

SCOTTISH BORDERS COUNCIL
27 OCTOBER 2022
APPENDIX I

OPEN QUESTIONS

Questions from Councillor Anderson

1. To Executive Member for Roads Development & Maintenance

As the Council pushes for a greener way of traveling, and residents are encouraged to buy electric vehicles, what is SBC doing to ensure that the infrastructure that will feed the electric car revolution is being planned for and put into place?

As SBC plans for greener fleet vehicles, we ourselves have a shortage of charging points that are of high enough voltage. Has the Scottish Government given guidance on how to renew infrastructure with a plan to fund such upgrades?

As a rural area, would investment in Hydrogen technology or hybrid technology be a better way forward?

Should SBC be seen to encourage electric vehicles when the infrastructure is not in place with large enough coverage, which leaves residents disappointed and angry?

Response from Councillor Greenwell

The public charging infrastructure delivered by Scottish Borders Council over the last 10 years has been achieved with funding from Scottish Government and Transport Scotland.

This approach was adopted to support the growth in EV vehicle ownership and Scotland's journey to achieving Net-Zero by 2045.

The Council was successful in a bid to the UK Community Renewal Fund, to deliver an EV Charging Feasibility Study for the Scottish Borders. The key aim of the study is to deliver private investment equitably across the Scottish Borders.

A report is being prepared for Council 24 November 2022 seeking endorsement of the feasibility study recommendations and to seek further funding from Transport Scotland and Scottish Futures Trust.

Currently we are operating 72 charging points at SBC locations funded by Switched on Fleet. In addition, a further separately funded "HQ Smartgrid" project is nearing completion which will see an additional 70 charging points ranging from 7kw to 22kw installed at the Newtown depot and at HQ Bowden road. As part of this project, some of the points will be publically available.

We currently have 60 electric vehicles with a further 24 in procurement for 22/23. For 2022/23 we applied for vehicle funding through SoF but have so far been rejected, they have recommended that we seek funding for further installations of charging infrastructure which is now in progress.

Part of the EV Charging Infrastructure Feasibility study recognises that there is too much uncertainty in terms of technology development, consumer behaviour and other fuel alternatives to commit to EV Charging infrastructure for a predicted demand in 2030. So a recommendation to Council will be that an initial phase of development of new EV charging infrastructure will be delivered for 2026 predictions and in 2025/26 the assumptions in this current modelling will be re-assessed to define the next phase of development for 2030

demand. This re-assessment will take account of technology developments, other alternative fuels including hydrogen, which also requires significant investment in infrastructure, consumer behaviours, journey habits etc. to define the investment needed for a second phase of investment for 2030 demand.

Scotland has committed to being Net-Zero by 2045 with strong targets of being 70% to net-zero by 2030. Scottish Borders Council has maximised the investment of external funding to deliver the current network of chargers and maintain them within existing budgets. The new approach to deliver private sector investment to the region is an essential step to help the Scottish Borders contribute to Scotland's Net-zero targets and will support a growth in EV vehicle uptake in the region.

2. To Executive Member for Community and Business Development

What is being done to support rural residents who live next to newly installed fibre optic internet lines, but are not being connected to them? BT and Open Reach have been unhelpful and unresponsive.

What is SBC doing, or planning to do, to ensure our residents are supported in obtaining FTTP (fibre to the property)? Is the Administration pushing our MP & MSP to support this much required service?

Response from Councillor Scott Hamilton

Scottish Borders Council is working closely with Scottish Government to support the roll-out of R100 ('Reaching 100%') broadband in the Scottish Borders. An update on progress was given to Executive Committee on 13 September 2022.

Openreach is currently building full fibre networks across the Scottish Borders.

Some of this build is commercially funded by Openreach, some is part of the Scottish Government's R100 Programme, and some will be privately funded.

Other providers are also building full fibre networks in the Scottish Borders (e.g. Borderlink/Go Fibre).

There are strict rules (State Aid/Subsidy Control/Procurement) in place that determine where public money can be spent on new broadband infrastructure – these apply to the R100 Programme.

The R100 Programme supports all properties to access speeds above 30 Mbps.

Properties not in commercial plans or the R100 contracts are eligible for a voucher of up to £5,000 via the R100 Scottish Broadband Voucher Scheme to provide access.

Residents and businesses can check if they already have a superfast connection, or when a superfast connection is planned, by entering their postcode at www.scotlandsuperfast.com and this site also provides a range of further useful information.

Question from Councillor Begg

To Executive Member for Environment and Transport

Is the Executive Member aware of industrial peat extraction in Scottish Borders and do they support this?

Response from Councillor Linehan

There is one site in the Scottish Borders where peat extraction is currently being undertaken, at Whim Moss near Lamancha. The site has been operating since the late 1970's and has a valid permission that extends to 31 December 2040. A determination of minerals planning conditions application was granted in 2001, which was then subject to a periodic review in 2016. The terms of the planning conditions will be reviewed again in 2031. The site is operated by Westland Horticulture.

Historically, there has been peat extraction permissions in the Scottish Borders at Kitleyknowe near Carlups, which is now restored and at White Moss to the SW of West Linton, which is a dormant site that no longer has valid consent to operate.

The Development Plan and any other material factors must guide the Council's consideration of any proposals for peat extraction. Both the Adopted and Proposed Local Development Plans contain policies (Policy ED10 (Protection of Prime Quality Agricultural Land and Carbon Rich Soils) and Policy ED12 (Mineral and Coal Extraction)) that seek to protect against development that results in the permanent loss of significant carbon rich soil reserves.

Whilst there is no specific policy on peat extraction in either plan, the version of Policy ED12 included in the Proposed Plan now includes explicit reference to peat extraction. The last paragraph of the proposed policy states:

“There will be a presumption against peat extraction and other developments likely to have an adverse effect on peatland and/or carbon rich soils within class 1 and 2 peatland areas”.

The precise wording of this policy will be determined during the current Examination on the Proposed LDP but it does reflect closely the wording recommended to the Council by NatureScot, in its representations to the Proposed Local Development Plan

It is anticipated that the revised National Planning Framework 4 (NPF4) will be laid before parliament this autumn and approved in the early part of 2023. It is important to note that NPF4 will become part of the development plan once approved and that this will provide the strategic policy direction and guidance for considering any application for peat extraction.

As currently drafted, the policies in the Draft NPF4 emphasise strongly the need to protect peat resources and focus on restoration of peatland/peatland environments rather than peat extraction. However provision (d) of draft Policy 33: Soils specifically states that:

“Development proposals for new commercial peat extraction, including extensions to existing sites, should not be supported, unless:

- the extracted peat is supporting an industry of national importance to Scotland, and*
- there is no reasonable substitute; and*
- the area of extraction is the minimum necessary and the proposal aims to retain a residual depth of peat of no less than one metre across the whole site; and*
- the time period for extraction is the minimum necessary; and the proposal is supported by a comprehensive site restoration plan which will return the area of extraction back to its original environmental status”.*

Whilst this policy may be subject to change through the review of consultation responses and the parliamentary process, it does give a strong indication of the “route of travel” of the policies relating to peat extraction.

Supplementary

Councillor Begg asked if Councillor Linehan and Scottish Borders Council could seek to influence Scottish Government delivery plans and support the alternative of mass composting from waste to prevent the further destruction of peat bogs. Councillor Linehan confirmed she would consult with officers and respond directly to Councillor Begg.

Question from Councillor Robson

To Executive Member for Education and Lifelong Learning

Is there a programme to improve wifi reception and to replace white boards in primary schools?

Response from Councillor Douglas

The project for additional and improved wifi in primary is progressing with CGI. Work in Secondary schools will commence in November to ensure additional areas of schools also have robust wifi.

There is not, nor has there ever been, a programme to replace and sustain interactive whiteboards in primary schools. These boards are additional kit which have been procured by schools independently of IT provision.

Inspire Learning does not require interactive screens, instead making use of projection (or “casting”) using a projector or Apple TV device and a white surface. Provision for this was made within the rollout of iPads with Apple TV’s provided in all schools. While iPads can interact with Interactive boards, the casting solution is more sustainable and cost effective and therefore when boards come to end of life, replacement can be with a simpler kit.

Supplementary

Councillor Robson asked if an update on progress could be provided in due course and Councillor Douglas agreed to raise this with officers.

Question from Councillor Steel

To Executive Member for Environment and Transport

What plans are in place to deal with the twin threats of Sudden Larch Death and Ash Dieback?

Response from Councillor Linehan

Thank you for your question.

Larch and sudden oak death are coordinated through Forestry Scotland.

If SBC suspect that there may be a case of this, then Council Officers will report this to Forestry Scotland’s regional Area Plant Health Officer. As far as we are aware there have been no cases to date.

Forestry Scotland have a national database for Phytophthora (diseases which causes sudden larch and oak death), along with details of restrictions and co-ordinated movement for timber production in this regard.

The cyclical risk assessment that the Council undertakes picks up on any Ash tree(s) which may have Ash Dieback Disease and require action, and also looks at other disease in trees.

Regarding Ash Dieback, we take advice from Scottish Government guidance and participate in the Scottish Tree Officer Group (STOG) who assess the risks provide regular information and updates including webinars, CPD and best practice.

The Association for Public Service Excellence (APSE) have produced a briefing note on Ash Dieback Disease. This provides a summary survey results carried out by UK local authorities, looking at the impact of Ash Dieback including estimated tree losses, the financial costs of dealing with the disease, future threats and some of the techniques local authorities are using to gather more data on the disease, including how any losses will be addressed through the planting of new trees including biosecurity considerations.

Officers can provide copies of latest advice from STOG and APSE if this would be helpful.