

## Sedbergh Economic Partnership – Meeting Notes

11am – 1pm, 24 October 2025

**Attending:** Andrew Cobb, Joanne Golton, John Barraclough, Cllr John Murray, Paul Thomas, Nigel Close, Baz Bennett (Sedbergh School), Frances Haigh, Ed Welti, Steve Ewence, Tony Reed-Screen, Sam Butcher (WAF), Jim Atkins, Henry Pooler, Ian McPherson, Debbie Wilson, Peter Marshall, Cllr Hazel Hodgson, Chris Woods, Peter Stockton (YDNP), Cllr Annette Colton (Garsdale PC), Lyn Richardson (WAF) **Apologies:** Douglas Thompson, John Barraclough, John Walker, Libby Bateman

Andy welcomed Cllr John Murray and Frances Haigh to the meeting

### 1. Matters arising

**Farfield Mill**, an important part of our local economy, has appointed a new chairman, John Walker. The manager, Jo Mowbray, has now left her role and Frances Haigh (finance) and Claire Hugginson (marketing) will now cover the management role during recruitment.

**Eden Tourism Network** – meeting at Hutton in the Forest this week to discuss expanding the network to include other areas (east of the M6). Important to share with Dent and Garsdale businesses. JG shared the Cumbria Living Heritage leaflet showcasing the lack of attractions/ acknowledgment of tourism east of the M6.

**Worker Transport** - Natalie Fryer at Cumbria Tourism recently met with JG, EW and SE to discuss employee access to workplaces. A survey will be sent out to Sedbergh businesses. **ACTION:** All hospitality businesses to be encouraged to complete questionnaire on worker transport.

**B4RN latest** – Garsdale PC to contact Fibrus and Connecting Cumbria for latest information on connections. Connecting Cumbria confirmed that it continues to work on areas like Sedbergh that don't currently have a gigabit broadband solution planned to ensure that no one and no place is left behind. They are engaging with several suppliers and stakeholders, including with B4RN who are engaging with the community to develop a voucher funded community project, to look for options for solutions to develop.

### 2. Public Transport in Sedbergh

**Council update** – Cllr John Murray, portfolio holder for transport at WAF provided an overview of his role at the Council and the new Buses Bill which will change rules on public transport competition and subsidies which should be helpful to rural areas. The bus grants help transport services to run as local authority funds are often diverted elsewhere, and discretionary funds are limited.

A new rural bus franchise pilot has been announced for Cumbria, a grant worth £500,000. A framework will likely be drafted for delivery and Cllr Murray will input into the process. Realistically, each area will receive £250,000 (Cumberland and Westmorland) and the monies will likely set up a framework for when the new combined authorities, then mayoral authority, are established. This framework will hopefully mean an end to annual contracts and tender bidding rounds, meaning a more stable transport service for everyone. There will probably be a bus service funded using this money and all monies have to be committed by the end of March. Tenders likely to go out in February.

In reference to Sedbergh public transport, the Kendal college bus suggestion but sadly not feasible. Western Dales will run two buses on Wednesdays to help with passenger numbers. The original Mon & Friday service bus has been fixed and is now operational and an upgraded bus for this service is expected from early 2026 (confirmed it will take card payments). Sedbergh bus group is now an active campaign group, and Cllr Murray

welcomed their regular correspondence and updates to the transport team. The case for support is strong, and the group is encouraged to keep in regular contact.

Reliability of bus services is important and needs a minimum 3-year commitment for people to make that change from car to bus. On transparency, more is needed in reference to the BSIP monies (Bus Services Improvement Plan grants from central Government) and how decisions have been made. Cllr Murray confirmed that a scoring system is in place for a 'best fit' process. The system uses passenger data and Cllr Murray was asked to consider that the Monday & Friday service is currently not charging due to broken machines so is not carrying out a valid passenger count. Sedbergh must be able to submit passenger numbers, and this includes the Western Dales services too, as voluntary routes are sometimes not counted.

Train station connections are important and Sedbergh can connect to both Garsdale and Oxenholme. Demographics show expected increases in number of older people and that service provision is key to helping prevent isolation and in accessing Kendal, especially for issues such as appointments, meeting friends (and accessing medication with local pharmacy closing). Transport services also matter for young people who have not yet passed their driving test or cannot afford a car.

What more can SEP partnership do? – Cllr Murray suggested making closer links with other transport providers, transport groups and work together. HH is working hard as ward councillor and a real champion for transport in Sedbergh. The economy of Sedbergh needs to be better explained to the decision makers, i.e. big employers, new homes being built, limited access to the workplace all needs passing on. **ACTION: Cllr Murray** to meet with Natalie Fryer (Cumbria Tourism) and Steve Ewence to discuss worker transport. Natalie to share Sedbergh data from the worker transport questionnaire. **ACTION: JG** to share Economy of Sedbergh paper with Cllr Murray.

### **3. Priorities, Themes and Mission Statement**

Baz raised the draft SEP Mission Statement, all agreed to shorten it slightly. PM suggested linking to the National Park objectives and include creating and filling jobs. **ACTION: JG** to share revised Mission Statement and objectives, making them SMART and inclusive of need to grow local economy and to fill vacancies/ grow job numbers.

A wider discussion took place on pushing Sedbergh as a location for larger events, making use of the Hirst Centre, competing directly with Kendal and Carlisle with a large-scale indoor venue. As well as seasonal tourism, venues and events should be looked at in more detail to promote Sedbergh's profile as a year-round destination. Parking options should be considered for larger scale events with shuttle buses running from Kendal and stations. This would need to be backed up by decent transport services and recruitment of volunteer drivers. For Booktown, the option to host larger-scale events could facilitate more well-known/ popular authors coming to Sedbergh on promotional visits and this would help grow the profile of Sedbergh.

There are several outdoor activity events held in Sedbergh each year. Volunteers already exist for these events such as mountain climbing, fell running etc. The town needs to be better organised for national events such as the English schools running championships - 300 families in Sedbergh but no food sellers or local businesses on site to engage. Sedbergh School have offered to display local information to encourage visitors to access the main street, **ACTION: PT/ HP** to follow up. This presents an opportunity for local hospitality and shops to engage, perhaps offer discount vouchers in advance. **ACTION: LR** to host an informal scoping meeting with local events group and businesses. SEP already has a draft tourism strategy but helpful to look at additional tourism opportunities to support/ fund. Farfield Mill is keen to be involved and needs to do more to link to the towns online calendar and the publication, Lookaround. All agreed the need to have an improved Sedbergh events calendar and make sure it is populated in one place to help businesses be aware and that there is no overlap, should car parking be needed. **ACTION: LR/ DW** to co-ordinate, including

information from fellrunning/ Sedbergh School and others – all done to increase profile and encourage longer stay/spend.

#### **4. SEP initiatives/ key projects**

**Main Street Update** – The information boards in main car parks have been updated. Thanks to John Barraclough for cleaning them. **ACTION: PT/CiC** to update the logos. JB has written to SPC regarding the proposed coach park and a holding response has been received. It is hoped that SPC will hold a consultation to give more information on the scheme, how it would work, for example where the drop off points are and take feedback from local businesses. YDNP have confirmed that building works started at Udales within the planning permission timeframe. With reference to the condition survey, a visit is due on 29 October. Previously, there had been difficulties on gaining access to the premises.

**Tourism Update** – Nigel gave an update and presentation on a potential new booking system for businesses in the wider Sedbergh area. It is advancing technically and is now seeking other business members from accommodation providers. NC may seek funds from Cumbria Chamber, WAF and will discuss with Eden Tourism Network. **ACTION: NC** to contact Sam regarding WAF business grants.

**Booktown update** – Paul reported that the Death in the Dales Festival took place in October and reported an increase in sales on the previous year especially to visitors from outside the local area. The event is becoming more well known and more crime writers are engaging. The event supports local hospitality and needs to continue on an annual basis and sporadic deliver can affect traction.

**Wellbeing** - the Main Street group, with Carol Nelson at the Sleepy Elephant, are investigating an initiative to raise the profile of Sedbergh and district as a wellbeing destination given the number of specialist therapists around Sedbergh, associated shops and serene environment. The profile of the town could be promoted as a well-being retreat, with funded PR support. **ACTION: Peter, John and Jim** to provide a briefing paper for agenda at the next meeting.

**Broadband** – Andy read through the e-mail from Connecting Cumbria. No further news at present but the MP has been in touch to say she is still on the case regarding rollout of superfast broadband. Annette queried the current broadband delivery response with a question on whether Fibrus need to give notice that they are not delivering which would then bring other parts of the project into place/ unlock next steps. **ACTION: LR/JG** to request update from Connecting Cumbria and B4RN.

#### **5. YDNPA**

**Local Plan hearings** – Peter advised that the Local Plan hearings will be held in early December at Bainbridge. The timetable is on the Yorkshire Dales website. Joanne and Sedbergh School are expected to attend. The main sites of Baliol and housing sites to be discussed. YDNP will defend its current allocation but accepted that there is pressure for housing. Westmorland and Furness Council funding could be available to facilitate development elsewhere should employment land status be lost.

PS advised that the WAF Economic Strategy has been launched for consultation and encouraged all to respond as he felt it was missing areas east of the M6.

BB highlighted the new ecology rules in planning applications and the lack of ecologists affecting application process/timescales and permissions. Ecology reports are needed for 25m2 of development. A new planning ecologist (Nick Handy) has been recruited at the park authority to help deliver against Government biodiversity targets.

**Annual forum** – The YDNP Partnership Management Plan annual forum was held on 23 October in Grassington. Baz attended and reported several successes against YDNP Plan objectives and new ones have

now been set. On cultural landscapes, more underground power lines have been put in place; on welcoming place, the new Coast to Coast route will soon be operational; on wildlife, the water quality issues remain a real concern and on new homes, more are being built to support local communities, with Sedbergh given as an example. 30 new phone masts have been installed around YDNP and are expected to become operational in 2027 (delayed timescale was queried). Going forward YDNPA will concentrate on wildlife, climate mitigation (farming, peat and renewables), welcoming place, flourishing economy with 5 million visits per year. Need to factor in expected decrease in working age population of 9% by 2040. **ACTION: PS** to share the new YDNP Partnership Management Plan.

### **Council News**

**Westmorland Furness Council** – Cllr Hodgson advised that both Cumberland and WAF Councils have agreed to have a new mayor-led strategic authority (decision taken on 14 Oct). The new Cumbria Combined Authority (CCA) will be established in early 2026, operating for a year without a mayor, before Cumbria's first Mayoral election in May 2027.

Cllr Hodgson is attending discussions on health services coming back into communities like Sedbergh. NHS funding could increasingly support community-based care and deliver treatment closer to home under a new 10-year plan with Morecambe Bay Partnership

The WAF economic strategy is in progress, hopefully it will help attract new grants from Government. Transport is a crucial element in the delivery of the new economic strategy. **ACTION: SB** to present latest on economic strategy and timetable at next SEP. Public consultation and survey underway currently with feedback requested on vision and priorities, **ACTION: ALL** to respond. Need to make sure that Sedbergh area is covered along with rest of east of the M6

**Sedbergh Parish Council** – no representation.

### **6. Any other business**

Farfield Mill are hosting a Festive weekend on the 8/9 November. 2026 will be the 25th anniversary of the Mill's restoration with many events planned

Community grants are open again until the end of January. Family hubs are running a feedback survey, and parents / families are encouraged to respond by 31 Oct.

**Next meeting: Friday 12 Dec, 11am Hirst Centre, Sedbergh** and agenda items include Wellbeing initiative, SEP Priorities.