



**Minutes of the proceedings of the ANNUAL TOWN MEETING  
of the Council held at 7 p.m. in the Parish Hall, Sedgefield,  
on Tuesday 7<sup>th</sup> May 2024**

**Cllr Blakemore (Vice Chair of the Town Council – Chair of Meeting), Cllr Dave Jasper (Mayor),**

Cllrs. David Brown, Kelly Dickerson, John Finlayson, Elizabeth Flanagan, Catherine Hart, Jenny Haworth, Peter Hinde and Mavis Wayman.

Clerk: Dr Jane Ayre

49 Residents

## **1 Welcome by the Chair of Meeting:**

Cllr Allan Blakemore welcomed everyone to the Council's Annual Town Meeting. He explained that unfortunately Cllr Mel Carr, Chairman of the Town Council, was unable to attend due to personal reasons. Cllr Blakemore explained this meeting was in three parts, the first being the Annual Town Meeting itself when the Town Council and other organisations would report their activities over the previous financial year, the second part would see the Mayor present financial donations to his chosen charities and the third part would be the announcement of the Young Citizen of the Year Award 2023 and the Citizen of the Year Award 2023. Cllr Allan Blakemore informed those in attendance that copies of the meeting's agenda, previous minutes and the Council's 2023/24 Annual Report had already been distributed around the room for information and confirmed that such were also available on the Town Council's website. He informed residents in attendance that they would be able to ask questions and make comments under agenda item 7 of the Annual Town Meeting.

## **2 Apologies:**

Cllrs Ann Carr, Mel Carr and Julie Towler.

### **3 Chairman's Report 2023/24:**

Cllr Blakemore referred everyone to the report by Cllr Mel Carr, Chairman of the Town Council, in the Council's Annual Report for 2023/24 on pages 6-7. Cllr Mel Carr reported 2023/24 had been a busy and challenging year. He noted the partnership working that had taken place in order to progress issues in the Town and well as seek improvements and new initiatives citing work with Durham County Council, the Active Travel Group and the Walk and Talk Trust (the latter being for the Town's new Heritage 100 walk). Considerable work has taken place in relation to the expansion of Butterwick Road Cemetery. Through on-going work with Durham County Council it is hoped that work will soon commence on improving play provision at Winterton and Eden Drive play areas. Cllr Mel Carr referenced the Council's successfully delivered, and varied, programme of community events. He also welcomed Cllr Peter Hinde as co-opted councillor as well as new staff members – Kate Lawson (Gardener) and Helen Reeder (Parish Hall Weekend Relief Officer). Cllr Mel Carr concluded by thanking his fellow Cllrs for their hard work and support during 2023/24 as well as the Town Clerk and all Council staff.

Cllr Allan Blakemore took this opportunity to present a small token of thanks on behalf of the Town Council for Mrs Annette Lawson's work over 2023/24 as the Mayor of Sedgefield's Consort.

### **4 Minutes of the Annual Town Meeting held 9<sup>th</sup> May 2023:**

The minutes from the Annual Town Council meeting held on 9<sup>th</sup> May 2023 were proposed by Cllr Jenny Haworth as being a true record and this was seconded by Cllr John Finlayson. The minutes were then agreed as being a true record of the meeting.

### **5 Matters Arising:**

Cllr Blakemore confirmed that the matter of Section 106 monies would be referenced in the reports to be delivered later in the meeting by Sedgefield Electoral Ward County Councillors.

### **6 Reports:**

#### **6.1 Town Council Annual Report 2023/24:**

Cllr Allan Blakemore reminded all present that copies of the Town Council's Annual Report 2023/24 had already been circulated around the room and would be shared through the residents database, promoted on X and placed on the Council's website from Wednesday 8<sup>th</sup> May 2024 as well as paper copies available in the Town Council Offices. Cllr Blakemore informed all in attendance at the meeting that the Annual Report contained an explanation of the Council's Committee system (page 3), Councillor contact details (page 4), Mayor's report by Cllr Dave Jasper (pages 8-9), the Town Clerk's review of the past year (pages 12 – 14), Policy & Resources Committee Report by Cllr Allan Blakemore (page 15), Personnel Committee

Report by Cllr Allan Blakemore (page 16), Community Development & Engagement Committee Report by Cllr Mavis Wayman (page 17), Community Chest Report by Cllr Julie Towler (page 19), Sedgefield Youth Club Report by Cllr Julie Towler (page 20-21), Allotments update (page 23), overview of our community engagement methods (pages 24-25) which includes the new Council website, financial information including income and expenditure account plus consolidated balance sheet (pages 26-28) and Town Council staff contact details (page 29).

## **6.2 Durham County Council Sedgefield Electoral Ward Councillors:**

County Cllr Chris Lines reflected over the previous financial year and confirmed that whilst he could not speak in detail on behalf of his ward colleague David Brown he could confirm that they worked closely on many projects both in their roles as this community's County Cllrs and as part of the Joint Administration of Durham County Council. County Cllr Lines confirmed that several topics discussed at the 2023 Annual Meeting were still major topics on the County Council's agenda and that progress is being made in all of these areas namely opening the DLI Museum, office accommodation strategy, devolution and financial management. Initial groundworks on the refurbishment of the DLI Museum and Arts Gallery have started. The office accommodation plan has evolved slightly. Durham County Council has taken an opportunity to acquire a building with existing office space on the wider Aykley Heads site and that is now where some staff will be relocated to. These two projects are both linked to the completion of The Story, the new history centre, which will be the permanent home for the County's archive, including the full DLI Collection. This new facility is due to open in July and in the interim archival material is being transferred there from County Hall, allowing the old HQ to be gradually vacated and in time be demolished. Once opened, the refurbished DLI Museum and Art Gallery will house exhibition space that is always dedicated to items from the DLI Collection and the display will be frequently changed so as to ensure more items from the collection are seen. The financial position of the County Council has worsened over the last year due to implications from central government, a point which all sides of the County Council chamber agree on. This situation applies to all local authorities across the country and has been reported widely in the media with calls from a wide number of sources requesting urgent action to better fund local government. Durham County Council is in a better position than the vast majority of councils, but £3.7million of reserves had to be used to set a balanced budget for 2024/25, and already at that time, faced additional base budget pressures of £37.8 million between 2025/26 and 2027/28. A lot of these pressures come in the areas of statutory responsibility such as children and young people's services. There is now a new Mayor of the North East who covers all seven local authorities in Northumberland, Tyne & Wear and County Durham. The new combined authority's first cabinet meeting had taken place earlier that day. The cabinet includes each of the local authority leaders, who will have to work together if they want the new arrangements to be successful. County Cllr Lines said Durham County Council is

the largest of those authorities so should have a strong voice. To clarify, the new North East authority would not take any responsibilities away from the individual local authorities but would look at the bigger picture in relation to infrastructure investment relating to transport, business, innovation and employment, housing and culture and sport. County Cllr Lines reported that prior to polling day he had approached all six candidates to ask questions about bus services. The newly elected Mayor did respond stating they were committed to ongoing dialogue and engagement, and specifically to looking at the situation with the X21. County Cllr Lines said he would be progressing this matter and it was clear that public transport across the County was a major priority. County Cllr Lines said that he and County Cllr Brown collaborate with each other and the Town Council, local community groups, individuals and County Council Officers on a wide range of matters from dealing with casework to allocating their Neighbourhood Budgets and securing other funds from investment in projects here. Whilst it can sometimes be frustrating how long it takes to get things done, County Cllrs work hard to try to achieve and initiatives like the Active Travel Project demonstrate the benefit of collaborative working and are starting to make a real difference. There will be more physical evidence of such work over the coming months when those schemes who received Section 106 funding start to progress. The County Council undertook a robust process to allocate Section 106 community contribution monies through an extensive engagement programme to seek capital projects in Sedgefield and to then hold a community consultation process allowing residents to voice their opinion. Findings were duly considered by the County Council's Section 106 Panel and allocation offers have now been made to support three capital projects in the Town – the expansion of Butterwick Road Cemetery, the getting around Sedgefield and Fishburn project (Active Travel) and the improvement of Winterton and Eden Drive play areas. A general election and local council elections in County Durham will have taken place by the time of the 2025 Annual Town Meeting. In the case of Durham County Council, the number of councillors will be reducing from 126 to 98. Sedgefield will remain a two-councillor ward, but will expand to include Bishop Middleham (which is currently a one-councillor ward). So changes are afoot, however, County Cllr Lines reassured the public that business as normal would continue for he and County Cllr Brown in the intervening time.

County Cllr David Brown reminded all that he had a dual role as both a Town Cllr and a County Cllr as well as 42 years experience of dealing with Council business as a Cllr in one guise or another. He endorsed all the comments made by County Cllr Lines. County Cllr Brown said he had not been a supporter of the move to Durham becoming one large Unitary authority as he believed local issues were best dealt with locally. Similarly he had concerns about the new devolution deal but hoped to be proved wrong. County Cllr Brown reminded all that within the Sedgefield Ward were also the areas of Fishburn, Bradbury and Mordon. Historically 25% of the Council's income came from the rural areas outside of the main settlements but this had

now changed as a result of settlements growing in size. County Cllr Brown said he preferred to deal with residents and matters on a personal basis rather than electronically and he was well versed in helping residents with a wide range of issues from road markings to pest control etc. County Cllr Brown informed residents that he and County Cllr Lines also sit on several different County Council Committees. County Cllr Brown currently sits in the County Council's Crematoria Committee and Licensing Committee. He then gave an oversight into some of the current issues facing both those Committees. County Cllr Brown also encouraged members of the public to submit comments to Durham County Council's Planning Department when they had concerns or issues about any planning application.

### **6.3 Sedgefield Charities:**

Ms Anne Gladwin gave a report on the Sedgefield Charities and their work of 2023/24. Ms Gladwin and Mr Simon Nott share the role of Clerk to the charities and undertake all administration work. The Sedgefield Charities comprise of three charities – The Howe Hope Estates, Sedgefield District Relief In Need and Education Foundation. Out of each of these charities it is Sedgefield District Relief In Need and the Education Foundation which are the grant giving charities. Each charity has a board of trustees who are responsible for the charity's management.

The Sedgefield District Relief In Need charity provides relief in need either directly to individuals or to other charitable bodies providing the same sort of help within the area of benefit. The area of benefit broadly covers the present civic parishes of Bishop Middleham, Bradbury, Cornforth, Fishburn, Mordon, Sedgefield and Trimdon. Help can be given by gifts of money, provision of goods, equipment (either outright or in loan, or by providing services. Support may be offered in cases of hardship, infirmity or ill health. The national economic pressures suffered through 2022 and 2023 affected the performance of the investments of the charity. This year the charity distributed less than 50% in value of grants than it did in 2022. A total of 15 relief in need grants were provided to individuals, at an average of £257 per grant. Additional grants were provided to two organisations – the first as on-going support to Sedgefield Pop In Club for the employment of a supervisor and rent costs and the second to St Edmunds Church towards a new raised floor. In addition, the charity provides continued support at Christmas for three older residents in Sedgefield and Fishburn. The Relief In Need Charity offers help to students pursuing courses beyond A levels and who fall outside the remit of Sedgefield Educational Foundation, often because they reside outside the

Foundation's area of benefit. Grants of up to £600 are made, depending on a family's income. In 2023, 3 education grants were funded with a total value of £1650. Any enquiries about potential applications can be made by contacting the Clerk who can advise on the application process.

Sedgefield Education Foundation's trustees are empowered to make grants to people residing in the present civil parishes of Bradbury, Fishburn, Mordon and Sedgefield. The trustees make grants to young people following courses leading to qualifications higher than A-level or equivalent. Applications to help fund post-graduate courses are not usually considered unless they are vocational and necessary to an occupation such as PGCE/teacher training. The value of an award is dependent on household income. An award may be renewed each year, subject only to the academic success of the student and no changes in the family's circumstances. In considering requests for grants the trustees applied the following thresholds for family income: £25K, £35K and £40K, below which grants of £600, £450 and £300 respectively are made. Grants awarded in 2023 totalled £3250. The students who received grants are studying a wide range of courses from artificial intelligence and teacher training to veterinary physiotherapy. Any enquiries about potential applications can be made by contacting the Clerk who can advise on the application process and the process will be advertised locally via posters, newsletters etc with closing date of 30<sup>th</sup> September for consideration in October.

#### **6.4 Sedgefield Development Trust:**

Ms Janette Savage introduced herself as the new Chair of the Sedgefield Development Trust and reported that Mr Roger Clubley had recently stepped down from that role after 23 years of service to the Trust. Ms Savage expressed her thanks to Mr Clubley and was grateful that he would remain as a trustee to continue to provide his experience and knowledge. Ms Savage then gave a report on the Trust's activities in 2023/24. 2023/24 had been extremely busy and the Trust had concluded its governance review which had helped refresh their understanding of their role and purpose, something which was particularly important as there had been a change in the Trust's directors and trustees in recent years. Ms Savage recorded her thanks to Durham Community Action for their help in this governance review. The Trust's directors and trustees are now working well and the Trust remains innovative, active and is financially sound. Ms Savage gave an overview of the Trust's 12 projects which

are as follows: Days In Days Out (DIDO) which remains active and has good numbers participating. The group have a monthly “in” session at the Parish Hall followed by a monthly “out” session such as bus trip/visit. Sew Easy which meets twice a week in the Parish Hall where participants have shown creativity and made some wonderful garments. The Sedgefield News which delivers a monthly printed publication to all households in the Town and Ms Savage thanked the team of volunteers who oversee the delivery of these publications. The website [sedgefieldweb.co.uk](http://sedgefieldweb.co.uk) which is an important community portal for all the Trust’s activities. The Farmers Market which takes place on a monthly basis and has had a very stable year with a good range of traders participating. The Energy Switch project has been suspended at the moment as the turbulence in world energy markets has made difficulties for this project to achieve meaningful savings, however, if it becomes clear that it can deliver valuable offers to the local community then the Trust will revive this initiative. The Woodland and Wildlife project has seen a number of changes at their site predominantly as a result of the disturbance caused by the construction of NETPark’s Phase 3 including the loss of a small part of its new planting and the need to redefine the northern boundary of the site. The project’s work shows there continues to be an abundant biodiversity of the site and hopefully there will soon be agreement with Business Durham on a number of issues then more certainty for the project and its future work. Homework Help has got off to a good start for the new academic year and the Trust continues to match demand for help with suitably qualified helpers. The Bees of Hardwick project had needed to be relocated from their long-term home, however, another site has been found with possibly better nectar and pollen resources. The Bicycle & Active Travel (BAT) project has had a busy year and worked in conjunction with the County Council, Town Council, volunteers and others producing tangible benefits such as cycle parking, cycle route improvement and leaflets. The Friendly Fixers repair café ran from Fishburn Youth & Community Centre continues to be very successful and demand for repairs is strong. There are a good range of skills and competence amongst repairers and clients are encouraged to make a small donation for the service in order to maintain and grow this particular project. Thermal Cameras is the Trust’s latest project which lends specialist cameras to enable people to identify where cold is entering, or heat is escaping, from their homes. People can then take action to reduce that and save money on energy bills. The project has had a very positive start with over 50 camera loans and a waiting list for next winter. The scheme doesn’t work in the warmer months so the Trust has paused this at the end of March and will resume again in early November. Ms Savage

concluded by thanking the wide range of participants in the Trust's projects, the volunteers who make it possible and her fellow directors and trustees.

### **6.5 Durham Constabulary:**

Sgt Daniel Lake of Durham Constabulary's Local Police Team thanked the Town Council for the opportunity to be involved in this meeting. Sgt Lake reported 90 crimes had taken place in the local area in the last 12 months which was a slight decrease from the 91 crimes in the 12 month period prior to that. When focusing in on those figures violent crime was down from 39 to 15, burglaries had remained the same at 5 each year, there had been a decrease in vehicle thefts from 6 down to 3 but there had been increases in other thefts from 26 to 43 and in criminal damage from 12 to 18. With regards to criminal damage, Sgt Lake reported there was no trend to such crimes. Sgt Lake said that overall crime and anti-social behaviour in the Town is down on previous years. He was pleased to report that as of 1<sup>st</sup> June 2024 an additional Police Constable was to be based within the local police team filling a vacancy that had been there for some considerable time. This officer would cover the areas of Fishburn, the Trimdons and Sedgefield. A new PCSO has been employed in Sedgefield for a little while and has been working closely with schools to address the issue of parking near to schools, an initiative which was showing promising results. There have been reports of young people at Hardwick Park, and to a lesser extent Eden Drive, but these are not at levels of cause concern. The local police team are trying to organize a meeting with detached youth workers who are working at Hardwick Park on Friday evenings to engage with young people. The reports have related to littering and graffiti which whilst low level issues these do have an impact upon the parks users. The local Police Team will be present at the forthcoming Mediaeval Fayre and Sedgefield Show to engage with local residents. Sgt Lake informed all that work is underway to resume the PACT monthly meetings. The intention is to have rotating venues for such between Fishburn, Trimdon and Sedgefield. These meetings are a very good way to keep people updated on issues as well as identify concerns, however, attendance at such has been poor previously. The local police team are increasing their social media usage to try to promote such meeting and encourage more public participation. Sgt Lake expressed his thanks to NETPark Phase 3 which has provided the local police team with funding to purchase a drone specifically for rural policing where there is currently poaching is prevalent.

## **7 Any Other Business:**

The Chair of the meeting, Cllr Allan Blakemore, asked members of the public if they had any comments they wished to make or questions for the Town Council, County Cllrs, Sedgefield Charities, Sedgefield Development Trust and/or the Police representative.

Mr Brian Fountain asked who had responsibility for the footpath which ran from Homebryth House to the Post Office (along the back wall) as this area had not been looked at for years and required maintenance work, including a tree which was growing into the footpath. Similarly, Mr Fountain also expressed concerns about the footpath which ran in the opposite direction. The Clerk replied that these footpaths were the responsibility of Durham County Council and that she would liaise with County Cllrs to obtain answers and reply to Mr Fountain directly. County Cllr David Brown said that he would also report these areas of concern directly to Durham County Council as these did belong to the County Council.

The Chairman thanked the public for their participation.

## **8 Presentations:**

The presentations and various awards were during the second part of the Annual Town Meeting beginning at 7.53pm.

### **a) Presentation of Cheques from the Mayor's Charity:**

The Mayor, Cllr Dave Jasper, said he had enjoyed his term of office and was delighted to present cheques to the following charities and local groups: -

- Red Sky Foundation
- 1st Sedgefield Rangers including Olivia Martin and Grace Rowe
- Sedgefield Players
- SPYS
- Readley Mesothelioma
- Sedgefield Youth Club
- Sedgefield Carpet Bowls Club
- Sedgefield in Bloom
- U3A
- SCA Mediaeval Fayre Committee
- Aycliffe and District Bus Preservation Society
- Little Movers
- Sew Easy
- 1<sup>st</sup> Sedgefield Scouts
- Sedgefield Baby and Toddler Group at Methodist Church
- Homebryth House Residents
- Sedgefield Local History Society
- Mordon Village Hall
- Woodland and Wildlife Group

- Feeding Families
- Sedgefield Handbell Ringers
- Sedgefield Memory Café
- Methodist Church Ladies
- DIDO
- Pop In Club
- 1<sup>st</sup> Sedgefield Brownies
- 1<sup>st</sup> Sedgefield Guides
- Alzheimer's Research UK
- St Cuthbert's Hospice, Durham
- Sedgefield WI
- Willowdene Care Home
- Sedgefield Out of School Fun Club

**b) Young Citizen of the Year 2023 (sponsored by County Cllr Chris Lines, Sedgefield Development Trust, Sedgefield Rotary Club and Sedgefield Town Council):**

County Cllr Chris Lines announced that George Nott was the Young Citizen of the Year 2023. A speech was delivered by County Cllr Lines detailing and recognising George's considerable achievements and services to Sedgefield over many years. This was followed by a presentation of certificate and gift presented by County Cllr Lines and the Mayor Cllr Dave Jasper.

**c) Citizen of the Year 2023 (sponsored by Sedgefield Development Trust, Sedgefield Rotary Club and Sedgefield Town Council):**

Ms Janette Savage (Sedgefield Development Trust) announced that Ian Mason was the Citizen of the Year 2023. A speech was delivered by Ms Savage detailing and recognising Ian's considerable achievements and services to Sedgefield, and beyond, over many years. This was followed by a presentation of certificate and gift presented by Ms Savage and the Mayor Cllr Dave Jasper.

The Chair of the meeting, Cllr Allan Blakemore thanked everyone for attending and closed the meeting at 8.46pm.