

## Sedbergh Economic Partnership – Meeting Notes

11am, 18 October 2024

**Attending:** Andrew Cobb, Tony Reed-Screen; Peter Marshall, Debbie Richardson, Joanne Golton, John Barraclough, Steve Ewence, Sam Butcher (WAF), Nigel Close, Peter Stockton (YDNP), Jim Atkins, Jo Mowbray, Libby Bateman, Cllr Hazel Hodgson, Justin Doherty, Clare McCarty, Adam Buxton, David Beeby.

**Apologies:** Matt Williams (WAF), Debbie Wilson, Victoria Hudson (Primary School), Jeremy Hewitson (WAF), Sarah Campbell (Settlebeck), Chris Woods, Lynn Richardson (WAF), Paul Thomas

### 1. Matters arising

**Business Network Event** – the latest social was held at the end of last month and attended by 15 local businesses. WAF and Cumbria Chamber were also represented. Attendees were given an overview of the work of the Business Growth Hub, various levels of business support available and relevant grant opportunities. Discussion widened to cover the Local Plan consultation, the Main Street and demand for local business units.

The Business Network would like to have representatives from Yorkshire Dales National Park at the next meeting to discuss planning issues and general support for business. **ACTION: JG** to arrange YDNP attendance at Business Network with Cllr Mitchell and Peter Stockton. Businesses also expressed a desire to see more industrial units in Sedbergh saying demand was high from local tradesmen.

**MP meeting** – SEP representatives will meet with Lizzi Collinge MP on 15 November. **ACTION: All** to contact JG should they wish to attend.

### 2. Enterprising Cumbria – David Beeby

David Beeby is the Chairman of the newly formed Enterprising Cumbria. He provided background to his career and the role of the new economic growth board he now chairs. David is also the Chair of Cumbria CBI and the Cumbria Community Foundation. Enterprising Cumbria will advise the two local authorities on economic growth and will act as a delivery partner to run government programmes – e.g. skills, business boot camps. David heads a 15-strong private sector board. A new economic growth strategy for Cumbria is being developed, building on from existing local enterprise partnership strategies and programmes. Themes and priorities to be assessed and published before the end of the year. Hopefully, this new advisory board will contribute to inclusive growth for communities in Cumbria and that local authorities will listen and act on to the advice given.

The largest employer in the area is Sedbergh School and Peter went through the value of the school to the local economy, supplying GVA data. The school generates 2000 visitors per annum to the area and hosts a number of families for national and international students. PM talked through the expected VAT impact and shared concerns that middle income families at the school will be hit hardest. There is an expected £1.5m to £2m local expenditure hit, which will affect contractors, supply chain, staff.

The SEP has produced and updated the Growth Framework; key issues currently are housing shortages, impact on recruitment and the potential growth around the visitor economy. Farfield Mill also recognised as a key component, culturally. David is keen to work in rural Cumbria with small towns and active communities. Discussion on housing/ employment sites and tourism ambitions should provide a good overview of issues and challenges facing the town today.

### 3. Baliol site

Baliol is owned by Visiondale, a consortium of 4 directors. Justin Doherty, Clare McCarty and Adam Buxton attended SEP to provide useful background to the site, current situation and ambition. The site was purchased seven years ago at auction and there remains a desire to deliver a good quality development, with both vision and viability.

The key issue for the site owners is the lack of change in site status in the proposed Yorkshire Dales Local Plan. The site is not proposed to be allocated for housing and is to remain as an employment site. The owners confirmed that it has an employment use designation but higher residential balance is needed for viability. There

has been little interest from businesses regarding demand for space on the site. The owners have been in conversation with YDNP to progress use of the site. Justin confirmed 5-6 different schemes put forward to the planning authority but none have been successful. Visiondale attended SEP to gather opinions regarding allocation status, to share their frustration at the lack of proposed status-change and to ask representatives from around the table to respond on the issue as part of the current YDNP consultation.

Visiondale have employed Lambert Smith Hampton as new planning consultants. LSH's Adam Buxton will draft a response to the proposed local plan allocations consultation in the hope that it will be independently assessed as part of the inspectorate documentation and the use for the site will be re-classified. It is recognised that Yorkshire Dales National Park need housing and employment and flexibility of the site is required or the site will be mothballed. YDNP members offered to be talk over the issues with Visiondale. **ACTION: CMc** to follow up.

Demand for employment land allocation does exist, primarily to house business units. These may not be suitable for Baliol but more suited to land at Toll Bar. JG and TRS are currently carrying out a survey for trades within the town to establish and document demand. Currently, the only other piece of allocated employment land is a small triangle of land adjacent to the Toll Bar site. The owner of the field to the west of Toll Bar put forward land for consideration but this was rejected by YDNP on the basis of lack of confidence around delivery. Agreed that building units here to meet demand would support local businesses and ease demand within other towns such as Kendal where demand currently outstrips supply. PS confirmed that a greenfield site would be supported as an exemption site if the demand was there for employment land.

#### 4. Key Projects

**Visit England** – Lyndsey Turner Swift (Director, VE), Gill Haigh (Managing Director, CT), Dan Visser (Chair, CT) and Julie Baker (Director, YDNP) visited Sedbergh last month and met with local CT member businesses. The visit was very helpful and informative and Lyndsey was impressed by the desire to see more tourism and commitment to providing a quality experience – see JG's previously circulated visit notes. All participants offered detailed and honest views about the issues and challenges currently facing their businesses and talked though areas that could bring about positive change. Clear messages were given about lack of access to housing and transport for workers and how this acts as a barrier to tourism recruitment/ staffing. There was a consensus from attendees that Sedbergh finds it difficult to compete with other busy main tourist centres despite a good offer and a desire for visitor growth. It was agreed that a new Sedbergh visitor strategy could provide a hook for projects to be developed and funded. Ideally, a programme of support similar to the Hawkshead scheme would be impactful. Lyndsey is now looking to use Sedbergh as a Case Study to help inform Visit England strategy and discussions across Government. **ACTION: JG/ CW** to liaise with Gill at CT.

**Draft Tourism Plan** – JG talked through the draft Sedbergh tourism plan. This builds on Cumbria Tourism's destination management plan to promote the area and increase footfall. The draft strategy has received input from several local businesses and the final draft will go to the parish council in November for comment. On the back of the strategy will be an application for funding from WAF/ CT/ Cumbria Community Foundation to support promotion of the town including new print and digital media, updating the website and growing theme-based tourism. Lynn (WAF) is meeting with JG and CW regarding a funding bid. **ACTION: JG** to circulate draft strategy and all members to send feedback ASAP.

**Main Street** – JB provided an overview of the Main Street Action Group, which has 6 active members. Cllr Hodgson noted a meeting with WAF Highways regarding High Street usage and safety due to be held in early November. **ACTION: HH** to advise Steve Ewence of date so can join the meeting to discuss pedestrian crossings etc. Jim raised the ambition for shared surfaces, previously championed under the Townscape Initiative plan.

#### 5. Planning

**Local Plan** – Consultation 7 regarding housing allocation sites is open for comment, the deadline is 29 October. The emerging Local Plan recommends four sites (69 homes). A positive response in support of housing development would be welcomed by YDNP. Peter stressed that is important that the Housing Authority and the Economic Development authorities respond positively as there's been only negative objections received so far from across the park. Sedbergh Parish Council have already responded highlighting concerns around United

Utilities and flooding, drainage on the site adjacent to the Medical Centre and the fact that Kings Yard has already been given planning permission.

SEP members present agreed that they wanted to respond. **ACTION: JG** to draft a response to consultation and circulate draft for comment. Those attending SEP today were reminded this is a general response based on opinions voiced and that it was important that responses and objections can be submitted on an individual basis. **ACTION: HH** to ask Housing/ Economic Development teams to respond. Key points in response to include Baliol should be allocated as mixed-use site, not wholly employment. New housing sites should include HMO-style accommodation as requested by several employees (need for cost-efficient accommodation). Kings Yard should not be included in the Local Plan as already has planning permission. SED3 should be re-considered alongside potential employment land adjacent to Toll Bar site.

**YDNP Management Plan** – reminded SEP that consultation by the YDNP Management Planning Partnership regarding the new YDNP Management Plan going forward is to be held shortly and would be of interest to the SEP. The plan covers the next 5 years and any new Government targets will go into that plan, including water quality and nature recovery.

**Employment Land** – following on from the Business Network event there is concern that the emerging Local Plan hasn't allocated any more employment sites. The businesses in attendance voiced a need for business units/ workspace and storage to support local trades in the town. The SEP (JG/ TRS) will undertake a survey to establish this demand and whether it supports potential growth of businesses and job creation. The Toll Bar site could be helped to be developed should sufficient demand be presented. Land adjacent to the Toll Bar was put forward for consideration but rejected by the Yorkshire Dales National Park based on insufficient confidence of delivery and demand. Noted that places like Kendal suffer from having insufficient numbers of business units to support Kendal-based businesses. Some Sedbergh-based businesses lease units in Kendal and it would help free up space for businesses within their own market **ACTION: JG/TRS** to share study outcomes with YDNP and WAF.

## 6. Council News

**Westmorland Furness Council** – SB advised that Economic Development are supportive of the idea of creating Toll Bar 2. The barrier is funding, it needs costing for infrastructure. Ec Dev team will keep it in mind should Govt funding materialise. Encouraged sharing the demand evidence to help build the case. Cllr Hodgson reported that bus tenders had been received. There is no official confirmation yet on who will run the bus service from 1st of November. Hazel continuing to work with the SPC and WAF Highways on coach points and parking.

**Parish Council** – no representation.

## 7. Chairman's role

At the last meeting of the SEP, a suggestion was put forward regarding the chairman's role following the request for a change of Chairman by the Parish Council. The general consensus concluded that the chairman was doing an excellent job. The Parish Council are an important part of Sedbergh and it was imperative to the future economic success of Sedbergh that the parish council have representation on the Partnership. Cllr Hodgson attended the recent SPC meeting and raised the point that WAF would only be minded to support Sedbergh initiatives if there was collaboration. The Economic Partnership is a valuable vehicle for Sedbergh and the outlook for Sedbergh is stronger when organisations are together and speaking with one voice.

A potential way forward is to introduce a new system of rotating the chairmanship every three meetings (approx. 6 months). AC offered to stand down 'for the greater good' and colleagues are asked to contact JG should they wish to take on rotational duties. All to note that the Chairman's role is to be filled by persons non-statutory/ independent.

**Next meeting: Friday 6 December, 11am Hirst Centre, Sedbergh**