

SCOTTISH BORDERS COUNCIL

MINUTES of Meeting of the TWEEDDALE
AREA FORUM held in Council Chamber,
Council Offices, Rosetta Road, Peebles on
Wednesday, 2nd September, 2015 at 6.30
pm

- Present:- Councillors W. Archibald (Chairman), C. Bhatia, K. Cockburn, G. Garvie,
Community Councillors G. Hughes, G. Parker, J. Taylor, G. Tulloch.
- Apologies:- Councillors S. Bell and G. Logan. Community Councillors C. Lewin, M.
McIntosh, Mr K. Langley, Station Manager, SFRS.
- In Attendance:- Inspector Mike Bennett (Police Scotland), Forward Planning Manager (M.
Wanless), Engineering Design Manager (P. Frankland), Lead Officer for
Transport and Access (G. Johnstone), Project Engineer (P. Aitken), Network
Manager (B. Young), Infrastructure Manager (C. Ovens), Democratic Services
Officer (K. Mason).
Members of the Public: 3.

1. ORDER OF BUSINESS.

The Chairman varied the order of business as shown on the agenda and the Minute reflects the order in which the items were considered at the meeting.

2. CHAIRMAN'S REMARKS

- (a) Sunnybrae Lodge, Walkerburn
The Chairman advised he was pleased to see that work had commenced to renovate and re-establish an A listed building known as Sunnybrae Lodge, Walkerburn.

**DECISION
NOTED.**

- (b) SESPlan
The Chairman advised that information relating to the SESplan main issues report consultation from 21 July – 30 September 2015 and on community event dates would be distributed by the Democratic Services Officer at the conclusion of the meeting.

**DECISION
NOTED.**

3. MINUTE.

There had been circulated copies of the Minute of the Meeting held on 27 May 2015.

**DECISION
NOTED.**

With reference to paragraph 17 of the Minute, Councillor Bhatia referred to Councillor Archibald's column in an edition of the Peeblesshire News which indicated that the SNP in administration at Scottish Borders Council had made available £3,000 to create an additional school bus service between Peebles and West Linton. She advised that the

additional school bus service had been supported by all Members of the Tweeddale Area Forum.

**DECISION
NOTED.**

With reference to paragraph 4 of the Minute, Ms Lynn Lauder, Interim Area Manager Tweeddale, Border Sport and Leisure Trust was present at the meeting to give an update on the Gytes Leisure Centre, Peebles. Ms Lauder advised that the manager of the Leisure Centre had left the employment of BSLT and she was now responsible for the management of the facilities in Peebles in addition to those at Hawick, Jedburgh and Selkirk. She advised that measures had been put in place to address problems relating to the condition and cleanliness of the facility which had resulted in positive feedback from the public. In relation to the price increases, she confirmed that meetings were taking place with clubs, in particular Peebles Rugby Football Club and a payment strategy had been put in place. Discussions were also taking place with the Football Club. In response to a question she advised of the reasons why facilities were closed on Saturday and Sunday afternoons.

**DECISION
NOTED and thanked Ms Lauder for her update.**

With reference to paragraph 11 of the Minute, Community Councillor Tulloch advised he had not received a response to his questions relating to the Food Waste Collection Service and the Democratic Services Officer advised that she would liaise with Officers in Neighbourhood Services.

**DECISION
AGREED that the Democratic Services Officer would liaise with Officers in Neighbourhood Services regarding the questions Community Councillor Tulloch had submitted**

4. PRESENTATION - LOCAL ACCESS AND TRANSPORT STRATEGY

G. Johnstone, Lead Officer for Transport and Access was in attendance at the meeting to give a presentation on the Local Access and Transport Strategy (LATS). He explained the strategy document was needed because the current strategy document was out of date; access and transport were key issues in the Scottish Borders; and for the provision of strategic direction. The main issues comprised of the following:- (a) the route to markets; (b) public transport; (c) walking, cycling and horse riding; (d) road maintenance; (e) forestry; (f) road safety; (g) parking; and (h) low carbon. The Lead Officer advised on the consultation process which would end on 23 October 2015. The next steps would be consideration of all responses, development of the main strategy document; and a presentation to the Development Plan Working Group and taking the document through the Council's Committee process. The strategy document would be finalised at the end of 2016. Mr. L. Hayworth, Peebles resident referred to BAM making financial compensation payments to Scottish Borders Council in relation to disruptions caused by the implementation of the railway and queried whether a similar scheme could be put in place whereby the Council would be compensated for the damage to rural roads caused by the transportation of timber. The Lead Officer suggested that Mr. Hayworth feed this into the consultation. It was understood that a potential new National Transport Strategy was currently being discussed by the Scottish Government. Community Councillor Hughes referred to the lack of resources for maintenance indicating the Council needed to make clear decisions on what to fund against what could be afforded and that the position was unsatisfactory, he also referred to problems with bridges throughout the area and more clarification was required when budget meetings were held.

**DECISION
NOTED the presentation.**

5. **PRESENTATION - PERMANENT TRAFFIC LIGHTS AT NEIDPATH CORNER.**

Paul Aitken, Project Engineer was in attendance at the meeting to give a presentation on the permanent traffic lights at Neidpath Corner. He advised that owing to the existing topography there was no cost effective option to improve the road alignment of Neidpath Corner. Therefore, practical options available were either to do nothing or to install permanent traffic lights. The design team had reviewed potential traffic light locations taking into consideration stopping sight distance, forward visibility, road width etc. Two possible locations for the westbound flow were considered and the option with the traffic lights close to where the temporary lights were located was considered to offer the safest layout. A specialist consultant had been appointed to design the traffic control system and to review the most suitable locations. The consultant also concluded that the most suitable location for the lights in terms of operation and safety was the option with the lights close to the temporary lights location. An independent safety audit of the proposed layout would also be undertaken. A budget of £200,000 had been set aside by the Council for this project. The advantages of the traffic lights would be:- (a) controlled traffic flows through a difficult section of road; (b) reduced traffic conflicts; (c) reduced likelihood of accidents; (d) alleviate damage to the existing wall; and (e) reduce likelihood of unscheduled road closure on strategic route owing to traffic accidents. The disadvantage would be possible minor delays to journey times. Discussion on this item of business was deferred until after the presentation of the following item of business.

A72

There had been circulated copies of a report by the Service Director Commercial Services advising on the position relating to the A72 in regard to sections highlighted for treatment, the position regarding traffic flow statistics and accident statistics, and the promotion of road improvements. The Infrastructure Manager explained the Statutory Performance Indicator for the condition of the Scottish Local Authority road network was defined as “the percentage of the road network which should be considered for maintenance treatment”. The overall results from the SRMCS were presented using a colour convention as follows:- green – minor defects might be present, but the road was considered to be in an acceptable condition; amber – further investigation was required; and red – the road had deteriorated to a point where repairs were very likely to be required to preserve serviceability and to prolong its future. In referring to the A72 by using a map the Infrastructure Manager showed those sections of road identified as being in condition red, amber and green and it was noted that significant sections of red/amber existed between Blyth Bridge and Wester Haprew; Four Mile Bridge; Edston Quarry; Peebles High Street; Walkerburn; and Clovenfords.

The Network Manager then went on to explain that at times, the narrow width and tortuous nature of the A72 meant that essential maintenance could often only be done safely through a road closure. The route had also been prone to emergency closures in the past as a result of landslips and/or traffic accidents. As a valley route the alternative routing choices in these circumstances were few and either considerably longer or on less suitable roads. For this reason a specific Action Plan was developed, in conjunction with the Police, to help deal with the issues associated with closures on the A72. Accident levels, both nationally and at Scottish Borders levels had been decreasing and the Council was making good progress against the ambitious nationally set accident reduction rate targets. Appendix C to the report illustrated the number of accidents occurring over the length of the A72 in the Scottish Borders. These were broken down as either west or east of Peebles and further classified by the Police categorisation of the accident. The numbers of accidents were also displayed graphically on a 3 year rolling average basis. Appendix D to the report showed how the A72 compared to other A Class routes in the Scottish Borders in terms of accident numbers in recent years. This illustrated that in terms of accident occurrence the A72 was not atypical to similar A Class type routes.

Community Councillor Hughes expressed concern as to whether the proposal to install permanent traffic lights was the correct way forward and commented that this was another

short term fix which would not resolve problems of damage to the walls etc. He said it would be better to put in place a proper permanent fix which would mean widening the road. He was concerned that there had been no discussion with communities affected and there had been no presentation of optional alternatives and costings. He indicated that members of the community had been led to believe if something was being done it would only need one closure and Officers had now indicated that some of the work would take place in October with further work following on from that and so there was no guarantee that there would not be other closures. A notice had been received by the Community Council at the beginning of the week advising work was to start in October and plans were inadequate for the consequence of this. If the road was closed and if the main roads were used as a diversion rather than minor roads it would be 28 miles from Stobo to Peebles and therefore this was a major disruption. He explained he had recently suffered a heart attack and queried what would have happened if the emergency services had been diverted because of a road closure. He was not convinced the installation of permanent traffic lights was the appropriate way forward. Mr Gordon Crooks, Gold Star Taxis expressed similar concerns, and referred to closures at Dirt Pot Corner when traffic had to be diverted to the B7062 and advised that the road was still in an atrocious condition owing to the diversions. His taxi firm had a contract with a customer in Stobo 7 times each day and he advised of the effect the proposals would have on his customers because of the increase in fares and journey times. He asked that the proposals be renegotiated and work be carried out during the evenings when the roads were quiet. Councillor Cockburn understood there would be problems in communities and said the closure highlighted how important the route was, there were no other proposals on the table, Council Officers were meeting the next day to discuss how best to deal with the closure. Councillor Bhatia advised that owing to budgetary restrictions it would be irresponsible to carry out a consultation regarding widening of the road at Neidpath Corner. She queried the positioning of the traffic lights, asked if anything could be done to protect the actual wall such as putting bollards in place to stop vehicles hitting the wall and causing more damage meaning the road would have to be closed and repairs made again. She asked if the road could be open sometime during the day and referred to problems for taxis, school busses, and suggested that a convoy system could be in place and local people needed comfort in regard to provisions for the emergency services. Community Councillor Tulloch considered that the cost of widening the road would be horrendous and that the traffic lights themselves would allow a degree of road widening. He hoped the traffic lights would be controlled by sensor movement to avoid delays. Councillor Garvie commented that because of Scottish Government policy, Councils had not been allowed to increase Council Tax for 8 years. As the road was formerly a trunk road he asked if there was not a case now for the Council to make strong representation to the Scottish Government to re-designate the road as a trunk road which would mean it would then be maintained and funded by the Scottish Government not the local authority. The Network Manager advised that unsuccessful attempts over the years had been made in relation to the de-trunking of other key routes in and adjacent to the Scottish Borders. He advised he would be happy to make representation to the Scottish Government relating to the A72, but was doubtful this would be successful. Councillor Garvie suggested that representation at Member and political level may have more chance of success. Community Councillor Taylor commented that the A72 was not fit for purpose and expressed concern about the consequences of increased traffic over the Meldons.

The Infrastructure Manager confirmed a meeting would be held the following day to refine the proposals in terms of the involvement of the contractor and thereafter that the Road Asset Team would engage with the users of the road. Work needed to be started as soon as possible before the winter. A convoy system for vehicles might be accommodated but this would delay the completion of the work. The Project Engineer then briefed Members on the operation of the permanent traffic lights explaining that the system was more intelligent than that of temporary traffic lights. The system in place would assess queue lengths which would maximise the flow of traffic thereby minimising delays, sensors in the road would also pick up cyclists and slow moving traffic. In the ensuing discussions

Members were advised that bollards were not an option and that white lines would be put in place. Community Councillor Hughes advised he was not saying that it was right to widen the road but that there had been no attempt to persuade him this was not a solution. No discussions had taken place with the community directly affected and he was unhappy at the lack of consultation. Community Councillor Tulloch commented that the roads in the Borders were notoriously bad for cyclists and he was delighted to learn that the A72 at Blyth Bridge would be updated. Councillor Bhatia suggested that a Sub-Committee be established to look at the A72 in more details and liaise with key stakeholders about the key issues.

DECISION

(a) NOTED

- (i) the presentation on the permanent traffic lights on the A72 at Neidpath Corner; and**
- (ii) the position with regards to the A72, in relation to its condition, treatments, traffic flows, accident rates and current identified road improvements.**

- (b) AGREED that a Sub-Committee, comprising of Members and Community Councillors of the Tweeddale Area forum be established at the next meeting of the Forum to look at the A72 in more detail and liaise with key stakeholders about the key issues.**

6. OPEN QUESTIONS.

The Reverend Nancy Norman, Peebles resident referred to the recent resignation of the Chief Constable of Police Scotland and queried whether this might open up the opportunity of bringing back the control and accountability of local Policing back to the Scottish Borders. She asked if the Council would consider making representation to the Scottish Government to that effect. Members discussed this suggestion and unanimously agreed that such a recommendation be made to Council

DECISION

- * AGREED to recommend to Council that representations be made to the Scottish Government asking if, following the resignation of the Chief Constable, consideration be given to reviewing Policing in this area and in Scotland in general with a view to ensuring greater accountability.**

7. COMMUNITY COUNCIL SPOTLIGHT.

Community Councillor Tulloch made reference to a planning application when the local planning officer had agreed with the developer to alter the development and no consultation had been made with the Community Council. Following discussion, the Democratic Officer would liaise with Planning and Building Standards and send a copy of the protocol for what constituted Non Material Alterations to all Community Councils in Tweeddale.

AGREED that the Democratic Services Officer would check with Planning and Building Standards the protocol in respect of requests for alterations to planning permissions and distribute this to the Tweeddale Community Councils.

8. POLICE SCOTLAND.

The Chairman welcomed Inspector Mike Bennett to his first meeting of the Forum. Inspector Bennett advised he had served in the Police Force for 23 years and this was the first week in his new role. A new Police Officer, Sergeant Duncan Marker was based in Peebles Police Station. Since the meeting in May local officers had covered a number of local festivals including West Linton Whipman, Peebles Beltane Festival and St. Ronan's Border Games. These events passed without any major incidents and were a great opportunity for Community Officers to get involved with the public. Officers had also

assisted at the cycling events which took place including Tweed Love and the Tour o the Borders – these events brought large numbers of cyclists into the town. Officers continued to give attention to parking and since the end of May had issued 78 tickets and given out 3 warnings in Peebles, 14 tickets had been issued in Innerleithen. Local Officers continued to give attention to the major roads in Tweeddale and the Camera Safety van could frequently be found at various locations. In relation to thefts and housebreaking, these types of crimes had decreased in the West Linton area over recent months but had unfortunately increased in Innerleithen and Peebles with mountain bikes being the prime target. Since February a total of 14 bikes had been stolen amounting to £33,000. In an effort to prevent these thefts Community Officers had undertaken an initiative giving advice regarding security and these crimes were also being looked at to see if there was a pattern. Funding from Safer Communities had been secured for SelectaDNA Forensic Marking Kits and 200 of these kits had been received. These would be distributed by Police Scotland to farms across the Borders It was intended to deploy the kits in priority locations and monitor their effectiveness in preventing acquisitive rural crime. Police Scotland was also liaising with NFUS & Scottish Land and Estates to identify suitable premises. SFRS community fire-fighters would work with Police Scotland in delivering these kits. Councillor Cockburn asked for information relating to vandalism at Kerfield Park, Peebles which had left the park unusable for the start of the football season. Inspector Bennett advised he would make enquiries and respond to the members of the Forum.

DECISION

- (a) NOTED the presentation.**
- (b) AGREED that Inspector Bennett would update Members of the Forum relating to the vandalism at Kerfield Park, Peebles.**

9. SCOTTISH FIRE & RESCUE SERVICE

In the absence of LSO Langley a report was tabled relating to the Scottish Fire and Rescue Service in the Tweeddale Area. The report explained that Fires in the Open were at a very low number, given the time of year. This was mainly down to the inclement weather which had been experienced over the last few months. A line rescue incident occurred last month in Peebles. Specialist teams responded along with Peebles station crew to rescue a man who had fallen into an excavation within his garden. Peebles crews reassured the casualty and readied the area and equipment for the arrival of the line rescue team who rescued the casualty using a vertical stretcher process. The casualty went to Borders General Hospital for a precautionary check-up. Innerleithen station had complete training in relation to the opening of the Borders Railway on 9 September. This involved theoretical input as well as practical input at the railway yards at Shawfair, arranged and completed by training officers from Galashiels. Scottish Fire and Rescue Service staff in all the local stations provided home fire safety visits all year round. These provided the householder with a home visit, focussing on identifying and reducing the risks of fire in the home. Smoke detectors with a 10-year battery life were provided as part of this free service. The Make It Or Break It programme was continuing to run in the Scottish Borders with the latest input in July at Scottish Borders College, Galashiels, prior to the summer break. This programme targeted 16 to 20 year old drivers with the aim to reduce road accidents and deaths in the age group. SFRS and Scottish Borders Council staff were highly active and effective in the SFRS Week Of Action which took place in June. This was an initiative targeting resources at those identified as at risk from fire, mainly the elderly who lived alone. Fire safety audits provided a targeted examination of a business premises and their relevant documents to ascertain how the premises were being managed regarding fire safety. The enforcement officer also engaged with members of staff to confirm their level of fire safety awareness. Unwanted fire signals were being addressed by phased intervention actions which identified premises which were producing 'false alarms', provided guidance on how to reduce a reoccurrence, and could also evoke legislation if occurrences failed to reduce in number. (Peebles Hydro hotel had been identified as an offender through the UFAS policy and SFRS were working

with hotel staff to look at ways of reducing the number of false alarm generated at these premises). SFRS Safeguarding Policy and Procedure for Protection of Children and Adults at Risk of Harm was implemented to link into adult and child protection. The policy had created closer ties with Social Services within Scottish Borders and ensured those people and families that fire crews identified as at risk were brought to the attention of Social Services. This had resulted in joint visits to homes to reduce risk to those occupiers. The SFRS was developing a strong partnership with the local Domestic Abuse Advocacy Service and involvement in Multi Agency Risk Assessment Conference (MARAC). The Local Authority Liaison Officer (LALO) and Scottish Borders Station Manager for Prevention and Protection were fully involved in all local MARAC processes, attending the monthly conferences and all steering group meetings.

DECISION

NOTED the update.

The meeting concluded at 8.25 pm