

Upper Liddesdale & Hermitage Community Council

Ordinary Meeting 11 May 2023

Draft Minutes

Meeting was held at Hermitage Hall.

Those attending:

Councillors - Annette Smart

Community Councillors - Geoffrey Kolbe (GK) Chairman, Rosie Webster (RW) Vice Chairman, Ian Hunter (IH) Secretary, Del Tucker (DT), Martin Steed (MS)

Members of the public - 20

Meeting started at 19:00hrs

1. Apologies for absence

Ward Councillors Jane Cox.

2. Presentation: Buccleuch Estates Woodland Planting Project

Stephen Adlard (forestry consultant) and David Nicholson (Buccleuch Estates) were present. Stephen Adlard (SA) gave a presentation on the proposed planting of the Leahaugh and Ninestane Rig forests. SA explained that on the whole, the planting was well below the national standard for sitka spruce as a percentage. The percentage of sitka spruce in the Ninestanes Rig forest was higher due to the presence of a number of archaeological sites which limited the total amount of land for planting. Planting sitka spruce was preferred on higher ground, where it grows better.

For Leahaugh, planting would be in small blocks, which would be clear felled. There was no planting design for Ninestane Rig as yet as there were changes being made due to consultation. One improved field in the South West corner would have been planted with native broadleaf, but was being left as a silage field due to local concern about planting improved land. It was intended to plant broadleaves in the water courses. A number of surveys have been done for archaeology, biodiversity and a botanical survey. There is peat on the higher ground which will be assessed, but most of it appeared to be less than 0.5m and so was OK for planting. A footpath was being considered through the forest to reach the Ninestanes Rig monument. There are a number of possible options.

Due to weight restrictions on the bridge at Hermitage Hall, timber would be taken out over Forestry Land Scotland tracks, if possible. If not, a new bridge would be built over Hermitage water downstream of the Hermitage Hall bridge and the timber would be brought out further down the B6399 which is approved for forestry transport.

SA showed a number of images showing how the mature forest would look from various view points. He noted that there would be changes in the view - but they would not be catastrophic!

On flooding, SA mentioned the UK Woodland Assurance scheme which set new standards for drainage. Drains would stop short of water courses and 'mounding' would be used instead of continuous ploughed furrows. SA noted that there were problems at harvest time due to the tracks that the harvest vehicles left and which increased run-off from the land. SA said that we should say where the problems were going to be.

RW noted that heavy vehicles on the land during planting at Larriston had affected the water supply from the springs. It was suggested that there be a 50m buffer zone around springs, but the problem was that forestry vehicles did not keep to the buffer zones. GK suggested plastic tape on posts around the springs which had worked on Arnton Fell. SA said that the Michinsons at Leahaugh Farm had their water supply in the proposed forest and they would make sure it was not impacted. Alena Warburton noted that creation of forestry roads and other water management works in the forest above their house had resulted in pollution of their water supply, which had silted up their hot and cold water system in their house! SA thought there was only the one water supply in our area, on Leahaugh. IH reported that he had two springs on Newlands, next to the proposed Leahaugh forest and he was concerned that the springs could be affected. SA reported that Michinson wanted to do the mounding on the forests, so he could be relied on to minimise problems.

Jane Bower (JB) noted that disease had wiped out the sitka spruce in the Czech Republic and that as Buccleuch Estates could take a longer term view than commercial forestry companies, they should instead go for more diversity in native broadleaf planting. SA said that broadleaf trees would be planted on the better ground, but sitka spruce did better than broadleaves on poorer ground. JB noted that she had planted a thousand hectares with native broadleaves up to 400m elevation just down the road and they were doing well.

Bill Murray asked who would compensate them for the devaluation of their house due to the planting of the forest? SA replied that there was no evidence that houses were devalued due to the planting of forests nearby.

Sandra Murrey noted that the B6399 was not suitable for timber transport as the road was too narrow for oncoming cars to pass. She doubted too if timber lorries could turn onto the B6357 at the bridge just North of Newcastleton. SA said he would record that in the report.

There was general agreement in the room that native broadleaves would be preferable to sitka spruce and JB made the point that Buccleuch Estates could take a longer term view than commercial forestry companies in that they did not need to maximise short term financial returns. On a longer view, native broadleaves did offer a good financial return. They were more attractive with respect to carbon credits and there were good forestry grants for planting.

3. Presentation: Tarras Valley Nature Reserve

Jenny Barlow and Angela Williams shared the presentation. Angela Williams noted that they had acquired 10.5 thousand acres of land from Buccleuch Estates as a community buyout in two tranches at a cost of £6M. There were 6 houses, three derelict properties and one farm (Combe Farm) on the property. She noted that the buyout was one thing, but now they had a number of responsibilities and liabilities and so they had to create a sustainable financial future for the Reserve.

There is a 5 year plan being worked on, which is linked to Langholm's Community Plan. They are looking for a way to move from a financial model which currently depends mostly on grants to one where they generate most of their income themselves. There are various possible income streams. One is visitors, they had 16k+ visitors last year. There is income from the farm. Carbon sequestration (carbon credits) is a 'wild west' at the moment, so they are holding off on that until risks and benefits become more apparent. They are renovating one of the derelict cottages for visitors and trying to be Net-Zero in its renovation. They are looking at glamping and sustainable tourist units.

They aim to bring people together through environmental education - school kids, primary and secondary, discovering nature on their doorstep. They look forward to offering apprenticeships to help people have a

career on the land. They are getting regular visits from universities who do field studies and they offer volunteer weekends for people from near and far. There is a website coming.

Drone surveys are being done to map the land for fauna and flora species. They are undertaking work to remove the self seeded sitka spruce from the moor and undertake peatland restoration

4. Approval of the Minutes of the Ordinary meeting on 3rd March 2023

DT proposed that the minutes be approved as a true record of the meeting. IH seconded the motion. Motion approved.

5. Matters arising

RW reported that the new Coast to Coast cycle track would come up the B6399 and there was a concern about traffic associated with the Buccleuch forests

6. Report: Oxygen Conservation

GK reported on a lunch meeting given by Oxygen Conservation at Hartsgarth Farm on the 5th of April. He noted that they had not made up their mind what they wanted to do with Hartsgarth and Blackburn farms and they would take a year or so to make up their minds. Rich Stockdale, the Managing Director, gave a presentation. Their guiding principle is to create a Net-Zero sustainable environment as part of an effort to mitigate against global warming. They were not for 'rewilding' however. They wanted to plant trees, but native broadleaves and not sitka spruce. In questions, Rich was asked if it was intended to put a hydro scheme on Blackburn Falls. Rich replied that hydro schemes were a red line for them as they damage the environment so much. On the matter of wind farms, Rich thought they might look at this, but there was general disquiet in the audience about the prospect of a wind farm.

7. Report: Pines Burn Traffic Management plan

GK reported on the ongoing saga of the alterations that operator EnergieKontor are making to the roads to enable the abnormal loads of turbine parts to be brought into Pines Burn wind farm. GK reported that the closure of the A6088 at Kirkton was now not going to happen and there were to be meetings with the operator to seek alternative solutions. It was to be hoped that as a result of this debacle, communities would be able to have input into the Traffic Movement Plans for wind farms from now on - firstly to use local knowledge to identify problem places and secondly so that the communities were well warned about the traffic movements and make alternate arrangements.

The question was put as to whether traffic movements could be done at night and GK answered that this was the intention (though it has since been reported that the turbine blades - 21 of them - will be brought in in daytime).

8. Report: Place Plan survey

RW reported that there had been 45 responses from 200 people in our area. RW said she had yet to do a proper analysis of the survey, but the main concerns of the area appeared to be the state of the roads, land use and mobile/broadband. The main dislikes were sitka spruce and windfarms!

9. Report: National Park

Jane Bower (JB) gave an update on the prospects of a National Park being designated in our area. There were worries about the disruption of this process due to the resignation of Nicola Sturgeon. The timetable was that proposals were to be in by September and there would be an announcement at the end of this year. However, it would appear the responsible Minister, Lorna Slater, is sticking to the timetable. Lorna Slater just made an announcement that she was now accepting expressions of interest in designating areas for a National Park and JB stated that she had filed an expression of interest as of today.

There was also a Scottish Government consultation on the criteria by which proposals for National Park designations would have to be judged. By-and-large the questions seemed to be sensible. JB said that the Campaign would continue to engage with the Scottish Government.

Minister Lorna Slater's announcement stimulated a huge amount of interest from the media and JB had been giving a number of interviews on TV and radio about the proposed Scottish Borders National Park.

10. Coronation Lunch Report

GK reported that the lunch had been a perfect day. Lady Emma Tenant was asked to propose the loyal toast and she graciously agreed to do so. GK noted that this had been a joint effort on behalf of the Hermitage Hall Committee and the Community Council. GK thanked John and Penny Scott for their hard work in organising the event. Also members of the Hermitage Hall Committee and the Community Council for helping to set up for the event. GK thanked Scottish Borders Council for a grant of £500 which enabled the event to be free for the local community. There was about £186 in expenses outstanding, and it was proposed that this be split between the Hermitage Hall Committee and the Community Council. There was general agreement for this proposal.

Ian Graham complained that he and Lynda Graham did not get an invitation for the lunch, which had been sent out by email by the Community Council and the Hermitage Hall Committee. He noted that there had been ongoing problems receiving emails from the Community Council. IH also said that he had had problems with emails from the Community Council. GK said that the Community Council was aware that there were a number of people who were not getting information through email, which is the regular means of communication, and were trying to identify them to communicate with them by other means. GK apologized that they had not received an invitation to the lunch. Ian Graham said that he was not accepting the apology.

11. Meetings attended: Teviot and Liddesdale Partnership 18th April

DT reported that the application by Hermitage Hall Committee for funds to landscape the ground behind Hermitage Hall had been accepted.

12. Conversion with Buccleuch Estates regarding shooting activities

IH reported an incident where stalkers from the Midlands who had the stalking rights over Buccleuch Estates land in this area were found wandering along the road with a map in one hand and their rifle in the other, seeming rather lost. IH also reported shots being fired from what seemed like a very high powered rifle which had been frightening. There seemed to be a worrying lack of basic shooting safety and of communication to the community that stalking was taking place. **GK said he would write to Buccleuch Estates to try and improve the situation.** Councillor Annette Smart asked to be kept in the loop on this matter. Stephen Adlard noted that once planting had been finished on the Leahaugh and Ninestane Rig forests, Buccleuch Estate keepers would be undertaking deer control.

It was reported by Lynda Graham and others that there was still a problem in walking dogs in the area where the dogs would find galloch and deer legs. It was difficult to get the deer legs from the dogs and the sharp nails could do damage if swallowed by the dogs. A map had been created where the dogs had found these remains. **GK said he would write to Tilhill and FLS about this matter again.**

13. Conversation regarding Super Cars racing on the B6357.

DT reported instances of 20+ Porsche proceeding at high speed down the road. IH reported that parades of supercars including Lamborghinis were racing down the road, preceded by a spotter car to ensure no traffic was encountered. It was agreed that this practice was dangerous and a serious accident was waiting to happen. **DT said he would write to Constable Allan Patterson on this matter**

14. Any other business

RW said that the Community Council's facebook page had become somewhat neglected and suggested that a new Facebook page should be created. It was agreed that a new Facebook site should be set up and **RW agreed to set up the site**

John Scott reported that the bench seat on the other side of the road to the Hall had been destroyed by a car not making it around the bend to go over the bridge. John Scott has asked that road signs be put up indicating the bend in the road as this was the second time in six months this had happened. He had also asked Scottish Borders Council to replace the bench and had high hopes that they would be able to do this.

11. Date of next meeting

13 July 2023

Meeting ended at 21:15 hrs.