

CONNECTED BORDERS 2017-2022

The vision of Scottish Borders Council's Administration

“ Our vision
for delivering better
communities ”



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SCOTTISH BORDERS CONNECTED BORDERS 2017-2022

CONNECTED BORDERS

“ Our vision for delivering better communities ”

This document presents the Administration of Scottish Borders Council's vision for the next 5 years (2017 – 2022). As well as stating the key principles that will guide our work it articulates the type of communities we want to create and the progress that needs to be made in order to achieve a more Connected Borders.

INTRODUCTION

The Scottish Borders is an area of outstanding beauty. As a community we are surrounded by beautiful countryside, historic towns, a manufacturing heritage and close community ties. Challenges include developing and growing as an area while holding these things at the heart of that development, and building on our strengths while ensuring that the vulnerable and marginalised are included and considered in every action that we take. Together we need to ensure that no-one and no community is left behind but that we grow and develop together.

As Administration Councillors we are excited about what the next five years hold for the Borders; there are significant amounts of investment on the horizon to develop our economic base, to build new industry and provide new opportunities. Our communities have the skills, ambition and sense of purpose to lead the Scottish Borders into the future, a future that delivers economic growth and sustainable development, a future that builds our communities into strong, energetic towns and villages.

Our commitments are based on four key principles;

- **Consensus** – all of the councillors in Scottish Borders Council were invited to be involved in developing this vision.
- **Equality** – everyone in the Scottish Borders has the right to be treated equally, with respect and with fairness.
- **Innovation** – we must innovate to meet the needs of our changing economic and social environment.
- **Community** – we are nothing if we are not a community, and our community is our greatest strength.

IN SUMMARY, OVER THE NEXT FIVE YEARS WE WILL BUILD COMMUNITIES THAT ARE:





01. CONNECTED COMMUNITIES

WHY IS THIS IMPORTANT?

Earnings for those working in the Scottish Borders are the lowest of any local authority in Scotland.¹ In order to achieve sustainable growth, communications throughout the Borders must improve. Scottish Borders Council (SBC) needs to invest in our roads and will lobby the Scottish Government to ensure that funds are available to upgrade our infrastructure.

SBC recently received Strategic Timber Transport Funding towards addressing the damage done by the haulage of timber. We want to see this principle extended to other industries which adversely impact our roads and will do this by building stronger partnerships with industry ensuring that these issues are tackled at the start of projects.

The Borders Railway has been a very successful project for the Scottish Borders with over 1.3 million passenger journeys in the first 12 months of operation. When comparing the first six months of 2016 (after the railway opened in September 2015) to the first six months of 2015 (when there was no railway) there was a:²



But we remain ambitious. We want to see the railway extended to Hawick and beyond, with proposals developed for extending the line to Carlisle. The benefits that the railway has brought to Galashiels and Tweedbank can, and should, be extended to other communities in the Borders.

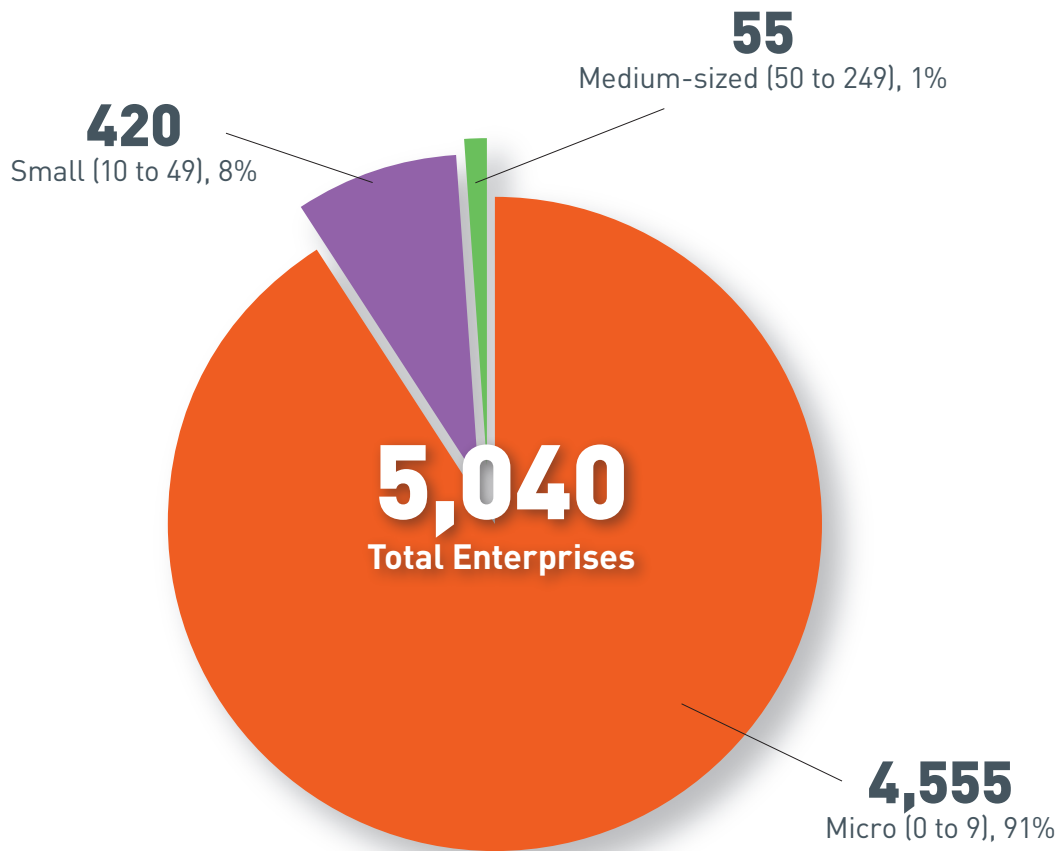
Despite significant investment, many of our residents and businesses often still suffer from exceptionally poor digital connections including poor broadband and patchy/low quality mobile coverage. To build our business base and make the Borders a place people choose to live, work and invest in, our businesses require the best possible access to good connectivity. In 2016 there were 5,040 businesses of which 91% (4,555) were Micro Businesses (0 to 9 employees), 8% were Small Businesses (10 to 49 employees), the remaining 1% of businesses had 50 employees or more.³

¹ Based on median gross weekly earnings, from 2016 Annual Survey of Hours and Earnings (ONS/NOMIS 2017)

² STEAM (Scottish Tourism Economic Activity Monitor)

³ NOMIS - ONS

BUSINESS COUNTS (ENTERPRISE) IN THE SCOTTISH BORDERS IN 2016



We have seen big gains in access to fibre broadband in recent years but some communities – particularly in rural areas - are still missing out. Over the next five years the Council will put pressure on the telecommunications firms and the Scottish Government to ensure that the Borders becomes one of the best connected places to live or do business and a leader in broadband provision in Scotland.

WE WILL:

- Fully support:
 - the case for the feasibility study into the extension of the railway to Hawick and Carlisle, taking into account the Scottish Government's current Borders Transport Corridors Study;
 - the delivery of a local rail service between Edinburgh and Berwick-upon-Tweed including a new station facility at Reston in Eastern Berwickshire.
- Building on SBC's Digital Connectivity Programme, work with the telecommunications industry to improve connectivity and Broadband;
- Protect our roads budget and deliver significant road improvements over the next five years using the Council's Capital programme.
- Defend the provision of local public bus services in the Borders.



02. COMMUNITIES OF ENTERPRISE

WHY IS THIS IMPORTANT?

There are three main initiatives that will come to fruition over the next five years, impacting on the economic development of the Scottish Borders as a whole:

- The South of Scotland Enterprise Agency, set up on a similar basis to the Highlands and Islands Enterprise will bring a significant investment and support to business;
- The Borderlands Initiative will bring together Northumberland, Carlisle, Cumbria, Dumfries and Galloway and the Scottish Borders to work collaboratively on cross border initiatives such as tourism;
- The South East Scotland City Deal, announced in July this will bring investment to the Borders for business.

These all represent significant investment into the Borders to improve, expand and develop our skills, infrastructure and economic base. Not only will SBC be supporting our existing businesses to grow and develop but we will be encouraging new business and industry to develop in the Borders. We will be working with partners such as the Chamber of Commerce, Social Enterprise Chamber and Federation of Small Business, as well as Business Gateway, to maximise the benefits that will accrue from this investment.

According to the 2011 Census 16% of people aged 16 to 74 in employment work mainly at or from home. Additionally, 22% of the working population who live in the Scottish Borders work out with the Scottish Borders (e.g. Edinburgh or Berwick-Upon-Tweed). We need to ensure that connectivity is as good as it can be for these groups, whether that is digital or physical.

When new sites are identified for development, it is essential that adequate consideration is given for enterprise and economic development as well as residential development. Joined-up thinking is required when it comes to town and community planning, making sure that appropriate services and opportunities are provided for our communities and residents. There is a clear need for smaller communities to have their own designated employment land and the new Local Development Plan will address this.

Social enterprises make a significant contribution to the Scottish economy³, with an estimated Gross Value Added (GVA) of £1.68bn. In 2015 there were 195 social enterprises in the Scottish Borders, about 4% of the total for Scotland (5,000). If the Scottish Borders proportion of the GVA was equal to the proportion of social enterprise, then social enterprises in the Scottish Borders contribute £67.2m to the Scottish Borders economy. There are more social enterprises per 1,000

³ Social Enterprise in Scotland Census 2015 - <http://www.socialenterprisescotland.org.uk/policy/180>

people in the Scottish Borders (1.7) compared to Scotland (1.0). This is a relatively new innovation when it comes to business models and one that as a Council we should explore and build on. Social enterprise companies work for the benefit of all of our communities and we will do all that we can to support them.

WE WILL:

- Work with partners to maximise significant investment in our area through the Borderlands initiative and the Edinburgh and South East Scotland City Region Deal
- Ensure that the developing South of Scotland Enterprise Agency supports new and existing business and attracts investment to our area
- Produce a new Local Development Plan with a focus on delivering land for enterprise and promote this to business to attract new industries to the Scottish Borders
- Encourage new and existing businesses and public sector partners to pay the living wage

³ Social Enterprise in Scotland Census 2015 - <http://www.socialenterprisescotland.org.uk/policy/180>



03. COMMUNITIES OF BEAUTY

WHY IS THIS IMPORTANT?

Our **town centres** are great local assets where we connect with local services and facilities but many face challenges as patterns of retail change and shoppers use online services or large out of town supermarkets. Low 'footfall' in many towns results in some premises being left empty altogether. As a Council we will adapt the Local Development Plan to promote diversification in town centres that encourages new and existing businesses to flourish by making it easier for a greater variety of business types to set up, including specialist retailers, offices, tourist businesses, cafes and restaurants.

The **Borders' built and natural environment** is not just valuable in itself – it is a key economic asset that is vital to attract new jobs and investment in the modern economy. It follows that our economy depends on maintaining and enhancing the quality of our environment, and all new development should have that aim in mind. SBC will aim for the highest standards of design quality in terms of architecture, spacing and context to encourage new building that enhances our surroundings, either reflecting the architectural traditions of the Borders or introducing exciting new designs. SBC will encourage diversity and innovation in design to promote a full range of housing and a continued focus on providing affordable housing. But there should be particular emphasis on those areas that have a low supply but high demand for this type of accommodation.

In recent times, much new housing in the Borders has been built within or adjacent to existing settlements. The new Local Development Plan will aim to encourage smaller developers and new building across the Borders taking account of existing pressures on the infrastructure of existing towns and villages. The emphasis for all development - commercial or residential - will be on its quality of design and the context of its surroundings. The new Local Development Plan will also encourage opportunities to deliver new developments to the highest standards of design. Making the best use of new and existing infrastructure and provide sites for affordable housing.

SBC's Planning Service will continue to work to provide the best possible service to developers and planning applicants, ensuring swift resolution of applications, a clear process, and low costs, particularly for small developers and businesses.

A great part of ensuring our communities retain their beauty and character is to look after our natural environment. The Household Recycling rate for the Borders has increased slightly from 36.3% in Q1 of 2015 to 39.0% in Q4 of 2016. However, the Scottish Borders recycling rate is below the Scottish average of 44% although compares favourably to other similar rural councils.⁴ Future actions include improving access to community recycling centres.

Our Neighbourhood Teams do an outstanding job in keeping our Borders towns looking their best and working with local community groups to deliver festivals and other events. A great deal of time is spent on cutting grass, verges and annual planting. We hope to pilot an initiative whereby the Council works closely with communities to develop a way of managing communal land to increase bio-diversity and improve the whole environment.

The history, culture and activities that we offer are great assets. Tourism is critical for many businesses working and operating in the Borders and as a Council we will do all that we can to enhance and build on this. From considering the signage that is used in our towns, to how this area is marketed both within the UK and abroad we can promote the Scottish Borders as an exciting destination.

WE WILL:

- Diversify our town centres through better use of our planning regulations
- Take an innovative approach to new housing development, encouraging smaller, better placed developments
- Continue to deliver affordable homes in areas that need them the most, guided by the Local Housing Strategy (developed in partnership with Registered Social Landlords)
- Implement a new Waste Management Strategy to improve recycling rates
- Building on SBC's localities work, pilot a biodiversity project to manage communal land, opening it up for more innovative approaches to enhancing our communities

⁴ LGBF - <http://www.improvementservice.org.uk/benchmarking/tool.html>



04. COMMUNITIES OF WELLBEING

WHY IS THIS IMPORTANT?

Education should not only be about schools; we need to consider how our communities develop whether you are 2 or 102. Our Community Learning and Development (CLD) Teams throughout the Borders are doing a fantastic job in listening to our communities and delivering educational opportunities, for example, through developing the Early Years Programme or working with partners to deliver “Men’s Sheds”, and many other projects. This valuable work will continue and grow over the next five years.

As part of this we need to consider our buildings that provide our educational services. Over the next five years we will continue to maintain and deliver an improved schools estate throughout the Borders, ensuring that it is fit for purpose for the next generation. Our flagship project in Jedburgh will be delivered, in partnership with the community, to improve and enhance the educational establishment in that town. However other major Borders towns have high schools that require attention and we will deliver on the Schools Review that is under way. This programme will continue in line with the Council’s commitment to provide centres of excellence for our young people.

Partnership working is the driving force behind ensuring that the Borders remains a **safe place to live, work and visit**. We are committed to resolving the problems that adversely impact the safety and security of our communities working with others to tackle key areas such as the:



We will target substance abuse and its detrimental impact on the health and wellbeing of the vulnerable in our community.

The Borders is acknowledged as one of the safest communities in the country, an enviable position and one that we must fight to retain.

Live Borders was established in April 2016 and has been delivering **sporting and cultural services** since that date. During a period of significant financial pressure, the services that have been delivered on the ground have been maintained to a high standard. Over the next five years we will be working with Live Borders to enhance the cultural focus of our Border towns. The history and depth of our culture and traditions should be cherished and built on. The regeneration of the towns of the Borders has to include cultural regeneration as well as economic regeneration and local plans have to reflect that.

There is a growing network of multi-use paths being developed across the region and we will continue to work with national partners to deliver and increase them to encourage **active travel**. As cycling becomes more and more popular we will work to ensure that significant events such as the Tour of Britain and Tweedlove continue to thrive, bringing major investment, increased tourism and new interest in our region. Key partnerships with local cycling clubs, the Forestry Commission and The Mountain Bike Centre of Scotland are essential to ensuring that the Borders continues to be seen as the UK's premier biking destination.

Over the next five years, this Council will make significant progress in developing services to improve teenage mental health. We will look at models of prevention and treatment and work with partners to deliver improved services in the most relevant context, whether that is in schools or health facilities. We will work to ensure that every young person who requires counselling has access to it, that primary schools are identifying "at risk" young people at an early age, and that our partners are equipped to deliver services that address these issues.

WE WILL:

- Take a "whole community" approach to education (whether you are 2 or 102) to raise attainment, "close the gap" and provide opportunity for everyone
- work with police and local organisations to deliver an extensive project on substance abuse and its impact on mental health
- ensure that our town centre regeneration programme includes an increase in cultural centres as well as an economic focus
- continue to work with Sustrans to deliver multi-use paths across the region
- with partners, deliver improved mental health support to our most vulnerable young people across the Borders

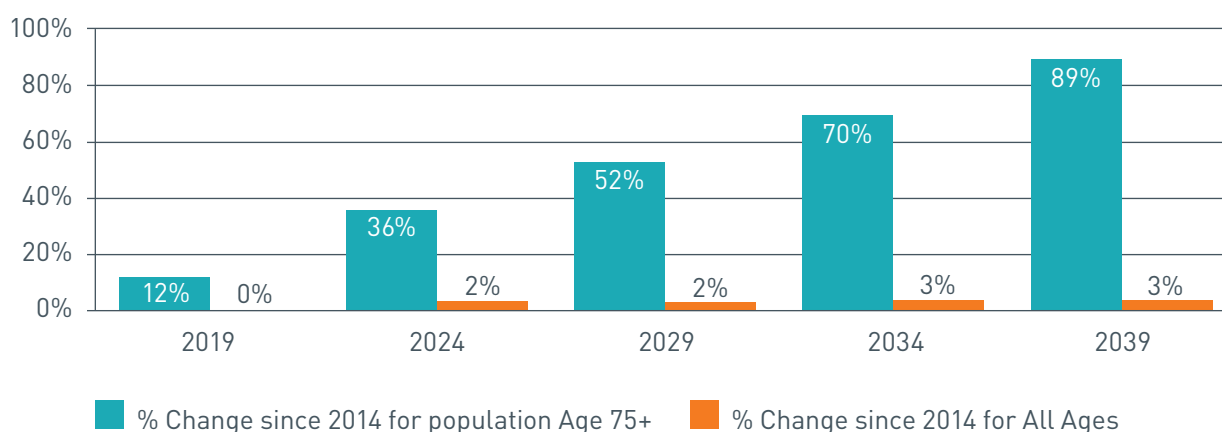


05. COMMUNITIES OF CARING

WHY IS THIS IMPORTANT?

Appropriate care for the elderly is critical as projections suggest that the number of people aged 75+ in the Scottish Borders will increase by 10,353 (89%) between 2014 and 2039, compared to a 3,080 (3%) increase for the total population.

PROJECTED % CHANGE IN POPULATION FOR AGED 75+ COMPARED TO ALL AGES FOR THE SCOTTISH BORDERS, NRS



As a community, we must act now to address this, or we will leave a much bigger issue for future generations to resolve. This is not just an issue for the Council but also for the Third Sector, housing associations, NHS Borders and other partners.

Of particular concern are those elderly people – and their carers - who will be living with dementia. There needs to be a clear patient pathway for those who have been diagnosed with dementia through diagnosis and treatment to a tiered layer of support available when they reach each stage. As a Council we will work with partners to deliver services that will be focused on each person's needs, ensuring that people do not have to struggle to access the care they require and that they can be confident it will be in place when they need it.

Working with partners in the Third Sector, we want to develop plans for prevention and early intervention. There are many fantastic projects that deliver family support, mentoring, education and maternal support. These need to be encouraged, developed and supported to ensure that the needs of our families are being met at an early stage.

WE WILL:

- Ensure that patient pathways are developed for elderly people so the journey of care from first diagnosis to palliative care is clear
- Embed the focus of our family support services to early intervention and mentoring, with a strong focus on early years support and parenting



06. COMMUNITIES THAT ARE EMPOWERED

WHY IS THIS IMPORTANT?

Over the next five years, this Council is committed to being transparent and open. We want communities to engage as much as possible with their local councillors, community councils, community trusts and the many other organisations that exist within our communities, collaborating to build a better Borders.

The Community Empowerment (Scotland) Act 2015 means that communities can have a much greater voice in how councils are run, how services are delivered and how council facilities meet the needs of the local communities in which they are located. This is a welcome and exciting development.

One of the key innovations introduced by the Act is “Participatory Budgeting”, whereby communities will help to decide how funds are spent. This process will be administered by new Area Partnerships (which are replacing Area Forums) and will deliver local decision making and offer a real voice to local community groups. They will have identifiable powers and be able to make a real impact on their local areas.

WE WILL:

- Introduce Area Partnerships to replace Area Forums to bring decision making closer to local communities
- Implement Participatory Budgeting for community projects (through the Area Partnerships) so that communities have a say on what is spent in their local area

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