

The Sedgefield Plan

Shaping the future of our area

Project Review – progress to date and forward plans.

1. Overview.

Sedgefield Town Council has decided that it is important to engage the community in the growth and development of Sedgefield in line with the opportunity revealed in the 'Localism Act' that requires Strategic Authorities, in our case Durham County Council (DCC), to produce a 'Local Plan' that defines strategic land use and infrastructure for the next 20 years.

In October 2013 DCC produced a 'Pre-Submission Draft Local Plan' that was publicised for local consultation that closed on 9th December 2013, In this plan Sedgefield has been 'allocated' 470 new houses to be built on a site between Eden Drive and the bypass as our share of the 31400 houses DCC intend to build countywide, there has been over 600 responses from members of the public and local organisations to the consultation process.

Sedgefield has been granted the right by DCC to produce its own 'Neighbourhood Development Plan', and in September 2013 a steering group was appointed to manage the process. '**The Sedgefield Plan**' has been underway since then and as we enter an important phase of work it is appropriate to review our progress and identify the work streams of the programme going forward.

The Sedgefield Plan will be a substantial document that will be written in draft form in the spring of 2014 for the approval of DCC to ensure its compliance with the Local Plan, DCC will then seek the views of the Sedgefield community in a consultation before agreeing to submit it for **independent inspection** following which, if the inspector approves the plan, it will be the subject of **a community referendum** in which a simple majority of those voting will approve the document that will have **statutory status for consideration in all future DCC planning applications.**

The process is expected to take about 18 months if all runs smoothly.

2. Progress to date.

At its first meeting in October the steering group identified two major tasks, **gathering evidence** to support the plan and designing a '**Community Survey**' that will capture the issues that concern the residents of Sedgefield and its surrounding area, we also commissioned the **design of the projects 'identity'** that is at the head of this report, and the **design and development of a web site** to create a communications platform . We defined the gathering evidence work stream by identifying four 'Topic Areas' that will be important to the final plan, they are;

The Sedgefield Plan

Shaping the future of our area

- **Housing**
- **Infrastructure**
- **Economy**
- **Community and Environment**

Each of these Topic groups has appointed a chair who has recruited individuals from the community with relevant expertise or enthusiasm to assist with the process of gathering evidence and they have made good progress to date.

The success of the Community Survey is critical to the success of our 'Plan' so we have researched surveys that have been completed in other communities from around the country and designed a questionnaire that will enable the community to express its view that will be the baseline for the subsequent plan document.

When approved The Sedgefield Plan may be challenged by developers or individuals in court so it is important that it is legally robust, we therefore took a decision to appoint a good research company with experience in this type of project to help us develop our questionnaire. After a thorough procurement process we agreed to appoint 'Public Knowledge Ltd' who have completed their work and the Community Survey will be printed and distributed early in January to every household in and around Sedgefield. It will also be published on the Sedgefield Plan web site www.thesedgefieldplan.co.uk, all responses are to be returned by Friday 24th January 2014.

The web site will be launched very soon and will be loaded with useful information on activities that are underway and anticipated, how to make contact and join in, how to express your opinion, dates for meetings and events and all of the documents that we acquire and publish including minutes of meetings, reports, useful reference documents and correspondence.

We have consulted with Northumbria Water, Gas and Electricity companies to determine current availability and capacity to support development, and we have researched proposed developments in neighbouring communities such as Stockton, Hartlepool and Wynyard that will impact on our community.

We have also made contact with other communities in the county who have or are about to start on their plans, we have consulted with planning aid who provide us with the support of an experienced 'planner', we have set up routine communications with DCC planners to ensure that we and they are 'on side' with our project. We have raised £16100 as a grant from 'Locality' and from the generosity of Sainsbury's to fund the early stages of the project.

The Sedgefield Plan

Shaping the future of our area

In 3 months we have made very good progress, have learned and continue to learn an awful lot about planning, community surveys, infrastructure and potential development and are on course to achieve our 18 month target.

3. Forward Planning

By the end of January the community survey will be returned and the analysis underway, the next milestone is to write a draft of the Sedgefield Plan but before we get there we need to identify the work streams going forward. There are a number of activities that we might choose to undertake each is relevant to our plan each one of which will require a commitment, a **Conservation Area Character Assessment** is underway, they are;

- **Local Landscape Assessment**
- **Community-Led Facilities Audit**
- **Community-Led Traffic Management Studies**
- **Community-Led Sites and Allocations**
- **Community Right to Build**

In addition we will need to produce as supplements to our draft plan;

- **Basic Conditions Statement**
- **Community Consultation Statement**
- **Sustainability Assessment**

We will probably need professional help with each of these including the final draft of The Sedgefield Plan.

It is also very clear from published inspectors reports that community/neighbourhood engagement is a critical success factor so we need to get the message out via posters, Sedgefield News, Local Press, Radio and by talking to the many groups and organisations in the community, it is easy to dismiss publicity as trivial and unnecessary expense but that would be a great mistake.

David Bowles

Chairman of The Sedgefield Plan Steering Group