

# Scottish Borders Community Councils' Network (SBCCN)

July 2009



## Chairman's Comments

The work of our Community Councils featured in the local press very recently. Hawick Provost Zandra Elliot and SBC Community Engagement Officer, Clare Malster, commented on the role of community councils following the suspension of four community councils and the elections held to determine the composition of another three. The publicity was indeed helpful. Imagine the opportunity for press coverage if a quarter of the Borders communities were required to elect their community councils during the same month across the Borders.

Provost Elliot expressed relief that sufficient residents of Hawick were prepared to stand for the suspended Community Council so that the grant for the Christmas lights would not be lost. Zandra Elliot's knowledge of the crucial role played by community councils across the Borders goes well beyond the need for Christmas lights yet this was the function that made the headlines.

Clare Malster explained that the main role for Community Councils was representing their area, consulting with the residents and passing on these views to public and other bodies. This is what makes the Community Council different from a voluntary organisation. Community Councils are elected to represent those who live within the boundary of that Community Council – by legislation. No local voluntary organisation has the strength of an Act of Parliament

sustaining it. Clare goes on to rightly say that Community Councils can and do become involved in a diverse range of activities, including bloom competitions, fundraising, litter clean ups, Christmas parties (and lights)! However, these activities can be undertaken by any community voluntary group at the behest of the Community Council or as an add on to their main function – representing the views of residents and doing everything in their power to effect change as a result of passing on the results of community consultation and engagement. Little, if anything should divert them from that cause.

To ensure that this role is effectively practiced there may be a need for Community Councils to be better informed about public services. Health and Social Care, Education and Planning are all undergoing significant changes in the way services are managed and delivered. The state of the roads, cleanliness of footpaths and verges, maintenance of public buildings require in depth local knowledge – not just of the main settlement but of the district and wider rural community.

Perhaps the time is right for each Community Council to appoint at least one Councillor for each of the services listed above, to become the informant and point of contact for that particular service. The Network would undertake to bring such representation to service focussed area meetings in order to provide detailed information from Council Officials and to share problems and solutions.

## The Single Outcome Agreement

The Single Outcome Agreement (SOA) which 'New Ways', our Community Planning Partnership, has submitted to the Scottish Government is available from Sarah Glendinning ([sglending@scotborders.gov.uk](mailto:sglending@scotborders.gov.uk))

Underpinning this is a voluntary sector document which, while not complete, has made major recent progress.

There are notable gaps in the section which maps community and voluntary sector activity against the SOA outcomes e.g. sports groups and cultural activity. Voluntary Sector Liaison Officer Liz Walthew agreed to continue to work on the document to fill the more obvious gaps and to restructure it slightly to be more in line with the SOA. Liz will meet with relevant people and aim to populate the Outcome section as much as possible so that the Community and Voluntary Liaison Group can sign it off at their meeting in August.

The final document will enable Community Councils to see where they fit into the SOA and hopefully encourage input into the next SOA through community planning sub groups.

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## Future Innerleithen



The project started in September 2008 at a meeting organised by Cllr Garvie and Network Vice Chairman Ross McGinn, which was well attended by most of the groups within Innerleithen. The reason for starting the group was two fold:

1. The primary school roll was expanding and will continue to expand and they will need more space at the present Community Centre and maybe even all of it
2. Also it was felt that it was time for investment in Innerleithen as most of the investment money seemed to have gone to places west of Innerleithen.

A Steering Group of 14 people held their first meeting at the end of September 2008. This Future Innerleithen Group operates under

the auspices of the Innerleithen Community Trust.

We were guided throughout by Jean Robertson, SBC, on the correct way to go about obtaining external funding for new developments and she helped us win £15K for this first phase from Big Lottery and SBC.

We employed an external consultancy firm, STAR – Small Town and Rural Development Group – who have lots of experience of doing these Community Needs Appraisals. Their biggest project has been for the Loch Lomond and the Trossachs National Park with 24 separate communities. We felt that with their help we would proceed very quickly. Colin Roxburgh from STAR started working with us in November 2008.

We had 3 major studies to complete:

- Community Survey - with 30 volunteers who delivered and collected the survey forms to each house in Innerleithen, Traquair and Glen all EH44 post

- codes
- Stakeholder Interviews - where a team of 6 people interviewed 23 separate groups within the community ranging from the youth, elderly, businesses, sports, bands, arts etc. One extra person had to analyse all of these interviews.

- Community Profile - where we collected various data on Innerleithen, Traquair and Glen on the population, housing, services, heritage etc.

These were analysed and various Themes and actions within the Themes were identified for the Community Event on 13<sup>th</sup> June 2009 where we had over 500 residents of all ages who placed stickers on the top priority actions and added additional comments. This was a very good community event as we had refreshments, musical interludes by local singers, face painting, bouncy castle, skate boarding demonstrations, stalls by local groups.

We are analysing all of the data to produce a Community Action Plan.

This will be published along with the various analyses in a 32 page booklet, which will be distributed to every house in Innerleithen, Traquair and Glen during July/ August 2009.

We will then start working on the highest priority activities.

There is a Scottish Government Fund of £60M that has been recently made available for the Regeneration of Small Towns, SBC have worked with the Scottish Government so that Innerleithen is one of those Towns. As the timescales are very tight to submit bids we have already started activities regarding the Gap site in Innerleithen High Street and for the development of the St James car park as a Community Centre and facility for bikers as these were clearly high priority projects from the analysis.

Innerleithen has a Bright Future.

*Brian McCrow, Chair Future Innerleithen*



## Training Opportunities

One unexpected outcome from the consultation with Community Councils on their requirements for training is the suggestion that a couple of study visits might prove popular. The initial period of consultation produced only a few responses to the survey of training needs and wants. Undaunted, the Network will send a copy of the one page questionnaire to all Community Councils with a request for a return (including nil returns) by the end of September. While Clare Malster will, in accordance with the Single Outcome Agreement, offer some training sessions over the autumn a fully customised programme, including training sessions, theme focussed events will be planned for January – December 2010 – including a couple of study visits!! Our Annual Seminar remains the main opportunity for everyone connected with the work of Community Councils to get together, draw fresh inspiration and celebrate good practice as demonstrated by a number of Community Councils. The 2009 Conference will take place on Saturday 3<sup>rd</sup> October in SBC Headquarters. The theme is “Local Regeneration”.

## Land Reform Legislation - Government enthusiasm for land reform has cooled

Ten years ago this month, the government's Land Reform Policy Group published “Land Reform – Proposals for Legislation”. Ten years on from that, and five years after the Land Reform (Scotland) Act was passed, there seems to be a growing appetite not only to take stock of progress to date but to inject new energy and direction into this agenda. Interested parties came together recently to consider ways of taking this forward. They'll be meeting again after the summer. Here's a summary of who attended and what was said:

- Land Reform (Scotland) Act 2003 is not delivering expected outcomes
- Previous commitment from Scottish Executive/ Scottish Government to review the operation and effectiveness of Land Reform Act has not been fulfilled
- Levels of investment in a comprehensive programme of community asset acquisition and development have stalled
- Standard of community capacity building per Community Learning & Development (SBC) is inadequate to meet the demands placed on community bodies in the pre and post acquisition of assets.
- Transfers of local authority assets into community ownership are ad

- hoc and lack a national strategic focus viz a viz that provided by the Quirk Review in England
- Common Good assets remain poorly documented with persistent financial irregularities and little opportunity for meaningful community oversight.
- A commitment from Scottish Government to produce guidance for local authorities on the disposal of public assets at less than best consideration has not been fulfilled.
- Scottish Government's Community Empowerment Action Plan is not currently a cross government policy priority and consequently the community asset agenda sits outwith mainstream policy thinking

So, What action is required ?  
A campaign of coordinated action should be pursued under the auspices of Local People Leading which should include the following key areas:

### Community Right to Buy

Registration and re-registration procedures should be simplified. Scope of the Act should be extended to cover all land in Scotland. Significant investment is required to raise awareness and understanding of the Act.

### Investment

Further public investment is required to support asset acquisition allied to new regulations and guidance to facilitate greater levels of transfer of public assets into community ownership

Capacity building support.  
More effective and appropriate levels of community development support should be available to communities to assist in pre and post acquisition support.

### Common Good

All Local Authorities should have accurate asset registers and strategic plans for management of common good assets. Communities should be provided with greater powers over their Common Good

### Crown Estates

The Crown Estate in Scotland should be reformed as proposed in the report – New Opportunities for Public Benefits and endorsed by HIE, COSLA and six local authorities from the Highlands and Islands.

Research and development.  
Commission longitudinal research into community asset ownership to study impact on community resilience, social capital and wider impacts on civil society

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## Direct Elections to NHS Boards

Scottish Government plans to give anyone over 16 the opportunity to participate in health board elections have been approved by Parliament. It means that for the first time members of the public will be able to play an active part in the decisions made by NHS Boards. In a UK first young people aged 16 and 17 will be able to take part in the polls giving them a first taste of the electoral process. The elections will use the Single Transferable Vote System. Two pilot elections will take place next year at locations yet to be confirmed. There will be an evaluation before any wider rollout. Nicola Sturgeon said "this is the single biggest step we can take to re-energise public engagement with the health service. Boards will no longer be able to ride roughshod over community opinion."

## New Borders Website

NHS Borders has launched a new website to give patients easy access to advice and information about long term conditions. The website, developed in partnership with SBC's Library Service can be accessed from personal PCs and from public libraries.

Visit

[www.bordershealthinhand.scot.nhs.uk](http://www.bordershealthinhand.scot.nhs.uk)

for more information.

## Community Links Scotland

[www.comlinks.org.uk](http://www.comlinks.org.uk) is worthy of a hit if you are looking for a mechanism which can pull together Social landlords, voluntary and community groups. Community Links enhances existing services as well as assisting in the establishment of new projects. The type of services provided include identifying unmet re-generation needs and carrying out project management, submitting funding applications, preparing feasibility studies, detached youth work and community consultation.

## Compact Action Plan Progress

The Compact Officers' Group numbers attending meetings had diminished due to changes in partners such as Enterprise and Tourism. It was therefore decided that instead of a separate Compact Action Plan that this would be linked in to the SOA. Clare Malster agreed to progress this with the statutory partners, looking at Strategic Outcomes and will consider items from the Action Plan during their work so that the Compact is clearly linked to the SOA and the work of Community Councils.

## Something to Say?

Do you have news that you would like to share with other Community Councils? Is there anything that you would like to ask Community Councils? Just forward your articles to Clare Malster at the address below.

We can provide this document on tape, in large print and various other formats by contacting the address below. In addition, contact us for information on other language translations, additional copies, or to arrange for an officer to meet with you and explain any areas of the publication that you would like clarified.

Clare Malster, Community Engagement Officer

Business Improvement Unit, Scottish Borders Council Headquarters, Newtown St. Boswells, MELROSE TD6 0SA, Tel: 01835 826626