

SEDGEFIELD TOWN COUNCIL



Minutes of the proceedings of the **AUGUST SPECIAL P&R MEETING TO APPROVE FOURTH BUTTERWICK ROAD CEMETERY EXPANSION PROJECT VALUATION** of the **Council** held at

5.15p.m. on

Monday 11th August 2025

in

Sedgefield Parish Hall

MINUTES

Present

Cllr. Allan Blakemore (Chairman)

Cllr. Jenny Haworth (Vice Chair) and

Cllrs. Mark Cant, Helen Cunningham, John Finlayson, Jenny Haworth, Peter Hinde, Tony Stubbs, Julie Towler and Mavis Wayman

Officers

Dr Jane Ayre (Town Clerk)

1. Apologies:

Cllrs Ciaran Butterworth, Ann Carr, Kelly Dickerson, Dave Jasper and Myles Mantripp.

2. Declaration of interest:

None.

3. Butterwick Road cemetery Valuation Update Report by Town Clerk:

Prior to the meeting the Clerk had circulated to all copies of the 4th valuation interim payment notice and accompanying contractors invoice as approved at an on-site meeting. It was agreed this payment is now to be made in accordance with the Town Council's contract. The Clerk provided an update regarding remaining on-site works in order to bring the site into operational use and the issue of retention monies with recommendation from the Butterwick Road Cemetery Working Group. The Clerk also reminded all the expansion of the cemetery only represented phase 1 of the works at Butterwick Road, focus will need to be given to the triangular piece of land between the allotment site and highway.

The Chair thanked everyone for attending and close the meeting at 5.38pm.

SEDGEFIELD TOWN COUNCIL



Minutes of the proceedings of the **AUGUST SPECIAL
TOWN COUNCIL MEETING TO CONSIDER
PLANNING APPLICATION DM/25/01625/FPA –
PROPOSAL TO ERECT 176 DWELLINGS WITH
ASSOCIATED ACCESS, INFRASTRUCTURE AND
LANDSCAPING, LAND EAST OF BEACON AVENUE,
SEDGEFIELD** of the **Council** held at **6.00p.m.** on
Monday 11th August 2025 in
Sedgefield Parish Hall

MINUTES

Present

Cllr. Mel Carr (Chairman)

Cllr. Allan Blakemore (Vice Chairman) and

Cllrs. Mark Cant, Helen Cunningham, John Finlayson, Jenny Haworth, Peter Hinde, Myles Mantripp, Tony Stubbs, Julie Towler and Mavis Wayman

Officers

Dr Jane Ayre (Town Clerk)

79 members of the public in attendance.

1. Apologies:

Cllrs Ciaran Butterworth, Ann Carr, Kelly Dickerson and Dave Jasper.

2. Declaration of interest:

None.

3. Welcome and Purpose of Meeting by Sedgefield Town Council Chair:

The Chair of Sedgefield Town Council, Cllr Mel Carr, warmly welcomed all members of the public to this meeting and explained the purpose of the meeting was to find out the views of residents regarding the planning application proposing to build 176 dwellings on land to the East of Beacon Avenue in the Town. The Chair reported the Town Council had taken a

proactive lead in making the local community aware of this application and organizing two drop-in information sessions for residents to find out more about this application, one being ran by DCC Planners and one by Lichfields on behalf of the applicant. A collaborative meeting had also been held with representatives from Bishop Middleham Parish Council, Sedgefield Primary School, Hardwick Primary School, Sedgefield Community College and both local County Cllrs. Representatives had been invited from Fishburn Parish Council and the Skerne Medical Group but none had been in attendance. Wynyard Parish Council are keen to support the Town Council in objecting to this application. The Chairman reported that the Town Council has submitted to DCC, the Local Planning Authority, an initial letter of objection to this application with intention that a second more detailed letter of objection would be submitted once residents' views were known. The Town Council has requested this application be called in for determination by Full Planning Committee. The Town Council are also looking at options for employing a specialist planning expert to assist with their next more detailed letter of objection. Cllr Mel Carr concluded that whilst the Town Council wanted to know the views of residents to ensure the Town Council's submissions reflected those views, it was essential that residents must also directly submit their views regarding this planning application directly to DCC as the Local Planning Authority who will determine this application.

4. Ward County Cllrs Chris Lines and Ian Catchpole:

County Cllr Chris Lines outlined the planning application process. Based upon the date of the planning applications submission it should be determined by DCC by 17th September 2025, however, this is not likely to be the case. The applicant has indicated they are making adjustments to their plans based upon feedback received to date and intend to submit those revisions in early September. This would indicate this planning application is likely to be considered by Full Planning Committee in November 2025, but that is not definitive. The Planning Committee is chaired by County Cllr Jill Campbell and comprises of 11 other County Cllrs. At the Committee meeting the DCC Planning Officer will present their report with recommendation based upon material planning matters. There will then be the opportunity for local County Cllrs to speak, for an unlimited time, regarding the application. After this objectors get the chance to speak usually for a maximum (combined) of 5 minutes followed by supporters getting the chance to speak for a maximum (combined) of 5 minutes. Due to time constraints it is important that the objectors co-ordinate their response and County Cllr Lines suggested, based upon the Town Council's strong lead in this matter to date, that the Town Council should co-ordinate how that time allocation is best used. County Cllrs on the Full Planning Committee then get the opportunity to ask questions to DCC Officers and others. At that point a debate will take place and then ultimately a vote on the application's determination. County Cllr Lines confirmed such Committee meetings are held in public, i.e. the public can be in attendance in large numbers, but that the public cannot speak at such. County Cllr Lines reiterated that objections to this application can only be made on the grounds of material planning

consideration and referred residents to a document on DCC's website. The Clerk confirmed this will be circulated through the residents' database and uploaded to the Town Council's website. County Cllr Lines reported the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) and central government situation regarding house building is currently fluid. Whilst The Sedgfield Plan, our neighbourhood plan overwhelmingly adopted by community referendum, is still current this will be impacted in Autumn 2025 as Durham County Council have to review the County Durham Plan. Neighbourhood plans must align to both their principal authority's Local Plan and the NPPF. Regardless of this state of flux DCC will have to make a determination on this planning application. County Cllr Lines said he was pleased the Town Council were seeking the services of a professional consultant as it was important to know how the matter of differing plans and differing stages of their development impacted. Cllr Tony Stubbs asked for information regarding the planning appeals process should a determination be made that is against our collective wishes. County Cllr Lines said there is a clear legal process for appealing but consideration would be needed at that time as to how such a process was managed and funded. County Cllr Lines said this development would come with a Section 106 Agreement which aims to mitigate the impacts on the new housing on the Town but fundamentally there is no physical space within the entire footprints of both primary schools to resolve their capacity issues nor area in the Town to resolve the parking issues and these points need to be raised as material planning considerations. Cllr Mark Cant said the importance of objections of material planning considerations could not be stressed enough.

5. Public Participation:

The Chairman, Cllr Mel Carr, opened the meeting for those in attendance to make their comments. There was no restriction on the length of time that anyone could speak but a request was made that people only speak once. The Clerk was asked to read out the Town Council's initial letter of objection to this planning application.

Mr Keith Williamson expressed his concerns regarding the environmental impact this application would have upon the wildlife in the field space. Mr Williamson said he had personally witnessed habitat being deliberately destroyed in this area over recent months, something which he had reported to the Police albeit he was disappointed with their response. Mr Williamson cited the large bat colony in the trees which will be impacted as well as the wildlife at the floodplain on the site. Mr Williamson said the area was rich in a vast array of wildlife ranging from foxes, deer, hares, white pheasants and more. Mr Williamson questioned the wildlife and environmental impact statements within this planning application. Mr Williamson said he continues to monitor human activities at the site and urged others to be vigilant and report as required.

Mr Brian Clasper reported that quails are found on the land now being discussed and these are a protected species. He also said that corn bunting are present and these are a species recognized to be in a perilous state. Long eared bats and horse shoe bats are also present, both of which are also protected species. This area contains wetland and is an important green site which is protected because of the protected species which can be found at this location. County Cllr Ian Catchpole said these comments were a valid ecological objection to the application. Mr Clasper said the environmental impact of this proposed planning application could not be overstated. Cllr Jenny Haworth noted there is an environmental impact assessment within the documentation for this planning application but it does not appear fit for purpose and requires challenging. Mr Clasper said he was happy to share his data, evidence and support as required. Cllr Tony Stubbs requested clarification on the protection of the land Mr Clasper confirmed the land is protected by the species which are present in it rather than the land itself having any particular designation, i.e. the wildlife is protecting the land. Mr Clasper said that if there was a shortage of housing then why were 4 bedroomed houses being proposed?

Mr Dave Edson said any incidents of environmental destruction/vandalism as highlighted by Mr Williamson must be reported to the Police and if it is felt the response is not good enough then that should be escalated through the Police's complaints procedure. It is essential any such activities are reported. Cllr Mark Cant suggested residents could consider crowdfunding in order to fund drone imagery being taken and collected over time so as to build up an evidence base that would show if any such activities had taken place. This evidence could then be submitted to the relevant law and planning bodies.

Ms Tracy Hadwin made residents aware that she had recently been walking along Beacon Lane and observed two people in hi-viz taking photos of hedgerows. She had taken that opportunity to challenge them about an access going in past the cemetery and small holding into a potential new estate on a road that is not wide enough for such. The response received was that the hedgerows had not been maintained and as a result the road was wider than envisaged. Ms Hadwin had then highlighted to these people the nearby well established trees and expressed concern that any works nearby would have upon them. She had subsequently asked DCC if there were any TPOs on these trees. Ms Hadwin had subsequently received a response from Mr Callum Harvey of DCC stating all trees in Beacon Lane cemetery have been under TPOs since February 2025. Ms Hadwin said this may impact on the road not being able to be put there.

Mr Mort Spalding expressed his concerns regarding the proposed earthwork cut and fill within this application. It was proposed that 60,000 cubic metres were to be removed from the upper field areas and fill it back into the lower areas with an additional 4,300 cubic metres being

important. The scale of this work would create a dramatic change to the natural land contours and character of the area.

Ms Alice Hobson asked if Northumbrian Water had been consulted as part of the planning process? County Cllr Ian Catchpole said that NWL had visited the area. Ms Hobson said that in the area of the Town where she resided Northumbrian Water have to empty the sewage tank five times per year. She noted that within this planning application there were no plans for any new sewage system, just a statement that such would join onto the existing system, a system that clearly could not cope with the Town's existing capacity never mind additional capacity that would come with the new housing. Cllr John Finlayson confirmed this matter had been highlighted in the Town Council's original objections. Cllr Tony Stubbs commented that the Town Council had received a response from Lichfields regarding the Town Council's initial objections. Cllr Stubbs said that lots of the responses from Lichfields were very vague and noted that with regards to the issue raised by Ms Hobson, Lichfields said they had engaged with NWL and been advised that the existing infrastructure was able to cope. Cllr Stubbs said this was just one example where we now want to see the evidence of such. Cllr Stubbs noted that similar vague comments were also being made in relation to NHS and DCC Education Department (school places) capacities, all of which said there were no capacity issues. County Cllr Chris Lines said that he is now liaising with Dr David Anderson, Senior GP at the Skerne Medical Group, who is preparing some information about the implications for his service if this development goes ahead. Mr Michael Devine detailed his recent experience where he had tried to make a doctors appointment and there had been no availability for 6 weeks, a situation that is happening now and not when there is potentially an even further expanded Town. Cllr Mark Cant suggested Ms Hobson submit an FOI to NWL requesting more detailed information about the sewage capacity and it could be that the subsequent response be used to accompany any objection she submits to DCC.

Mr Keith Williamson noted that when the new nursery opposite Beacon Lane held an open day recently, the roads were clogged and it was difficult to get in or out of the surrounding road systems. The same occurs near all three of the Town's educational providers at school drop off and pick up times.

Ms X questioned why this application was being made when there are other approved housing developments elsewhere in the County that have either not been started or not finished? She said that surely it made sense to complete those first. County Cllr Chris Lines said there was an issue, both within the County and nationally, of land banking whereby developers get planning approval but do not build. In addition to this problem there were currently around 8,000 dwellings across County Durham that are empty and not in use as well as areas in the County crying out for regeneration. Unfortunately, the question asked by Ms X is not a material planning

consideration that relates to the specific planning proposals, so cannot be used as an argument. The County Durham Plan is to be updated and currently there is a "Call For Sites" consultation. County Cllr Lines urged residents to take part in that consultation and request that housing developments are best when they are wanted and needed. County Cllr Ian Catchpole said central government now required County Durham to build 17,500 new homes. If the 8,000 dwellings current empty were renovated and brought back into the housing market this would reduce the number of new homes needed to 9,500. He said that County Durham is a big area so there is the need for some developments but DCC need to find the best place for such and them to be affordable. Cllr Allan Blakemore said The Sedgefield Plan identified areas where the community were happy for housing to be built and those have now predominantly been built upon and used which means the Town has already done its bit for new housing in County Durham and the Town has sufficient. The Plan's Built Up Area Boundary still contains options for some elements of in-fill to be used for further housing on a small scale. County Cllr Chris Lines said The County Durham Plan stipulated Sedgefield's housing need of 440 dwellings, a need that had to be delivered by 2037. Those 440 dwellings had in fact now already been built and this should mean there is no further requirement for additional housing developments in Sedgefield.

Mr Meirion Jones said new figures have now been produced by central government for new home building and from these, through the NPPF, identify local housing needs. Mr Jones said there is an issue not only for Sedgefield but nationally as these numbers cannot be delivered as the infrastructure is not there. He said his biggest concern was that were a Local Planning Authority can no longer demonstrate a 5 year housing land supply and the local plan is older than 5 years, which will be the case with the County Durham Plan in October 2025, makes those policies void. If this application goes to Planning Committee in November 2025 then the Local Plan will be out of date and not count. Mr Jones also highlighted this proposed site has a high flood risk and will require revised plans and mitigation. Instead the applicant should first be looking at other sites elsewhere with lesser flood risk.

Mrs Julia Bowles said it was clear the community was speaking with one voice to object to this proposed development. She said it was important that preparation was done for a future appeal process as regardless of the outcome, either in favour of the local community or not, there would be an appeal. She asked if it was worthwhile circulating a petition. Cllr Jenny Haworth had investigated this matter and found that in the context of planning, whilst a petition would raise local awareness it would have very limited effectiveness in the actual planning process. The only effective way for residents and the local community to make their objections known to the Local Planning Authority are to submit individual objections based upon material planning considerations. Cllr Haworth urged people in attendance tonight to spread the word to their

family, friends and neighbours. Cllr Stubbs agreed and said a petition did not hold any additional weight.

Ms Claire Lee highlighted the waterway which runs at the back of her property and those of neighbours. This has flooded in the past with water entering those houses. The waterway is not maintained by the County Council or riparian owner. Ms Lee asked who would be responsible and accountable for this waterway in the future because if these proposed dwellings were built then the detrimental impact in terms of flooding would be felt upon hers and her neighbour's existing properties and not the new housing.

Mr X said the more people that objected to this proposed development the more chance there was of influencing. Mr X asked for the Town Council's letter of objection to be shared and said that people in the Town did not have any idea that this planning application was going on. He requested a special edition of the Sedgefield Extra encouraging everyone to object. He said lots of people had not grasped the outlook and how this would affect the community.

Fishburn Parish Cllr Stephen Tinkler said he had heard lots of negative comments regarding the proposed development and said there had to be positives for such and asked what those were. Cllr Tony Stubbs said that as a resident then a positive could be greater footfall in shops and restaurants, however, the negatives far outweighed those due to principally the additional infrastructure pressures. Mr Tinkler asked where was the 25% increase in Sedgefield referenced in the letter of objection from the Town Council? He asked what had been done to mitigate those problems? He noted that Sedgefield has a new Community College which had been built with no scope for expansion. County Cllr Lines pointed out the Community College had been built well before the 440 new homes had been added to the Town. Mr Tinkler said that no impact had been felt upon Sedgefield by the Hardwick Grange development between Sedgefield and Fishburn. Cllr Allan Blakemore disagreed and said impacts were felt in lots of different ways from policing, to school places, to infrastructure and more. These impacts were being felt beyond just Sedgefield with school places also being impacted at Bishop Middleham and Wynyard. Cllr Blakemore said the loss of Sedgefield's character was the key negative, residents are not NIMBYs but want to protect the heritage of the Town. The negatives from this planning application far outweigh any positives because the Town has been saturated with development in recent years. Mr Tinkler said he was in favour of this development.

Mr Neil Hobson suggested an approach be made to the new nursery in the Town to determine what capacity, if any, they have.

Ms X expressed concern at the impact that construction traffic would have on the Town and its Conservation Area. She pointed out that such construction traffic would be present for at least

4-5 years as the development progressed and this would have a significant impact upon people living in nearby properties.

Ms X said the proposed access along Butterwick Road would directly pass her property and she already suffers problems on a daily basis due to school traffic. Many elderly residents live in this area and there have been instances when emergency services access has been restricted. Ms X noted that recently a small new access road has been built leading into the nearby cemetery and this had caused problems at certain times to nearby residents but the scale of the proposed new development was huge in comparison and the disruption would be far more and for a significant number years. She expressed concerns about the potential impact upon pupils coming to and from the Community College. Cllr Mel Carr reminded all that DCC have already granted planning permission for 14 dwellings on land near to the Community College so this road will be busier still when they are built.

Ms Kathrine Winter said that it was not just GP services that would be affected but also those of extended health services such as district nurses, community midwives, health workers etc and it was important to include this in objections.

Mr Mike Gandy pointed out that the Hardwick Grange development between Sedgefield and Fishburn had impacted upon the Town as more people were having to rely upon cars and this added pressure to the Town's roads and parking thereby compounding those problems further.

Ms Tracy Hadwin noted comments that had been made earlier in relation to a petition and understood the response received. She noted that when DCC had held their drop-in session they were issuing comments forms that could be completed and returned. She asked if more of those could be printed and put into local shops to share or a template put in a publication that goes out to residents?

Ms Sheila Pinder said that Sedgefield had grown by 25% over the last 10 years. She asked if any other communities in County Durham had faced this? Why Sedgefield? Cllr Tony Stubbs noted that in Lichfields recent response to the Town Council it said that a Settlement Study showed 230 settlements across the County with Sedgefield being listed at 19th. Cllr Stubbs said it would be useful to get hold of that Study and then to be able to ask why development wasn't being focus on those settlements cited as 1st – 18th.

6. Summary of Meeting by Sedgefield Town Council Chair:

The Chairman, Cllr Mel Carr, thanked the public for their attendance and comments. He reiterated the importance of individuals submitting their objections directly to DCC as the Local Planning Authority. The Town Council will continue to keep the public updated.

The Chair thanked everyone for attending and close the meeting at 7.13pm.

APPROVED