



31 January 2019

Local Development Plans Team  
Scottish Borders Council  
Newtown St Boswells  
Melrose  
TD6 0SA

**Scottish Borders Local Development Plan 2 Main Issue Report: Response to Public Consultation**

Dear Sir/Madam

We are writing to object to the inclusion of sites MESH1001 and MESH1002 at Eshiels as proposed mixed use development sites. This is outlined in Chapter Four, Growing our Economy, of the Main Issues Report. In particular this letter is a response to Question Six.

There are a considerable number of reasons why these sites are unsuitable to be zoned for business and industrial and mixed use, including housing, in the next Local Development Plan. We are outlining these below.

In his foreword to the Main Issues Report, Councillor Tom Miers states:

“Our overarching purpose is to encourage new growth and investment while preserving and enhancing the unique landscape and built heritage that characterises the Scottish Borders.”

The inclusion of these two sites would be in total opposition to this main aim.

There are a number of issues that are specific to Eshiels and others that are applicable to Peebles as a whole.

First of all, in relation to Peebles generally, the Council commissioned a report entitled Western Rural Growth: Development Options Study from the London-based company Land Use Consultants (LUC). The number of houses that the Council commissioned LUC to find sites for in the Peebles area seems totally disproportionate in relation to the rest of the Borders. It is stated in the LUC report:

“In terms of housing requirements, an indicative figure of 1,000 homes was given by the Council, though it was recognised that this was only aspirational, and that large sites were likely to be few in number.” (1.7)

Development on the scale proposed in the Main Issues Report would make Peebles more and more a dormitory town. In the Borders volume of *The Buildings of Scotland* (Yale University Press, 2006), the general description of Peebles concludes with:

“Lord Cockburn’s quip, ‘As quiet as the grave – or Peebles’ may still apply to this gentle rural burgh on each bank of the silvery Tweed, but for how long? Ease of access by motor-car and an insatiable demand for new housing now threaten to turn Peebles into a rural suburb of Edinburgh.”

The Council rightly acknowledges that Peebles is an attractive town in the Main Issues Report but development of the scale proposed would eventually smother its uniqueness.

All the main Borders towns and villages are clearly defined urban settlements, with clearly visible and marked boundaries. With the current demand for housing, it is understandable that such boundaries are constantly being pushed against. But surely the solution of the worst kind of ribbon development should not be chosen. The unique landscape of the Borders deserves better than this.

Moreover, the reopening of the railway line to Galashiels and Tweedbank suggests that it would be logical to try and develop areas around the rail link, which would encourage people to use more sustainable transport. Also there are existing settlements, like Eddleston with its own primary school and located closer to Edinburgh, which might welcome further modest development.

In Peebles, there are major problems with capacity in the schools and there is no prospect of a new High School for years, if not decades, to come. Where will the children who live in the 1000 new homes in and around Peebles go to school?

Likewise, the existing medical centre and health service is already overstretched. One of us recently made an appointment to see a GP. The earliest available appointment was over a month ahead. There is no way that this can be described as a good service.

The roads around Peebles and Eshiels are now much busier than they used to be. The development of Cardrona over the last 25 years has greatly increased the volume of traffic on the A72. The development of mountain biking at Glentress has also further increased the volume of traffic, especially at weekends. The potential development of 240 houses and business and industrial units at Eshiels would only further add to the volume of traffic. None of this sits comfortably with the Council’s aspirations to be more sustainable.

Eshiels is a small, close-knit community that has grown up organically over time. Originally a farm, the unusual settlement pattern dates from the end of the First World War when smallholdings were established following the 1911 Small Landholders (Scotland) Act. Among other consequences, the Act enabled ex servicemen returning for the war to rent smallholdings and those at Eshiels appeared to have been established in early 1920s.

Originally there were 14 smallholdings which stretched along the main road from Number 5 in the west to almost as far as the Glentress Hotel, and scattered up the road to Linburn Farm. Each

smallholding was established with a cottage, either an existing dwelling or a newly built bungalow, sometimes a barn, and a field.

This unusual settlement pattern is similar to those in other parts of Scotland. In south east Scotland, such smallholdings exist at Damhead in Midlothian and Boggs Holdings in East Lothian. All of these settlements are unusual given that there is a mixture of low density housing and small-scale agricultural enterprises, creating an almost croft-like pattern similar to that in the Highland and Islands.

In this sense, Eshiels is a very unusual type of settlement pattern and the only one of its kind in this part of the Borders. Housing co-exists with small scale rural and agricultural enterprise. It works well, making it a very hospitable place where people enjoy living and working.

Since the creation of the holdings, other houses have been built in the area including a small number of bungalows in the 1970s and 80s, some larger houses up on the hillside, and the original farm steadings have been converted into housing. In the area close to our house, the settlement has grown by about 50% over the last 30 years. All the new building has been quite carefully integrated into the landscape and the existing settlement pattern, retained within the original field boundaries. It is part of the countryside, not randomly imposed on it.

Ironically, Eshiels is not even defined as a settlement in the first Local Development Plan. The planned zoning for housing would impose a settlement of over 240 houses along with business and industrial premises on the existing small community. This would effectively swamp and kill it.

There are other issues that make this a poor choice.

One of the major effects of zoning Eshiels for housing and business and industrial development would be the detrimental impact on the attractiveness of the Tweed Valley as a tourist destination. Glentress has an international reputation as a centre of excellence for mountain biking. Surely efforts should be made to nurture and develop this instead of planning to convert the surrounding area into a massive housing estate.

The main road and lower fields at Eshiels are subject to flooding every time there is heavy rain. The building of new roads and all the new paved parking areas, that are an integral part of any new housing estate, and associated run off would only add to this recurring problem.

Eshiels is not connected to the main sewage systems. It is downstream of the sewage works. How would this be addressed if hundreds of new houses were to be built at Eshiels?

There is badly maintained narrow footpath between Glentress and Peebles. In places it is so narrow that we worry about being hit by the mirror of a passing truck when walking along it. It is impossible to walk along it other than in single file. Despite the recent introduction of a 50 mph speed limit, traffic still thunders along at breakneck speed. This is the footpath children are expected to walk along to school.

The development of the old railway cycle path has been a welcome development but it doesn't directly link Eshiels to Peebles.

Eshiels has dark skies and no street lighting, as befits its rural identity and one of the joys of living here is to be able to walk outside one's front door on a cold, clear crisp night and observe the magnitude of the heavens.

An interesting characteristics of the Borders landscapes is the legacy of hardwood planting of shelter belts in the field boundaries that dates back to the 18<sup>th</sup> century, creating a distinctive and very attractive landscape worth preserving. This in turn nurtures a rich diverse natural habitat. If this proposal were to go ahead, this would be lost, as well as good agricultural land.

Perhaps the Council should look at Eshiels and use it as a model for place-making in other parts of the Borders, as an alternative to the current model of inviting developers in to create bland, copy-cat housing estates.

In recent years, the creation of the new housing schemes at Cardrona has transformed that part of the Tweed Valley from a totally rural environment to an unprepossessing suburban settlement. The development of mountain biking at Glentress has transformed the area immediately adjacent to Eshiels into a major visitor attraction, with attendant car parks and built environment.

Finally, it is clear that the methodology used to identify the sites MESH1001 and MESH1002 has some serious flaws when scrutinised.

One of the stated objective of the LUC report was:

“To engage with landowners and developers on the desirability and effectiveness of the sites being proposed.” (1.3)

Later in the report, it is stated under Land owner and developer engagement:

“The original intention of the study was to contact the relevant landowners to determine their level of interest in bringing shortlisted sites forward for development. However, a lack of readily available landowner information, and the need to bring the study to a close, meant that there was insufficient time to undertake meaningful engagement with landowners. It was agreed with the Council that landowners would have the opportunity to participate in future consultation on the study outputs.” (2.23)

If the consultants had taken the time to visit Eshiels and had spoken to anyone who lives here, they would have found out who owns the land in a matter of minutes. This is indicative of the lack of thoroughness of this report, commissioned by the Council and paid for by taxpayers. This has served as the basis of the Main Issues Report. It is also indicative of the Council's lack of engagement with stakeholders.

This casual and cavalier attitude towards landowners and local communities contrasts with the impression given, throughout the LUC report, that developers were consulted in depth about their preferred sites, which totally skews the conclusions of Main Issues Report. It reads as if the

Council's agenda is totally developer driven. This is short-changing taxpayers and makes a mockery of the process of consultation.

We would urge the Council to reconsider this proposal.

We hope that the Council will be able to take these comments into consideration when further developing the new Local Development Plan.

Yours sincerely

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