructed. A resilience shed for the Whitrope Heritage Centre would follow.

c. Railway Line, Tubes & Bags: LG reported that she still had not been able to get any response from Savills about the bags. **She had been identify the tubes as belonging to Tilhill and so will contact Andrew Fisher at Tilhill** and hopefully get it sorted.

4. Report; Report; Place Plan

RW reported that Claire Martin of Community Enterprise has been quiet. It seems they had been asked to help with the Place Plan for a lot of Community Councils. **RW will chase Claire Martin up.**

5. Report; Information Boards RW reported she now had a quote from Viv Designs to design the boards which is an estimated £180. RW proposed that this could be paid out of the ringfenced fund for information boards. This was agreed.

6. Report; Storm Eowyn

Resilience team member Sandra Murray reported that she found that most people were OK. What she did find frustrating was that she did not know who might be vulnerable. Some people needed a generator, for example, but as there was also no list of assets she did not know who to call on to get a generator to those who needed one. GK noted that attempts had been made previously to have people fill in questionnaires with this information, but there had been practically zero response. GK suggested that it needed a

person-to-person approach to get this information and perhaps the Chat would be a good forum for this. Sandra suggested that small generators could be kept in storage - perhaps at the Hermitage Hall - and commented that a number of small camping stove kits which consisted of a one-ring burner and four gas cylinders could be kept in storage so that people could at least heat some soup or boil water for a hot drink. GK noted that he had done some research on suitable generators and had bought a Hyundai HY2000SI generator (which now costs about £460) which was powerful enough to start a chest freezer and seemed to be reliable enough for intermittent use. The best generator, of course, is a Honda 2.2 kW generator, but they cost about £1200 and is too good for this application. GK cautioned that generators could not be left in storage for years and then be expected to start when needed. They need regular maintenance and regular running to ensure they work when required.

Resilience team member John Scott reported that Steele Road had coped okay. He stated that the refurbishment of Hermitage Hall included an array of solar panels and a large battery, which would be suitable for power during a power outage. The Hall could thus act as a warm-hub resilience centre for people in a resilience stress incident. There were a number of sheds planned which could serve as storage for camping stoves and the like.

RW commented that SPEN will pay for people to stay at a hotel in cases where there is prolonged power outage lasting several days.

7. Report; SPEN Cross-Border Connection Project

GK reported on an online meeting of the Stop-the-Pylons group, which has 14 representatives of various groups and Community Councils and included John Lamont MP and Rachael Hamilton MSP. It was reported that SPEN will be carrying out a further round of 'detailed' consultation on the proposed route of the line during March or early April.

The South of Scotland Golden Eagles Project has been wound up now but has been reformed as the Restoring Upland Nature charity. This is now an independent charity with a wider remit than before, but will be free to object to wind farms on the basis of the threat to raptors that they pose.

There was a 6 minute news item on ITV Borders News about the proposed transmission line which featured members of the Stop-the-Pylons group.

There will be a meeting between the group and the Network Electricity Systems Operator (NESO) tomorrow the 14th of February, organised by John Lamont which GK will attend

8. Report; Teviot Wind Farm

GK reported that Muirhall had made some alterations to the number and layout of the turbines, but that the landscape officer had maintained her objection to the scheme. The application was due to go to the Planning Committee on the 3rd of March. GK said he had asked to address the Committee in opposition to the application, as is usually allowed, but this had been refused as it was a Section 36 application so the Committee were responding to a consultation request rather than consenting or refusing an application. GK commented that this was rather arbitrary since the Committee consisted of elected members and the public had a democratic right to make their views known to the Committee. Watson McAteer said he would find out the ruling on this. He had addressed the Committee for the Pines Burn wind farm on behalf of the opposition and offered to do so in this instance.

9. Report; Pine Burn Wind Farm

GK reported that the wind farm became operational in October and that the final five turbines of the development were still awaiting planning permission. The MoD had objected as the noise from the turbines would exceed the Eskdalemuir budget allocation for the scheme and it was stuck until that was resolved.

10. Report; Foundation Scotland

GK reported that a Company Limited by Guarantee (CLG) was to have been set up to receive funds from Pines Burn and Teviot wind farm. However, Barbara Elborn could not proceed with putting this in place for personal reasons and so it had been decided to bring in Foundation Scotland to handle the community benefit funds on behalf of the Community Councils.

GK noted that as part of the agreement, the Community Councils were supposed to put the funds into their bank account and to ensure that legal and financial obligations were met in handling and distributing the funds. GK stated that as constituted, there was no protection for the individual Community Councillors and they were individually liable for the handling and distribution of the funds. While other Community Councils like Hawick and Denholm did it this way, he felt they did not appreciate the risk.

GK put three choices: Firstly to refuse the funds. Secondly to give the funds to another Community Council like Hawick or Newcastleton. Thirdly to set up a SCIO as an appropriately constituted body through which the funds could be administered. Watson McAteer thought commented that setting up a SCIO was a good move as he saw that in the future, Communities were going to be increasingly responsible for using money from the Council and finding other monies for services.

It was agreed that GK would start setting up a SCIO for receiving wind farm community benefits in the first instance.

11. Report; Center Park Hawick

GK reported that there had been a meeting on the 11th of February where senior management staff of Center Parc gave a presentation to Community Councils on the proposed village to be sited 3 miles North of Hawick. It would consist of 700 units in a forest setting in about a thousand acres. GK commented that he had been impressed that the CEO Colin McInley had made the presentation supported by senior managers. Watson McAteer said he and fellow Councillors had also been impressed by their commitment.

There would be about 1200 jobs created, of which about 90% would be local.

The team were paying particular attention to the traffic management and this would be designed using data from their other village sites.

There had been much discussion about the effect on other tourism and hospitality businesses in the area. But from experience from the other six villages it seems that a halo effect actually boosted local hospitality businesses. Watson McAteer said that Hawick was buzzing with excitement about the scheme and there did not seem to be any down side to it.

12. Report; Financial

MS reported that there is £3686.22 in the account of which \$2725.84 is ringfenced.

13. Any other business

RW reported that the Christmas Cheer event put on by the Hermitage Hall Committee and the Community Council had been a great success with about 50 people coming to it.

14. Date of next meeting

10 April 2025.