

Sedbergh Economic Partnership – Meeting Notes

11am – 1pm, 8 May 2026

Attending: Andy Cobb, Joanne Golton, Libby Bateman, Lyn Richardson (WAF), Cllr Hazel Hodgson, Tony Reed-Screen, Sam Butcher (WAF), Peter Stockton (YDNP), John Barraclough, John Mellor-Clarke, Anna Sarcek, Debbie Saunders, Cllr Annette Colton, Ed Welti, Cllr Adrian Waite, Steph Baldwin, Kiara Turner, **Apologies:** Peter Marshall, John Walker, Chris Woods, Paul Thomas, Nigel Close, Steve Ewence, Hannah Reynolds, Ian McPherson, Jim Atkins, Baz Bennett

1. Matters arising

Town of Culture bid – JG and AC recently met with representatives from Kirkby Lonsdale regarding their own application to the scheme. Sedbergh is referenced as a satellite town within the bid. Announcements are expected in Spring 2026 and Joanne will keep members informed of any updates.

Joanne will circulate the updated Sedbergh statistics and capacity table so members can review the key performance indicators again. **ACTION: AC** to invite the new Chief Executive Officers at the Yorkshire Dales National Park Authority, James Blake, and Miranda Cannon at Westmorland and Furness Council to a future SEP meeting. **ACTION: JG** to follow up the email to Border TV, as a town twinning visit is expected shortly and this may provide a good opportunity to tie in coverage.

The Pump Track event was very well attended, with strong community support and involvement. The project demonstrated that there is a clear demand for a permanent location for the facility. Representations have been made to Sedbergh School regarding a possible site, and Tony is to follow this up. A special thank you to Hannah and Becky for helping to make the project happen.

Economic Strategy - WAF adopted its new Economic Strategy in March. The strategy focuses on people, business and place, and under the theme of “Thriving Together” also addresses wider issues including skills, deprivation and sustainability. WAF supports the SEP model and would like to see this approach replicated across towns in the wider area, focusing on key themes such as broadband, transport and housing.

Sam will arrange a meeting in Sedbergh involving local businesses, SPC, YDNPA and other stakeholders to provide an overview of the new Economic Strategy and explore potential projects, funding opportunities and wider priorities for the town. SEP discussed the importance of having projects developed and ready for funding opportunities as they arise. The Council is also keen to ensure it is well positioned ahead of budget setting/ funding opportunities from any future mayoral authority. It was noted that the Enterprising Cumbria partnership budget will transfer to the new Combined Authority.

2. Transport in Sedbergh

Councillor Adrian Waite is the new portfolio holder for transport at Westmorland and Furness Council, replacing Cllr John Murray. He is keen to improve transport connections across the Council area. Sedbergh Bus Users Group has already developed a good working relationship with Cllr Waite.

SEP were advised that the next round of bus service tenders is due to go out in preparation for further Government funding for routes from September. Scoring criteria has been established to balance cost and strategic objectives, with greater emphasis now being placed on rurality rather than simply cost alone. SEP discussed the continuing need for improved public transport connections in Sedbergh, both to support visitors and to strengthen the local economy. Reliable transport links are important not only for residents and visitors, but also for enabling staff to travel to and from Sedbergh at appropriate times for work and for local people to access employment opportunities elsewhere.

Discussion emphasised that public transport should be viewed as an investment rather than simply a cost. Sedbergh serves a significant visitor economy alongside a resident population of approximately 3,500 people and a substantial local workforce. Cllr Hodgson raised the point that the current use of a 16-seater bus does not adequately meet the needs of the town, particularly in terms of reliability, confidence in the service and social equality. All agreed that this issue urgently needs to be addressed by the new portfolio holder.

ACTION: JG to provide Cllr Waite with Sedbergh economic statistics and supporting evidence to strengthen the case for transport investment here.

3. Booktown

John Mellor-Clark and Kiara Turner introduced the strategic plan for the Sedbergh Booktown Literacy Trust. Booktown will continue to deliver its themed festivals, including the next major event in October titled *Death in the Dales*. The Trust is expecting 100+ visitors per event. JMC explained that literary events are becoming more popular, with the Lake District now hosting five annual book-related events and approximately 120 literary festivals taking place across the UK, many of which are long established.

SEP discussed the launch of the new Lake District Book Festival, which will take place in Cartmel and is expected to be a prestigious event. Discussion focused on where this leaves Sedbergh within the wider literary landscape. Suggested that more specialist and distinctive events may work particularly well for Sedbergh, and the Trust is now developing a fundraising strategy to help sustain future events and the wider work of the organisation.

One project currently being explored is a farming-themed literary event, with an application expected to be submitted to the YDNP Sustainable Development Fund. Another proposed theme is wellbeing and “healed by nature”, which remains in development. The Folk Horror and Ghost Story Weekend will also return, alongside additional feeder events throughout the year.

Booktown representatives recently visited Wigtown to learn from the experience of its Book Festival committee. Wigtown’s main festival involves around 140 local volunteers. Sedbergh recognises the need to grow its own volunteer base and develop a stronger understanding of grant opportunities. Members who attended the visit returned highly motivated. The Trust is now exploring ways to recruit volunteers under a proposed “Friends of Booktown” banner as part of a three-year development plan. Copies of Booktown strategies from around the world have also been obtained to provide ideas and examples of best practice. The group will continue to meet representatives from similar organisations and towns to gather further information and insight.

ACTION: LR to meet with the Booktown group and the Community Enterprise Team at WAF Council, which may be able to provide up to 10 hours of funded business support to the group. **ACTION: EW** to meet with the Booktown Trust on Lookaround links. **ACTION: John Mellor-Clark** to contact Tony regarding Community Interest Organisations in Sedbergh.

SEP discussed the possibility of closer links with the Lake District Book Festival, including potential satellite events that could help promote Sedbergh Booktown as both a brand and visitor destination while also benefiting local businesses and hospitality providers.

4. Farfield Mill

Anna Sarcek attended as the new Manager at Farfield Mill and she is currently developing a new strategy for the Mill. Input and perspectives from across the community are welcomed. Anna has already spoken with artists, staff and other stakeholders and intends to extend this engagement further into the wider community. Participation workshops will follow to help shape and develop the strategy.

A full programme of exhibitions is planned for this year and into next year. Upcoming events include the popular annual plant sale on Saturday and a special 25-year anniversary celebration weekend on 23 May, which will include live music and a variety of activities. A “Fest of Farfield” event is also planned later in the year, which will launch products celebrating the Mill’s 25th anniversary. The workshops at the Mill continue to be popular. Farfield Mill is also looking to elevate its café offer to become more of a destination café experience.

However, it is recognised that there is a wider industry challenge in encouraging more local people to visit attractions on their own doorstep. The new strategy will therefore include work aimed at increasing local engagement and visits. Anna encouraged members and the wider community to share ideas and suggestions by visiting the Mill or getting in touch directly by email or telephone. Schools were identified as an important audience and potential area for future engagement. **ACTION: JB** to contact Anna regarding the loom.

DalesBus service is now stopping at Farfield Mill and that there is a strong desire to maintain and support this route going forward. All agreed to continue reminding tourism organisations and visitor bodies about the importance of Farfield Mill within the area’s visitor offer.

5. Development and Planning

Baliol - Members noted with sadness the passing of Visiondale representative Claire McCarthy. The owners of the Baliol Site have now held the site for approximately 10 years and are keen to bring the site forward for development following the proposed changes within the emerging Local Plan. A new scheme is currently being developed and is expected to be discussed with officers at the Yorkshire Dales National Park Authority shortly.

Udales – Following on from the structural survey report the building is now classified as “vulnerable” rather than “at risk”. A repairs notice is not expected to be pursued at this stage, partly because there is currently insufficient evidence to justify action and because other buildings within YDNPA are considered a higher priority. Also, concern expressed that serving a notice could prove counterproductive in dealings with the current owner. YDNPA’s view is that the situation is likely only to be fully resolved through a future change of ownership.

The local MP has become involved in discussions, and Peter Stockton suggested that she be asked to contact the owners directly as they are based within her constituency. **ACTION: JG** to follow up. Members also discussed the potential relevance of WAF’s Town Centre Empty Buildings Scheme for rural high streets should the scheme be extended to cover rural centres including Sedbergh.

Local Plan - The modifications consultation for the emerging Local Plan is currently underway and closes on 12 May. SEP will submit a response. Sedbergh Parish Council has already submitted comments expressing concerns regarding the loss of Baliol as an employment site. The Local Plan remains on track for adoption in June, although it was noted that the YDNPA is already using emerging Local Plan policies in the consideration of current planning applications. Development briefs are now being prepared for the Sedbergh sites and will include design guidance.

Housing Information – Information relating to the occupations of residents within the Broadacres development was circulated. This evidence was particularly useful in demonstrating the wide range of occupations supported through new housing development and the contribution that housing makes to the local economy. Additional market housing data has also been requested by Peter Stockton. SEP advised that several teachers from Sedbergh School have moved into the new development.

Planning Applications - An application for five additional visitor pods at Borwick Fold Farm has been approved, increasing the total number of pods on the site to ten - a positive contribution to the local visitor economy. An application has also been submitted at the Pinfold Caravan Park site to remove touring caravan

spaces and replace them with static caravan pitches but that the application may struggle on flood risk grounds.

6. SEP Key Priorities

Main Street - John provided a brief overview of current Main Street activities. Mug Story is helping to promote Sedbergh through its social media reels, and members were encouraged to view / share the posts on Instagram. Branding work for Sedbergh is now underway, with Paul Thomas acting as lead on the project. This work includes the development of a branding identity strategy, updates to the website and the preparation of a wider branding document. As part of this work, a questionnaire will be made available through the website to allow the wider community to comment on the current website and contribute views on Sedbergh's future branding and identity. It is hoped that this work will also connect with wellbeing professionals and related wellbeing-based visitor offers within the area. WAF's Town Centre Revitalisation Fund may be relevant to Sedbergh.

Tourism - Steph provided an update on the new Lakes and Dales Getaway accommodation booking initiative. This involves a new website and booking platform aimed at supporting local accommodation providers. Once the new Sedbergh website has been established, it is intended that a booking link will connect the two platforms together. Soft marketing of the new accommodation platform is already underway, and Steph will be contacting holiday property owners over the coming weeks.

Business Networking - The next business networking event had originally been planned for 14 May but clashes with the Parish Council AGM. The event is therefore expected to be moved back by approximately 1-2 weeks.

7. Council News

Andy thanked WAF for its continued funding support for the SEP Project Co-ordinator role. Lyn Richardson advised that Community Grant rounds are now open again, with a closing date of 31 July. Previous Council-supported projects in Sedbergh have included Sedbergh Town Band, the Pump Track project and Farfield Mill. **ACTION: All** to contact Lynn regarding any project advice or funding information.

In relation to transport discussions, Cllr Hodgson advised that housing tenancy lists for Sedbergh are affected where prospective tenants do not have access to suitable bus services, highlighting again the importance of reliable public transport connections.

An update was also provided regarding staffing at the local library. WAF is currently seeking to recruit a new staff member and, in the meantime, is attempting to maintain opening hours using staff from libraries in other towns.

Lyn reminded SEP that the Appleby Horse Fair will take place next month. Information leaflets are available outlining relevant sites, local roads and agency contact details.

8. Any Other Business

- The next meeting of the East Cumbria Tourism Network will take place on 16 June.
- The Fell Runners Association is holding an event in Sedbergh this weekend, including selection events for national teams. Members hoped this would bring additional visitors and footfall to Main Street.
- Sedbergh School Sports Day is taking place this weekend.

Next meeting: Friday 17 July, 11am Hirst Centre, Sedbergh - Future dates: 18 Sept, 30 Oct, 11 Dec