

Selkirk Hill Management Group: AGM, 6 August 2025

Ian King (Chair)

The Chair welcomed everyone to the meeting and presented his annual report

SELKIRK HILL GROUP 2024-25 : Chairman's Annual Report - AGM – 06 August 2025

As the outgoing Chair / Vice Chair / Secretary of Selkirk Hill Group, it is my privilege to again present a resume of our activities (and concerns) which we have encountered over the past year.

But first – let us start with a look back in time!

Selkirk Hill, while not explicitly highlighted in historical accounts, is intrinsically linked to the rich history of our town.

However, the Hill has been part of the Selkirk Common Good for centuries.

It is acknowledged that the Hill was granted as common land to the town of Selkirk by David I in the 12th century, to allow for grazing, peat cutting, and turf gathering for fuel and roofing – opportunities which are less appealing these days!

But nonetheless, the Hill continues to be a well-loved and valuable outdoor community asset.

The Selkirk Hill Management Group was formed in 1996 –the inspiration of the distinguished local councillor Stuart Roberts who wished to have local users and residents look after Selkirk Hill - rather than leave it to the (even then!) under pressure and uncertain finances of Scottish Borders Council.

Thus, the Hill – extending to about 140 acres - is managed by a Committee which represents local folk, councillors and community councillors together with representatives from the golf club, nature conservation organisations and the SBC Countryside Service.

The Hill Group (on behalf of the Selkirk community) strives to safeguard this part of our local heritage and to maintain the boundaries, historic and natural character of the Hill for future generations, whilst preserving freedoms of access for the public and conserving the natural flora and fauna of the area.

The constituted Hill Group is a stand-alone body separate from other organisations, such as the Community Council, but it is happy to work in partnership with like-minded spirits! For example, I appreciate we have always maintained a good working relationship with Selkirk Golf Club who share the Hill with us.

Thus, for almost 30 years, the Hill Group has striven to deliver the aims and objectives set out by its original membership and which are set out in our Constitution and Aims and Objectives.

The Constitution was updated and signed off last year and these aspirations remain relevant today!

Namely,

- 1) Maintaining the boundaries, heritage and natural character and integrity of The Selkirk Hill on behalf of the people of Selkirk.
- 2) Preserving the freedoms of access and enjoyment historically and currently enjoyed by the people of Selkirk, and all others having a desire to appreciate the qualities of natural countryside.
- 3 Carrying out such works to maintain The Selkirk Hill in its natural state.
- 4) Planning and carrying out projects intended to enhance the amenity on Selkirk Hill.

- 5) Protecting the Selkirk Hill and its traditional habitats and boundaries from encroachment, misuse or misappropriation.
- 6) Conserving the natural flora and wildlife habitat of The Selkirk Hill as a form of tended heathland by seeking only to balance what is traditionally present against the requirements of the local amenity and those using The Selkirk Hill.

During the last 12 months, the Group have faced a number of challenges (and opportunities) including regular maintenance which has been successfully achieved by the Hill Warden (Campbell Dempster) despite various weather extremes when it has been difficult to keep pace with growth and to keep accesses clear and well drained. Campbell has also kept Curries Fountain running and regular attention has been required at the Caulks Well to protect the public access. We are also pleased that the Golf Club – our near neighbour on the Hill - took the initiative to resolve some flooding issues on the approach to the 2nd tee - in the Caulks Well area. Thanks!

Elsewhere,

- I am pleased to report that the Common Good Sub Committee has agreed a funding package for repairs to the bridge structure at the foot of Buxton (locally known as the Steely Brig)

It is helpful that SBC has issued an advisory letter to Buxton residents asking them to avoid the use of pesticides – and thereby help protect their local environment

And, most importantly, I am delighted to report that an application to SBC for an increase to the annual maintenance grant has been successful. This sum had remained static for some 20 years and the new increase is most welcome in our efforts to counter the rising costs of demand and inflation!

Meanwhile, there is ongoing dialogue with SBC regarding issues concerning the Common Good land, namely recognition of the traditional Common Good boundary (which is generally accepted as the drystone dykes which enclose the perimeter)

And the need to review and prepare a maintenance plan for the unadopted Drove Road at Buxton (beyond the public car park area) – where the condition of the road is deteriorating and assessment is required to help protect the future of this historic access and set out responsibilities for its upkeep – especially with potential expansion to the local building group currently being sanctioned by SBC.

Another future challenge is the repairs needed to the perimeter drystone dyke to the northeast boundary of the Hill. There are now gaps which allow livestock to encroach onto the Hill and these gaps – although livestock are essentially the farmers responsibility - should ideally be repaired using traditional materials.

On a more positive note, challenges can also mean opportunities:

We have met with members of the Bowden Moor Group and discussed mutual interests and objectives. The Hill Warden will maintain contact and we have agreed to share experiences.

Similarly, we have recently been introduced to the 'Bright Green Nature' Group who look after 60 acres in the Haining/ Deer Park area of Selkirk. It is hoped to explore matters of mutual interest with them, including creating a footpath link which would provide the Selkirk community with a more meaningful circular walk around the town and through rural environments.

For the future, there is eager anticipation that the local community is exploring the reintroduction of a Haggis Hunt to the Hill next year (2026) and the Hill Group will endeavour to encourage and support this popular event.

The Hill remains popular, although numbers are slightly reduced but this may reflect the opportunities of other open spaces elsewhere in the vicinity. (perhaps on more level ground?) The successful husbandry of the Hill has also benefited wildlife and provides flourishing habitats. Our monthly conversations keep note of encounters with rare or unusual fauna and flora which have been observed and we hope to compile a computerised register to record these topics and their evolving statistics.

Also in the past year, some storm damage required urgent tree husbandry to protect public safety and triggered a tree survey assessment of the lower half of the Hill. It is hoped the remaining area will be surveyed in the next year. Again, an issue with SBC regarding the acceptance of historic boundaries!

We look to the future with some optimism. There is the potential to create a 'Friends of the Selkirk Hill' group and this will be explored. As already mentioned, we are in contact with neighbouring environmental groups and we shall also maintain some contact with the High School who acknowledge the Hill is a very convenient neighbour and convenient resource for accommodating some their curricular activities.

Finally, I wish to thank past and present Members for their support and enabling me to have a deeper understanding of the Hill and what it represents – especially the help from Campbell our Hill Warden (who carries out his duties patiently and efficiently) and Councillor Leagh Douglas (for her positive link with SBC bureaucracy),

THANKS

plus, the echoes from the past still resonate – sadly missed members such as my predecessor Gordon Edgar – plus the late Caroline Cruikshank, Jim Bradley - and Alan McGhee (who represented the local Golf Club) and local resident John Rathie - who were all sources of inspiration, commitment and information for me!

I also appreciate the occasional attendance and support from members of the Selkirk Community! It is vital that our community asset remains a buoyant and relevant part of our daily life! We must not take it for granted!

For day-to-day budgeting help, Judith Thomson has kept a steady hand on the financial tiller... and David Playfair has recently donned the mantle of Treasurer. Plus, as ever, Viv Ross has again given unfailing help as our Auditor!

Last but certainly not least – thanks to Susan Gray (Countryside and the Access Team) from SBC who have continued to give advice and support wherever possible.

Many thanks to all!

I wish the Chair of the next Committee good fortune in striving to support, protect and achieve the intrinsic objectives of the Hill Group on behalf of the Selkirk community!

Our valued community resource is under threat and our heritage is watching!

Ian King, Outgoing Chair / Vice Chair / Secretary (Selkirk Hill Group: 2007- 2025)