

Upper Liddesdale & Hermitage Community Council

Ordinary Meeting 3rd February 2020

Draft Minutes

Location: Hermitage Hall

Present:

Community Councillors - Geoffrey Kolbe (GK) Chairman, Andrew Warburton (AW) Vice Chairman, John Scott (JS) Treasurer

SB Councillors - George Turnbull, Watson McAteer, Davy Paterson.

Member of the public - seven

Meeting started at 7:00 pm

1. Apologies for absence

Community Councillor Lawrence Scott

2. Police Report

Constable Alan Patterson explained that there had been a change in the format of the Police Report and reports were now not compiled individually for each of the CC areas, but were now to be aggregated into reports for the two regions Hawick-Denholm and Hawick-Hermitage. When asked why, Constable Patterson said it was for data protection under GDPR. However, when pressed, it seemed that the changes were as much to do with saving money as compiling reports tailored for each local community was a significant drain on police resources.

Cllr. Watson McAteer expressed his “disgust” that the local Inspector had not consulted with SBC Councillors - or indeed the Community Councils - before making these changes, a view enthusiastically endorsed by the other two Councillors. It was agreed that if we were going to have Police Reports, they should be useful to the local community and that it was an important police function to meet with local communities and inform local communities about criminal activity which affected them.

It was agreed that a letter should be written to Chief Inspector Stuart Reid asking him to reinstate the previous format of Police Reports, pending a proper consultation on this matter.

3. HEEPs presentation (Gary Miller of Changeworks)

Gary Miller explained that Changeworks is an environmental charity working with Scottish Borders Council (SBC) to deliver the Scottish Government’s (SG) Energy Efficiency Program in Scotland. The Home Efficiency Energy Program seeks to provide funding to tackle fuel poverty and improve the efficiency of people’s homes. “Fuel Poverty” is defined by post code area and home owners are not means tested to qualify for the grant, which is up to £7500 per household.

Gary Miller explained that they had found there was a credibility gap, where people were inured to approaches from companies of uncertain reputation offering cut-price double glazed windows, loft insulation and cavity wall insulation and it was difficult to persuade them that this was a government backed scheme delivered in cooperation with the local authority. He said that in this regard, their efforts in Newcastleton had been greatly helped by the Newcastleton & District Community Trust (NDCT) who were a “known and trusted face” in the community. As a result, the uptake in the Newcastleton area had been around 25% of household, in contrast to 4% on average in other areas. Property surveys to determine what help could be given - if any - were free and with no obligation.

In response to questions, Gary Miller explained that contractors were chosen by Changeworks. It was not currently the policy to improve the energy efficiency of a property up to a certain standard (as will shortly be required by SG for properties when they are sold), though this may be the case in the future.

A resolution "To support Changeworks in their scheme to improve home energy efficiency in this area, in conjunction with SBC" was agreed unanimously. It was also agreed that Changeworks could send out information packs to the homes in this area with a letter of support from UL&H CC. Information about the HEEPs scheme would be put on the UL&H CC website and promoted through email and other communications.

3. Approval of the minutes of the last meeting

JS proposed that the minutes be approved. AW seconded the proposal. The minutes were approved unanimously

4. Matters arising

JS reported that Royal Mail had decided not to put in a post box at Hermitage Hall. JS said that Royal Mail had been very uncooperative and had seemingly based their decision on a wholly erroneous estimate of the number of households within one mile of the proposed site, which they would not justify or correct. It was agreed that a letter should be sent to John Lamont MP, asking for his help interceding with Royal Mail on this matter.

On the matter of the lack of road markings on long stretches of the B6357 which had recently been relaid, Cllr Watson reported that surveys of road markings were being done within a set program and would be marked up in due course.

Flooding on the road by Newlands, (from Steele Road to the B6399) had not been a problem now the drain under the road had been cleared.

The electricity pole near the entrance to Hartsgarth Farm, which is now almost in the river due to the river changing course and threatens to be undermined in severe flooding, has been examined by Scottish Power engineers and it is proposed to replace the adjacent poles with stronger ones and carry the span over the river without any intermediate supporting pole.

There had as yet been no response from SBC Roads department about the Hewisbridge End bridge, where there is no hazard warning of any sort on the approaches to the bridge and where a visual aid such as painting the parapet ends would be appropriate.

It was also reported that the bridge on the B6399 between Longhaugh Farm and Leehaugh Cottage had been damaged and the complete parapet on one side had been dislodged, with a consequent hazard to passing traffic which might go into the river! Sandra Murray reported that there were no hazard warning signs put out either side of the bridge. We were informed that a bridge structural survey was being undertaken.

Penny Scott was concerned that road verges were being damaged by farm vehicles pulling off the roads to avoid other road traffic and hoped that this could be minimised by reminding all road users that the road verges were a valuable ecosystem.

5. Treasurer's report

JS spoke to a written report, which he had presented to the meeting. (See attached)

JS stated that the insurance renewal had been done.

6. Project Updates

Resilience Plan JS reported that the Resilience sheds were now in place. The plan and items for the sheds were to be given to the Resilience Team (GK, JS and Sandra Murray) on the 4th of February. This plan will be put on the UL&H CC website. A vote of thanks was given to Brian McFarlane of SBC for his support in this project.

Community Trust JS reported that he had attended the Ambitious Communities event at Castle Douglas on 4th December. There Isla McCulloch of the Development Trusts Association had given a presentation.

Interpretation Boards GK regretted that he had made no further progress on this matter. However, it was reported that SBC may undertake the fabrication of the information boards and failing that, there was a company in Coldstream which could make them GK and AW to progress this.

Defibrillator GK to provide plan and costing for a defibrillator for the B6357

Paths installation/replacement AW to propose a plan for footpath renewal for the next meeting. In the meantime, £450 needs to be spent on footpaths from the UL&H CC budget by 28th Feb to qualify for a

footpaths grant. It was agreed that signage to the Nine Stanes would form a suitable basis for using these monies.

Borderlink Superfast Broadband GK reported that despite the challenges of terrain and weather which had proved more than Borderlink had experience in the East or which they had expected here in the West, they had worked steadily to improve the reliability of their network, to the point where GK was now prepared to terminate his BT broadband contracts. It was noted that the network had yet to be completed with respect to a relay to serve the properties on the Kielder road. The costs associated with the lease arrangement with the property owner meant that this relay was not commercially justifiable as matters stood. However, Borderlink would be one of the companies contracted to complete the R100 scheme later this year and with the grants available under that scheme, it would be possible to install the final relay and complete the network.

8. SBC Budget Matters

It had been agreed by SBC that the CC budget would retain its current format for the year 20/21 and CC grant funds were ringfenced. In reply to a query by JS, Cllr. McAteer reported that of the £500k funds given by the SG for distribution to the communities via bids through the Area Partnerships, approximately £100 was left over and it was currently planned to roll these monies over to the next financial year. However, this was subject to approval by those responsible for the council budget and the council itself.

JS asked the CC to support a proposal by the Four Federations of Community Halls to SBC to preserve historic rural hall funding through one consolidated organisation, rather than be funded through bids to the Community Fund by each individual Community Hall. JS declared a conflict of interest, as a member of the Hermitage Hall Committee, and offered to excuse himself from the discussion. But GK noted that the Hermitage Hall benefited the whole community and from that viewpoint, what was good for the hall was good for the community and asked JS to participate in the discussion. After a brief discussion, a motion was put to the CC whereby "UL&H CC endorse the proposal of the Four Federations as set out in their letter to the SBC elected members dated 9th December 2019 and urge Councillors to support the proposals." This was proposed by GK, seconded by AW and passed unanimously.

9. Dark Skies

It was reported that at a Teviot and Liddesdale Area Partnership (AP) meeting on 4th December, it was agreed by 5 of the 7 member CCs to request funding of £5k per CC to cover the cost of the two year survey required as part of the application for "Dark Sky" designation. UL&H CC had not been represented at that meeting and had no further details. GK wrote to Barbara Elborn of Newcastleton & District CC (NDCC), who had made the proposal for details. Barbara Elborn responded but without giving the requested details. AW will attend the next AP meeting on 18th February and will add the support of the UL&H CC for this project.

10. Road Closures

The frustration of the local community in regard to the repeated and lengthy closures of roads - in particular the B6357 - was impressed upon the Councillors present. Too, the forthcoming work by BT on the B6399 near Whitrope, where the road would be closed for five days from the 17th of February, would appear to lack any coordination of planning or concern to minimise the disruption to road users and the local community. The Councillors present all concurred that BT were not open to cooperation or sensitive to local concerns on the matter of road closures. They suggested that a letter to the MP and MSP was the most profitable way forward.

It was agreed that the current work on the B6357 (repairing the cattle grids at Ash Trees and Slatie Brae) needed to be finished before the work on the B6399 started and a joint letter with NDCC should be written to the SBC Roads department. This matter should also be raised at the next AP meeting.

11. Meetings attended

SBCCN meeting on the 5th of February - to be attended by GK

NDCC meeting on 11th February - to be attended by JS

AP meeting 18th February - to be attended by AW

12. National Park update

Jane Bower reported on a new project being undertaken by the Campaign for a Scottish Borders National Park, which was to uncover the history, archaeology and social impact of the burning of the 12 Towers of Rule Water by an English army in 1545, as reported in various letters by the Earl of Hartford (who led the army) and others to Henry VIII, but about which very little more is known.

13. Communication

There were no communications

14. Any Other Business

It was reported that there was a lot of rubbish which had been dumped on the B6399 near Hawick. The Councillors present noted this.

15. Date of Next Meeting

April 6th

Meeting ended at 9:05pm