

Upper Liddesdale & Hermitage Community Council

Ordinary Meeting 9th March 2023

Draft Minutes

Meeting was held at Hermitage Hall.

Those attending:

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 - 10

Meeting started at 19:00hrs

1. Apologies for absence

Ward Councillors Waton McAteer, Annette Smart and Jane Cox.

Andrew and Alena Warburton, John and Penny Scott.

2. Approval of the Minutes of the Ordinary Meeting 12th January 2023

IH moved that the minutes be accepted as a true record of the meeting. DT seconded the motion. Motion was accepted

3. Matters arising

There were no matters arising

4. Treasurer's Report (John Scott)

John Scott (JS) had previously circulated a statement of the accounts to the Community Councillors. GK noted that there was £3631.76 in the bank, of which £2121.84 was ring-fenced and that left £1509.92 as unencumbered funds. It was noted that we would not get the grant from SBC if the account remained at this level.

5. Buccleuch New Woodland Planting

MS and IH attended the consultation presentation on 20th February at Buccleuch House in Newcastleton. MS reported that the bridge next to Hermitage Hall was apparently 'fragile' and the plan was to create another bridge to access the Ninestanes Rig plantation. It was not known where the bridge would be as yet as work was ongoing on the design.

MS asked about the amount of Sitka Spruce being planted and if this could be replaced with Native Broadleaf trees? The answer was that this was not as economic since the crop rotation period for Sitka Spruce was 40 years against 100 years for Native Broadleaf. As it was, there were (comparatively) large amounts of open ground due to the archaeology of the area, and ground unsuitability. There would in fact be only 37% Sitka spruce coverage on the Leahugh plantation, and 63% on the Ninestanes Rig plantation.

MS asked about the path to the Ninestanes monument itself and was told that the monument was actually on Forestry Scotland land. It could be approached through the Ninestanes Rig plantation via the various rides and open ground.

IH felt that the presentation had been very informal and “unprofessional”. He had spoken to Stephen Adlard, the consultant designing the forests and to “John” from Buccleuch Estates. IH noted that later versions of the map for the Ninestanes Rig design had moved the planting further up the hill instead of being down to the roadside as indicated on the published maps.

There were general complaints that there had been no discussion with land owners bounding the forests and community consultation had been sporadic. Meadow and hayfield improved pasture was being turned into forest, a process that could never be reversed.

There were also general complaints that previous plantings had led to increased water run-off from the land and so increased flooding. This had been the case particularly at Leahaugh Cottage. It must be ensured that mounding should be used rather than ploughing, or if ploughing was done, it should be along the hill contour and not up-and-down the hill which increased water run-off.

There was also commented that the B6399 road was not suitable for log lorries. When the time for harvest came, there would be a lot of disruption to the traffic on that road, which is a school bus route from Newcastleton to Hawick. RW reported that the Coast-to-Coast cycle route was to open in July and it was planned that the route would pass up the B6399 from Newcastleton to Hawick. **RW said she would contact the organisers of the Coast-to-Coast cycle route about possible conflicts of the cycle route on roads used by forestry lorries.**

Jane Bower suggested that the NFUS should be invited to have a look at the plans to see how much improved ground it was proposed to plant. She also commented that riparian planting near the river was regarded as good practice for environmental purposes and such planting should be encouraged in these plans.

The point was made that they will plant as much as they can unless we push back to curb their desire to maximise the economic benefit of the exercise.

GK commented that we seemed to be at the start of a journey on the planning of these forests and it was evident that much more community involvement was desirable. **GK said he would write to Buccleuch Estates and to Stephen Adlard** with the comments made at this meeting and hopefully engage with them to make suitable changes. He also noted that the Ordnance Survey maps indicated a footpath to the Ninestanes monument over the Buccleuch Estates land to be planted and we should negotiate with them to install a footpath to the monument, and a car park by the road.

The question was asked if there was a ‘change of use’ planning requirement for planting forestry and **GK said he would find out.**

6. Buccleuch Sale of Land - Blackburn Farm and Hartsgarth Farm.

The sale of the land to Oxygen Conservation was currently going through. GK reported that he had asked a representative from the company to come to the meeting and explain what they intended to do, but they had declined, stating that they might come to a future meeting. Residents of Hartgarth Cottage or Leahaugh Cottage, both of which bound the land of Hartgarth Farm, had not been informed of the sale, nor had they been visited by Oxygen Conservation.

Jane Bower reported that the Laings of Twislehope Farm had been visited, but they have a contract to farm sheep on Hartsgarth. She said that it seemed Oxygen Conservation was financed from the proceeds of an online gambling business and so there was no shortage of cash! It seemed that they wanted to take a year to decide what they wanted to do with the land, but indicated that they wanted to get some cattle on the ground and do some tree planting - but not Sitka Spruce! They had not mentioned wind turbines, though they own a large number of other small businesses which consisted of one or two turbines. It was commented that the company was looking to recruit a local manager.

7. Meetings attended

RW attended the Teviot & Liddesdale Partnership meeting. A presentation has been given by Harry Whitmore of South of Scotland Community Housing (SOSCH) who was trying to promote the renovation of derelict and poor quality housing to bring it up to modern standards. They did not actually provide money for this, but would help facilitate grants to this end. This was a community based project aimed at decreasing the decline in population.

There had been a disagreement between the Councillors and the CC representatives in that the Pot B panel had refused funds for an event in Newcastleton, but the Councillors over-rode that decision.

DT reported on the meeting of affected Community Councils with Muirhall Energy regarding the Community Benefit from Teviot Wind Farm. He noted that the preferred route was to form a Company Limited by Guarantee to handle the £2.8M per year that would come from the Community Benefit. It seemed that two CCs were not represented at the meeting and some CC representatives would not accept an agreement unless all CCs were represented to agree. The desire was to set up an agreement so that the agreed Community Benefit would be legally binding on any successor to Muirhall Energy. There would be another meeting at which final agreement would hopefully happen.

DT noted that there was an online meeting with Local Energy Scotland on the 20th of March, which he would not be able to attend. The details of the possible arrangement would be explained at this meeting. **GK said he would attend.**

8. Place Plan

RW explained the purpose of the Place Plan was to enable the CC to better target SBC resources in the community and be aware of the community view on a range of issues. RW presented her draft questionnaire, which she had modelled on the Southdean CC Place Plan questionnaire. GK had made a number of suggestions about improving the form. RW agreed to amend the form and wanted to start the consultation period on the Tuesday of the CHAT at Hermitage Hall at the end of March, and finish it at the end of April. This was agreed. RW said the data would then be analysed and the results would be published on the website.

It was agreed that the preference would be to post the questionnaire to each household including a stamped-addressed return envelope to post back the form. Given that there are about 100 houses in the community, and second class postage is 68 pence, this would involve about £140 for postage, on top of which would be the cost of the paper, printing and envelopes. There was general agreement that the CC would commit to this expenditure.

GK said he could create an online version of the questionnaire.

9. National Park

Jane Bower from the Campaign for a Scottish Borders National Park gave an update on the process by which the Scottish Government is creating new National Parks. She reported that the resignation of the First Minister and the subsequent election process for a new leader of the SNP had thrown the whole

process in the air. The promise to create a new NP came about because the SNP had formed an alliance with the Scottish Greens after the last election and there is no certainty that this alliance would hold with a new leader. That might halt the process of creating a new NP, though she said that locally, the SNP Councillors were more enthusiastic for a NP than the Conservatives!

Jane Bower vowed that whatever happened, the Campaign would carry on. The Campaign had published a document on Countryside Visitor Management. This proposed setting up a 'Ranger Network' which would include not only Park Rangers and SBC Rangers, but also farmers and land managers. This would act in a similar way to the Scottish Partnership Against Rural Crime and would help educate farmers and landowners on ways to manage visitors to minimise impact on their land businesses.

Jane Bower reported on the 12 Towers of Rule project in which there had been a lot of ongoing interest. In partnership with Archaeology Scotland, who were leading a number of archaeological digs, a lot of children and adults had learned skills that could be transferred to other tasks.

The Campaign had now secured £5k funding for Professor Richard Oram to do an archive search of the historical records of this period (1545). The resulting report would give academic respectability to the project, and enable the Campaign to seek funding from bodies such as the Heritage Lottery Fund. Jane Bower said the Campaign was continuing to consult with communities to determine what sort of NP the area wanted.

10. Any other Business

GK reported that SBC was giving £500 to each CC to be spent on celebrating the Coronation in May. GK said he had talked to the Hermitage Hall Committee Chairman and they were agreeable in principle to a joint effort. A Sunday Lunch on May 7th was suggested. It was agreed that this was a good way to spend the £500 grant. GK said that Newcastleton CC was not minded to organise any celebration in the village due to the poor local economic conditions. We could thus put on a celebration for us and Newcastleton.

IH reported that the B3699 would be closed from the 5th of March for three weeks due to road subsidence at Whitrope Foot. GK did not think we had been notified of this.

11. Date of next meeting

11 May 2023

Meeting ended at 20:15 hrs.