

Upper Liddesdale & Hermitage Community Council

Ordinary Meeting 14th November 2024

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 - 20

Meeting started at 19:00hrs

1. Presentation by SPEN on the proposed cross-border transmission link

Ewan Borthwick and Ross Laird were present and Marlene Mirimbe was on Teams to give the presentation. Ewan said that NESO had required them to design a two circuit 400 kV power line from a substation to be sited North of Galashiels (Gala North) to the border near Newcastleton. The pylons would be 50 to 61 metres high and would be lattice frame. The line was needed to bring power from onshore wind farms in the North of Scotland, which would be brought down to Livingston and then come down to Gala North. From the border, the line would travel to Harker, which was being upgraded and replaced. After looking at all the various options for putting a transmission line through the area, A preferred route had been identified. This consisted of a corridor through which the line would run, which would be tweaked depending on the consultation to give the best 'balance'. A substation would be placed at Whitrope to serve the wind farms in the area. The consultation would last until the 30th of November, though this was not a hard cut-off and responses would still be considered after this date.

The timeline for the planning process was that the Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) would be started Q1 of 2025. By Q3 2026 the route will be fixed and there will be a new consultation on the EIA. in Q1 2027 there will be an engineering review to fix the positions of the pylons. A planning application under Section 37 of the Electricity Act will be submitted in Q3 2027. The application period will be 12 months, after which construction will start in 2029 and the line will be live in 2033.

Questions from the audience followed.

On the protection of the peatlands, it was explained that the EIA would assess the peat distribution. GK pointed out that the line would pass right over Nine Stanes Rig other megalithic structures in the area. They stated that they did not know about that, but RW said it had been pointed out at the exhibition in Hermitage Hall some months earlier. There was general disquiet that points which had been raised in earlier consultation interactions appear to have been ignored and forgotten. Concern was raised about water sources, but it was explained that this would be assessed during the EIA. Jane Bower pointed out that the power from the onshore wind farms in the North of Scotland was being taken - or would be taken - by undersea cables down to England and asked why this line was necessary? Ewan stated that the undersea cables were only to take the offshore wind farm power, not the onshore power. GK asked if preferred routes had been worked up for the route from Livingston to Gala North and from the border to Harker. The reply was no, they had not. GK noted that since there was no preferred route coming down to

Gala North, or from the border to a Harker substation (whose site was not yet known), going through an exercise to establish a line here was premature.

When asked why the line could not go down the A7? The response was that the existing 132 kV line was built in the 1950s and current planning restrictions meant that putting a 400 kV line down the valley was not on.

GK asked about community benefit, what was in it for us to have our landscape ruined by these pylons? The answer was that the Scottish government is looking into possible community benefits. There could be a reduction in electricity costs for those near the power line, there could be help with house insulation or solar panels on the roof or hubs for charging EV cars. GK asked if there had been any previous instance where any of this had been provided? The answer was no.

GK noted that SPEN would be reporting back to NESO on the results of the consultation and asked for a show of hands of those who were satisfied that the line taking power from Scotland down to England and ruining our landscape in the process was a good thing? No hands were raised. GK asked for a show of hands of those who did not want their landscape ruined so the English could benefit from electricity produced in Scotland? The vote was unanimous.

2. Apologies for absence

Ian Hunter sent his apologies.

3. Approval of the minutes of the meeting on 12th September 2024

RW moved that the minutes were an accurate and true record of the meeting. MS seconded the motion. There were no dissenters. The motion was carried.

4. Matters arising

LG noted that on the matter of the tree tubes and bags left on the railway line, she had discovered that the land was being managed by Savilles and contacted Benedict Hoskins Abrehall to tell him about the bags. She had not yet been back to see if they had been now removed.

5. Consideration of a response to the proposed cross-border link transmission line.

Councillor Watson McAteer noted that 34 Councillors had put a motion to the Council that the consultation period be extended to the 31st of December, which was passed. However, SPEN seems to have ignored this and are sticking to 30th November as the cut-off date. He said that the route was the issue. It would be much more direct to take the line West from Gala North to Harker, which would go through forest and avoid any settlements. But the only justification for this route was to pick up proposed wind farms in the area. Also, the existing line down the A7 had been replaced two years ago, which leads one to question the extent to which planning restrictions really are a problem. Councillor Annette Smart said she had attended a lot of CC meeting and consultation events and so had a good overview of the feeling on this matter - which was that the community was against it in the strongest terms possible.

After some discussion, it was agreed that GK would ask for people who had made responses individually to send their responses to him and he would compile these into a response from the Community Council.

6. Place Plan update

RW reported that Claire Martin of consultants Community Enterprise had been shown around the area by RW. Claire said she would like to come and present at a CC meeting, but would be at the Chat meeting next Tuesday. Claire was working on the Plan. She had updated the demographics from the last 2022

Census and looked to see how it fitted with the Local Development Plan. Claire had noted our views on 'energy' and that as this community was a series of hamlets, rather than a village, it would be notably styled to reflect that.

7. Financial Report

MS spoke to his financial report. He noted that the bank balance as of this date is £3,082.22 and the net funds available after the ring-fenced funds had been accounted for was £960.38

8. Proposal to host a Christmas drop-in in conjunction with Hermitage Hall

This was agreed. RW and Penny Scott would liaise on the details of the offering. **RW would send out invitations to the Community by post. GK to supply labels for the envelopes.** Stamps and envelopes are in hand.

9. Any other business

It was noted that the fibre optic cable was being laid by the road sides. Do we know when we will be connected? **GK said that he did not, but we would find out.**

It was noted that there were a number of people living at and near Whitrope tunnel and there were a number of visitors to the Railway Heritage Centre. Would it be possible to have a resilience shed there? GK said he would put it on the schedule. It was also noted that a salt (grit) bin was needed at the corner on that bit of road. **GK said he would make enquiries. GK also said he would put phone numbers of people who could open the resilience shed on the website.**

8. Date of the next meeting

GK noted that Hermitage Hall was closed in January for a refurbishment. He proposed that we slip a month and have the next meeting on 13th February 2025, and every two months thereafter. This would mean our AGM would be in April, which would be after the financial year end and the year's accounts could be presented at the AGM. This was agreed.

The meeting ended at 21:00 hrs