

## Sedbergh Economic Partnership – Meeting Notes

11am, 26 July 2024

**Attending:** Andrew Cobb, Chris Wood, Tony Reed-Screen; Peter Marshall, Debbie Richardson, Joanne Golton, John Barraclough, Steve Ewence, Gillian Holmes (WAF), Sam Butcher (WAF), Nigel Close, Peter Stockton (YDNP), Libby Bateman, Cllr Hazel Hodgson, Jeremy Hewitson (WAF), Lynn Richardson (WAF),

**Apologies:** Matt Williams (WAF), Debbie Wilson, Victoria Hudson (Primary School), Jim Atkins, Paul Thomas, Sarah Campbell (Settlebeck)

### 1. Matters arising

- Actions: Joanne went through the list, most to be covered as agenda items.
- Tourism plan to be discussed in item 7. On ways to encourage visitors, and link to potential Eden Valley funding, members were reminded that ARUP produced a study for the Kirby Lonsdale to Kirby Stephen trail via Sedbergh, **ACTION: SE** to share.

**Recent visitor events** – Tony shared the success of the recent Sedbergh Music Festival, this was a fantastic event, supporting local, national and international artists, and was well received. Thanks to John Seymour and his team for all their hard work. Events like this are an excellent showcase for Sedbergh and it is hoped that it will have similar success in the future.

Slovenia dancers from twin town, Zrece, visited Sedbergh in June to dance in traditional costume. Also in the same month, the Booktown Festival ran through half term week. It was a re-launch this year and attendance figures doubled those at previous events. There is a drive to see this event run annually. A new Crime Writing Festival will be held in October. The Artisan Markets continue to run between May and September, the town band will be performing at the one in July.

**New WAF Community Development Officer** – Gill Holmes introduced Lynn Richardson as the new WAF Community Development Officer, who will replace Gill once she retires in September. SEP thanked Gill for her work in Sedbergh and wished her a happy retirement. Lynn will cover a large patch from the south of Kendal to Arnside, Kirkby Lonsdale and Sedbergh through to Dent. The role will also support council members and links to communities including grants and finding other funds. Lynn previously worked at South Lakes Housing and is familiar with Maryfell, tenant needs and has good local knowledge.

### 2. Key projects

**Main Street** - John Barraclough provided an update on Main Street. A small group has met to discuss next steps. Key issues remain over parking and access on busy days – need to ensure the Parish Council are briefed and involved. JB and TRS hope to meet with SPC next week. JB has also logged each business' opening hours to analyse and see where gaps are.

JB felt that the small Main Street meeting was helpful but change and actions will need to be driven from businesses themselves, perhaps as an off shoot from the new Business Network. **ACTION: JB** to set up a small Main Street Business Action Group from the next Business Network meeting. This action group will be business led, meet monthly, work to identify and tackle issues and understand common ground. Gill Holmes is currently involved in a similar group up in Hawkshead. **Action: JG** to send JB the Hawkshead project bid.

**Udales** – the building remains a concern. JB, JA and Carole Nelson from Sleepy Elephant shop met with owner and agent last week to discuss the building. Ideally the building would be mixed use retail and accommodation with the Booktown project interested in using the retail space. Consideration given to community benefit agreement, like Farfield Mill. The price tag is negotiable and monies could be raised to meet the sale price but the renovation costs remain the issue, with the costs expected to pass the £1m mark.

Peter Stockton confirmed that the YDNP Enforcement Officer had visited Udales and that a Section 215 notice will not be served as there is 'nothing substantial enough' to warrant it, currently.

**Sedbergh stats/ KPIs** – JG updated on capacity numbers showing room for growth, noting that electric charging points should read 4, not 2.

- Concern expressed regarding an increase (40+) in the number of second homes to 129 plus 88 registered holiday lets.
- Settlebeck School numbers are now 206, a rate of 93.6% and the Primary has 157 children attending the site with wrap-around care providing 30 places. Speckled Hen Nursery is doing well with 30 children attending currently.
- Sedbergh School currently has 4 apprentices with 2 apprenticeships about to be advertised including a plumbing apprenticeship. **ACTION: JG** to include occupancy rates from key providers in the town, noted that many bookings are now very last minute, so difficult for operators to plan ahead.

### 3. Sedbergh School

**Government changes** – Peter Marshall provided overview of the value to the local economy that Sedbergh School provides, including £18m that is spent in the locality. There are 60 heritage buildings to maintain and an annual budget of budget of £2.5m to spend on windows, rewiring, boilers etc. The School is keen to continue its give-back programme, an initiative from the Headmaster. **ACTION: JG** to circulate stats and infographics sheet.

The business rate impact is around £200,000 per annum. The school is self-supporting through fees, its fundraising arm and alumni – it receives no other income. The VAT fees will have a significant impact and already numbers have dropped from 590 to 562 for the start of next term. Sedbergh School is well placed to weather the storm, especially compared to other schools. Its traditional market is self-employed, working parents and the School is keen to share cost burden by reducing fees. However, this will mean the need to cut costs for state sector places, SEN support and number of bursaries. There is a market for international students but important to service local and regional students also. There will be an impact on expenditure.

The School's procurement policy will still use local firms and will encourage local firms where possible to tender for contracts. There are 150 bursaries currently. The summer schools provide valuable income with 390 students here in Sedbergh this week and 1200 on short courses – this hopefully helps local hotels, shops and restaurants. The School is grateful to local residents, especially when events bring many additional visitors to the area - such as the recent cricket matches.

**1525 – 2025** – Sedbergh School is 500 years old next year. A special gala weekend is planned for 2-4 May 2024, this will feature music, sports, arts and crafts and expected that significant numbers of children, parents and alumni will attend. There will be a need to find additional accommodation. Need to make sure all Sedbergh benefits, ideas include a reception at Farfield Mill. **ACTION: JG** to contact Cumbria Tourism and YDNP regarding block bookings. **ACTION: NC** to contact School regarding options for May bookings at Howgills Accommodation.

SEP agreed the need to use our businesses to promote Sedbergh more, using social media, newsletters to customer databases etc. The Sedbergh School database is approximately 1000 emails for parents, 7000 for alumni, 2000 for summer courses, and approximately 2000 for the Black Bull. **ACTION: JG/CW** to send on Sedbergh events lists for circulation.

**Tech centre** – the School are in discussion with YDNP on phased delivery options. The Foundation has raised enough funds to cover the initial build cost. However, the project will not start until the situation with VAT on fees etc and its impact is clear.

### 4. Planning

**Local Plan news** – the YDNP list of housing sites to come out late August. Sedbergh expected to have allocated land for 70 houses between now and 2040 - this is disappointing as the Framework for Growth indicates a 10% growth to support current services and infrastructure (approximately 130 houses).

The YDNP Strategic Housing Market assessment has been updated to look again at target numbers and demand. **ACTION: PS** to share draft SMHA figures with JG. The Sedbergh stats sheet is very helpful for local plan information and may well be used for the inspection. The consultation on proposed sites starts in September, out to YDNP members in October, with decision in November, published and handed to Inspectorate after that.

PS took questions on car parking regulations, need for extra care (can be built on exception sites) and Baliol. The former school site is likely to remain for employment use but currently has vacant building credit which needs to be tackled. A new nursery; supported living and similar uses would qualify as uses for the site. The adjacent land at Toll Bar is not expected to be allocated for employment as no certainty of delivery but the site can be used for employment purposes under exception site rules. SEP viewed this news as disappointing. **ACTION: SEP** to write during consultation period to ask YDNP to reconsider a mixed-use site for Baliol and employment site status for Toll Bar.

**New Govt and expected changes** – YDNP are not expecting changes to planning rules from the change in Govt. Peter explained that expected exclusions for National Parks for wind turbines to remain but may present a challenge for sites adjacent to the park, also greenbelt and grey belt not an issue. The district level housing targets have only just been removed so no real change when they come back in. No top-down targets and the new market housing assessment gives good accurate targets. PS concluded that not seeing anything that will result in changes to the proposed new Local Plan. **ACTION: JG** to write to local MP, Ian Mitchell, WAF leader, National Park members in push to help progress the Baliol site.

## 5. Housing

**Rawthey Meadows** – JG provided an update from Broadacres. The first 22 properties have been completed (mixture of shared ownership/ open market and rentals) and rentals are being occupied. 2 open-market units remain for sale, along with 8 shared ownership ones. **ACTION: JH** to help publicise shared ownership availability to help fill remaining units.

Jeremy Hewitson is the new rural housing enabler for WAF. He covers the rural area for WAF and is here to promote affordable housing. Jeremy is keen to work with communities on community-led housing schemes. The Council has access to £4.8 million to help delivery, much of which has been allocated already and includes a local scheme with Dentdale Community Land Trust. **ACTION: JH** to contact PS to discuss help to deliver schemes.

## 6. Promoting Sedbergh

Cumbria Tourism have kindly provided a list of promoted Sedbergh articles and information. **ACTION: JG** to share with GH and CW. The 2024-2030 Destination Management Plan has 'increasing the value and share of tourism spend across the 'less-visited parts of Cumbria' as a key objective and something Sedbergh should tap into. The recent Cumbria Visitor Survey showed that 4% of visitors specifically came to Sedbergh, of all visitors 40% included 'health and wellbeing' as a main reason for visiting and 65% said 'being outdoors'. Both hugely relevant to Sedbergh and the current strapline – a place to breathe.

Small tourism group to be formed to draft tourism strategy with CT and to perhaps seek funding for a Hawkshead-style project. GH confirms Hawkshead was a pilot project and includes cost for public realm and tourism support. **ACTION: JG** to contact CW, GH, Farfield, SPC, and others to set up working group to tackle who the key audiences are, how to do better in tourism, how to improve spend in local economy etc building on previous actions and new ideas. Tourism remains the key issue and need to engage fully with Cumbria Tourism to progress.

Potential tourism reach - 3000 attended the cricket match, 1200 attended the Sedbergh music festival, 1000 on summer short courses etc, this equates to approx 5000 wallets in Sedbergh. Need to promote and communicate the Sedbergh message to harvest the spend. Use organisations like Lancashire cricket to promote Sedbergh to their members as part of the selling tickets. The working group could look again at information boards but digital and promotional marketing messaging is key.

## 7. Any other business

- JG has invited the new MP, Lizzi Collinge, to a future SEP meeting. Lizzi has replied positively and we are awaiting a date.
- Next Sedbergh Business Network meeting will be held in early September, JG will advise on date.

**Next meeting: Friday 13 September, 11am Hirst Centre, Sedbergh**