

Upper Liddesdale & Hermitage Community Council

Ordinary Meeting 10th April 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, Ian Hunter (IH) Martin Steed (MS) Treasurer. Lynda Graham (LG, co-opted)

Members of the public - 10

Meeting started at 19:00hrs

1. Presentation: Invenergy Cliffhope wind farm

For Invenergy, the presentation was given by Maeve McCloskey and Alastair Hamilton. They introduced the company as being based in Chicago and being international in nature, specialising in renewable energy of all sorts. They noted three other wind farms in Scotland, Betty Hill, Corriegath and Pencloe which is in construction. They showed a map of the site which they had published as an initial presentation of how the 48 turbines (height 200m) might be distributed, but freely admitted that this would change in the light of consultations and data from other surveys they were undertaking.

They noted that the Scoping Report had already been submitted (but not yet published on the ECU website). The projected timeline was after initial public consultations, the design would be “chilled” and there will be further public consultations in September 2025. The Environmental Impact Assessment Report would be submitted in Q4 2025. They expected a determination in 2029. Construction would start in 2031 and the development would be operational in 2033.

On Community Benefit, they noted that a MOU had been signed with 9CC, a group of nine affected Community Councils for the Pencloe wind farm. They were prepared to offer £5000/MW per annum indexed to the date of the Final Commissioning and payable over the lifetime of the project. GK noted that the electricity from the wind farm would be going to England and that the profits from the wind farm would go to the United States. Scotland in general would get no benefit and this community in particular would suffer the destruction of its landscape as it is turned into an industrial energy production area. It was not a ‘good look’ that Invenergy were only prepared to offer the bare minimum they could get away with. GK asked for sight of the MOU with 9CC, which could be used as a model for our area and this was agreed.

Jane Bower asked about the cost of the project and Alastair Hamilton was vague on the matter, saying that for the turbine components themselves for a 350 MW scheme it would probably be about £750-800m, but there was the cost of the battery storage, the grid connection with any sub-station requirement and so on. Jane Bower asked if a sensitivity analysis had been done and what the decision date for the go-ahead? Alastair Hamilton was vague on the matter, noting the current volatility in the world economy, the review that NESO was doing on the connection entry list to try and minimise it and whether zonal energy pricing would be brought in as a result of the UK government’s energy policy review. The other matter was that Invenergy would not know what the MoD response would be until an application was actually submitted.

GK asked about the weight of the nacelle and Alastair Hamilton was vague on the matter. He noted that turbines were getting more efficient all the time and that the final power output of the turbines was yet to be determined. It would be 7-8 MW, but it could be more. When pressed about the actual weight of the nacelles Mr Hamilton mentioned a weight of 100 tonnes, but it could be more. The manufacturer would probably be Vestas. A question on the length of the turbine blades was asked and Maeve McCloskey stated a figure of 62 metres (but in a subsequent email this was corrected to 80 metres). The concrete plinth on which the tower would sit would be 8-9 metres in diameter and 4-5 metres thick. The earth removed from the hole would be spread around.

The proposed transport route from from the port of Blyth, then up the A68 or A698. Finally, the route would be up the A68 then turning off onto the A6088 and then into the Wauchope East (Forestry Land Scotland) forest at Southdean, crossing the B6357 into Wauchope West forest and so entering the site. When asked about the return route, Alastair Hamilton was vague on the matter and suggested the forest roads would be two-way, empty vehicles returning the way they came. There would be no traffic on the B6357 in that case.

A question on where the scheme would be connected to the grid was asked and Alastair Hamilton was vague on the matter. GK noted that in the TEC Register the connection was to be made at Hawick. Alastair Hamilton seemed to think that could change and the connection might be made to the Teviot substation.

On a question about lighting on the turbines, Alexander Hamilton stated that yes, lighting would be required. The MoD only required infra-red lighting, which was not visible, but for civilian aircraft the lighting would have to be visible red. This could be mitigated by upward pointing cones around the lights to prevent the lights being seen at ground level, or transponders which civilian aircraft could be required to carry, or just having lights on the turbines in the cardinal positions.

Jane Law asked about the noise from the turbines and it was stated that a background noise survey would be done by either Hayes McKenzie or Corley. An upper limit of 35 db was the goal. On a question about water sources, it was stated that a hydrological survey would be done with particular attention to private water sources.

Gary Cooper asked about the amount of forest that was going to be cut down and Alastair Hamilton stated that the policy was to keyhole the forest with clearances of radius 100m around the turbines.

Ian Graham asked about the carbon footprint of the wind farm and it was noted that there was a Scottish Government tool for calculating carbon footprint and this would be used.

2. Apologies for absence

There were none

3. Approval of the minutes of the ordinary meeting 13 Feb 2025

RW proposed the minutes were an accurate and true record of the meeting. This was seconded by MS. There were no dissenters and the motion was carried.

4. Matters arising

Place Plan RW noted that Community Enterprise had been commissioned to write the place plan, but after a period where they had been very 'quiet' RW enquired what was going on. It transpired that Clare Martin, who had been working on our Place Plan, had been busy working on Place Plans for neighbouring CCs and had wanted to coordinate them where appropriate. However, she was now moving on and only a draft had been done. RW commented that the draft report seemed to consist of stuff that we had done already, and it was not robust enough on landscape. There were no maps other than what was on the UL&H CC

website and there were no action plans. The grant money from Scottish Borders Council for this project was now all used up.

RW said that she was disappointed and wanted to communicate a collective disappointment from the Community Council and the community on the poor delivery of the specific brief. It was agreed that she could write on behalf of the CC and the community.

RW noted that although the report was not finished, it was in the format required by SBC to be included in the planning review and so we could finish the report ourselves. She thought it would need about two months to pull it together.

Tubes and bags on the railway LG reported that the tubes left by Tilhill and FLS were now gone, but the bags were still there on the 24th of March. Savilles said that they would contact the client. The bags were still there on 2nd April. LG said she would continue to press for their removal.

Information Board Design RW reported that a map of the area was being worked for the info boards and this map could also be used in the Place Plan. She would report on progress at the next meeting.

Oxygen Conservation GK reported that Oxygen Conservation (OC) had requested an opportunity to share their plans for the Blackburn/Hartsgarth nature conservation area and they would be coming to the CC meeting on 12th of June to do that. GK noted that there was much popular concern about the cull of goats which Oxygen Conservation had undertaken and he had asked for a statement from OC about this, which had been emailed to the community. A number of people raised concerns about the cull and mentioned how John Lamont MP had received a petition with 4000 signatures against the cull and would be raising the matter in Parliament. GK noted that goats are destructive and indiscriminate browsers. Farmers and land owners controlled the goats in the same way they would deer. GK noted that OC could be questioned further on this matter at the next CC meeting.

5. Financial Report

This was given at the AGM prior to this meeting on this day.

6. Teviot Wind Farm

The proposed Teviot Wind farm is a 350 MW development consisting of 52 turbines of height varying from 180 to 240 metres located about 10 km South West of Hawick. The developer is Muirhall Ltd.

Since it is larger than 50MW, the application goes straight to the Scottish Government for determination under Section 36 of the Electricity Act 1989. Scottish Borders Council are, however, a statutory consultee and on 3rd March the Planning and Building Standards Committee met to consider the application. Despite a report to the Committee by Scott Shearer of the Planning Department which clearly downplayed the negative effect on the landscape and heavily reinforced the requirement to meet the Scottish Government's renewables targets, the Committee voted 5 to 3 in favour of raising an objection.

As is now the custom, if a host local Council objects to a Section 36 Application, there will now be a Public Local Inquiry, if Muirhall decides to go ahead.

The primary group objecting to the wind farm is the Teviot Landscape Community, chaired by James Pow. They are now seeking funding for the legal and landscape expertise that will be needed to represent them in the Inquiry.

All work on processing applications for wind farms seems to have stopped at present while the UK government makes decisions regarding the future energy policy in the UK. If, for example, so called Zonal

Pricing is adopted, where each region in the UK effectively generates and manages its own electricity as favoured by Octopus, the country's largest energy provider and the National Electricity Systems Operator which manages the grid in the UK, then there would be no need for wind farms in the Scottish Borders to supply electricity for the South of England.

There is also a review of all the planning applications and consents that have not been built being conducted by NESO. This is due to the massive congestion of renewables energy wanting to get grid connection, which has led to connection dates stretching out ten years and more because the Transmission Operators like Scottish Power Energy Networks are too busy and there is a long waiting time for critical components like transformers. This Review will attempt to lessen the queue for connection by striking consented developments which have not been built for various reasons, or for which the developers do not have the cash, and applications for which plainly the developers do not have the cash or resources to actually build the wind farm.

Meanwhile an agreement in principle has been reached between Muirhall and the affected Community Councils on the payment of Community Benefit. A document has been circulated to the Community Councils for signing, but there is general agreement that negotiations are paused until it becomes clearer what Muirhall decides to do next.

7. Pines Burn wind farm

GK reported that the wind farm had started generating last October. Seven turbines were operational and five taller turbines were still in planning. Community Benefit payment was now being paid on this wind farm. GK said he had asked Foundation Scotland, who are handling the payments from the wind farm, to hand on to our share until we had a SCIO in place to handle it.

GK reported that both Windy Edge II wind farm (EnergieKontor) and Liddesdale wind farm (EDF) had been due to submit an application by now but had not yet done so. EDF are owned by the French government and had been told to stop all foreign expense and concentrate on nuclear energy for France, so this scheme may be abandoned.

GK reported that the Transmission Energy Capacity Register showed that as well as Teviot wind farm to be connected to they Teviot substation, another wind farm was Chesters developed by Queequeg, which had not been seen before. They are not answering emails or the telephone, so it is difficult to get any more information.

8. SPEN Cross Border Connection Project

GK reported that he had met with SPEN (Teams meeting) on 24th March

At the meeting was: Andrew Henderson of Greyling, who are managing the communications, Marlene Marimbe SPEN environment management, Euan Borthwick SPEN project management, Owen Campbell SPEN.

The point was made that the current round of consultations is an extension of Round 1, not Round 2 as is commonly stated. (This extension of Round 1 was forced on SPEN because of the inadequate nature of the first go-around). An interim report will be published in May regarding the responses to Round 1, which has concerned itself with the actual route of the transmission line. Based on that the actual positions of the pylons will be determined and Round 2 will then consult on that.

GK asked that we be updated on the Scottish Government's thinking on Community Benefit and how that will work. We would also like to identify which properties will be subject to a Residential Visual Amenity Assessment as part of the Environmental Impact Assessment.

At present the proposed sub-station on Black Rig just North of the Whitrope Heritage Railway centre is just a dot on the map. GK made the point that we should expect to be able to see detailed plans of the substation to assess its visual impact and this should be available on June 12th when they come to our CC meeting. To give some idea of the size, 400KV substations usually occupy an 80 acre site and this will be a combination 400KV and 132KV substation. It will be a very large structure. There is basically nowhere else they can put it as this is a fairly large, flat site.

GK put it to them that since we are affected by the change in route of the line around Newcastleton, where it is now proposed that the line runs to the East of Newcastleton rather than the West, we have been affected and so we should have an exhibition in Hermitage Hall showing how it will affect our community. They have subsequently agreed that there will be an exhibition on 24th of April from 3-7pm.

9. Action Against Pylons

A group has been formed to fight the pylons. It is called Action Against Pylons: Scottish Borders Alliance. There are a number of other Action Against Pylons groups in the country and there is active communication between them to learn from the experiences of others.

The group consists of affected Community Councils, including ours, Newcastleton, Teviot & Borthwick and Walkerburn, various tourist groups like the Save Scott's Countryside, John Lamont MP and Rachael Hamilton MSP. There are about 20 members.

After four meetings of the group and several meetings with SPEN and NESO a two pronged strategy has been formulated.

Firstly, there will be an effort to make SPEN underground as much of the transmission line as possible. A report by DNV which contrasted the cost of undergrounding to the effect on the landscape of overgrounding (that is, pylons) noted that the increase in cost of a hybrid line in which some of it would be undergrounded was "marginal". There will therefore be an attempt to pressure SPEN into undergrounding the line where it goes near settlements or sites of historic or scenic interest.

Secondly, the whole justification of the line will be argued with NESO who manage the grid, OFFGEM who manage NESO, and the UK government who manage OFFGEM. The proposal for the line would appear to be premature as there are no proposals to connect Livingston to the proposed substation at Gala North, and no proposals to connect the Southern end of the line at Newcastleton to Harker - or actually Harker's successor which has not been decided yet.

It is hoped to get cross-party support in opposing this line.

10. Any other business

None

11. Date of next meeting

12 June 2025