

Upper Liddesdale & Hermitage Community Council

Ordinary Meeting 12th June 2025

Draft Minutes

Meeting was held at Hermitage Hall.

Those attending:

Councillors: Watson McAteer

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 - 20

Meeting started at 19:00hrs

1. Presentation: SPEN - Cross Border Connection Project

The latest thinking on the preferred route for the transmission line was given by Marlene Marimbe with Euan Borthwick, Owen Cambell and Nicola Ludwig in attendance. It was explained that they were looking at a preferred route for the transmission line that was further to the east to avoid the settlement of Steel Road and the houses nearby. Engineers were Exploring the possibilities.

Engineers were also looking at the placement of the pylons along the preferred route which would be done in November this year. Round two of the consultations would now take place in the third quarter of 2026 and it was estimated that determination by the Scottish government would take place in 2029.

The proposed location for the Teviot substation would now be north of Leap Hill instead of the South, but they needed to be careful to avoid the Catrail. In response to questions it was stated that the Teviot substation would occupy about a 500 by 300 metre area of ground and the transformers for the site would weigh about 100 tons.

In response to a question on How the meeting would be reported, it was stated that whether the audience was for or against the transmission line would not be reported. It was asked that it be recorded that the meeting was 100% against the transmission line.

2. Presentation:

a) Oxygen Conservation, Plans for Blackburn/Hartsgarth

A presentation whilst given by Dave Keir of Oxygen Conservation. Dave explained that any land owner receiving funding from the Scottish government must now show benefits to the community from their project. This is different from the community benefit which is obtainable from wind farm projects but it must show some economic benefit to the community. Oxygen conservation is looking for projects and ideas which the community could do together with the company. Some ideas they had included internship programs for young people learning about the nature and land. They are establishing a Oxygen Accelerator Program which is to help for new businesses to start up. An example given was a stalking business in Perthshire. Another idea was establishing walks around the estate. GK suggested that a path to Blackburn Falls would be of great benefit to the community. GK also noted that He looked forward to working with them on the matter of flood management.

On the proposed wind farm, It was stated that the feasibility study was in an early stage. Ornithology and peat surveys had been completed. It was proposed to build the wind farm in the north of Heartsgarth. A questioner noted that the land on which Pines Burn wind farm was located was fenced off with warning notices that people could be electrocuted and asked if this was this going to happen on Hartsgarth? Dave Kier responded that this was not their plan.

Gary Cooper noted that birch die back had been reported in this country in trees imported from abroad and asked about tree diseases in the stock which Oxygen Conservation were going to plant? Dave responded that the seeds for their trees were acquired locally or from areas a little to the north of this area. So all the sources were local and no diseases would be imported. Dave noted that they would be planting about 1.6 million trees.

On a question about the very dry period we have had and the risk of fire particularly since the sheep have been taken off the land and now the grass is quite high Dave responded that they would provide some camping areas for anybody who did want to camp in the area. This would help mitigate against any fires being caused by wild campers in the area.

b) Oxygen Conservation, Langholm wild goats

David Braithwaite, Chairman of the Wild Goats Conservation Group, gave a short presentation in which he Said that their group was seeking to become a constituted organization. They will be linking with the British primitive goat research group led by Dr Shirley Goodyear and would collect DNA samples in the hope of proving that the goats could be shown to be a remnant of Bronze Age goats. They also wanted to do a census of the number of goats on the Langholm Hills. He noted that a petition had 3820 signatures protesting against the untimely cull of the goats, which had been very well received by Rachael Hamilton MSP and John Lamont MP. A Scottish government petition to have the goats declared a protected species had 11,500 signatures and the matter would be discussed in the Scottish Parliament after the summer recess.

GK asked Dave Keir of OC to respond and he said that the Scottish Government had told them to control the goats and other browsers (by shooting) rather than erect a fence and they were obligated to follow Scottish Government requirements in this matter.

Jane Bower noted that the goats were not “wild” but were actually domesticated goats which had escaped and were therefore, ‘feral’ rather than wild. GK read out a letter from the Scottish Government to Rachael Hamilton in which they also considered the goats to be a feral non-native species and therefore could not be protected. David Braithwaite stated that their intent was to change the Scottish Government’s mind so that the goats were protected.

3. Apologies for Absence

Councillors Jane Cox and Annette Smart sent apologies for absence.

4. Approval of the minutes of the Ordinary meeting 10th April 2025

IH 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.

5. Matters arising

a) Information boards

RW reported that Vivienne Seeley of VivID Design Consultancy had produced an infoboard design of the area that she showed on the projector screen. It met with general approval and it was agreed that this design should be adopted. RW explained that it would be placed at Hermitage Hall and at the resilience shed layby opposing Larriston House with the “you are here” red circle appropriately placed.

b) Place Plan

RW reported that the Place Plan was at the pre-submission draft stage with a little more editing necessary. It would be submitted to Scottish Borders Council for a check to see that it met the criterion before being published for adoption by the local community and other stakeholders. GK thanked RW for the hard work she had put in to prepare the Place Plan with general agreement from the meeting.

c) Tubes and bags on Railway

LG stated that the tubes and bags had finally been removed. GK thanked her for her persistence in this long running matter.

6. Financial Report

MS presented a statement of account which showed £810.97 of unrestricted funds and a total ringfenced funds of £2725.84. GK noted that the resilience shed at the top end of Hermitage valley was now in place and would soon be populated with resilience items - at which point MS would receive an invoice!

7. Ciffhope Wind Farm

GK noted that Invenenergy had submitted a EIA Report to the Scottish Government, setting out the methodology which they would use to determine the impact of the proposed wind farm. GK referred to a draft response which had been posted on the website and asked that this be approved. There was general agreement to do so.

8. Fibre Connectivity

GK noted that Openreach was now installing fibre routers in houses and urged people to apply to their broadband provider to have the fibre router installed in their house. There was a socket on the back of the router into which the current telephone could be plugged and so a new telephone was not required. The phone would not work if there was a power cut, however, and GK urged everyone to buy a small Uninterruptable Power Supply which would power the phone and the router for about an hour in the event of a power cut - long enough to enable people to get information on the power cut or call for help should they need it.

9. Any other business

RW asked GK how the Community Trust for this area was coming along and he said it was work in progress.

10. Date of next meeting

14 August 2025