AGM CHAIRMAN’S REPORT – 17 May 2025

Many thanks to the Board for re-electing me as Chairman for the last year. As is normal, it falls on me to update you all on the “comings” and “goings” at the Trust since we all last met.

I re-iterate to members, as I did last year, that PCT is a facilitating organisation, with the objective of delivering and supporting local projects that sustain and enhance the community. We cannot do this without the support of Members, paid staff, volunteers and the members of the Board, all of whom contribute.

I will come on to it in detail later, but I am issuing a stark warning to members and the wider community today, that without a good solid base of support, the organisation will struggle to achieve its principal objectives.

That is why I would like to start off on matters of **Structure, governance and management**

* On a sad note, most of you will know that Robina Hutton died earlier this year. Robina was a calming influence on the board and while she had retired from the Board, we were sorry to hear that news and our sympathies were passed on to Phillip at the time.
* We currently retain a stable Board of 7 Directors, however, this is the absolute minimum. Existing projects are developing and new project opportunities will inevitably pop up. Last year I made a gentle plea to members present and the wider public to come forward. This year, it’s not a plea, it’s a demand to people to get involved or help persuade someone who would. If we don’t bolster the Board in particular in the coming months, I know from my own personal input (and all other Directors are the same) that the commitment and workload is simply unsustainable.
* So on that point, I would like to thank my fellow Directors for all their hard work over the year. It feels like a thankless task at times, but we do maintaina sense of doing some good and long may that continue.
* On the staffing side, we said goodbye last year to Jacqui as office administrator. Since Jacqui’s departure, the office has been run by Myriam and Susan and again we are gratefully indebted to them for their dedication to keep things running, as well as continuing with their support of the Re-Use Hub. That is about to change next week, however, as we will welcome Carol Mace as our new office administrator and I hope that Carol will slot in comfortably and that many of you will get to know her fairly quickly.
* Our major staffing “coup” last year undoubtedly was to attract Debbie Sterricks to the Re-Use hub as manager. Debs is not with us today, as she is on a well earned holiday, but I would like to report to members that she has settled in well and is working extremely hard to improve all aspects of the re-use hub. I think she is enjoying it – lets hope so. She has managed to attract an ever increasing team of part-time paid and volunteer assistants, who collectively do such a great job. As a result, we are seeing sales going well. Debs has significantly increased the Facebook activity and is using different sales channels, such as ebay, to vary the sales options and we’ve even had articles of value go to auction in order to maximise value.
* Last year, I reported that the Board were committed to employing a full time Project Development Officer in the coming year. For a number of reasons, that has been put on hold, but it remains a key objective and when finances allow, a Project Development Officer remains a key staffing goal. We have just this week learned of a funding stream that might be available later in the year for this, so fingers crossed.
* As always, our volunteers are at the heart of PCT. So can we, as the members, all publicly acknowledge our volunteers with a round of applause.

We now turn to a brief review of our **Projects:**

First of all, **School Brae Hub**

Within the current building itself:

* As already outlined, the Reuse Hub has continued operations during the year. It’s importance to the Trust as a source of income; a public face of the Trust; and a local mechanism to keeping material from landfill cannot be underestimated. It’s at the heart of PCT and we are committed to it.
* The Mens Shed are soon to be on the move. That move makes sense for them, but until they have there new premises ready, PCT are happy to have them here and will work with them for a smooth transition. We are yet to decide on whether the current Mens Shed space will be made available for other alternative uses once they go – that decision will be made based on the circumstances at the time.
* Current constraints mean we continue to struggle to provide the Pipe Band with the space that they need, but, as with last year, however, this room will be made available to the Pipe Band for the Beltane week and we’ll do whatever we can to support them then.

We continue to maintain the building in a useable state, but have put on hold any non-essential work, given our longer term plans. I will update you shortly regarding the School Brae Hub Redevelopment, under the separate agenda Item 7.

We now turn to other active PCT Projects

* **Eshiels Community Woodland**

Much of the management group’s time has been taken up over the last year with the preparation and publicising of detailed plans for the long-term management of the woodland. As part of that, the major up coming work relates to organising the felling of conifers and subsequent re-planting with native broadleaves, with pre-felling work including the submission of an application to Scottish Forestry for felling permission and discussions and agreement with Scottish Borders Council (SBC) relating to access and timber extraction. Both matters are progressing and as such, discussions are currently ongoing with potential forestry contractors. Felling is still on schedule for a date in September/October this year.

£700 was raised from firewood sales in the 2024 season, which was donated to Peebles Foodbank. Funds from future firewood sales are open to other community groups to apply for.

The management group has put a huge amount of effort into getting to this stage and it will be great to see the harvesting work completed by the end of the year and a transformation of the wood by replanting thereafter.

* **Town Action Plan (Peebles Place Plan)**

The team from a number of other organisations, led by Crick and under PCT, finalised the Peebles Place Plan and Town Action Plan during the last year, and these were registered in February this year - our thanks go to all who contributed – a huge amount of work went into these. For those who have not looked at them, the plans are available from the PCT website and they are well worth a look. It’s now up to us, the community, to use them and I can say that elements of the objectives and points outlined are very much part of the School Brae Hub redevelopment objectives.

In addition to our own projects, we continue to support Projects operating under the PCT Umbrella

* **Peeblesshire Paths Group**

The group continues to be active, but always looking to recruit more volunteers. Some improvements to reporting issues to SBC need to be made, but the volunteers work hard and are often unrecognised for the improvements they make to many of our well trod paths.

* **Cycling without Age**

Continues to work primarily with the care homes at Dovecot, Riverside, and Tweedgreen along with RVS and Dementia Friendly Society. This coming year, they are hoping to increase the availability of rides to include people who may be more socially isolated and at home. This is a recurring theme, but they plan to recruit more volunteers and are currently seeking funding for an additional trishaw to bolster the options they offer.

* **Floral Peebles**

Continues to maintain a huge selection of flower beds, with new and recurring displays throughout the year. Undoubtedly, the very poor summer seriously hampered activities last season, but displays were well appreciated in those challenging conditions. This year, at present, sees a different set of challenging conditions. John – I’m sensing your next purchase might have to be an agricultural scale water bouser – not something you might have thought necessary in August last year. Our thanks go to you and your volunteers, who contribute so heartily to the colour and appearance of the town, right throughout the seasons.

* **Peebles Youth Voice**

For a number of reasons, the Group decided to disband in August 2024. Subsequently, I am told that a number of members have had discussions regarding maintaining the Group’s existence. This is still work in progress. Either way, the Trust will support it where it can.

* **The Glebe**

This group is now no longer a PCT umbrella group, having decided that they were organised and sufficiently self-supported. It is great to see that they have developed to the extent where they are happy to operate without PCT umbrella assistance and we wish them all success in future.

PCT continues to offer support to potential new umbrella groups. With recent announcements on SBC / Live Borders assets in the town, we are well placed and open to supporting groups who may wish to progress matters themselves. We are set up and developing tested structures to own community assets for the benefit of the community and offer support to new groups on a varied basis – so come and speak to us, if you have ideas.

With regards to other community asset matters, I can update you as follows:

* **March Street Mill Allotments**

The purchase of the site by the Trust from Whiteburn is close to completion and a lease to the Allotment Association is ongoing. Timings for this to complete are dependent on Whiteburn, but we are hoping to have it finalised within the latter half of the year.

* **Station Building**

Malcolm will kindly update us on that, but progress is being made and the hopes are to finalise the purchase in the coming months

* **School Brae Toilets Building**

We will come onto that under separate agenda Item 9.

So our vision and plans for the coming year?

* Pushing on with the School Brae Hub development plans; successful growth at the re-use hub; safe and productive timber harvest and replanting at Eshiels wood; securing ownership of the March Street Mill allotments; securing ownership and redevelopment of the Station building; successful asset transfer of the School Brae toilets building; and continuing support to existing and starter groups
* All under the cohesion of being and continuing to be self-sustaining and financially secure
* Which brings me back to my first point earlier. Without the support of volunteers these projects and new ones will simply not happen.
* Please, have a think. Can you help, or persuade someone you know who can help? It’s up to you.