

### **Notes of a meeting with Lizzi Collinge MP – 15/11/2024**

SEP representatives and local businesses met with Lizzi Collinge MP and aide, Bess Eagles, to discuss issues relating to the economic wellbeing of Sedbergh, including the need to support businesses and employment in the town and to grow the economy.

1. Joanne Golton and Tony Reed-Screen met Lizzie at the Toll Bar employment site to assess potential expansion, reflecting current demand from business. This would need investment from public funds to help delivery. Toll Bar is a suitable location for employment expansion as it is close to new housing sites and doesn't require access via Main Street to new sites to the east. There are currently no transport services to support employers in Sedbergh, so more employment sites are needed locally. Evidence indicates that some businesses are renting local residential garages and lockups in other towns, and implies that further investment is needed in Sedbergh to help deliver more of these much-needed units.
2. Round table discussions were held with SEP representatives and business persons at The Black Bull Hotel. The need for new sites for housing in general and affordable housing in particular were discussed. The following notes summarise further current themes.
  - a. Andy Cobb provided an overview of The Sedbergh Economic Partnership (SEP) and its aim to support and expand economic growth in the town. Sedbergh is located in both the Yorkshire Dales National Park and Westmorland and Furness Council. Each authority is asked to engage more closely with the SEP to provide solutions to the need for job creation and more housing.
  - b. Sedbergh has a housing shortage. There is a need to grow the housing supply base in Sedbergh to support growth of the town. This would mean increase in all types of housing from Houses of Multiple Occupation (HMOs) to rentals to family homes. Demand is high and more homes are needed. Sedbergh is currently unable to compete on the same scale with Kirkby Stephen and Kirkby Lonsdale as it is in a National Park. Lizzi will highlight the issue of house building in National Parks in her next meeting with the housing minister.
  - c. James Ratcliffe at the Black Bull discussed issues around staffing; where to house workers and making sure working hours and wages were attractive. It has proven very difficult to encourage people to work in Sedbergh away from central lakes and wider Cumbrian locations. Businesses like the Black Bull were engaged with Kendal College for student placements and training (but they seem more Lakes focussed), also Morecambe and Lancaster College but better links could be made – Lizzi to help. [There are opportunities for apprenticeships in the hospitality industry]. Trade is difficult and increased costs to cover the rise in national wage and NI employer contributions will sadly mean price hikes for customers.
  - d. Debbie Wilson at Visitor Information Centre raised bus service issues and the inefficiencies regarding the currently inadequate service, lack of transport to support the workforce, the expense of a taxi from Oxenholme Station at £48, not supporting education establishments and having to extend current timetables because tendering and contracting are slow.
  - e. Jim Atkins talked about housing and the need to tackle second homes with both fiscal and planning initiatives to deter their further proliferation. The SEP recognises the need to have short term lets to support tourism economy. Pleas

that new builds would have principal occupancy and would welcome HMO-style housing to support employers.

- f. Paul Thomas at Westwood Books talked about the current impact on high streets and the need to talk directly to businesses rather than via key industry groups/ bodies. He pressed government to change rules to support fair competition on the high street, specifically around price setting and online markets.
- g. John Barraclough provided Lizzie with an overview of the Main Street businesses and the findings of a recent survey. An Action Group has now been established. He will keep her informed regarding progress. Sedbergh needs a vibrant Main Street to help keep confidence high and visitors engaged.
- h. The issue of Sedbergh as England's Booktown was raised and how Sedbergh needed more support nationally from national tourism bodies, such as Visit England/ Britain, to help promote it.
- i. Discussion on the urgent need to improve the transport links with train connections (Leeds/ Carlisle and West Coast), and that there are no existing public transport links for visitors to travel between the Yorkshire Dales and The Lake District. Lizzi hoped boundary relaxing between authorities would mean better co-operation in future.
- j. James Ratcliffe talked about how the hospitality industry was struggling with the supply of staff – the Bull has now taken on overseas staff placement but paperwork onerous.
- k. Peter Marshall at Sedbergh School discussed the impact of National Insurance employer contributions and VAT for public schools and concluded that this would mean a significant £3,000,000 loss of spend in the local economy and fewer local jobs.
- l. Noted that Sedbergh and Farfield Mill will feature on BBC Countryfile on Sunday 17<sup>th</sup> November at 5.20pm.
- m. Paul raised the issue of local farming families and pressed the MP to support farmers with measures to help income/ wages adding that most would not be adverse to new tax rules if fair wages / fiscal support for farmers was in place.
- n. Meeting went well and Lizzi agreed to come to a future Sedbergh Business Network event.

Ends

JG – Nov 24