SKIRLING2024 - 2029COMMUNITY ACTION PLAN

SKIRLING COMMUNITY ACTION PLAN STEERING GROUP



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INTRODUCTION 1

SKIRLING COMMUNITY ACTION PLAN

This Community Action Plan summarises community views about:

- Skirling now, and how it is changing
- The vision for the future of Skirling
- The issues that matter most to the community
- Our priorities for projects and actions.

The plan will be our guide for what we - as a community - try to make happen over the next 5 years.

WORKING TOGETHER

The preparation of the plan has been organised by the Skirling Community Action Planning Steering Group. It was set up by Skirling Community Council, with support and involvement from representatives from a range of local groups and interests. We have been supported in carrying out the work by the STAR Development Group.

This plan will help us to develop our joint priority projects and make representation on behalf of the community on the issues that matter most to our residents, organisations and local businesses.



LOCAL PEOPLE HAVE THEIR SAY

The Action Plan has been informed by extensive community engagement carried out over a five month period from May to September 2023

The process involved:

- stakeholder conversations with community organisations, volunteers, residents, church, local businesses, landowners, service providers and public agencies
- carrying out a community views survey of all households
- preparing a community profile detailing facts and figures about the community
- organising a Community Futures Event



130

COMMUNITY VIEWS SURVEY FORMS WERE RETURNED FROM 113 HOUSES

AROUND 20

DIFFERENT INTERESTS AND ORGANISATIONS TOOK PART IN STAKEHOLDER CONVERSATIONS

67

PEOPLE TOOK PART IN THE PRIORITY VOTING AT (OR AFTER) THE COMMUNITY EVENT

THANKS TO EVERYONE WHO TOOK PART

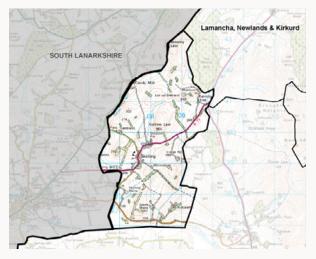
² OUR COMMUNITY NOW

We have summarised below the main facts and figures from the Community Profile and some of the views from the Community Views Survey. Full copies of these reports are available at www.skirlingvillage.co.uk

SKIRLING COMMUNITY PROFILE 2023 SUMMARY

LOCATION

Skirling is a small conservation village and Community Council area in the Scottish Borders. It is included within the Upper Tweed locality of Scottish Borders Council and lies close to the border with South Lanarkshire only two miles east from Biggar. Along with Broughton and Tweedsmuir, Skirling is part of the Parish of Upper Tweeddale. The Community Council area includes the village of Skirling, the small nearby settlements of Skirling Mill and Muirburn, and the surrounding farmland.



POPULATION AND HOUSING

It is estimated locally that there are just over 200 people living in the Community Council area – a slightly higher estimate than the 194 recorded in the 2011 census. A noticeable difference between 2011 and 2023 is the decline in the percentage of under 16's living in the area – all the more reason to welcome the recent additions!

The current local assessment of the number of pre and school age children in the area included 9 preschoolers, 10 primary school and 17 high school pupils.

The local estimate is that there are around 110 houses in the Skirling Community Council area. There is a relatively high level of owner occupation and a low level of private rented housing compared to the Scottish Borders. Social rented housing is on a par with the Scottish Borders – thanks to the mix of Scottish Borders Housing Association and Eildon properties providing 20 houses between them.



LOCAL ECONOMY

Some of the main sources of employment for people in Skirling are in Education, Health and Social Work followed by Agriculture and Forestry, Manufacturing, Construction and Accommodation and Food Services.

There are approximately 13-15 farms in the Skirling area. Most of the farms are family owned which often means that families have been farming the land for generations. Typical farm size in the area is relatively small – and many farmers have diversified their sources of income e.g., through contracting businesses, visitor cottages and forestry etc.

Previous assessments of the local economy showed that compared to Scottish Borders and Scotland there was a high rate of economically active persons in Skirling with higher rates of self-employed and part time employment and a lower rate of full-time employment.

The area has been popular with people commuting as far afield as Edinburgh, with good road links and a bus service. Post Covid there is now a significant increase in people working most of the week from home in the village.

SCHOOLS AND EDUCATION

Nursery and Primary Schooling is at Broughton Primary School. There are currently 40 pupils in the school (with approximately 10 of these from Skirling) and a further 15 children in the nursery.

The main High School for the catchment is in Peebles. Some children go to Biggar High School which is much closer but there are no school transport arrangements as it is outwith Scottish Borders Council.





HEALTH AND CARE

Resources and facilities include:

- GP Services in Biggar
- Cottage Hospitals at Biggar and Peebles
- Main hospitals in Melrose, Wishaw, Livingston, Edinburgh
- Ambulance Service in Biggar West Linton, Wishaw and Livingston
- District Nurses based in West Linton
- First Responders
- Upper Tweed Drivers subsidised transport for healthcare visits
- The availability of public defibrillator (at village hall)
- Care homes in Biggar, Peebles, Lanark and Innerleithen

COMMUNITY AND RECREATION

Community Centre and Halls

• Skirling Village Hall

Churches

• Skirling Kirk

Open Spaces and Outdoor Recreation

- Village Green
- Community Garden at Broughton Primary
- Local paths (see Environment Section)

Community Development Groups & Resources

- Skirling Community Council
- Skirling Village Hall Committee
- Resilient Skirling
- Skirling Church members

Other Groups and activities

- Toddlers Group
- Community Lunch
- Breakfast Club (two mornings a week at Broughton Primary)
- Table Tennis
- Badminton
- Pilates, Yoga,
- Biggar Stitches and Soup and Sew
- Occasional classes (e.g. Pottery)
- Warm Space in Village Hall over winter months.
- First Aid and Defib training

Community Events

- Village BBQ on green
- Village Photograph
- Annual Car Boot Sale
- Christmas Carol Singing
- Christmas Community Lunch
- Advent Windows
- Village Christmas Party (previously in Skirling House)
- Ceilidh
- Annual Village Clean Up
- Occasional craft fairs
- Drive In Concerts on the Green during Covid

Community information

- Skirling Village Facebook and Website
- Kirk Matters (Church Newsletter for Upper Tweeddale 3 times a year)
- Village Hall WhatsApp Group
- Toddlers WhatsApp Group
- Noticeboards at Hall and bus stops
- Community Newsletter (4 times a year)

ENVIRONMENT AND HERITAGE

Environmental assets and resources include:

- Right of Way and designated Core Path out to Broughton 3 miles away (tricky to use, but still passable)
- Woodland behind Skirling House
- 'Community Woodland path' circular around Gallows Knowe.
- The Village Green
- Skirling Burn (flowing into Biggar Water and eventually joining the Tweed)
- Village enhancement with flower tubs

Heritage sites and features:

- Village Conservation Area
- Church and Graveyard
- War memorial
- Village Hall
- Skirling House
- Site of Skirling Castle
- Historic Drove Roads and annual fairs
- Gallows Knowe



4 OUR COMMUNITY NOW

COMMUNITY VIEWS SURVEY: LIKES

What we like - and some comments from the survey

LIKES	% OF RESPONSES
 COMMUNITY SPIRIT "Everyone seems to get on well and there never appears to be much hassle" "There is a fabulous support system in the village where people strive to help and benefit each other" "It has a real sense of community without being intrusive" "I like that if I have any problems there is always someone willing to help" 	56%
VILLAGE CHARACTER AND FEEL "Hasn't been overdeveloped and retains a certain charm" "Child friendly. Dog friendly. People friendly." "Skirling is a lovely peaceful place to come home to after a busy day" "I love the laid back feel of the whole village"	51%
ENVIRONMENT AND COUNTRYSIDE "Good location in the stunning scenery of the Scottish Borders" "Lots of nice places to walk" "It's clean and tidy/kept looking nice" "How pretty it looks thanks to the folk that look after the flowering tubs"	37%
 COMMUNITY EVENTS, ACTIVITIES, AND FACILITIES "Community events – Village advent window, the lunch club, the Jubilee celebration" "I love the village green especially when there's a party on it." "The village hall is a great asset" "Has its own website & Facebook page to help keep locals informed" 	27%
LOCATION "It has a good country feel about it – well positioned in lower central Scotland" "Shares close ties with neighbouring Broughton and Biggar" "Lovely small rural village but close enough to a bigger town which has all the amenities and in a commutable distance to two big cities"	18%
AMENITIES AND SERVICES "Schoolhouse garden for eggs and veg" "Skirling Church for its little light on during Covid and what it contributes to the village" "A good local school"	13%
EVERYTHING!	2%





COMMUNITY VIEWS SURVEY: DISLIKES

What we don't like - and some of the comments

DISLIKES	% OF RESPONSES
 TRAFFIC AND ROADS "There is so fast traffic, means I can't really walk around the village safely" "the pedestrian access in the village is totally inadequate. At the north end of the village there is none! "The road can make it more difficult to walk around the village with small children" "All three speed limit changes – better just 30mph all the way through" "Very bumpy, pot holed lane around the green and up by the loan" 	39%
THERE IS NOTHING TO DISLIKE "There is very little not to like about Skirling" "Very little, the village is pretty near perfect"	22%
ACCESS TO SERVICES "Poor bus service to and from school to Biggar" "Bus connections for Lanark, Edinburgh – lack of integration" "No footpath to Biggar our closest town, hard to use main road with young kids and buggies" "Being on the outer edge of Borders Region we seem to be last to have roads gritted" "Internet/phone reception is slow"	20%
 LOCAL AMENITIES "There are no basic services such as a shop/post office. I believe a local shop would be well supported" "No pub, no school, no shop" "Water pressure issues every summer" "Lack of immediate facilities, but I knew that when we moved in so no point in complaining!" 	16%
COMMUNITY FACILITIES & ACTIVITIES "Lack of play facilities for younger children" "Not enough social activities, even if it was at certain times of the year" "Could be some more social activities for blokes!" "Maybe a weekly or fortnightly update on the Hall noticeboard to read please"	13%
ENVIRONMENTAL ISSUES "There aren't any dog poo bins, or general waste bins at all" "Telephone exchange area looks untidy" "Walking routes from the village are a little limited – thank goodness for the woodland" "Flooding risk"	9%





• VISION FOR THE FUTURE

We asked people what they hoped Skirling would be like in 10 - 15 years' time. Our hopes and dreams...

> Remain as a small, peaceful, and safe community A thriving and mixed age population Well connected to surrounding towns and villages Continue to be a community with a heart Greener and carbon neutral



"Very similar to now but with a little more activity – buses and a shop"

"Everyone to have sourced green energy"

"A safe, friendly, inclusive community with something to offer all age groups"

> "A safe and sustainable community, with affordable housing for local people"





"A vibrant village where families are proud to raise their children in a caring community"

MAIN STRATEGIES AND PRIORITIES 7

These are the main strategies and priorities the community and its organisations will focus on over the next 5 years – working in partnership with public agencies, landowners, local businesses, and with other third sector organisations and supporters.



THEME 1: SAFE SKIRLING – traffic, roads and pavements

Skirling's location on the A72 makes it important to slow traffic going through the village. Speeding traffic and lack of safe pavements in some parts of the village can hamper residents moving freely around their own village and can reduce their ability to connect with others and participate in community life.

Recent efforts to introduce speed limits have gone some way to helping – but residents say there is much more that needs to be done. Making Skirling a safer place for residents of all ages to walk or cycle in would include – village 'gateways', a 20 or 30mph speed limit throughout the village, and crucially new pavements that help connect up housing with the village hall and church.

Repairs to the pavement out to Skirling Mill were also highlighted, as was the need to improve the road around the Village Green.

Main priorities

- Further traffic calming and speed restrictions
- Improve and develop new pavements throughout the village and out to Skirling Mill

THEME 2: WELL CONNECTED SKIRLING – improving access

Skirling's location and its lack of its own facilities and services means that it is very important that it is well connected to nearby towns and villages and the range of services and amenities they offer. Good access to Biggar only two miles away in South Lanarkshire is particularly important, as is connection to Broughton where children go to primary school and residents use the good community shop.

Looking wider afield there is seen to be a need to continue to lobby for improved access to health, education and other services that are sensitive and flexible enough to accommodate a community and its residents that is on the periphery of Scottish Borders Council and also often accesses services in South Lanarkshire.

Main priorities

- Good safe all ability path links to Biggar and Broughton to encourage active travel
- Better bus services or community transport
- Ongoing dialogue with service providers/local authorities/health boards, to improve service delivery
- Developing joint working with other communities in Upper Tweeddale and beyond.





THEME 3: SKIRLING COMMUNITY LIFE

The Village Hall, Village Green and the Church all provide opportunities for people to come together in the community and enjoy activities and events. They are much appreciated as are the people – the volunteers who take time to make the community and these venues come alive.

Ways of developing these resources were suggested including making the church more of a community resource, and continuing to upgrade the hall, and looking at creating more parking space for people using these facilities.

In addition, the creation of an outdoor play and picnic area was seen to be a valuable addition – particularly with the recent increase in the number of children and young families. A place where children can play and adults can gather to meet and socialise. Some design and funding work has previously been carried out in the community for this and it would be timely to progress this further.

In general people enjoyed the activities and events held in the village and suggested that more would also be welcome. With more people working from home than in the past it was thought that there might be more opportunities to bring people together or provide homespun hospitality.... like informal coffee drop ins, pop up pub or movie nights. Providing more local access to basic food essentials was also thought to be worth pursuing as an idea.

Main priorities

- Ongoing improvement of the village hall and church for community use
- Play area and picnic area
- More activities and events
- More amenities e.g. Pop up shop/café/markets/ pub



THEME 4: SKIRLING ENVIRONMENT AND HERITAGE

Skirling is surrounded by lovely countryside – farmland, woodlands and rolling hills. People would like to see the access out into the countryside maintained and developed, to continue to encourage the development of 'community woodlands' and walks, and to look at ways of encouraging biodiversity and wildlife.

People would like to continue the good work of village enhancement and also to create opportunities for growing produce and planting fruit trees.

The area also has an interesting history with links to the drove roads and horse fairs. Work is in progress to provide more information and interpretation on this heritage and there is the potential to develop this more over the coming years.

Main priorities

- Improve paths networks
- Encourage biodiversity and Wildlife
- Village Enhancement
- Community Growing
- Promoting and enhancing local heritage



THEME 5 SUSTAINABLE AND RESILENT SKIRLING Increasingly, in light of climate change, communities have to keep an eye on the future and act today to mitigate and adapt. Some of the priorities already identified will help with this e.g. encouraging more walking and cycling, local growing and encouraging biodiversity. Other priorities noted included looking after the Burn that flows through the village to reduce the danger of flooding in the future; doing more to recycle, and to look at ways of reducing dependence on fossil fuels (e.g. use of electric transport, supporting energy efficiency in homes and community buildings, and looking at opportunities for community renewables).

Main Priorities

- Address flooding issues
- More recycling
- Reducing fossil fuel use

THEME 1: SAFE SKIRLING – TRAFFIC, PAVEMENTS AND ROADS

PRIORITIES	WHAT ACTION SHOULD BE TAKEN
TRAFFIC CALMING AND SPEED RESTRICTIONS	 Support and continue work to develop village gateways and other traffic calming measures. Continue to lobby Council for additional measures: Dragon's teeth, Roundels, Countdown signs for 40mph, advisory cycle lanes. Monitor effectiveness of existing speed reductions Lobby for uniform speed limit (20 or 30mph?) throughout the whole village.
Action by	Community Council, Scottish Borders Council, Police Scotland
VILLAGE PAVEMENTS AND ROADS	 Develop plans for pavements/safe routes from the top of the village down to the village hall and church Improve path out to Skirling Mill Improve road around the village green
Action by	Community Council, Scottish Borders Council



PRIORITIES	WHAT ACTION SHOULD BE TAKEN
DEVELOP AND IMPROVE PATH LINKS TO BIGGAR AND BROUGHTON	 Improve existing path to Broughton Research and develop safe all abilities path/ route into Biggar
Action by	Scottish Borders Council, South Lanarkshire Council, Sustrans
BETTER BUS SERVICES/ COMMUNITY TRANSPORT	 Try to improve bus services in the area Explore with other communities the need for a community bus that could link a number of villages in the area to services and amenities in nearby towns.
Action by	Community Council working with other communities in the area, Scottish Borders Council and local councillors, other neighbouring local authorities, Transport Providers
IMPROVE ACCESS TO HEALTH, EDUCATION, CHILDCARE AND OTHER SERVICES	 Document and represent issues raised by local residents Ongoing dialogue with service providers/local authorities/health boards to improve service delivery Lobby to maintain Broughton Primary School – increased teachers, wrap around childcare Encourage and support other childminders in the village once Katy retires!
Action led by	Community Council, local Scottish Borders Council and local Councillors, Biggar Medical Practice Patients Group, Health Boards, Broughton Primary School Parent Council
IMPROVE BROADBAND SPEED/MOBILE SIGNAL	• Document current issues, weaknesses and gaps in existing provision and lobby for change.
Action by	Community Council, local businesses/home workers/farmers, Broadband Service Providers, Telecommunication Companies, Scottish Government
PARTNERSHIP WORKING WITH OTHER COMMUNITIES IN UPPER TWEEDDALE AND BEYOND	 Support and continue to develop links with other neighbouring communities Make joint representation on service delivery and joint action on projects, and sharing ideas, information and resources.
Action by	Community Council, Church - in tandem with other communities and with the support of Scottish Borders Council and Tweeddale West Councillors



THEME 3: SKIRLING COMMUNITY LIFE

PRIORITIES	WHAT ACTION SHOULD BE TAKEN
VILLAGE HALL AND CHURCH	• Support ongoing plans for improvements to Village Hall and Church that will help with energy efficiency, community use, storage and parking.
Action by	Village Hall, Church
PLAY AREA AND PICNIC AREA	 Agree best site and most suitable design – building on the existing plans and funding efforts Work to develop the play and picnic area.
Action by	Play Area Action Group
ACTIVITIES AND EVENTS	• Look at ideas raised in the CAP community survey, stakeholders' conversations and event - and the best way to take them forward.
Action led by	Village Hall, Church and other interested volunteers
LOCAL AMENITIES AND HOSPITALITY	 Explore how other small communities have opened up and run small occasional shops/cafes/markets/pubs in their village halls, greens or churches Build on existing initiatives and resources (local produce at hall, links with Broughton Community Shop, individual skills and interest locally) Trial/pilot some experiments.
Action by	Village Hall, Church and other interested volunteers



THEME 4: ENVIRONMENT AND HERITAGE

PRIORITIES	WHAT ACTION SHOULD BE TAKEN
LOCAL PATHS NETWORKS	 Produce small map and information about local walks Improve existing paths e.g., to Broughton Investigate how paths/routes can be expanded to link to other paths networks and places e.g., in Biggar. Develop, sign and promote a circular walk for the village.
BIODIVERSITY AND WILDLIFE	 Involve people in study, enjoyment and enhancement of local biodiversity and wildflife.
VILLAGE ENHANCEMENT	 Continue programme of village enhancement Look at how planting can be linked to productive growing Look at how planting can help with the development of 'gateways' at village limits.
COMMUNITY GROWING	 Explore how other communities have developed community gardens and orchards and productive growing in 'gap' sites. Identify and progress opportunities for community growing in Skirling.
PROMOTING AND ENHANCING LOCAL HERITAGE	 Continue to provide information, interpretation and signage of local heritage Explore how Tweedsmuir and others have been developing eco-museums.
Action by	Set up an Environment and Heritage Action Group for this theme?



THEME 5: SUSTAINABLE AND RESILIENT SKIRLING

PRIORITIES	WHAT ACTION SHOULD BE TAKEN
FLOOD PREVENTION	 Monitoring and maintaining Burn – and making improvements as required to reduce flooding risk.
RECYCLING	Improve recycling facilities
	 Look at ways of developing community composting.
REDUCING FOSSIL FUEL USE	 Support increased energy efficiency and renewable energy sources in houses, village hall and church
	Support use of Electric Vehicles
	• Explore opportunities for community renewables.
Action by	Resilient Skirling, Set up a new Sustainable Skirling Action Group?

MAKING IT HAPPEN 13

The priorities in this action plan will be taken forward by our local community groups working together with interested volunteers, other Community Councils, relevant Community Groups, local Councillors and Council Officers (Scottish Borders Council and South Lanarkshire Council)

EXISTING ORGANISATIONS

We already have coordinators and volunteers for some of the themes. If you would like to get involved, have ideas to offer, or for further information please contact:

Community Council: secretaryskirlingcc@gmail.com

Village Hall Committee: skirlingvhc@outlook.com

Parish Church: Isobel Hunter [isobel@skirlinghouse.com]

Resilience Group: Lisa Thomson[lisathomson16@aol.com]





NEED FOR NEW ORGANISATIONS AND ACTION GROUPS

As the priorities in this plan develop, other dedicated action groups might evolve.

In the meantime, we are working on establishing a Community Development Trust, in the same way that some other communities like Tweedsmuir have done. This would enable the community to purchase land or buildings and raise funding for community projects. This would mean that, in addition to having the Community Council to lobby and make representation on behalf of the community, we would also have the Community Development Trust to develop and manage community projects.

WORKING WITH

NEIGHBOURING COMMUNITIES

We already work with neighbouring communities to learn from each other and to lobby for the priorities that we share. Over the next five years, in the process of implementing this plan, we would hope to develop these links further to lobby jointly for services and resources that could benefit us all.

KEEPING THE ACTION PLAN UP TO DATE

The Community Council will organise a Community Action Plan Annual Review meeting once a year to report back to the Community on how the plan is progressing and to see what has been achieved and what more needs to be done.



COMMUNITY ACTION PLAN

SKIRLING

2024 · 2029

This Community Action Plan sets out the priorities for the development of Skirling over the next 5 years as determined by the community through an extensive process of community engagement carried out over a five month period from May - September 2023

The Plan contains

- A summary of our Community Profile
- Our main likes and dislikes as identified in our Community Views Survey
- Our Vision Statement for the future of Skirling
- The main themes and priorities for action
- Information on how you can stay in touch and get involved.

The Plan is for the whole community and is jointly owned by all the organisations and individuals that took part in its preparation. We will be working together to ensure its implementation over the next 5 years.

Acknowledgements

Skirling Community Action Plan Steering Group was supported in preparing this Community Action Plan by STAR Development Group.

Funding was provided by SSE Clyde Borders Community Benefit Fund



