

Sedbergh Economic Partnership – Meeting Notes

11am, 20 October 2023

Attending: Andrew Cobb (Chair), Joanne Golton, Sam Butcher (WAF), Janey Hassam (SPC), Cllr Kevin Lancaster, John Barraclough, Jim Atkins, Peter Marshall (Vice-Chair), Gillian Holmes (WAF), Debbie Wilson, Tony Reed-Screen, Tony Roberts, Libby Bateman, Cllr Ed Welti

Apologies: Debbie Richardson, Francine Bult, Sarah Campbell, Cllr Hazel Hodgson, Matt Williams (WAF), Steve Ewence, Chris Wood, Ian MacPherson, Peter Stockton (YDNP), Carol Moffat

1. Welcome and Actions

JG went through the actions from the last meeting, most are covered in the agenda. JG will follow up with Tim Farron's office regarding letter to BDUK. Reminder to everyone to let local organisations know that funding opportunities exist via the South Lakeland Locality Board and to get in touch with Gill Haigh.

Coach parking – no meeting so far with Highways on crossing points or other highways issues. A funding bid is being submitted to Locality Board by SPC to cover costs for a highways design for the coach parking area. SPC to procure and GH will provide SPC with the official list of firms to contact should funding be approved. In principle the space could provide for up to three coaches and five car parking spaces. It is Highways land so permitted development may be possible but if fully covered with hardcore then change of use may be needed. **Action JH and GH** to progress. Important that local councillors support the Locality Board ask. All agreed supportive of the end product but not necessarily the means.

Terms of Reference – revised draft circulated prior to meeting. JG went through the amendments and provided an overview of the parish council concerns regarding transparency, collaboration and accountability, this was further explained by Kevin.

JG ran through the SEP background and function including formation following the Doug Wheeler report, current SEP set-up and funders. The Chairman invited comments from around the group, specifically in relation to whether the SEP should be a constituted group or a subgroup under the Parish Council or stay as it is plus the SPC suggestion that they should hold the accountable body role.

Comments included:

- the SEP useful as is.
- SEP is not an executive decision-making body; it is not bound by any group and has no executive powers so not concerned on accountability.
- Individuals entitled to disagree, for example most may support more housing but individual members may write to object.
- Should SEP become a subgroup of SPC then it would create administrative overload burdens for the clerk.
- SEP is a collaboration; it is broad and inclusive not exclusive.
- SEP is not an executive decision-making body so doesn't necessarily need to be constituted or accountable.
- SEP remit must be an economic one.
- SEP is a useful group which implements collective actions.
- Financial accountability could sit with SPC if the preferred option.

- Community Trust was happy to remain acting as bankers, the financial accountability is fully transparent and shouldn't be questioned.
- The SEP is an autonomous body, strength lies in own initiative, people sharing un-minuted opinions helpful so wouldn't support SPC public meeting suggestion.
- SEP becoming a constituted group could be a useful route on a technical level for grants etc.
- WAF Council see SEP as very valuable. Across Westmorland Furness area outside the main four towns no other group like this exists. It is well represented and is unique for the area.
- Concern expressed over rival funding applications, need to not pitch for same monies.
- If SEP was a sub-group of the parish council, may lose some of the interaction that we have with Westmorland and Furness and with the Yorkshire Dales and, in the future, may be 'taken over'.
- Don't understand concerns about transparency, all discussions and actions are very transparent and documented.
- SEP had failed in collaboration and needs to communicate better.
- Support the variety of views from mix of organisations, fear SEP would disappear if became part of SPC.
- People may see a lack of accountability, maybe a constituted body would be a good idea.
- Agencies may view the SEP very differently if part of SPC.
- SEP should continue to exist as a collaboration without any terms of reference or constitution.
- Would like to see an increase in the awareness of SEP with the local community.

The Chairman summarised the overall discussion, which lasted over an hour, and asked everyone if they wanted SEP to have a constitution, this was rejected. The Chairman asked if the group wanted SEP to stay as it is and this was agreed. More work needs to be done on communication and the focus should be on economic development issues only. **ACTION: JG** to amend ToR and draft a comms plan.

Council CEO visit - The chief executive visit is being held on 15th of December. **ACTION: All** to contact JG with suggested businesses/ individuals for the visit. GH suggested a successes list to be sent in advance of visit. **ACTION: JG** to draft list.

2. Key issues update

Public Transport - Hazel provided an update via email. The Bus Grant was successful and tenders and contracts for a daily service for the A684 route are currently ongoing. The funding pot that was used may cover a variety of former district areas, **ACTION: GH** to clarify bus area grants.

There is no prescribed timetable as part of the tender contract, WAF will wait to see what the providers will put forward but important to influence this. The Wednesday services are now three return services, two from Dent. The early service is regularly full resulting in people being turned away. Hopefully there will be an opportunity to influence the new timetabling particularly to link to trains and shopping visits. Need to promote the use of the buses or we will end up in the same situation as before. The £2 fare remains in place until December 2024.

Tourist Information Centre Funding - Tim Farron MP has written two letters in support of the TIC and requests that funding is not cut. YDNP decision expected on the review and finances on 14th November. Cllr Mitchell is well placed to help the situation and is keen to support.

CiC is making a grant application to WAF to help the TIC with core funds (should the YDNP monies be cut) and for new promotional activity. **ACTION: JG and GH** to assist with firming up ask and application. If the grant application actions are supported, they will help increase the turnover in the TIC.

3. Themes - latest

Main Street - JB introduced plans for a Main Street sub-group starting with discussion between businesses on the blueprint for the Main St, this could include themes, pop-ups, events; key areas to include growing the nighttime economy, food economy, above-shop accommodation. JB will initially engage four to five businesses and to capture their thoughts and ideas.

PM discussed potential 'hot food takeaway' tenant news for the Browns retail shop and took views. These included recognising that a capacity exists for such an operator and it would support the vitality of the Main Street; it would help to support local provision rather than the delivery of takeaways from Kendal; there may be a need to check planning requirements; there is a demand for takeaway food from staying visitors; the town has previously supported similar operators previously; it would be good for the local economy to meet this demand; small concerns over market capacity and potential impact on other operators. **ACTION: JB** to invite JH and DW to join the sub-group.

Promoting Sedbergh - Sedbergh CiC is developing a bid for funding to support proposals for a new PR campaign and to assist in providing revenue support for the TIC (especially needed if YDNP cut their grant). Part of the bid may include a social media audit from Cumbria Tourism. **ACTION: JG** to help Chris draft the bid and meet with GH to discuss bid content. **ACTION: CT** to be invited to next meeting.

Supporting Business - There is a lack of available units registered on the council's property portal or via local agents. If Sedbergh is open for business (for new/ existing/ growing companies) then we need to promote unit availability to those businesses on the property register - those wishing to move to the area or grow their business can see what Sedbergh has to offer. PM plans to hold a series of short meetings with local businesses to see how things are, take stock. **ACTION: PM, TR, JG** to revisit the business hub site and talk through how best to administer it.

4. Any other business

- Tony requested that the frequency of SEP meetings be changed from 6 weeks to 8. This was welcomed and revised dates for the coming year will be circulated.
- Settlebeck School to provide update on intake and current projects at next SEP.
- Cumbria Tourism are seeking towns/ venues to participate in the Dark Skies Festival. The Black Bull are interested in running a 'meal under the stars' event. If anyone has any further suggestions / knows of any groups / would like to organise anything please let Francine at CT know.
- The Shared Prosperity Fund has confirmed support to 22 projects. The monies will also fund umbrella programmes to deliver smaller grant schemes across a wider patch – these include culture grants; sports facility grants and business support grants. Sadly, Farfield Mill's application was not successful.

Next meeting 11am, Friday 1 December at the Hirst Centre, Sedbergh