

Sedbergh Economic Partnership – Meeting Notes

11am, 8 March 2024

Attending: Andrew Cobb (Chair), Debbie Richardson, Joanne Golton, Cllr Hazel Hodgson, John Barraclough, Jim Atkins, Steve Ewence, Chris Woods, Tony Reed-Screen, Peter Marshall (Vice-Chair), Gillian Holmes (WAF), Debbie Wilson, Jo Moffat, Sam Butcher (WAF), James Ratcliffe, Amy Buzuriu, Paul Thomas,

Apologies: Matt Williams (WAF), Peter Stockton (YDNP)

1. Welcome and Actions

Andy welcomed local businesses Westwood Books, Black Bull, Howgill Accommodation

TIC Funding confirmation – Julie Barker confirmed that the finance and resource committee met on Tuesday and funding was approved, this will now go to full committee. Same level of funding was confirmed (£5k). SEP thanked the TIC manager and volunteers for providing such a welcoming and important service to the town and to its visitors.

Section 215 letter – a response was received from YDNP regarding the request for a s215 notice for 37-39 Main Street and YDNP officers will attend the site and provide feedback. **ACTION: JG** to circulate letter. Planning permissions expire soon for the site and the owners have submitted permission to commence work.

2. Visitor Services, YDNP

Head of Visitor Services at YDNP, Julie Barker, kindly provided an overview of the tourism services that the park authority provides. JB looks after visitor centres, museums, retail and strategic events and links with regional tourism bodies and local councils. The small budget of £15k and a 3-man team is focused on working with businesses to grow tourism whilst promoting the YDNP National Park special qualities (e.g. dark skies).

Tourism, generally, sits within DCMS and National Parks in Defra. Following the pandemic all Destination Management Organisations were reviewed and have since re-emerged as Local Visitor Economy Partnerships (LVEP). There are two covering the YDNP and these are York and North Yorkshire (run by North Yorkshire Council) and Cumbria Tourism. Each are responsible for delivering a destination management plan. Sedbergh sits within the Cumbria plan.

The National Park special qualities are a key component, the visitor services team of three people work on projects to support businesses. Examples include the new cheese festival across several sites, handholding new business to create and hopefully sustain new components of the festival. The YDNP dark skies festival in September is another example, more businesses could hook into this event - astro tourism training is a popular one for businesses helping them to become 'dark skies friendly'. YDNP Management Plan goal is 10% increase in new visitors.

Discussed need for a Sedbergh Tourism Strategy, JB recommended fit with the LVEP than just the National Park - useful to look at demographic, visitor data, STEAM data etc and to use information from businesses on where their visitors come from (Howgills/ Black Bull/ Farfield confirm they do this). Goal must be to grow visitor spend and visitor numbers, suggestions include promoting Howgills, walking trips and wellbeing emphasis. **ACTION: JG** to arrange separate meeting with Cumbria Tourism/ PM/ DW/ JR and draft visitor strategy for discussion. **ACTION: JB** to talk with YDNP (Jim Walker) and look at data regarding local initiatives.

YDNP do not routinely promote to coach operators but have informal links with those using the Dales Countryside Museum - an area for expansion. YDNP provide an image library for businesses to use, more recently new images from the Westmorland Dales have been added to the library.

3. Planning Update

Local Plan – thanks to Tom Harland for the update in Peter Stockton’s absence. Consultation on revised sites likely June/July. Currently reviewing 49 sites (33 consulted on last year, plus some previously rejected plus a couple of new suggestions). Seeking updated advice on landscape impact, highways, flood risk, infrastructure and other constraints to inform a revised shortlist for consultation (round 7). Strategic Housing Market Assessment – questionnaires sent out to key stakeholders. Likely to complete and be published in April. Results will dictate whether any substantial changes needed to Local Plan’s draft housing policies e.g. housing target, sizes, tenures etc. **ACTION: JG** to draft response.

The hope is to ‘publish’ a final draft of the Local Plan towards the end of the year - effectively the beginning of the end, when informal consultation stops and further significant changes to the Plan are unlikely. Stakeholders will have the opportunity to make formal representations on the final draft before Planning Inspectorate holds a public examination to determine whether the Plan can be adopted (2025).

YDNP Management plan - the review is underway and consultation closed end of Feb. Summary of results will be published once considered by NPMP steering group next week. Over 1100 responses - helping younger people live/work in YDNP and reducing impacts of second homes ranked as two of the three highest priorities in responses by residents. Further opportunities to input expected.

Planning news – expected changes to legislation, around holiday lets and permitted development rights, are due this summer. Likely that YDNP will respond either small scale or introduce park-wide, new policies may be needed. In Sedbergh, concern over holiday lets targeted rather than second homes, making owners consider changing use to second homes to avoid taxes and use class changes. **ACTION: JA** to draft letter to YDNP on subject. Amy confirmed a notable drop in Airbnb prices across the town which are difficult for providers, like Howgills, to compete with. Important to encourage the use of Airbnb room letting as a valuable resource for the town’s workers and visitors.

4. SEP Key Themes -news and updates

Main Street – John and Joanne have visited 34 businesses, distributed the Main Street survey and spoke with business owners. There has been a good reception from businesses and John has collected 16 surveys with the remainder to collect next week. Many comments include the perception of Sedbergh, whether it is a market town or tourist town as it currently presents mixed messages. Westwood Books reported happier visitors now that some hospitality venues are open seven days a week including Gundog Cafe and the Black Bull. Several responses suggest a Business Network, JB will promote the information evening when collecting remainder. Once questionnaires collected, JB will write up a draft Main Street plan to address the issues and look at cause and effect for next meeting.

New business – Former Browns shop refurbishment progressing well and should open in 4-6 weeks, this will be a welcome addition to Main Street. The School confirms that the takeaway will be in keeping with the traditional look of Main Street with machinery at the back and a vent directing smells away from the main thoroughfare. Disturbance and nuisance clauses are in the lease. The adjacent unit lease may be kept on by the School, yet to be decided. The look of Main Street was also picked up during the questionnaire distribution, perhaps a painting project could be explored further.

Business event - Business information evening planned on 27 March at White Hart, Sedbergh. The event will be free to attend and include information on grants, business support, an update on Main Street survey and will invite comment on whether a new business network is wanted. **ACTION: All** to share event information to contacts/ local businesses.

Housing - Joanne provided update from Broadacres. Release of remaining plots due this week, with handovers expected August. Overnight road closures planned, SPC have asked for closure times to be revised from 6pm to 8pm. The contractor Equans are trying to secure work placements and job creation locally, they have also recently delivered workshops at Sedbergh Primary School, **ACTION: JG** to circulate information.

Kings Yard – PM provided an update; a new developer is being sought and they are underway with the archaeological survey requirements.

Baliol - Joanne provided an update, once again the owners are dismayed at the lack of any progress. Housing Portfolio Holder, Cllr Judith Derbyshire, will visit Sedbergh in May, to meet housing providers, look at sites and talk to all stakeholders with a view to unlocking some of the housing delivery in Sedbergh. Cllr Derbyshire was previously a rural housing enabler; this could prove useful in bringing development forward.

Tourism – Sedbergh Music Festival runs 16-27 June. Artisan Markets will take place on May 25, June 29, July 27, August 24, September 21. Sedbergh School will be running Easter and Summer courses.

Yoto Carnegies – the UK's longest running book awards for children and young people will partner with Sedbergh, England's "book town", to deliver a free day-long festival of events. This is the first partnership undertaken by the awards and is due to take place on the 23 April. The day-long event will see several authors/ illustrators workshop events for both state/ private school children (taking place at Casterton). There are CPD sessions for English teachers and librarians plus an evening talk by the author of Madame Doubtfire. This is a great opportunity for Sedbergh and will boost Book Town ambitions.

Booktown – the book festival will run from late May into June, there will be a crime writing festival in October (a fringe festival linked with a magazine) and a children's writing competition during summer holidays. There will be writing and poetry workshops, all to help raise the profile of the booktown with lots going on, a real collective effort.

Sedbergh School – the school is 500 years old next year and has requested a royal visit. **ACTION: PM** to present plans, links, opportunities and benefits for Sedbergh town centre at next SEP

5. WAF Council News

Transport Contract – The new daily bus service will run from the end of March until the end of October. Western Dales will also operate on Wednesdays and Saturdays and more requested during the summer holidays. Public consultation takes place in June on travel needs. All are encouraged to use the service.

Locality Board – Locality Board- The Booktown has applied for funding and a decision is expected shortly. **ACTION: JG, CW and GH** to meet to progress a bid for tourism. No further grant monies available this financial year, with an announcement due shortly on the budget for 2024/5.

Coach parking – Highway Service Plan was presented to SPC recently, including plans for roads in the area. The request for monies to draft an appraisal for a Coach Parking solution is on hold, awaiting a visit from highways officers, due to look at the site, shortly.

Plans underway to upgrade the sewage system in the area, **ACTION: HH** to circulate more information.

6. Any other business

- AC received from the rural network and will circulate to all. Cumbria CVS also provide a funding circular; GH will send on. **ACTION: AC** to circulate the latest Funding Digest to all.
- Thank you to WAF for funding provided towards the coordinator post, new funding streams will be applied to, this year.
- With regret, SEP note that SPC continue to suspend their attendance. SEP members agreed that many issues raised by SPC have since been responded to. **ACTION: JG** to draft letter to SPC.
- Cumbria Tourism launch their Destination Management Plan on Wed 21 March and have invited SEP members to attend.

Next meeting 11am, Friday 10 May 2024 at the Hirst Centre, Sedbergh