

Sedbergh Economic Partnership – Meeting Notes

11am – 1pm, 12 December 2025

Attending: Andrew Cobb, Joanne Golton, John Barraclough, Paul Thomas, John Walker, Nigel Close, Ed Welti, Steve Ewence, Tony Reed-Screen, Sam Butcher (WAF), Jim Atkins, Henry Pooler, Ian McPherson, Debbie Wilson, Peter Stockton (YDNP), Lyn Richardson (WAF), Chris Woods, Felicity Rooney, Frances Haigh, **Apologies:** Libby Bateman, Paul Thomas, Baz Bennet, Cllr Hazel Hodgson, Peter Marshall, Hannah Reynolds

1. Matters arising

Welcomes - Andy welcomed John Walker, the new Chairman at Farfield Mill.

SEP Mission statement – the final version was agreed. **ACTION: Joanne** to publish.

Late night opening - Chris reported a successful evening, the weather was kind. The band, Drumnation, were well received and the craft market in the church was very well supported with happy stallholders. Thanks to Ian for the Christmas lights and to Debbie for organising.

2. WAF Economic Strategy

Sam introduced the council's new economic strategy, 'Striving Together'. This is due to be approved by WAF Cabinet on February 10 2026 and published soon afterwards. It will be an inclusive and green growth strategy concentrating on sustainability, people, business, and place. This will be a 10-year economic strategy. **ACTION: SB** to circulate new Strategy to SEP members.

The new economic development strategy will include measurements, metrics and milestones. Funding and delivery most likely to be in partnership with a multitude of funding sources.

In reference to the proposed combined authority / mayoral authority, this has been taken into consideration, and the strategy also aligns with the Cumbria Economic Strategy. Sam surmised that the strategy was correctly balanced across the area, including the area east of the M6.

3. Yorkshire Dales Authority

Local Plan – The hearing sessions have now finished with the Planning Inspector's report due early next year. The plan is expected to be assessed as sound, but modifications are anticipated. Plan modifications will be undertaken by the Local Plan team. The plan will then be published, and open for comment. It will go back to the Planning Inspector and formal adoption expected in June 2026. The new Local Plan is given some weight already, especially on current pre-app discussions.

JG attended the local plan hearings with Glenn Dugdale from Sedbergh School. The SEP were questioned on the Baliol site and responded as per previous submitted consultation responses. The owners of site SED3 were also present and confirmed that they would still like their site to be considered for housing, despite it not being allocated at this point. The owners may be interested in attending a future SEP meeting.

The most significant change for the Sedbergh area, will likely be the former Bailiol site reallocated as a housing site. It seems likely as it has not delivered as an employment site during the current plan period. YDNP see this as an employment site lost and have concerns that vacant buildings policy may see reduced numbers of affordable housing delivered on the site.

Shortly, the Local Plan team will start work on housing development briefs and draft the new National Park design guide - this will include style, density, landscaping, materials.

Barn conversions will now be for local occupancy only, no longer converted as holiday homes. Discussion on barn conversions with concerns that they are expensive to renovate which may prevent local people affording to progress. Historically many have been converted for holiday lets or for families moving into the area. However, local occupancy may mean initial purchase price is lowered to help local families to take on the work.

YDNPA see the Local Plan as positive for the area, it should release land for up to 1000 new homes (750 expected). It will see permanent occupancy for all new homes built and a good percentage of affordable homes. This should help bring in younger buyers to help with school places, fill employment vacancies etc. On the conservation side, it should benefit the park and its extended area, including the moors and uplands. On the economy, YDNPA remains supportive of farm diversification and visitor-facing businesses.

All agreed there was a need to make sure all ages benefit from these new houses, not just retirees, who perhaps could sell their older house at a premium (as no local occupancy restrictions) and move to a new local occupancy one. YDNP asked if there is a way for the authority to monitor these outputs and how these new houses are contributing to socio-economic data information. YDNPA and SEP would welcome such a project and perhaps a housing needs survey would be useful for new sites. Broadacres gathered data information for their new-build project, **ACTION: JG** to ask Jeremy Hewitson on how best to proceed.

YDNP news - The chief executive, David Butterworth, is to retire in March. Recruitment for this important post will begin in the new year. JG has been asked to write a piece on SEP for the Dales newspaper, which will be distributed to every home within the National Park.

Udales – the condition survey is now finished and awaiting the published report. Thanks to everyone who was involved in this. It is hoped the survey report will shortly be in the public domain.

4. Wellbeing project

John Baraclough, Peter Marshall and Carole Nelson are discussing the notion of Sedbergh as a 'wellbeing' destination. At least 20 wellbeing businesses are based in the town and surrounding district. John has also met with Greg Stevenson at Gundog PR to discuss a familiarisation trip for journalists, when the project has progressed further.

Carole Nelson organised a meeting at People's Hall in late November for businesses interested in promoting the town as a place for wellbeing. Several businesses attended and it is a theme that businesses would like to explore further. **ACTION: JG** to share Carole's meeting notes and draft project marketing plan. **ACTION: FR** to build an information database and approach businesses to survey. Ian asked that the theme of wellbeing be better defined to help businesses/ groups consider if they are eligible to participate. **Action: JB** will continue to coordinate with Carole and keep SEP informed. Carole to be invited to future SEP meeting.

Lynn Richardson recently ran a meeting bringing event organisers to discuss making delivery a little easier and coordinated. It was well attended and various actions came from it. Event planning and tourism promotion are the two areas to be explored further. Hoping to meet again in January.

ACTION: HR and JG to meet to discuss TouchStay proposal (as per Keswick Tourism Association project). **ACTION: HP and PT** to progress mobile promotional board at school events.

Regarding wider Sedbergh tourism initiatives, SEP discussed a new updated visitor-facing website and the need to adopt a central communication to avoid duplication and generate dedicated theme-based websites e.g. well-being website or a book town website. The CiC currently administer the town website and recognise the need for change. All agreed any new website for Sedbergh needs to be 'everything to everyone' to try and spread the message of what it can offer. In reference to funding a new website, WAF are offering community grants, deadline is 31 January. An application, under the CiC, to the council for funding could then lever in other match funding pots. The council funds need to be spent within 12 months, and the package could include a website and promotional activities. **ACTION: CW** to set up web group and discuss grants with Lynn.

Nigel has further developed his website booking proposal which could include wellbeing themed experiences, like Airbnb's website offer, alongside accommodation - focussing on where to stay and what to do, working alongside other operators. **ACTION: NC** to discuss with Cumbria Chamber regarding project funding.

Good round table discussion on the agreed need to bring all strands of Sedbergh visitor engagement together. Tourism is an area that requires delivery and businesses want to see some action. Important to consider promoting Sedbergh as a place to live and work as well as visit – helps economic growth/ fill job vacancies. All agreed to use existing networks to let local people know what's happening and to better link web listings with Lookaround.

5. Local Initiatives and key projects

Bus Users Group – Ed provided an update. Monitoring of passenger numbers continues. Buses are still running full. Payment facility still not resolved on the Monday and Friday buses, this affects counting of passenger numbers.

The government has announced new 3 yr funding of £1.7 million for bus initiatives. This is in addition to the £250,000 pilot monies - still to be confirmed on what they will be used for. Tenders for new or existing contracts for bus services are due to be submitted in February.

The excellent data analysis work by the Bus Users Group shows there is a less than average spend per person on public transport in Sedbergh compared to the rest of the local authority area. **ACTION: EW** to write to and inform government, MP and WAF. **Action: JG** to invite Councillor Murray to next meeting.

Main Street Update – Jim has previously provided WAF Highways/ Streetscene with a list of actions. Most of this has been done but a few more works need to be carried out, **ACTION: JA** to contact WAF to follow up. Noted that Udales looked quite dark during the Late-Night Opening event and hopeful that the conditions report will help begin the process of pushing Udales to a more positive future.

Leighton's barbers are closing at the end of January with no known new use currently. Planning authority confirm that the shop area would be subject to planning permission should it want to revert to residential use. Current YDNP policy would be to dissuade conversion and retain retail/economic use. The framing shop is still for sale, and the old house part is expected to revert to residential. There are lease issues at the fish & chip shop and hopefully this will be resolved soon.

B4RN – No real changes. Sam Robson from B4RN had been in touch via email to say Main Street and remaining unbuilt areas are currently in feasibility stage, teams are currently assessing the viability of the project, this includes considering available funding from the government run gigabit voucher scheme – but additional funding streams may be needed. Concern expressed at the lack of progress.

Tourism Update – Joanne attended the Eden Tourism Network meeting this week. The network is now to expand to areas east of the M6 and be renamed East Cumbria Tourism Network (ECTN). The ECTN will be open to all visitor-facing businesses including those in Garsdale and Dent. One of the areas that they support is business training and industry news sharing. **ACTION: JG** to contact ECTN to organise free training for sole traders and businesses in Sedbergh (similar to recent business support training workshops in Keswick).

Council News

Westmorland Furness Council – The council have launched a new nature recovery strategy and funding is available for local groups. **ACTION: LR** to share further information.

Sedbergh Parish Council – no representation.

The coach parking consultation has still not started; SEP hopes it will start shortly to allow businesses on Main Street to share views. The coach parking remains a divisive issue for SEP members. EW confirmed that 15 new car parking spaces are expected to be made available in Joss Lane car park if it goes ahead.

6. Any other business

Brian Capstick, at Birks Farm, has submitted a request to the School and the YDNPA to use land for an Armed Forces Day next July. All appreciate the work that Brian does for the veterans community. It is hoped that this can be a community wide and collaborative effort for Sedbergh.

M6 upgrades – Funding has been offered by National Highways to support local community initiatives in areas affected by ongoing work. **ACTION: JG** to send out National Highways note to SEP members.

Farfield Mill is marking its 25-year anniversary with a special weekend of heritage, art, and community from 23 - 25 May. Visitors can explore the Mill's history through short film, discover the artist studios and watch live demonstrations.

Andy thanked everyone for their attendance in 2025, and SEP meets again on 23 January. Thanks to the school for hosting and hospitality. Happy Christmas and a prosperous 2026 to all.

Next meeting: Friday 23 Jan, 11am Hirst Centre, Sedbergh