
Minutes of the proceedings of the
ANNUAL TOWN MEETING of Sedgefield Town Council
held at **7 p.m.** in the **Sedgefield Parish Hall**
on **Tuesday 13th May 2025**

MINUTES

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| Present | Cllr Mel Carr (Chairman) Cllr Allan Blakemore (Vice-Chair) Cllr Peter Hinde (Mayor) and Cllrs. Ciaran Butterworth, Ann Carr, Helen Cunningham, Kelly Dickerson, John Finlayson, Jenny Haworth, Peter Hinde, Dave Jasper, Julie Towler and Mavis Wayman |
| Officers | Dr. Jane Ayre (Town Clerk) |
| Residents | 37 |

1. Welcome by the Chair of Meeting:

Cllr Mel Carr welcomed everyone to the Council's Annual Town Meeting. Cllr Mel Carr 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 of Sedgefield present financial donations to his chosen charities and the third part would be the announcement of Citizen of the Year and Youth Citizen of the Year Awards for 2024. Cllr Mel Carr informed those in attendance that copies of the meeting's agenda, previous minutes and the Council's 2024/25 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 Mark Cant and Myles Mantripp.

3. Chairman's Report 2024/25:

Cllr Mel Carr reported it has been a privilege to be Chairman of the Town Council during 2024/25. The Town Council had continued to represent its residents and help with their enquiries and issues of concern, where necessary working with Durham County Council. Cllr Mel Carr's full report could be read on page 6 of the Town Council's 2024/25 Annual Report. Cllr Mel Carr thanked his fellow Town Cllrs and Town Council staff for their hard work and support over the year. He concluded by paying particular thanks to long-serving Town and County Cllr David Brown who had

stood down at the recent local Council elections.

Cllr Mel Carr took this opportunity to present a small token of thanks on behalf of the Town Council for Mrs Jaime Hinde's work over 2024/25 as the Mayor of Sedgefield's Consort.

4. Minutes of the Annual Town Meeting held 7th May 2024:

The minutes from the Annual Town Council meeting held on 7th May 2024 were proposed by Cllr John Finlayson as being a true record and this was seconded by Cllr Dave Jasper. The minutes were then agreed as being a true record of the meeting.

5. Matters Arising:

There were no matters arising from the previous Annual Town Meeting minutes.

6. Reports:

6.1 Town Council Annual Report 2024/25:

Cllr Mel Carr reminded all present that copies of the Town Council's Annual Report 2024/25 had already been circulated around the room and access was also available via the Town Council's website. The report will also be promoted through the residents database and x account as well as paper copies being available in the Town Council Offices. Cllr Mel Carr 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 5), Mayor's report by Cllr Peter Hinde (pages 7-8), the Town Clerk's review of the past year (pages 9-11), Policy & Resources Committee Report by Cllr Allan Blakemore (page 12), Personnel Committee Report by Cllr Allan Blakemore (page 13), Community Development & Engagement Committee Report by Cllr Mavis Wayman (pages 14 - 15), Environment Committee Report by Cllr Mark Cant (page 16), Community Chest Report by Cllr Julie Towler (page 17), Sedgefield Youth Club Report by Cllr Julie Towler (page 18), a Butterwick Road Cemetery Expansion update (page 19), overview of our community engagement methods (pages 20 – 21), Parish Hall overview (pages 22 – 23), financial information including income and expenditure account plus consolidated balance sheet (pages 24 - 26) and Town Council staff contact details (page 27). With regards to the Community Chest, Cllr Mel Carr reminded all in attendance that some monies remain within the Chest and encouraged local community groups to apply. With regards to the expansion of Butterwick Road Cemetery, Cllr Mel Carr said he was pleased to report that considerable progress on-site was now being made in relation to this capital project.

6.2 Durham County Council Sedgefield Electoral Ward Councillors

County Cllr Chris Lines gave an overview of the key issues which have been occupying the County Council over the last year as well as key projects that he had

been working on in the Sedgefield ward, much of which had been included in his monthly written reports which are shared with the public through the Town Council's residents database. County Cllr Lines said that money, or lack of it, had been top of Durham County Council's agenda over 2024/25 as the County Council continued to experience escalating costs in delivering statutory services such as adults and children's social care, particularly the latter where there are some very complex needs and care packages that cost hundreds of thousands of pounds per year. County Cllr Lines said that without adequate funding from central government, this was putting intolerable pressure on the County Council's budget but that work was also taking place to investigate the root causes and try to reduce costs by initiatives such as starting a project to bring some residential children's care services back in house, and begin to mitigate the very high costs of using external providers. County Cllr Lines said most of the budget challenges relate to mandatory service areas which leaves very little money for discretionary spending which will have an impact on future opportunities to invest in the local area. The County Council's annual budget was approved in February 2025 which included around £15million of new savings, and the County Council has to find £45million over the next four years just to balance its books. This is going to be challenging and County Cllr Lines said highlights that local government funding is not fit for purpose, with a Council Tax system that penalises the less affluent areas of the country like County Durham. In July 2025 the new central government did make a commitment to undertake a Fair Funding Review which in theory should redress some of the imbalance that currently favours local authorities in the Home Counties but there is no guarantee of that and those other local authorities will be lobbying hard from a different perspective. At the end of 2024 the County Council received a single year financial settlement from central government which makes it problematic for medium to long-term financial planning. County Cllr Lines said that as it happened there was a significant improvement in that settlement compared to what was anticipated, but that was then offset by the impact of the increase in National Insurance which is having a significant impact upon the County Council as a major employer despite central government stating at one point this would be net neutral for councils but it is not. And meanwhile, social care costs continue to rise. In addition, £73 million of transport infrastructure funding had been allocated to County Durham by the previous central government. This has been reduced to £23 million, which will have a direct impact on some projects that were being lined up for the Sedgefield Ward. County Cllr Lines said that despite that doom and gloom, Durham County Council is in a much better financial position than many other local authorities, some of which have already, or may soon, issue Section 114 notices which means they cannot balance their books and need central government to send more money or step in and take control. That is not going to happen with Durham County Council but these are certainly very challenging times. County Cllr Lines then moved on to talk about specific issues in the Ward. With regards to buses,

services across the County continue to be appalling and many have experienced first hand the X21 service in this area. County Cllr Lines supports the North East Mayor's intention to bring bus services back into public control as through this providers could be required to reinstate routes, even if they are currently deemed to be uncommercial. This will not be a quick process and County Cllr Lines reiterated that Durham County Council do not run the buses, but as a key stakeholder he continues to lobby, via his work on the North East Combined Authority Overview and Scrutiny Committee and attending meetings of the North East All Party Parliamentary Group at the Houses of Parliament, for reinstating links from this Ward to Newton Aycliffe and Darlington. In the interim he has worked closely with Durham County Council's Integrated Passenger Transport Team to explore shorter term options for plugging those service gaps while the wider project proceeds, such as improved on-demand bus services or a form of community bus service, like those that can be found in parts of North Yorkshire and elsewhere. County Cllr Lines said that work is also needed to improve bus shelters. County Cllr Lines spoke about those Active Travel Project schemes which have started to be implemented, improving walking and cycling infrastructure and making it safer and easier for people using wheelchairs and mobility aids to get around. In the near future there will be the installation of speed matrix signs on two roads leading into Sedgfield, and advisory 20mph zones in residential areas around the schools. County Cllr Lines said he had been leading the Active Travel Project for the last four years and said its achievements had only been possible due to collaboration and commitment of several organisations in this community, including Sedgfield Town Council and Sedgfield Development Trust's Bicycle and Active Travel Group. Active Travel will continue and while funding options might be harder to find in the short-term, County Cllr Lines said the group would continue to push and remain ambitious in their aims. County Cllr Lines was pleased with the new and improved play equipment that has and is being installed near Eden Drive and at Winterton estate plus football goalposts being reinstated at Station Road Playing Field, all improving facilities for young people. A major upgrade to the play facilities at Hardwick Park is almost complete despite the capital budget for this being approved in February 2022. County Cllr Lines then turned to planning matters. County Cllr Lines expressed his thanks to the Town Council for spotting and objecting early on to the planning application for an anaerobic digestion plan just outside the Parish boundary and to the team at Knotty Hill who mobilised the community. County Cllr Lines played a role in ensuring this application went back to Planning Committee and when that is finally reconsidered there will be strong and persuasive voices of opposition to it. The Parish also faces the prospect of another round of planning applications to build significant numbers of new houses in Sedgfield. County Cllr Lines said that since central government relaxed national planning regulations, while setting much higher targets for local authorities such as Durham County Council, prospective developers have started lining up proposals, and the reality is that some will be hard

to resists. Once any planning application has been lodged with the local authority then the community will know what it faces and County Cllr Lines said all would work together to co-ordinate a community response, he knew the Town Council were as committed to that approach as he was. County Cllr Lines thanked the Town Council for the very valuable, close and positive working relationship that he had with them, both at Town Cllr and officer level. County Cllr Lines concluded by looking ahead as the shape of the County Council had changed significantly since the recent local Council elections. He said an intake of so many new faces presented opportunities to Durham County Council. New Cllrs will bring different perspectives and fresh ideas. It was a matter of fact that many of those lack experience and will be on a steep learning curve, but County Cllr Lines said that was his position in 2021, and for the sake of County Durham, and this Ward, he hoped the various aspects of the new Council would take shape quickly and that Durham County Council gets on with the vital work of delivering local services. County Cllr Lines said he welcomed Ian Catchpole as his new Ward colleague and looked forward to working with him on projects for the benefit of Sedgefield Ward's residents. Finally, County Cllr Lines expressed thanks to David Brown who had stepped down at the election and wanted to put on record his gratitude for his many years of public service, and in particular for his support during the last term at Durham County Council.

Cllr Mel Carr welcomed newly elected County Cllr Ian Catchpole to the meeting and said that everyone looked forward to working with him over the coming term of office.

6.3 Sedgefield Charities

Ms Anne Gladwin gave a report on the Sedgefield Charities and their work of 2024/25 and copies of this had been circulated around the room prior to the meeting. Ms Gladwin explained Sedgefield Charities are a group of charities derived from smaller charitable endowments dating from the 18th century up to 2000 for form three charities – Howle Hope Estate, Sedgefield District Relief In Need and Educational Foundation. Sedgefield District Relief In Need and the Educational Foundation are grant giving charities, each with a specific role and function to support people in the local area. The Howle Hope Estate charity is an unincorporated charity governed by a scheme granted in 2000. The Estate was formerly Howle Hope Farm and the proceeds from the sale of the farm have been invested and these investments help to support Sedgefield District Relief In Need and the Educational Foundation. Sedgefield District Relief In Need and the Educational Foundation each have a board of trustees who meet twice a year being responsible for the charities' management and make decisions about the applications for grants. Both grant giving charities have specific objects and remits. Sedgefield District Relief In Need supports people who are in immediate need and

aims to alleviate hardship, infirmity and disablement. 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 performance of the Charities investments improved over 2024. Trustees were able to fund all eligible grant applications received (a 47% greater value of grants than in 2023). The Relief In Need Charity also offers help to students pursuing courses beyond A level and who fall outside the remit of the Sedgefield Educational Foundation, often because they reside outside the Foundation's area of benefit. Grants of up to £600 were made, depending on a family's income. In 2024, 3 education grants were funded with a total value of £1,500. Ms Gladwin went on to explain the The Educational Foundation awards grants to support people from low income families with living costs who are entering higher education. The Foundation's Trustees are empowered to make grants to people residing in the present civil parishes of Bradbury, Fishburn, Mordon and Sedgefield. Grants are made to young people following courses leading to qualifications higher than A level or its equivalent. Applications are preferred from candidates who are pursuing vocational courses which are necessary for a specific occupation such as PGCE or teacher training. Applications to help fund post-graduate courses can also be considered. The value of the award is dependent on family income based upon thresholds. Grants to a total value of £1,200 were awarded by the Trustees in 2024 reflecting two applications received – one a renewal and the other a new applicant. Ms Gladwin and Mr Simon Nott share the role of Clerk to the charities and undertake all administration work. All queries regarding potential funding and applications should be submitted to sedgefieldcharities@gmail.com.

(Cllr Julie Towler joined the meeting)

6.4 Sedgefield Development Trust

Ms Janette Savage introduced herself as the Chair of the Sedgefield Development Trust and thanked the Town Council for the opportunity to report on the Trust's work. The Development Trust is a charity and its objectives are to advance the economic, social, environmental and cultural quality of life of residents, visitors and people who work in Sedgefield, Bradbury, Mordon and Fishburn. These objectives are achieved through a series of projects that change over time. At present there are 10 active projects. The Farmers Market continued to thrive with a group of dedicated Trustees and volunteers. Whilst there is always some turnover of traders, the market has had a stable year and the market's key vegetable traders remain reliable and popular. There are several projects which address social and cultural

objectives – DIDO (Days In, Days Out), Sew Easy, Sedgefield News and Sedgefieldweb. Ms Savage reported DIDO continued to thrive with a membership at 70 with regular attendance being between 60-65 per session. The group has a wide range of trips out and, for days in, an exciting range of activities such as parties, dances and team games. Sew Easy meets in the Parish Hall with sessions on alternate Monday nights and on Wednesday afternoons with a wide range of sewing abilities catered for. Sedgefield News continues to share news from local people and local organisations, all made possible by the 40-50 advertisements placed by local businesses and team of distribution volunteers. Sedgefieldweb, the Trust's website, continues to perform well with active users up 35% from the previous year with the most popular pages being News and Farmers Market. Ms Savage then spoke about the Trust's projects which relate to nature and environmental initiatives – Woodland & Wildlife, Bees of Hardwick, Bicycle & Active Travel, Friendly Fixers and Thermal Cameras. The Woodland and Wildlife project site has officially been given the name Skerne Wood @ NETPark. There is lots of work taking place behind the scenes with this project but onsite there have been the usual work sessions including a dawn chorus walk, a bird census, hedge laying and Christmas tree recycling. The Bees of Hardwick have had a successful year and the 15 beehives at the new site are working well. The Bicycle & Active Travel project works in conjunction with the County Council, the Town Council, volunteers and others. Over the last year several of those Active Travel projects have come to fruition and more are nearing completion as detailed by County Cllr Chris Lines earlier. This project is also keen to provide more cycling groups and training but do need more volunteers. The Friendly Fixers Repair Café continues to offer a valuable service and in 2024 the group fixed over 120 items ranging in type from electrical to gardening equipment and more reflecting the fantastic range of skills from its volunteers. The Thermal Cameras loan project helps people to assess their draft insulation. The season for this project is November to March when approximately 40 loans were made. The Trust is looking for a volunteer to take on this project. Ms Savage said that 2024 was a stable and financially sound year for the Trust with active projects continuing to serve local communities across a diverse set of interests. Ms Clubley highlighted the well deserved awarding of Honorary Freeman status to Roger and Sandy Clubley in recognition of their 25 years plus services to the Development Trust. Ms Savage concluded by saying a huge thank you to all the Trusts volunteers and saying that if anyone wished to join the Trust Board or any of its projects to either get in touch with her or attend their next meeting at Ceddesfeld Hall at 7.30pm on Monday 2nd June 2025.

6.5 Durham Constabulary:

No Durham Constabulary representative was present and no report had been provided.

7. Any Other Business:

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

Ms Helen Clifford-Brown noted in the Annual Report that the Town Council has nine staff and noted that Personnel in the Income and Expenditure Budget accounted for the highest level of spending in the Town Council. Ms Clifford-Brown wanted to know what hours staff worked, what they were paid and how their work was decided. The Clerk responded citing that of the nine staff employed, five were on part-time hours with all nine staff being employed throughout the working week as well as weekends, from 8am until midnight, to ensure the opening/closing/cleaning of the Parish Hall. All staff have set hours of work and responsibilities with all salaries having been determined by job evaluation, approved by the trade unions, to ensure that staff salaries are correctly set in accordance with national grades. Whilst the Town Council offices are open to the public from 9am – 12 noon Mondays to Fridays (1pm on Wednesdays) staff are present in the office both before and well after those hours dealing with a whole range of issues from telephone calls assisting the public to attending meetings and progressing matters. The Personnel budget heading in the Income and Expenditure account includes far more than just staff salaries, of which it costs any employer more to employ a member of staff than they individually get paid, such as training and PPE. As part of the Town Council's succession planning in one area of its work considerable investment has been made during 2024/25 in training one member of staff which has entailed them attending a horticultural college for block release which has incurred travel and accommodation costs. The Clerk explained that it is the Town Council who determines policy and it is the work of the Town Council officers to then action that policy. Ms Clifford-Brown thanked the Clerk for this explanation and said this gave her a much better understanding and answered all her questions.

Mr Brian Fountain said he had intended to ask the Police if they were aware of the increased number of youths who are riding e-scooters and motorbikes on pavements. Were the Town Council aware? Cllr Mel Carr said the Town Council were unaware and thanked Mr Fountain for raising this issue. Mr Fountain said that someone from Homebryth had recently tripped and hurt themselves as a result of such activity. Mr Fountain said he had witnessed that latest example of such activity at 8pm on 12th May 2025. The Clerk was asked to put Mr Fountain in contact with the local police team so this matter could be investigated. Mr Fountain concluded by thanking the Bloom Group and Town Council for clearing and disposing of the overgrown shrubbery on the back lane, an issue which he had raised at the last Annual Town Meeting.

Mrs Julia Bowles thanked County Cllr Chris Lines for the information that he gets out to the community. Mrs Bowles noted the Town Council had highlighted in its annual

report the work that it does on community engagement but said that lots of people do not engage this those means that use technology. Mrs Bowles said the Town Council needed better communication with the local community in order to be able to influence matters. She suggested, as she has previously, the Town Council hold public meetings every few months to pull the community together. Cllr Mel Carr said the Town Council has and will continue to hold public meetings when there are issues to discuss in order to obtain community views which will then influence the Town Council's response. Cllr Mel Carr reminded all in the room that public participation is a standing agenda item on all Town Council Committee meetings and members of the public are welcome to attend either to observe or to speak to raise a concern or view. Mrs Bowles said she was disappointed that nothing was organised in the Town for the recent VE Day commemorations whilst Fishburn had delivered a many activities. Mrs Bowles said she was disappointed that people do not express those views as she was sure others felt the same as her. Mr Michael King, another resident in attendance at the meeting, said a commemorative event had taken place on VE Day at the Town's war memorial which had been attended by 100 children from Sedgefield Primary School plus veterans, residents and Town Council representatives. Cllr Peter Hinde said that if people want to have events then they need to come forward and make their views known and also to be prepared to volunteer to help with such. He pointed out that the forthcoming Mediaeval Fayre along with all the other community events hosted by the Town Council, the SCA and more throughout the year were done by very small, and in many instances declining, teams. Cllr Hinde urged people to attend meetings, get involved as to delivering events needs help from the community. Cllr Hinde also highlighted the Town Council would soon be advertising a Councillor vacancy and that was another way for someone to volunteer to represent their community.

Mr Alan Patterson asked how much influence the Town Council had in Durham County Council's spending in Sedgefield. Cllr Mel Carr said the Town Council had no such influence. Mr Patterson said that over recent years many bike racks had been installed around the Town and he asked if anyone had ever seen them being used? County Cllr Chris Lines replied that he had seen all bike racks being used but would like them to be used more. Mr Brian Fountain said he regularly saw bike racks being used on Sunday mornings and Cllr Mel Carr noted the bike racks outside the Co-op were popular. Mr Patterson quoted figures that he had obtained for the installation of various bike racks around the town through a Freedom of Information request and also said he had spoken to cyclists who will not use the racks unless they can directly view their bikes meaning bikes continue to be propped up against shop fronts in some areas. Mr Patterson said he felt that money had been spent unnecessarily. County Cllr Chris Lines challenged the figures that Mr Patterson had quoted as those included more than just installation of bike racks. County Cllr Lines said he would investigate the costs and provide a response to Mr Patterson. County Cllr Lines said the installation of bike racks had been just one element of many

Active Travel projects which had been developed based upon an Electoral Ward wide public consultation. The Active Travel group is a collaborative working group with representatives from Durham County Council, the Town Council and the Development Trust's Bicycle & Active Travel project.

Mr Phil Hogg spoke about the Eden Gardens development and specifically the large green area with the dolomite path. The path does not lead anywhere and Mr Hogg asked if anyone knew what this was supposed to be. County Cllr Chris Lines said that at some point in the future the developer would hand this over to Durham County Council for adoption but it was acknowledged that this was not going to be for some time. One lady in the public said that residents were due to pay maintenance fees from 2026. Mr Hogg expressed health and safety concerns regarding the path as it needs a ramp/dropped kerb at the end where currently it simply stops and is a tripping hazard. County Cllr Chris Lines said he would investigate this matter.

Mrs Julia Bowles said the public were asked for more safer crossing point in the town, such as the one outside The Hardwick Arms. County Cllr Chris Lines said this matter would be added to the Active Travel project's work so that options could be explored although there are legislative requirements that do bind such matters. Linked to this matter Mr Brian Fountain asked what the Town Council's position was regarding pavement parking. The Clerk replied that whilst the Town Council did not have any powers to stop pavement parking, this had been a matter identified by the Active Travel project as the implications of such parking for those wishing to use the pavement was a safety concern. As such the Active Travel group will be inviting the police and County Council highways/enforcement officers to its future meetings to look at what could be done to improve this situation.

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 7.43pm.

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

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

- SPYS
- Sedgefield Youth Club
- Sedgefield in Bloom
- U3A
- St Edmund's Christmas Tree Festival
- SCA Mediaeval Fayre
- 1st Sedgefield Scout Group

- Homebryth House Residents
- Sedgefield Local History Society
- Woodland and Wildlife Group
- Sedgefield Handbell Ringers
- Sedgefield Memory Café
- DIDO
- Pop In Club
- 1st Sedgefield Brownies
- 1st Sedgefield Guides
- Sedgefield Out of School Fun Club

b) Young Citizen of the Year 2024 (sponsored by County Cllr Chris Lines, Sedgefield Development Trust, Sedgefield Rotary Club and Sedgefield Town Council):

County Cllr Chris Lines announced that Miss Iona Darnton was the Young Citizen of the Year 2024. A speech was delivered by County Cllr Lines detailing and recognising her considerable achievements and services to Sedgefield in many different settings. This was followed by a presentation of certificate and gift presented by County Cllr Lines, the Mayor of Sedgefield Cllr Peter Hinde and Ms Janette Savage of the Sedgefield Development Trust.

c) Citizen of the Year 2024 (sponsored by Sedgefield Development Trust, Sedgefield Rotary Club and Sedgefield Town Council):

Ms Janette Savage (Sedgefield Development Trust) announced that Mr Tony Guest was the Citizen of the Year 2024. A speech was delivered by Ms Savage detailing and recognising his 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, the Mayor Cllr Peter Hinde and Mr Mel Carr of Sedgefield Rotary.

The Chair of the meeting, Cllr Mel Carr thanked everyone for attending and closed the meeting at 8.42pm.