

Sevenoaks Town Team
Virtual Meeting held at 11 a.m. on 30th April 2020

Discussion relating to Sevenoaks Town Recovery Plan

The meeting was held via Zoom. A transcript of the 'Chat' is at the bottom of the meeting notes.

Present:

Cllr Andrew Eyre	Town Team Chairman, Stag CEO, Town & District Cllr
Linda Larter	Sevenoaks Town Council CEO / Town Clerk, Town Team Executive
Steph Harrison	Sevenoaks Town Council / Town Team Committee Clerk
Cllr Dr Merilyn Canet	Town Team Executive, Senior Action Forum, Town & District Cllr
Cllr Tony Clayton	Sevenoaks Rail Travellers Assoc. Town & District Cllr
Cllr Victoria Granville Baxter	Town Team Executive, Sevenoaks 2020, Town Cllr
Samantha Walshe	Space NK
Maxine Morgan	Town Team Vice Chairman, Specsavers
Cllr Elizabeth Purves	Town Team Executive, Sevenoaks 2020, District Cllr
Julie Philips	CEO, Sevenoaks & District Chamber of Commerce
Rob Cundy	Edge Recovery
Jamie Wilson	Sevenoaks Pantomime
Matthew Ball	Local Historian and Corporate Affairs Consultant (Property & Planning)
Nick Brooker	Chairman Sevenoaks & District Chamber of Commerce, Handelsbanken
Katrina Walker	Warners Solicitors / Chamber of Commerce
Kelly Love	Space NK
Jenna Cooper	Thompson Snell and Passmore
Elliott Walters	Town Team Executive, Station Manager
Roberta Ware	Town Team Executive, Francis Jones Jewellers
Gabrielle Argent	PR & Marketing volunteer
Andrew Raby	Thackray Williams Solicitors
Jane Beer Jones	Sevenoaks Rugby Football Club (SRFC)
Laura Stamboulieh	Alison Young Beauty
Paul Jackson	Court Management Consultants
Paul Baker	Wealden Properties
Cllr Avril Hunter	Town Team Executive, Sevenoaks District Councillor
Emily Haswell	Sevenoaks District Council
Panos Giannakis	Entrepreneur
Ruth Hyde	Cryojuvenate
Rich Mills	Co Working Group
Michael Barrett	FM Conway
Roger Walshe	Sevenoaks Society
Mark Tuvey	Local Businessman
Elizabeth Dolding	Town Team Executive, Warners Solicitors
Kathryn McKerlie	Sevenoaks & District Chamber of Commerce

1. Aim of the Meeting

Andrew Eyre introduced himself as Chairman of the Town Team and set out the key points to be discussed at the meeting. He would then invite introductions from those attending and open the meeting to discuss proposals for consideration to include in the draft Sevenoaks Town Recovery Plan.

Sevenoaks Town Team
Virtual Meeting held at 11 a.m. on 30th April 2020

- i) The new business environment is going to look very different to what was known pre COVID 19. The Association of Town Centre Management had originally predicted that the high street would change radically over the next 5 years and are now stating that this has been condensed into 5 months. Many of the changes to consumer behaviour and business practice may not revert to pre COVID 19.
- ii) In his role as Chief Executive of the Stag he explained how he was very aware how this pandemic has affected businesses.
- iii) Prior to the meeting an outline of the nationally accepted four stages of a Recovery Plan for a Town Centre had been distributed:

Stage 1 Crisis	The Government, Kent County Council and Sevenoaks District Council supported by the Chamber of Commerce, Sevenoaks Town Partnership and Sevenoaks Town Council are providing information to enable financial assistance where it is available.
Stage 2 Post COVID 19 Framework for Recovery	We need to collectively think of ideas to encourage footfall back to the Town Centre and other shopping areas in the town. Putting in place plans and ideas ready for the Post COVID 19, rather than thinking about them when we reach this stage. Innovation should be encouraged.
Stage 3 Pre-Recovery	This stage is about building capacity for recovery and transformation Working together on good ideas and plans to encourage people back to our high streets. Putting Stage 2 into action.
Stage 4 Recovery & Transformation	Establishing what the new ‘normal’ is going to be for the Town Centre and how businesses will work within this. In the short time that COVID 19 has impacted the UK businesses have shown their creativity and ability to adapt and this might need to continue in the future.

- iv) The meeting had been arranged to focus on Stage 2
- v) He stated that there was work taking place on a draft Recovery Plan with our own ideas and would want to also include the ideas from those at the meeting

Sevenoaks Town Team
Virtual Meeting held at 11 a.m. on 30th April 2020

and then circulate widely to see if people agree with the content? Or have other ideas to add? – we hope to do this asap.

2. Introductions

All present at the meeting introduced themselves to each other.

3. Open Discussion relating to ideas and information to include in the Draft Sevenoaks Town Recovery Plan (see also Chat transcript)

1. Sevenoaks would **follow national public health guidelines** and where appropriate national best practice as identified by the Association of Town Centre Management. Lessons will also be learned from other countries who are coming out of lock down ahead of UK.
2. **Public confidence** will need to be restored to encourage them back into shops and businesses.
3. Social distancing is likely to remain for some time. Could the **High Street be closed to cars e.g. as a trial for 3 months?** Currently there are few businesses open and public can queue on pavement if more opened this would become congested. The space in the road would enable more social distancing and the opportunity for pop up businesses e.g. street food for restaurants that are unable to open. Note: need to consider buses and deliveries.
4. With our narrow paths could we organise that **pedestrians only walk in one direction**, preferably facing traffic, enabling pedestrians to step into the kerb if needed.
5. **Car parking** – people will need longer to shop. Giving benefits to those who have walked into town, rather than bringing their cars. Parking initiatives for those who have to travel by car.
6. Could there be a **benefit for more buses / park and ride?**
This could contribute to pedestrian safety – less traffic would make it easier to introduce one-way pavements for pedestrians. Previously it did work in Sevenoaks during the Blighs development, using the site off Otford Road, which is still available. At the time the plan was to develop further, using space by Morley's Roundabout to the South. Anything which could reduce vehicle use in the centre of the town would be helpful, and so maybe a joint plan with the National Trust to cut traffic using the Knole access off the High street would be worth looking at.

Sevenoaks Town Team
Virtual Meeting held at 11 a.m. on 30th April 2020

7. Businesses have already started to work differently, delivering and extending opening hours as examples.
8. Need a **consistent and strong campaign to promote** Sevenoaks as a safe place to shop and do business.
9. **All businesses** regardless of sector to be encouraged to **sign up and promote the same key message.**
10. What is **Sevenoaks USP?**
11. Remember the **target audience** for the campaign including all age groups.
12. **Stag** did attract up to 300,000 visitors per annum which had a positive impact on the local economy. Like many leisure facilities it is at risk due to COVID 19 – consider public crowdfunding / virtual fundraising events.
13. **Promotion and marketing activity:** social media (including WhatsApp groups, physical marketing – shop window competition, marked trails, flags in flag holders throughout the town, overhead banners.
14. **Events** to encourage people back into town.
 - Open-air cinema's or activities that can be held as an easier way of socially distancing.
 - Food event on the Vine, or restaurants serving outside of their restaurants.
 - Interactive entertainment.
 - Photographic Exhibition to be held at Kaleidoscope Gallery of Sevenoaks Businesses 2020.
 - Could we plan events with a moveable date to avoid adverse weather conditions?
 - Can the Fireworks, Christmas Lights Switch On, Pantomime go ahead? If so, how can it be made safe.
 - We need to make sure that when we come out of lockdown Sevenoaks is a bright and cheerful place to come to. Could we aim for our best ever Sevenoaks in Bloom? It could be a real community spirit and perhaps people who don't have gardens in Sevenoaks might like an area to attend to. It could bring a real pride into the Town centre.
15. Utilise all **public open space** – potentially for different uses to previous.
16. The **market** could be a key component in attracting footfall into the centre of the town. Maybe a covered market could be the right use for the Tesco site?

Sevenoaks Town Team
Virtual Meeting held at 11 a.m. on 30th April 2020

17. Add a **list of businesses that are trading now** to the Town Team's weekly newsletter. Maybe a video of Andrew highlighting that the town is preparing a Recovery Plan. Comment from one member – *“When I was thinking about this I went onto the Town Team website and found the weekly newsletter. This hasn't been advertised anywhere that I was aware of and we need to think about how we push traffic to the website, and I found it interesting and informative. I immediately circulated the link to my road WhatsApp group. We need to get that circulated so that the Town Team website is the go to website for information and perhaps a link with other parish councils websites (I live in Otford but it is relevant to people in my area too and it is people from these surrounding areas also that we want to encourage into the town)”*. Perhaps businesses operating could also promote a link?
18. Could the town be **open to different groups on certain days or times**?
19. Could shops operate a **click & collect** service in their shops or **By appointment only** schemes.
20. Encourage more **local workers**. Will commuting to work become a thing of the past. Engage with as many local groups as possible.
21. Produce **Back to Business Guide**.
22. **Business to Business** - Businesses (such as solicitors, accountants, estate agents, Stag etc) could team up with restaurants/ cafes/ shops etc so that people who come in to use the business services stay in town longer. People who used to commute may be partially working from home in future so we may have more people around to come into town. Encourage businesses and business people to use local businesses more.
23. **Sponsorship** needs to be about working together not just money to get your business name up. Sports clubs have sponsorship from businesses and perhaps they should be speaking to each other as a way of encouraging business between local clubs and businesses.
24. Sevenoaks should **acknowledge the huge debt** we owe to all those people working on the front line during the crisis, often putting themselves at risk, and celebrate what they did and recognise their achievements.

Sevenoaks Town Team
Virtual Meeting held at 11 a.m. on 30th April 2020

25. Sevenoaks should also **celebrate the businesses and voluntary organisations** which found new ways to make life more bearable for the community.
26. Before the shutdown the number of **secondary school students** in Sevenoaks was due to increase to nearly 6,000 by 2025. This is a big element in Sevenoaks social and economic life, making the streets safe for them and ensuring young people can access schools will also be a priority.

4. Next Steps

Notes of Meeting and Draft Sevenoaks Town Recovery Plan circulated.
 Review responses and incorporate where appropriate
 Produce Action Plan with designated tasks to different organisations or groups of organisations.

BE READY AND UNITED FOR COMING OUT OF LOCKDOWN

The meeting was held via Zoom. A transcript of the 'Chat' is below. It should be noted that these comments were sometimes answered verbally and do not appear on the 'Chat'. Some of LL comments are recording verbal conversation.

LL	The aim of the meeting is to collectively think of ideas to encourage footfall back to the Town Centre and other shopping areas in the town. Putting in place plans and ideas for post COVID 19 rather than thinking about this when we reach this stage. Innovation should be encouraged. Regain confidence for public and business sector. Ideas coming forward are events, retail more friendly for older generation, Stockholm evidence that people do not feel safe in shops and cafes.
MB	Lockdown will only be eased gradually, focusing on certain age groups / types of businesses, should we think about who these groups are likely to be and how we promote social activities / businesses in a targeted way
LL	Need to bring confidence that town is a safe. Narrow pavements, shutting the High Street to cars to enable more pedestrian space? Walk facing the traffic?
JB	That is a great idea, we are all scared to get too close and this could be a great and easy solution.
LS	Sorry to ask, but I did admit at the beginning that I wasn't a local! Can I ask members what role they believe their town plays in its context? What is its USP? Who are you hoping to tell 'we are open' too – as each will need a different message? The Government (to seek funding if it emerges), shoppers to encourage spending? Businesses (to bring workers in), inward investors?

Sevenoaks Town Team
Virtual Meeting held at 11 a.m. on 30th April 2020

GA	I think the Stag has a great role to play – The Big Night In was a great example of how artists can still entertain – musicians, comedians can successfully promote content. This could be free to celebrate an event or by donation.
LL	Encourage people to ‘Use it or Lose it’ of local businesses – new marketing campaign.
JB	Could also start crowd funding for the Stag, none of us want to lose it.
LL	Parking initiatives?
RH	What about a free bus into town from places? Love Local Card?
JB	Like a park and ride? Again, would need social distancing.
GA	An online auction would engage audiences – supermarkets and retailers to offer items and items would need to be collected / or delivered to get people dropping in?
AH	If High Street is shut what about access for buses?
GA	An open air cinema – in cars – in Knole Park – bring your own picnic
RH	What about staging a socially distance show from the Stag – on line! People pay to view from home.
LL	Will follow national public health guidelines and best practice from Association of Town Centre Management – but the idea is for Sevenoaks to have a Recovery & Marketing Plan ready to go
EW	We need to be realistic. Road closure of the High Street is sensible to allow social distancing, especially if we want to get people back into Sevenoaks and using the town.
VGB	Important to look at welcoming public spaces in Sevenoaks, streetscape etc. traffic management to be built around that.
EW	Transportation needs to be considered though, such as the buses and access for those who may not be able to walk as far. Parking is a rabbit hole, however do bear in mind the car parks around the station are currently absolutely empty and could be considered for use. What we have done at Southeastern is a marketing strategy, to promote and push ‘support local’. These have been dropping in to our customers in boxes where they have chosen to receive emails.
JB	Can you save the Chat at the end and share via Chamber as I cant seem to copy it and there are great points that I want to take back to the Rugby Club.
EW	There was one recently about the Sevenoaks area, I can enquire from our Marketing Team to do a Sevenoaks specific article – once we have got a strategy.
AC	Right now there are about 3,000+ usual commuters who are working from home – and not spending their money anywhere. What can we do for them?
LL	Who are we marketing too? What is are USP?
JP	If shop opening hours will be extended this could be a good opportunity to engage with restaurants and encourage later appointments followed by a dinner offer for customers?
GA	Radio needs to be used to inform and engage – a weekly advice spot for ‘how to...for businesses’ would be helpful.
RM	I think it is a bit too early to start coworking right now due to health and safety concerns, but as government restrictions are gradually lifted, this could be a great way to bring people back to the high street. In particular would be commuters

Sevenoaks Town Team
Virtual Meeting held at 11 a.m. on 30th April 2020

	and people struggling to work from home (due to poor internet / distraction / loneliness etc). it could work in pretty much any space with a decent internet connection – possibly a large room at the Stag? E.g. place the desks around the edge of the room 2m apart. This could provide a little income for the Stag, but perhaps more importantly, it means more people in the town spending their lunch money there. It may even encourage people to consider working more locally post COVID instead of commuting into London every day.
LL	More people walking – include walking and cycle trails.
GA	A treasure map ride for families? Keeping groups separate but engaged in outdoor activity.
LL	Town Centre – an extension of people’s homes?
PG	Feeling of safety and implementing measures for ensuring people’s safety are really important for people to start feeling comfortable walking around. As I have seen and been researching for the past few weeks from other European countries it might be worthwhile considering adopting few new measures. Things like wearing face masks and generic sanitization process that could be installed and used publically and privately (for the Stag as an example) in the town.
JC	Through the local card we can reward people who have walked into town.
ED	I think that with social distancing there are a lot of people who will not want to go to Bluewater immediately because of social distancing we need to encourage those people to come into Sevenoaks instead.
GA	A list of open businesses and take our services would be helpful for all residents.
LL	Can we move loyalty card to electronic?
MB	As well as supporting existing businesses, is there also an opportunity to encourage pop-ups / startups? Low rents to see if new businesses can grow?
GA	The loyalty card on an app would be good
RH	Perhaps promote tourism in Sevenoaks
LL	Neighbourhood Plan – move forward with Cultural Strategy
GA	Use Zoom to offer 1:1 business advice – is this being done already?
MB	Car parking obviously important but an opportunity to seize on the climate benefits or reduced pollution – target young people / more community transport
GA	Culture on line would be good now – art and artists from the local area – celebrating skills
NB	Some joint initiative with the national trust to make use of Knole Park to promote our history and culture
LL	What can we do for the commuters / businesses who are normally going to London and are now in Sevenoaks - make Sevenoaks feel safe?
EP	Is there any way we can encourage people who are around with time to get involved in Sevenoaks in Bloom and make the town a really colourful place to come into when we come out of lockdown?
GA	Commuters need walking trails, culture online, plays streamed online, takeout maps
RC	There are some great ideas coming forward. We should not fool ourselves that everything will be back to ‘normal’ in 6 months.
LL	Train services will be different with social distancing measures
RC	There are two issues, individual businesses and the town

Sevenoaks Town Team
Virtual Meeting held at 11 a.m. on 30th April 2020

GA	Click and collect is the safest way to shop – communicate via this pick up area – offer extra services here
LL	Flexible and co working spaces will be needed more.
KM	How about a mobile testing hub on the Vine when they become available?
GA	Farm shops are doing particularly well – box schemes to the door. Is this the way to keep retail going generally?
RC	The way to avoid failure is to work together. A consistent regular message to everyone’s social media to update them with new openings, activities and events
LL	Support each other, help prevent businesses from failing
GA	Give people some advice on how to use social media
JB	Should we start a #hashtag, we can then share posts with the hashtag
LL	Same marketing consistent message from all businesses – what is open now? What is next stage?
AH	Social media is great but what about elderly who cannot use this? We are not all computer literate. Who will help them?
JB	Hashtag is a great way and we would have to think of other ways for those not on social media
LL	Sevenoaks Back to Business – Bigger and Better!
JP	We have a social media workshop arranged specifically for retail and restaurants, all welcome – sevenoakschamber.com
NB	Agreed some great ideas here. A small working group to sift through and capture key points?
MB	Agree – perhaps a role of libraries and volunteer groups that have emerged
EP	In response to Gabrielle’s comments about farm shops what about another food fair on the Vine when we reopen the town?
MB	FM Conway recently assisted with re-opening Southwark market by creating controllable queuing systems allowing locals there to buy fresh produce. Could this be an option for the immediate term for the grocery side but possibly to assist stores with smaller footprint to sell stock in a market format instead of bringing people inside the store? Is there a space that could cater for this?
LL	Sevenoaks food market stalls are still open and doing very well and being really appreciated by the public. Use public space for more pop ups including restaurants who could not comply with social distancing. Aware that not all businesses can operate in new normal and will need to adapt.
VGB	It would be great to commandeer Tesco building with co-operation of Freshwater, as public covered space for markets, co working, gathering for the elderly.
LL	Old fashion notice boards help with people walking around for those who do not use social media.
RH	How about biz’s who are closed collaborating with the ones that are open – pop up stalls or banners within these – even if only to promote within the open shops??? The elderly who go out would see this information – social distancing of course.
MB	How about young people to help support older people? And local stores and businesses? School holidays coming up but no opportunities for gap year travel, so how can we help them gain skills / occupy time?
LL	Public safety idea – walk one direction?

Sevenoaks Town Team
Virtual Meeting held at 11 a.m. on 30th April 2020

EP	What about the Town Council producing the list of businesses / retailers still open and local businesses with link to the council website which would link all of the businesses to the Town Council
LL	The Town Team are doing this weekly can be expanded to include this idea
SH	That's on our website now
VGB	We must really encourage businesses to join this.
GA	A flier given to at click and collect, sponsored by local businesses can signpost websites, maps and locations for where to access services
LL	Using on line – e.g. make up lessons and link to selling brands
JP	Could we produce a Back to Business Guide? An opportunity for local businesses to advertise in a printed and delivered guide to local homes also using the content from social media?
Paul	We have to remember that there is only one way into the town, traffic is too fast with people now walking in the road to self isolate
GA	All businesses can engage with customers on a central website. Call it 'Sevenoaks Open for Business' – promote one address and communicate with individual businesses from there. Easy to remember for customers and can be promoted via click and collect
AC	If we want a key message to be 'Sevenoaks is Safe' get businesses and other organisations to say what they are doing to keep users safe.
LL	Events including open air cinema? Sponsorship for activities?
RC	Andrew, do you have the facility to put separated chairs in the Stag car park for open air cinema?
JB	Bit like TED talks
GA	The Tate has amazing films on artists – all free
JB	What about our huge community of sports clubs? What are your thoughts?
GA	Andrew Lloyd Webber has been screening his musicals – for free. Amazing things can be done over the internet.
JB	How are the other clubs coping? The rugby club is keeping its head above water but for how long?
LL	Cultural events from people's homes?
GA	Schools could do an art competition – virtual exhibition to celebrate end of isolation. Can teenagers do D of E virtually?
PB	Dialing in and drive ins are good but the headline was how to get footfall into local businesses?
LL	Remember to include all age groups to contribute to the Recovery Plan
GA	Maybe the businesses need to go to the people – at an open air event and offer experiences rather than a brick and mortar shop
LL	Is sponsorship a thing of the past?
RC	There are lots of businesses in trouble. Trouble does not mean closure and failure. Restructuring and time to pay options are already available.
JB	Don't say that! We rely on sponsors very heavily and most of them are continuing to support as we are giving them Return on Investment – it needs to be a two way street

Sevenoaks Town Team
Virtual Meeting held at 11 a.m. on 30th April 2020

RH	What about different colour wrist bands for people who have had the virus (in theory are no longer contagious and cant get it again) maybe that would help footfall?
GA	Sponsorship for businesses to say 'we are still here' would be quite appealing?
LL	Simple and well advertised is the key to marketing
GA	Open space maps?
LL	What is the best use of public open spaces including High Street and car parks?
RH	Virtual gaming event in one of the club fields – I know a man who can 😊
RC	I would advise against stopping marketing spend – make it more targeted
KW	I think sponsorship will be an issue particularly in the shorter term. Businesses will be holding on more tightly to monies until things become more settled – whatever settled becomes
MB	Yes, use culture to drive footfall and innovation, am currently doing this in Lambeth / Brixton
GA	Street food vendors? Very popular in London cooking demos – big name chefs?
JW	Events could be more flexible. Sevenoaks has more volunteers than people who need help
GA	BFI has a competition for under 25-year old's to make a film
LL	We will be collecting all ideas and issue a document for people to give thoughts and then convene another meeting.
MB	Interesting chat, got to be a 3 – 5-year plan I think
LL	By everyone, thank you for contributing, stay safe. BW Linda (not on screen, lent my computer to Andrew).