

Sedbergh Economic Partnership – Meeting Notes

11am, 13 September 2024

Attending: Andrew Cobb, Chris Wood, Tony Reed-Screen; Peter Marshall, Debbie Richardson, Joanne Golton, John Barraclough, Steve Ewence, Sam Butcher (WAF), Amy, Peter Stockton (YDNP), Lynn Richardson (WAF), Jim Atkins, Paul Thomas, Jo Mowbray

Apologies: Matt Williams (WAF), Debbie Wilson, Victoria Hudson (Primary School), Libby Bateman, Cllr Hazel Hodgson, Jeremy Hewitson (WAF), Sarah Campbell (Settlebeck)

1. Matters arising

ARUP study – The former ARUP report on future cycle routes was discussed, specifically in relation to potential funding around links with the Eden Valley. Nick Cotton was a key contact at the time; there may be elements in there that can be taken forward to help tourism and it would be good to link northwards. The project was revisited with the former MP two years ago but stalled.

Local events – late night opening confirmed for 4 December, Sheepfest is in 2025, the Crime Writing Festival is on 12 & 13 October. The town twinning group is taking several Settlebeck students to Zrece in the New Year, this has been funded from Westmorland Furness Council. Lynn Richardson reported that WAF were very pleased with the application, especially around its inclusivity.

2. Tourism

Visit England - Cumbria Tourism are hosting Visit England director, Lyndsey Turner Swift, as part of the 50 years anniversary. JG met with Cumbria Tourism CEO, Gill and Farfield Mill Marketing Manager, Clare to discuss visiting Sedbergh on Friday 20 Sept. Lyndsey and Gill will meet with several hospitality businesses to discuss ambitions, issues and challenges followed by a tour of Farfield Mill. SEP approached to help co-ordinate and suggested inviting Howgills, Dalesman, Black Bull and the TIC. Paul at Westwood Books also keen to discuss Booktown plus key areas for Sedbergh of culture, landscape and education. SEP discussed link to international visitors and marketing, especially given 20% overseas students at Sedbergh School plus the popular summer courses, language schools etc. **ACTION: JG** to provide update note after visit.

Draft Tourism Plan – JG circulated the SEP draft tourism strategy followed by round table discussion on current Sedbergh visitors, potential markets etc. Howgills Accommodation confirmed their main clientele were families and couples, particularly from south England. Farfield Mill visitors are usually over 65s with just 6% of their visitors being children and families. Westwood Books attract the older day tripper from urban centres, picking up customers often on the ride out. There are also people on holiday, families in the summer and some of those who are waiting on children attending the summer courses. Westwood Books occasionally get dealers from the US and Europe outside of the main season and they often get visitors on a stop off point on the way down from Scotland - perhaps this is an area to explore. Discussion around need to appeal to stayers and day trippers, providing itineraries and digital updates. The TIC reported Dutch and French as their main international visitors, who often stop in for information on walks, maps, gifts and books. Suggested more work with HF holidays to encourage their guests into town more and to also provide more information on wet day ideas. **ACTION: JG** to update strategy and share with partners for feedback.

Visitor Information – Farfield Mill are now part of the Bloomberg Connect app. This app which provides guides for major US and European museums and information can be translated in up to 20 different languages. It's a good way to promote the mill and open up to new audiences. Sedbergh is on the Dalesway walking route and the long walks market is a national and international market which could be explored further. Peter Stockton advised that Julie Barker from YDNP will have more visitor profile data. Reminded that visitors will often be friends and family that often come to visit, eat and explore. AC reminded all of Sedbergh's archaeology and the cultural and historical links it has. **ACTION: JG** to work on new visitor survey to share with partners including hospitality businesses and TIC. **ACTION: PM** to enquire about quick online survey to summer courses parents to request feedback on Sedbergh.

3. Planning

Local Plan news – the latest consultation is to be published on Monday, with a six-week response time. This consultation will list all housing sites for consideration including 4 sites in Sedbergh, for up to 70 new homes. YDNP Members will make a formal decision on sites, based on the responses, before it goes to the planning inspector. The new government are pushing for more housing delivery and this will probably result in pressure on adjoining authorities to deliver more housing.

The SEP position, as per the Growth Framework, remains a wish to see a 10% housing increase to support employment, school roll numbers and local services. This would represent 130 homes, rather than 70. SEP also disappointed that no further land for employment has been proposed. Baliol is still to be seen as an employment site, which can include some housing to help deliver the business use. Peter confirmed that WAF could not currently commit to a budget to bring forward a new site for employment and the Planning Inspector needs to see some certainty for it to be considered. There are local tradespeople who are using units in Kendal due to lack of space in Sedbergh, the local Stonemason for example. **ACTION: TRS** to talk with local tradesmen and create short survey to gauge need for business units.

SMHA – The Strategic Market Housing Assessment has recently been updated, originally published in 2019 and provides detailed information on types / numbers of housing required to meet population needs. Evidence points to national park properties being 22% under-occupied, compared with England at 6%.

YDNP Management Plan – this document covers the next 5 years. Any new Government targets will go into that plan, including water quality and nature recovery. There are various subgroups feeding into the management plan, Peter sits on the Stronger Communities group, a group relevant to the town. Sedbergh remains one of the few communities pushing for growth.

YDNP was asked how the authority responds to the housing assessment to turn around the issue of decline in working population. The new Local Plan is the main planned response to the changing demographic and to increase working age numbers. Further discussion on who has the remit to drive employment and new economic strategies, Peter confirmed it was the new Enterprise Partnership and the new North Yorkshire/ WAF economic development teams. **ACTION: AC** to invite the Member for economic development to present formally the economic development plan for Sedbergh covering population support, economic development plans, and business support. **ACTION: JG** to invite new Chairman of Enterprising Cumbria also.

4. Key Projects

Business Network – the next meeting will be at the White Hart on Wed 2 October at 6.30pm. Lesley Robinson from Cumbria Growth Hub will join Joanne and Sam to give information on the Growth Accelerator project.

Main Street – JB attended the SPC meeting to give a short presentation on the Main Street survey and next steps. JB promised to keep them updated. The relationship between SCP and SEP was brought up again – JG has circulated their latest correspondence. **ACTION: JB** to form a small Main Street action group at the next Business Network meeting.

Ambition remains to buy and develop the former Udales building. Carole Nelson is leading this project. YDNP have held internal discussions on Udales and their officer Tom Harland is helping where feasible.

Local banking hubs were discussed as issues exist for businesses and residents in accessing banking. Sedbergh School did enquire, regarding the former Browns site, but as Sedbergh has a Post Office, it would not be a hub priority area as most residents can access some form of banking services. The new government may be supportive as rolling out more community banking hubs is listed in the manifesto.

Housing – The first 6 rental plots at Rawthey Meadows have been occupied and 7 open market/shared ownership plots have completed their sales. There are 7 shared ownership plots still available and 1 open market plot. Broadacres are hosting a shared ownership open event this weekend (14/15 Sept) at the site

where a mortgage advisor from Metro Finance will be present to answer questions on shared ownership financing.

5. Council News

Westmorland Furness Council – Cllr Hodgson had difficulty connecting into the meeting but kindly provided an email update. Hazel has met with the new MP Lizzi Collinge twice since summer. They have been involved in discussion regarding the continuing accident hotspot at J37 of the M6, which has recently claimed two more lives. Cllrs Mitchell and Hodgson aim to have regular monthly meetings with the new MP.

Hazel advised that the current daily Stagecoach bus service will continue to the end of October. A new tender is offered in September to service providers to start from November and £1.6m extra funding has been put forward from WAF for an early and late service timetable.

Hazel reported that SPC met with the WAF Highways Officer to progress parking and traffic plans. There is a commitment to re-mark all highway lines before end of October, plus progressing coach parking design and costings prior to presentation to the National Park. Traffic officers are now working to present a parking plan for Sedbergh for public consultation – **ACTION: LR** to provide clarification. There are continuing issues to resolve from WAF officers regarding the recycling site at the Spar regarding operation size and maintenance costs.

The Boundary Commission review has indicated that WAF needs to reduce its elected members by 3 (resulting in 2850 residents per ward member). All are encouraged to respond to the public consultation on the issue.

Enterprising Cumbria – The former Cumbria LEP is being wound down with function going to local authorities. The staff are now employed by Cumberland Council but will work across the two areas. Enterprising Cumbria will replace the LEP. Isabel Brown is the new CEO of Enterprising Cumbria and David Beeby is the new Chair. An economic growth board has been set up with 15 members - Gill Haigh from Cumbria Tourism is our link. Functions and purpose very similar to the local enterprise partnership. **ACTION: JG** to share the EC Board details and **ACTION: AC** to invite David Beeby to a future SEP meeting. The EC Board will produce a new growth strategy by November, followed by an Economic Summit in late November, hopefully with a cabinet minister expected to attend. Westmorland Furness Council will produce their first Economic Development Strategy early next year and SEP need to work to ensure Sedbergh's growth priorities are included in that drafting.

6. Any other business

Andy discussed the SEP chairman role going forward. The impasse situation with SPC needs to be resolved as collaboration is important for the growth of the Sedbergh economy. The economic partnership exists as a forum to discuss common ideas and issues for the town and it is important to have SPC at the table. The SEP Chairman role needs to be independent and apolitical. Ideas were shared on how best to take forward and solve issues related to chairmanship, for example having a rotating chair. **ACTION: AC** to seek views from SEP members prior to next meeting, draft paper to be circulated.

Next meeting: Friday 18 October, 11am Hirst Centre, Sedbergh