
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 5th May 2026**

MINUTES

Present

Cllr Allan Blakemore (Chairman)

Cllr Peter Hinde (Mayor) and

Cllrs. Ciaran Butterworth, Mark Cant, Helen Cunningham, Kelly Dickerson, Jenny Haworth, Peter Hinde, Dave Jasper, Myles Mantripp, Tony Stubbs, Julie Towler and Mavis Wayman

Officers Dr. Jane Ayre (Town Clerk)

32 residents

1. Welcome by the Chair of Meeting:

Cllr Allan Blakemore welcomed everyone to the Council's Annual Town Meeting and explained there were three parts to the evening, 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 2025. Cllr Blakemore informed those in attendance that copies of the meeting's agenda, previous minutes and the Council's 2025/26 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 Mel Carr and John Finlayson.

3. Chairman's Report 2025/26:

Cllr Blakemore said over the last year 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 Blakemore outlined the content of the Annual Report and highlighted that since its production the Town Council had appointed Ms Kate Graney to the position of Head Gardener & Cemetery Superintendent and Ms Sue Archer as Receptionist. Ms Graney had taken up position with immediate effect and Ms Archer from 2nd June 2026. Cllr Blakemore

reported the Town Council are now undertaking a recruitment exercise for its Gardener vacancy. Cllr Jenny Haworth took this opportunity to present a small token of thanks on behalf of the Town Council for Mrs Jaime Hinde's work over 2025/26 as the Mayor of Sedgfield's Consort.

4. Minutes of the Annual Town Meeting held 13th May 2025:

The minutes from the Annual Town Council meeting held on 13th May 2025 were proposed by Cllr Helen Cunningham as being a true record and this was seconded by Cllr Jenny Haworth. 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 2025/26:

Cllr Allan Blakemore reminded all present that copies of the Town Council's Annual Report 2025/26 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.

6.2 Durham County Council Sedgfield Electoral Ward Councillors

County Councillor Ian Catchpole gave an overview of his various roles held within Durham County Council which included Vice Chair of the Audit Committee, Chair of the Combined Fire Authority for County Durham and Darlington Audit and Finance Committee, Chair of the Environment and Sustainable Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committee as well as membership of the Standards Committee, Highways Committee, Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Management board, Combined Fire Authority for County Durham and Darlington plus Combined Fire Authority for County Durham and Darlington Appeals Committee. County Cllr Catchpole noted that whilst DCC had cancelled its previous climate emergency declaration it was still important that we look after the environment. He went on to outline the projects he had funded in the Ward over the last year, many of those jointly with his fellow Ward County Cllr, including a sound system for the Mediaeval Fayre, funding to Sedgfield Youth Club, an awning at the primary school and his work with the Sedgfield Special Education Needs Hub. County Cllr Catchpole looked at his future aspirations which included a Winterton Leisure Hub (dependent upon obtaining land), a fireworks display at Ceddesfeld Hall and a Christmas Market on the evening of the tractor lights display. Looking back over the last year County Cllr Catchpole acknowledged residents concerns in relation to planning proposals and the importance of ensuring residents concerns are fed into the planning process. County Cllr Catchpole concluded by highlighting several areas of his on-going work.

He has recently organised Clean & Green days in Fishburn and has one planned for Sedgefield. Work on the ponds in Sedgefield near Ceddesfeld Hall is on-going and to be tackled by bringing different organisations together. DCC continue to engage with the North East Combined Authority (NECA) regarding buses including local bus services with the aim of securing a return of the link between Sedgefield and Darlington.

County Cllr Chris Lines reported on an “interesting and challenging” year at Durham County Council where the 2025 election saw a change in the political make-up of the Council’s administration. County Cllr Lines reminded all that he had said this time last year that the vast majority of members in the new administration would be on a steep learning curve as they had never served as Councillors before, something which had been the same for him four years earlier. The scale of newness has presented challenges for both Councillors and officers. County Cllr Lines said there had been “bumps in the road” but the County Council is still functioning and doing its job which was good news. He reported the County Council continues to operate in an extremely tough financial climate. Principal local authorities did receive a multi-year settlement at the end of 2025 for the first time in many year, which allowed for a degree of certainty in medium term financial planning but the settlement in itself wasn’t enough in reality. The long-awaited Fair Funding Review did benefit Durham County Council and the government’s announcement did improve the County Council’s funding position for this financial year by approximately £5 million. However, County Cllr Lines pointed out that social care costs continue to rise rapidly and along with other budgetary pressures means the County Council has to find additional savings of over £9 million this year and a further £42 million over the following three years. As savings have had to be made at the County Council since 2020, County Cllr Lines said that it felt inevitable that finding further savings would start to have a noticeable impact on front line services. He stressed this would be the case whatever administration ran the Council, however, some decisions that are going to be taken are going to be very political. The current administration presented a budget for 2026/27 that included a rise of 1.99% in Council Tax, less than the originally planned increase of 3.1%. County Cllr Lines said no Cllr was keen to put up Council Tax and said there is a degree of consensus in Durham County Council, both historically and currently at both Cllr and officer level, that it’s a tax that is not fit for purpose and sustains economic inequalities between regions of the country. There isn’t any universal agreement on what the best alternative is and no central government administration has shown any inclination to pursue an alternative approach. County Cllr Lines said this means Council Tax is the only means currently available and if the County Council does not use its tax raising powers prudently it will not be able to set a budget and the consequences of that would be very serious. He had expressed his concerns to a

County Council Scrutiny Board meeting before the Full Council meeting about the long-term consequences of decisions being taken now and not using its full tax raising powers could have a serious impact on the County Council in the years that follow. County Cllr Lines said that as he now sits on the opposition benches in County Hall and feels there have been some proposals and ideas that the Reform administration have brought forward which he profoundly disagrees with. He acknowledged that it is the governing party's right to pursue its agenda but he believed that some motions and reports introduced needed to be robustly challenged and he has used his opportunities to do that. He gave the examples of the rescinding of the declaration of a climate emergency, advocating a return to drilling for fossil fuels and amending the County Council's Code of Conduct in such a way as to allow for more offensive language in debate and public statements, the latter example being one which County Cllr Lines said particularly appalled him and said that we should aim for better standards and more civility in public discourse. County Cllr Lines said his over-riding priority since 2021 had always been his role for his Ward, for Sedgefield and its residents and that nothing had changed in that regard as his election pitches had been rooted in promoting the power of community collaboration and how more can be achieved by working together. County Cllr Lines said that whilst he a County Cllr Catchpole sat on opposite sides of the chamber, and will inevitably have different views on some issues, they are both also committed to working together on campaigns and projects that are for the good of residents in the Ward and he hoped this had been evident over the last 12 months. County Cllr Lines said that one of the most high profile examples of that joint working was the community campaign against the anaerobic digestion plant and he thanked all others who were involved in that work including the teams at Knotty Hill Golf Centre and Hardwick Hall Hotel as well as the Town Council and other nearby Parish Councils. Work on-going relates to the two significant planning applications proposing to build new housing in Sedgefield and County Cllr Lines praised the Town Council for its strong and proactive lead in responding to these. Both local County Cllrs continue to work hard to improve bus services where County Cllr Lines said he was confident that in time we would see better physical connections in our Ward and to other parts of the County and North East. The collaborative Active Travel Group continues to make progress in improving and promoting walking and cycling infrastructure in the Ward and on highway safety matters. County Cllr Lines expressed his thanks to the work of the Sedgefield In Bloom group in enhancing the area between the end of Station road and the re-instated path for the Hardwick park underpass and hailed this another example of effective collaboration. Both local County Cllrs have also backed the foundation of the Sedgefield area Men's Social Group and County Cllr Lines said he was supporting work being led by County Cllr Catchpole in relation to SEND provision in the area. County Cllr Lines concluded by saying it was important to explore positive opportunities for the ward and promote our vibrant community and area in the same

way the ward had benefitted from the recent National Cross Country Championships and the work of the Sedgefield Ploggers and Sedgefield Business Network.

6.3 Sedgefield Charities

Ms Anne Gladwin gave a report on the Sedgefield Charities and their work of 2025/26 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. Trustees were able to fund all of the eligible applications that they received and wished to fund. The Fund received a lower number of applications when compared with the previous year (32% less). 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. Only 1 new application was received in 2025 and there were no renewal applications. 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. In 2025 the Foundation paid 3 grants, 2 as renewals and 1 as a new application. 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.

6.4 Sedgefield Development Trust

Ms Janette Savage, Chair of the Development Trust, gave a review of the Trust's work over the last year. The Trust has reflected on the kinds of projects it wants to support in its defined area of Sedgefield, Bradbury, Mordon and Fishburn and agreed that it wants to deliver projects which deliver positive impact in at least one of the following ways: socially, economically, environmentally, through sustainability, or by connecting people in our community. An open event was held to not only showcase the Trust's current projects but also hear the views of residents. This was a very positive and invaluable event. The Trust are currently supporting 14 projects. The Bees at Hardwick project now has 19 hives and 11 members producing approximately 150 jars of honey which has been sold at the Town's Farmers' Market. The Bike and Active Travel Group have worked closely with both the Town and County Councils to support improvements to walking and cycling including speed matrix signs and improved cycle parking. The Group are now looking to support current walking routes initiative. The Days In, Days Out (DIDO) Group continues to thrive, attracting over 60 people to meetings and trips. The leadership team has strengthened safety and risk procedures, and participants have responded positively, helping to make outings safer and more enjoyable. The Farmers' Market continues to go from strength to strength thanks to a dedicated team of volunteers. December's expanded festive market was particularly successful. There have been weather-related challenges over the last year so the Trust would like to thank the SCA for the use of Ceddesfeld Hall's car park when high winds have prevented the Market from setting up on the village greens. The Friendly Fixers Group's repair sessions at Fishburn remain popular and continue to keep items out of landfill. The Group have run a successful session with the Brownies and Guides and is now exploring new ideas, including bike repairs, responsible tech disposal and on-line tutorial videos. The Homework Help Group has seen an increase in interest where they are currently supporting 3 students across four sessions focussing upon GCSE Science and Maths. Thanks were expressed to Sedgefield Library for supporting the Group's in-person sessions. The Sedgefield News project continues to be a vital source of community information with over 3000 copies distributed each month. Advertising continues to cover all printing costs and more than 70 volunteers help with writing, co-ordination and delivery. The Sedgefield.web and the Trust's wider IT systems continue to run

smoothly, supporting communication across all of their activities. The Sew Easy Group meets regularly in Sedgefield Parish Hall and caters for all abilities. The Thermal Camera projects remains in high demand, with 24 loans this season alone. Running from November to April, the scheme helps residents identify draughts, improve energy efficiency and reduce heating costs. The Woodland and Wildlife Group continues practical conservation work at Skerne Wood at NETPark. Regular volunteer sessions and well-attended community events have included Christmas tree recycling and dawn chorus walks. Finally, the Trust continues to work with the Town Council and Rotary Club to deliver the Citizen of the Year Awards, celebrating the fantastic individuals in our community. Ms Savage said that in addition to the established project, the Trust was pleased to welcome two new community groups this year. The Sedgefield Allsorts Group provides an inclusive and welcoming space for women to meet, build friendships and enjoy a range of activities, from crafts and guest speaks to singing, dancing and trips. As a direct result of the Trust's recent open event they have launched a new men's community group SAMS (Sedgefield Area Men's Social) led by Graham Price and their first meeting took place the previous month focussing upon shaping ideas with potential members. Ms Savage concluded by thanking all the Trust's volunteers, project leaders, partners and residents of Sedgefield. Anyone wishing to find out more should visit sedgefieldweb.co.uk and the Sedgefield News.

6.5 Durham Constabulary:

PC Stephen Ward from the Local Police Team reported that over the last year there had been 1462 incidents across their geographical area and explained how such are then categorised. PC Ward highlighted that in the year to date there had been 36 reported incidents of shop-lifting with 12 resulting in a positive outcome. This level of shop-lifting is a 30% reduction when compared to the previous year and the introduction of the Town's Shop Watch initiative was hailed as a key part of that reduction. In the year to date there had been 51 anti-social behaviour crimes which were then categorised as either nuisance, personal anti-social behaviour or environmental. When comparing the latest figures with the previous year there had been a 30% reduction. With regards to burglaries over the last year to date, there had been 1 reported commercial burglary (compared to 5 the year prior) and 4 reported residential burglaries (compared to the 13 of the year prior). PC Ward said members of the Local Police Team continue to work from Sedgefield Police Station but it is not manned on a 24 hour basis as the Team do support the Newton Aycliffe Team and get called away to cover other areas in response to incidents. PC Ward reported the Local Police Team have recently relaunched its PACT meetings with the next one taking place on 21st May 2026 at 6pm in Sedgefield Parish Hall. He urged residents to come along and attend to use this as an opportunity to speak directly to a member of the Local Police Team. He also reminded all of the

importance of reporting incidents and concerns as the Police needed such to understand local issues.

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 and/or Sedgefield Development Trust.

Mr Phil Hogg asked how the Police advertise their PACT meetings. PC Ward replied these are advertised through the Police's social media networks and into the Sedgefield News.

No further questions were asked by members of the public.

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 7.31pm.

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: -

- Sedgefield Youth Club
- Sedgefield in Bloom
- SCA Mediaeval Fayre
- 1st Sedgefield Scout Group
- Sedgefield Local History Society
- Woodland and Wildlife Group
- Sedgefield Handbell Ringers
- Sedgefield Memory Café
- Pop In Club
- 1st Sedgefield Brownies
- 1st Sedgefield Guides
- Sedgefield Out of School Fun Club
- Sedgefield Man's Club
- Pitlington Brass Band
- Rebecca Waddington Feral Cats

- Sedgefield Rangers

b) Young Citizen of the Year 2025 (sponsored by County Cllr Chris Lines, Sedgefield Development Trust, Sedgefield Rotary Club and Sedgefield Town Council):

County Cllr Chris Lines announced that Amelia Taylor was the Young Citizen of the Year 2025. A speech was delivered by County Cllr Lines detailing and recognising 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 2025 (sponsored by Sedgefield Development Trust, Sedgefield Rotary Club and Sedgefield Town Council):

Ms Janette Savage (Sedgefield Development Trust) announced that Mr Michael King was the Citizen of the Year 2025. In recognition of Mr King's long-standing service to St Edmund's Church his official presentation had taken place during a church service on Sunday 3rd May 2026. A recap 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 and Mayor Cllr Peter Hinde.

The Chair of the meeting, Cllr Allan Blakemore thanked everyone for attending and closed the meeting at 8.06pm.