

Sedbergh Economic Partnership – Meeting Notes

2pm, 18 March 2022

Attending: Andrew Cobb (Chair), Chris Wood, Francine Bult, Ian McPherson, Joanne Golton, Cllr Kevin Lancaster, Cllr Nick Cotton, Janey Hassam, Peter Marshall, Peter Stockton, Cllr Robin Ashcroft, Sam Butcher, Cllr Suzie Pye, Tony Reed Screen, Jo Mowbray, Debbie Wilson. **Invited guests:** Dan Harrison, Jodie Mitchell, Tim Farron MP, James Ratcliffe, John Barraclough, Laura Thornton.

Apologies: Gillian Holmes, Carol Moffat, Nicky Millington, Matt Williams, Sarah Campbell

1. Welcome and Actions

Andy welcomed everybody to the meeting. Dan Harrison, Headmaster at Sedbergh School was welcomed, along with representatives from local business sectors, James Ratcliffe (hospitality), John Barraclough (manufacturing) and Jodie Mitchell (retail).

- Most action items are covered under the agenda. Notes from last meeting accepted.
- Noted that Robin Ashcroft is SLDC Veterans Champion.
- Electric charging project still being progressed and it was noted that Dent had recently installed 4 new EV points. Ongoing.

2. Sedbergh Childcare Project

Cllr Susie Pye introduced the childcare report with Laura Thornton from the Sedbergh Parents Action Group. The report concludes that the lack of childcare in Sedbergh is harming the ability of local people to work and of Sedbergh businesses to recruit locally. Sedbergh is losing families to other towns as parents access childcare solutions.

One positive report was that County Council and Sedbergh Play Group Committee have agreed the use of the Children's Centre five days a week during term time, following school hours. **Action: SEP** to write to the primary school requesting a quick implantation of wrap-around care to support families in Sedbergh. **Action: SEP** to establish a small working group to help find monetary and physical resources to help establish a Nursery and wrap around care project.

3. Sedbergh Growth Framework

Joanne went through the updated action plan and the current challenges facing delivery.

- Lack of collective business voice
- Delivery of more housing
- Tourism/ marketing co-ordination
- Delivery of childcare provision
- No public electric charging points
- Local budgets/ project delivery
- Baliol site
- Reorganisation and effect on Sedbergh
- Recruitment issues
- Town offer across hospitality/ retail 7 days a week

Local government reorganisation. SEP members should note that the reorganisation also affects the Yorkshire Dales National Park as well as County Council and District Council. All potential impact will be known in May but will affect YDNP member numbers. The National Park have made some changes to member numbers in anticipation but full reorganisation details are not yet known.

Housing. More homes are needed to support jobs in the local economy. This includes rental accommodation and/ or shared houses. Noted that Sedbergh School report that up to 50 of their staff have indicated that they would like to lessen the commute and buy a house here in Sedbergh.

The new Sedbergh Business Network portal will help by advertising shared accommodation/ rental units for workers. Sedbergh School reported the need for homes for prospective employees. Other businesses

report the same and the lack of available housing inhibits business growth. **Action: JG** to source list of all available accommodation and share with employers.

Marketing and Promotion. There is a need for better marketing coordination for the town. Joint promotion work, key messages and the need to pool resources to make them go further is to be discussed at the first meeting of the Promoting Sedbergh group, next week (kindly hosted by Howgills apartments). We also need to let businesses know all the events planned over the coming year so they can make necessary arrangements to be open / manage staff numbers to cope with additional footfall.

Project Delivery. SEP discussed budgets in relation to the ongoing coordination of activities in Sedbergh, funding request now in to SLDC. Pleasing to see new private sector representatives at SEP - increased business representation will result in a good mix of private, voluntary, and public viewpoints.

Recruitment. This remains a significant issue for the town. A Job Fair for Sedbergh featuring a range of local employers is being considered as part of the new Business Network project.

4. Economic Opportunities for Sedbergh

Dan Harrison, Headteacher of Sedbergh School provided a quick overview of the community aspects of the school. The school firmly believes in 'giving back' and students can often be seen out and about around the town undertaking community works. Should there be any ideas for further community work that would be suitable for students please let the school know. The school wants to offer more local provision for their facilities. The school currently provides two scholarships for the lower sixth and two for the upper sixth. There is an ambition to increase this to 15 local scholarships (across ages 13-18yrs) by the 500yr anniversary in 2025. The school is working with Settlebeck School and The Springboard Foundation to meet these goals.

Concerns were raised that school fees were discounted for 2nd homeowners having a local address and, if true, this was adding to the pressure on availability of homes. DH provided clarification that this was not the case and there are no discounts based on parents having a local address. The school currently owns 20 homes locally which they rent out to staff.

Tim Farron MP thanked everyone for his invitation and found the discussion very informative, he is encouraged to hear of SEP's work to date. TF would like to help where he can on the childcare issue, quite clear that it is having a debilitating effect on the town. The rural transport issue remains but there is hope that the new authority might help to solve this. **Action: TF** to contact primary school and talk with private nursery providers to help solve childcare issue.

More needs to be done on housing as current policy is not supporting economies like Sedbergh. TF has dealt with 25 evictions on section 21 notices where local workers are losing their homes (which were converted to Airbnb lettings). TF reported that 2020/2021 had seen a 32% increase in second homes in South Lakeland according to council data and that 60 to 80% of sales have gone to second homeowners according to agents across South Lakeland in the last 18 months. Clear that school roll numbers will start to diminish across the area as a result of these changes. Small changes can be made to help address second home ownership and TF is lobbying hard in Parliament to achieve this (changes include corporation tax and HMRC marrying up their tax threshold levels).

Discussion had on new land subsidies and environmental payments which will result in radical changes to the farming sector. It is a huge concern for local farming families across the Dales and the Lakes and the effort to help farms through this continue at parliamentary level.

5. Tourism in Sedbergh

Francine Bult provided an insight into the various initiatives that Cumbria Tourism (CT) is undertaking as part of the attract and disperse campaign, which covers Sedbergh and its hinterland. Initiatives include the long-distance cycling lake and dales loop, the 'welcome back to high streets' campaign and the dark skies festivals (another one in November to support winter tourism).

Like a lot of other sectors, tourism is struggling with recruitment. CT has a jobs page on its website and every sector is welcome to post vacancies free of charge. CT also working to push hospitality as a career option. International travel trade is still buoyant and lots of inquiries still come in - e.g., a craft group from the Netherlands looking for an itinerary around the Lakes.

Welcome to Yorkshire has now ceased trading but this could present an opportunity for the Yorkshire Dales National Park and other tourism bodies to work together. **Action: JG** to circulate CT update paper and **FB to publish an update of CT work** in the area in Lookaround.

SEP to consider town twinning opportunities as several potential employees for the hospitality trade could come over, subject to visa approval, which may help recruitment issues. **Action: PM** to consider this route and look at rules regarding training and deployment of overseas students.

JG met with a group of hospitality facing organisations and businesses in February. This was a positive start in the plan for a joint approach in marketing and promoting Sedbergh. Notes from that meeting have previously been circulated. Upcoming events dates were also shared.

6. Planning Matters

YDNP Local Plan. The housing viability study is expected to be considered at the March YDNP meeting. It will look at the percentage of affordable homes in the various sections of the park. Second homes and holiday lets remain a major issue.

A note from Peter Stockton was circulated. The planning authority are now reviewing the housing viability study, expected that 30% of new houses (in this area, different in other areas) have to be affordable. Consultation on this will be in September. All new houses would have a permanency which will affect value (but perhaps not affect viability value, which will help determine this as a policy). New census data will provide second home numbers and should be out shortly.

Discussion on number of new homes and sites concluded that the Park needs to consider sewerage issues as there is infrastructure limitations and frequent deposits into the rivers. Everyone was reminded that the utility companies have an obligation to rectify any issues to allow delivery of housing.

Planning applications. The Baliol project is not going to committee as it is still far from current policy - will either get refused or members will move to discuss whether the gap from policy can be filled. Likely it will go to summer planning committee. SEP has submitted comments on the application.

PM provided a short presentation on the latest Sedbergh School planned technology centre. The new building would be available for courses, conferencing, lectures. Expected to submit planning in the summer with a potential finish date of September 2024. SLDC are looking at digital creative hubs, in Kendal, but perhaps Sedbergh could also be considered. **Action: PM** to contact Robin Ashcroft to discuss.

7. Partner Updates

Postponed until next meeting. All advised to start networking with the potential councillors prior to new authority taking over.

8. Next meeting 11am, Fri 29 April at the Hirst Centre, Sedbergh.