

Sedbergh Economic Partnership – Meeting Notes

11am – 1pm, 17 July 2026

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

1. Matters arising

Andy Cobb welcomed members to the meeting and wished Debbie Wilson (Tourist Information Centre) a speedy recovery on behalf of the Partnership.

Town of Culture - Kirkby Lonsdale had been unsuccessful in its application. The funding round was highly competitive; Stockton was the only town in the north of England to receive an award.

Udales - Jim Atkins advised that a rear window had recently fallen out, further highlighting the deteriorating condition of the property. Jim expressed disappointment that his correspondence with Historic England had simply been referred back to the Yorkshire Dales National Park Authority. **ACTION: JA** to write to James Blake, incoming Chief Executive of the Yorkshire Dales National Park Authority, once he takes up post in September.

Music Festival feedback – all agreed that the event had been excellent, recognising the high calibre of performers and the significant contribution made by John Seymour and Sedbergh School's Music Department. Although the festival is expected to record a small financial loss, it continues to attract internationally recognised musicians and remains an important cultural asset for the town. The current timing of the festival coincides with the end-of-term examination period and Challenge Week at Sedbergh School, and organisers are therefore considering alternative dates for future festivals.

Pump Track – following the successful mobile pump track demonstration at Easter weekend, work continues to identify a permanent location. Sedbergh School has been approached regarding an accessible and suitable location. The project continues to be progressed by a working group under the Sedbergh Community Trust.

Library – new opening hours are in place following the appointment of a new manager.

2. Council Update

Economic Strategy - Sam Butcher advised that the business engagement event, introducing WAF's new Economic Development Strategy, will be rearranged for September. **ACTION: SB** to circulate the revised event details and circulate a new summary document of the new strategy.

WAF Council Budget – Cllr Hazel Hodgson outlined the Council's current financial position, noting that significant savings continue to be required over the coming years (£40m). Members heard that lower-than-anticipated income from second homes had contributed to the budget pressures. Despite the financial pressures, the Council's statutory responsibilities remain unchanged. Hazel advised that the Council is planning to achieve savings of around £15 million per year over the next two to three years.

WAF remains committed to supporting local communities through grant funding for community projects, accessibility improvements and initiatives benefiting young people. Lyn Richardson will remain in post as Community Development Officer, supporting community organisations and local projects (e.g. Sedbergh Gala). Community project funding has recently supported Sedbergh Band, the People's Hall, and the Pump Track demonstration visit. A further £50,000 remains available, some of which may come to the Sedbergh area in future.

The current highways budget is £1.2 million, which will primarily be used for maintenance works rather than new schemes. Rural areas have been identified as a priority for highway maintenance. Responsibility for the Local Transport Plan will transfer to the Cumbria Combined Authority, presenting opportunities to strengthen transport links supporting tourism and the wider economy.

Other WAF news – much needed opportunities to link transport planning with the Eden Project, particularly in relation to hospitality and tourism. It was questioned whether the Sedbergh area could benefit from these initiatives and whether Westmorland and Furness Council has a wider strategy for improving public transport connectivity. Hazel advised that shuttle links to the rail network are being reconsidered, particularly serving Tebay, Keswick, and Carnforth. The Yorkshire Dales National Park Authority is also progressing work on the Sedbergh to Garsdale Active Travel Route (Route 19). **ACTION: HH** to meet Brian Steadman to discuss opportunities for improving the Sedbergh-Garsdale transport link.

SEP noted that local resilience plans for flooding and other emergencies will become increasingly important, with Sedbergh Parish Council's existing resilience plan being updated annually and submitted to one central point for the county.

3. Transport Plans

Joanne summarised John Carey's previously circulated report highlighting the importance of improved public transport connections for Sedbergh. Discussed need for stronger evidence to demonstrate the impact of transport on local businesses, employment, tourism and environmental ambitions – particularly the continued lack of direct public transport links with Oxenholme Station. WAF's Economic Development Team will support further evidence gathering to strengthen the case for improved transport services and add an economic impact assessment to John's report. **ACTION: Sam** to prepare a questionnaire for local businesses to gather evidence on the economic impact of transport provision, John B & Joanne to circulate.

Post-16 transport has been included within the latest transport tender process. Hazel had previously circulated details of the new routes that have been put out to tender. SEP agreed that future transport tenders and promotional material should include references to both the Dales Way and the Westmorland Way, recognising their importance to visitors and sustainable travel.

It was reported that the new Sunday bus service operating from the northeast via Garsdale to Sedbergh has unfortunately been cancelled due to roadworks affecting the route. There is much disappointment at the loss of the new service, particularly in both Garsdale and Sedbergh. **ACTION: John Carey** to discuss the cancelled Sunday service with Hazel Hodgson and ensure the impact evidence is incorporated within the transport report.

Cumbria has been selected by the Dept of Transport as a bus reform pilot area, a means to use new ways of planning, funding and delivering bus services. WAF's are holding Bus Reform Pilot consultations and all are encouraged to participate in forthcoming stakeholder workshops and the consultation questionnaire.

4. Development and Planning

Baliol - Peter Stockton advised that the Yorkshire Dales National Park Authority has commissioned a development brief for the Baliol site. It is expected to be published in August and, in line with other major site briefs, will be publicly available. It will provide guidance on matters including development density, building heights and other planning considerations.

Joanne advised that discussions had taken place with the site owners and that planning consultants were on site today carrying out a site survey to help plan next stages.

Local plan - the Yorkshire Dales Local Plan was formally adopted on 30 June replacing the Authority's previous policies with one document, replacing 11 previous ones. Planning officers have been briefed on the changes. The revised policies continue to support rural business development, farm diversification and housing delivery whilst placing greater emphasis on nature recovery and environmental management. Larger infrastructure developments may require additional environmental mitigation, although it was emphasised that this does not represent a fundamental shift in planning policy. SEP noted that all new housing within the National Park will now be secured as principal residence housing through Section 106 agreements. There were no significant planning applications requiring discussion.

5. SEP Key Priorities

Wellbeing Festival - Preparations continue for the Sedbergh Wellbeing and Walking Festival, taking place from 14-20 September. The festival, supported by Sedbergh Summits, The Black Bull and Dalesway Therapies, will include walks, talks, wellbeing activities and food events designed to showcase the area's growing wellbeing sector. There are around 30 therapy businesses in the area, and the festival aims to generate wider economic benefits for these businesses. All agreed that the event has exciting potential. An introductory session featuring participating businesses will be held on 13 September at the People's Hall. Talks during the festival will include topics such as navigation, Wainwright books and local wildlife. Must use Cumbria Tourism and other regional marketing channels to help promote the event.

Main Street and Tourism - John Barraclough presented a draft concertina-style visitor information card featuring artwork by Anne McKinnon. Members welcomed the concept, agreeing that it would provide an attractive guide and souvenir for visitors. **ACTION: Joanne** to obtain the equivalent Kirkby Lonsdale visitor guide. **ACTION: JG/JB/PT** to develop the proposal and identify potential funding opportunities.

Branding and marketing strategy progressing under Paul with several local businesses coming together to develop a new tourism branding strategy for Sedbergh, with initial proposals expected in September. Group includes a mixture of expertise, including photography, graphic design and marketing. Joanne has previously prepared the SEP Tourism Strategy, which may provide a useful foundation for the group's work and is there for using as appropriate.

Public Realm – Jim Atkins reported a small number of outstanding actions of public realm improvements requiring attention. **ACTION: Hazel** to progress with the Highways Team.

Westmorland and Furness Way - a new long-distance walking route opens in Autumn 2026, with its own promotion budget and website. There are 6 routes, covering 120 miles. Sedbergh is a start and finish location. Businesses should include the route on their website/ socials. This could link well with the wellbeing offer. Businesses can list for free on the new WFW website. Passports and stamps will be available from the TIC. The route should be promoted on the new Sedbergh website.

East Cumbria Tourism Network - Joanne had previously circulated the minutes of the latest meeting. Members felt there would be value in encouraging more local businesses to participate, particularly if the next meeting is hosted locally in September. **ACTION: Joanne** to explore opportunities for Sedbergh to host next East Cumbria Tourism Network meeting.

Members also discussed whether SEP could work more closely with the new Kirkby Lonsdale marketing officer through jointly funded marketing activity, helping to better coordinate tourism promotion across the two towns. It was noted that Kirkby Lonsdale Town Team leader, Marie Batty has expressed a willingness to work collaboratively with Sedbergh.

Tour de France – WAF is seeking information from local communities on events and festivals planned for July next year, to be included in visitor-facing promotional material. **ACTION: All** agreed to inform Lyn of any

planned events or festivals. The TDF route starts on 2 July 2027 and comes near to Sedbergh – hospitality businesses take note. **ACTION: Joanne** to circulate Lyn Richardson's update to members.

6. SEP Future

Members reaffirmed the importance of maintaining a single collaborative voice for Sedbergh, bringing together businesses, community organisations and public agencies to support the town's long-term economic prosperity.

Chair's Update - Andy Cobb advised that he will be stepping down as Chair as he and Shelagh relocate to Lancaster area, supporting her treatment at hospitals in the south Lancashire area.

Andy reflected on how much he has enjoyed living in Sedbergh, praising both the beauty of the area and the strength of its community. He said he was proud of what the Partnership has achieved during his time as Chair and welcomed the continued involvement of everyone with an interest in Sedbergh's economic future. He also thanked partner organisations for their ongoing engagement and expressed his appreciation to Sedbergh School for hosting meetings and supporting the Partnership's inclusive approach. Andy highlighted the importance of maintaining the Partnership's collaborative approach and emphasised the value of the Partnership Coordinator role. Andy also expressed his hope that Sedbergh Parish Council would rejoin the Partnership in the future, on equal terms and with no preconditions, as the town would be stronger with all key organisations represented.

All agreed that Sedbergh must remain alert to increasing pressures on public finances and the potential implications for the town, with SEP providing an important forum through which partners can respond collectively.

Members noted that recruitment of a new independent Chair will now commence. Joanne confirmed that the Chair's Person Specification had been circulated and that John Barraclough will serve as Interim Chair until a permanent appointment is made. Baz Bennett will continue as Vice Chair.

Speaking on behalf of the Partnership, Peter Marshall thanked Andy for his integrity, leadership, warmth and humour throughout his time as Chair. Members expressed their sincere appreciation for his commitment to the Sedbergh Economic Partnership and wished both Andy and Shelagh every success for the future.

Andy concluded by thanking Peter Marshall, Tony Reed-Screen and John Barraclough for their support as members of the Executive Group.

7. Any Other Business

Sedbergh School to provide update on the new Schools Group and to meet the new Headteacher,

Date of Next Meeting

Friday 18 September 2026, 11.00am, Hirst Centre, Sedbergh.