



SEVENOAKS
TOWN TEAM

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NINTH ANNUAL REPORT
2021

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An introduction by Cllr Andrew Eyre, Chairman of the Sevenoaks Town Team



Andrew Eyre, Chief Executive of The Stag Theatre

Both in Sevenoaks and throughout the country we have had a very difficult year in both our personal and business lives. Thankfully the most serious impacts of Covid-19 now largely appear controlled by the successful national immunisation campaign. This continues as we approach the end of 2021 with shots for our school children and booster shots for those most at risk from the effects of the virus but we continue our domestic and commercial return to normality. We will not of course forget those who have suffered from the illness and particularly those we have lost. I suspect we have all been touched personally in some way by the effects of this virus.

During the year many businesses on our High Street (including us at The Stag Theatre) had long periods of closure, long periods where restricted opening rules were in place and throughout the pandemic period a shortage of customers, the lifeblood of all our businesses.

What has come out of this difficult year has been is the community and neighbourly spirit which has brought us closer and which I hope continues as the overt impact of the pandemic diminishes and we continue our return to normality.

I am though very proud of the way Sevenoaks businesses worked together and supported each other during an incredibly difficult time. The Town Team worked hard to keep our members in touch and when Government restrictions allowed - and with very little notice - produced the popup market

which had very positive feedback but unfortunately few takers. However the work has given us some new equipment which is available for hire and overall is a model we can potentially use in future.

We work closely with the Chamber of Commerce and it has seen its founding Chief Executive, Julie Philips move on. I wanted to thank her for her support of the Town Team (and separately of The Stag) and wish her well for her new venture providing her brilliant ideas and administrative & development support to the Samaritans organisation in Sevenoaks.

I also wanted to welcome Mike Reid to the Town Team. He has been an invaluable and experienced addition to the team. He has greatly helped Linda and I both in support but also with ideas and a great enthusiasm linking in with our members and other businesses in the town.

I wrote last year at the peak of the lockdowns that our key target is to continue showing how safe and welcoming is the town of Sevenoaks and that it is safe to visit and enjoy shopping, services or leisure. That aim hasn't diminished and the new momentum we have achieved in 2021 puts us in good stead to continue for the return of the Bonfire Fireworks Night event with Sevenoaks Round Table and the return of the epic Christmas Lights event. Into 2022 we plan for the Business Awards and then to continue our preparation work towards setting up a Business Improvement District for our town.

Sevenoaks: the best place to shop, live and do business.

1. Sevenoaks Town Team – Strategic Aims

Since 2011 the Executive Board have been working to develop the following key strategic aims:

1. Increasing visitors to Sevenoaks Town
2. Branding Sevenoaks
3. Investigating and investing in different forms of digital marketing
4. Developing a branded Town Partnership website
5. Providing a calendar of events
6. Marketing the town as a clean and safe place to live and visit
7. Produce initiatives to address the empty shop issue
8. Improve engagement between public, private, and economic sector partners in order to use this combined expertise to improve the town
9. Encourage inward investment into the town and make Sevenoaks attractive for businesses looking to start up
10. Improving the accessibility and environment of Sevenoaks town

2. Sevenoaks Town Partnership – Executive Board

The Executive Board consists of the following members:

Representing	Number	Current Member	Current Organisation
Sevenoaks Town Council	3	Cllr Raikes Cllr Granville Baxter CEO / Town Clerk	
Sevenoaks District Council	1	Cllr Avril Hunter	
Transport	2	Tony Clayton Austin Blackburn Elliott Waters	Sevenoaks Rail Travellers Association Go Coach SouthEastern
Leisure Facilities	3	Jane Parish CEO Andrew Eyre (Chairman) Hannah Kay	Sencio Stag Knole
Chamber of Commerce	1	Julie Phillips CEO	
Blighs Meadow	1	Andy Sims	Savills, agent for Bligh's owners Standard Life Investments
Sevenoaks Chronicle	1	Editor	
Sevenoaks Society	1	Roger Walshe	
Large Business	2	Maxine Morgans Elizabeth Dolding	Specsavers Warners Solicitors
Small Independent Business	2	Roberta Ware Glenn Ball	Francis Jones Jewellers Local Architect
Resident Association	1		
Round Table	1	Mike Williams	
Police	1		
	21		

3. Digital Projects

3.1 Information Screens

The Town Team currently manages three information screens, one at Sevenoaks Mainline Station, one at the Stag Community Arts Centre and the latest addition at Bat & Ball Station. A further screen will be installed at the new Bat & Ball Centre.

3.2 Info Pods

The Town Team originally installed info pods enable access to enable access to tourist information, including bed & breakfast accommodation, events, businesses, travel information, restaurants and much more.

Info Pods were located at:

- Stag Foyer
- Sencio Leisure Foyer
- Sevenoaks District Council Foyer
- Sevenoaks Bus Station

- Sevenoaks Town Council Foyer
- Sevenoaks Community Centre
- Café on the Vine
- Bat & Ball Station Café

During the pandemic these were removed for public health restriction reasons. There were also some technical problems on keeping them up to date. We will start to re-introduce them and are looking at a digital information screen being used at Sevenoaks Station for onward integrated transport from train to bus.

3.2 Website

The Town Team's website is now functional and can be viewed at www.sevenoakspartnership.org

3.3 Facebook & LinkedIn

The Sevenoaks Town Council Facebook and Town Team pages are being reset. The new "Official" Facebook Sevenoaks Town Council page is now operational, with the Town Team page being deleted (it takes some time) and a new one created. Sevenoaks Town Council now has a page on LinkedIn aimed at conversing more with the business community.

4. Sevenoaks BID Proposal



Sevenoaks Town Partnership (now known as the Sevenoaks Town Team) held two initial consultations with local business rate payers (hereditaments). The purpose of the initial consultations was to raise awareness of the Business Improvement District (BID) project and to identify the projects which were important to local businesses.

It was originally envisaged in 2018 that if agreed at a referendum, all local business rate payers would pay 1% of their Rateable Value (RV) to the Sevenoaks BID providing a total annual income of £298,657 to be spent on projects for the benefit of the BID area.

Following representation from local businesses the Town Team has had some further thoughts on this matter. By enabling businesses with a Rateable Value of less than £15k to provide a voluntary levy of ½ % this would reduce the guaranteed non-discretionary annual income to £269,169 (@ May 2017).

It was then that they needed feedback from businesses who were currently 'undecided' needing to see more detail to the proposed projects and the BIDs to make a final decision.

Since then nearby shopping destinations Orpington and Tunbridge Wells now operate BIDs enabling funds to be invested into the business area to attract more visitors. Their initiatives include free parking at designated times providing a further challenge for the retailers of Sevenoaks.

The BID world has become quite different during the pandemic and there are different constraints on receiving funding from local businesses. It is anticipated that there will be a review of the scheme in the near future. For Sevenoaks it has been agreed to defer progress on this until after the Neighbourhood Plan referendum.

5. Pop-up Market



As Covid restrictions began to be lifted The Town Team worked on schemes to re-open the town centre. The principle plan was to run a pop-up market at Buckhurst Place providing retailers and market traders an opportunity to do business in the open air. It was also intended that the owners of cafes and restaurants who could not comply with Covid rules would take advantage of an open air seating area.

The designated market area was in Buckhurst 1 and an area equivalent to about five car parking spaces was dressed with artificial lawn, planters and bench café tables. Sevenoaks District Council “donated” the area for which no charge was made.

All relevant town centre businesses were visited to explain the opportunity and to invite participation. All existing market holders were also invited. So too were market traders from Tonbridge Saturday market and farmer’s market.

Uptake was disappointingly poor with the main factors being:

- The weather, which was appalling
- Full time traders having an existing diary of markets in other towns
- Part time traders not having enough stock and most commonly being unavailable due to childcare commitments
- Local businesses with premises being unable to staff both their business and a market stall

Though a poor outcome there was almost universal appreciation among Sevenoaks businesses that had been visited, that the Town Team/Council was making the effort to re-open the town. As the event progressed there were adverse comments from some businesses relating to the loss of parking, some traders not being suitable for Sevenoaks and creating competition.

6. Vegan Market



A very successful outcome from the establishment of the temporary market was the introduction to Sevenoaks of a Vegan Market run by Vegan Markets UK. This was a one day market which featured about 25 stalls selling not just vegan food but vegan cosmetics, jewellery, clothing etc. It was heralded by The Town Crier and opened by Mayor Cllr Canet.

Encouraged by the outcome of the Vegan Market another event has been booked to take place on November 13th 2021. This will take place in The Vine Gardens. To add to the atmosphere arrangements have been made with The Listening Room to provide entertainment on the bandstand. This is all free of charge to the Town Team/Sevenoaks Town Council.

7. Business Hub



The Hub was opened on 8th June 2021 by Mayor Cllr Canet.

It provides 13 hot desks, 5 private office pods, a meeting room and café/kitchen. Sevenoaks District Chamber of Commerce is now based in a further private office and the Sevenoaks Town Council Finance Department will be moving to a separate part of the building this Autumn.

Take-up of the hot desks and pods is building as awareness of the Hubs existence and availability is gathering pace. Following the initial set up of the Hub marketing and booking software by the Town Team, as originally agreed the Chamber is now responsible for marketing the facility and managing bookings.

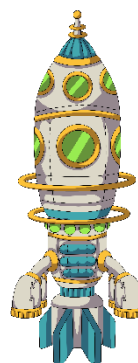
Potential and actual hirers have generally seen other hubs in the area and without exception report that in their view this one has the best set-up and atmosphere.

8. Plastic Free Sevenoaks



World Refill Day took place on 16th June. The event was promoted by Town Team using a mix of social media and posters. There are presently 25 locations in Sevenoaks where one can refill a water bottle for free or obtain a discount when buying coffee if one has a re-useable cup.

9. Town Trail



At Christmas 2020 a town trail was introduced for the first time. This is an updated version of a treasure hunt, designed for children and families to encourage them back to the town centre to visit a variety of shops and businesses.

During the school summer holidays another town trail was organised and 54 unique users entered. When including parents and siblings, that figure translates to about 200 people.

The businesses reported that they didn't notice any influx of trade as a result of the trail but for the most part were pleased that it had increased footfall in the town.

Other than organising the locations and promotion the cost to Town Team was £590 paid to Bepuzzled the company which runs the trails.

Now that schools are fully re-opened and with more time to market to them it is planned to run a Christmas trail for 2021

10. Stag Takeover



Aimed at encouraging people to return to the town centre this event was jointly organised by The Stag, Sevenoaks Town Council and The Town Team. In essence, entertainment was provided throughout the town centre during late August and early September. From all accounts the scheme worked well and is likely to be repeated.

11. Sevenoaks Business Show



The show was held for the first time at the Bat & Ball Centre on Wednesday 22nd September. Though exhibitor bookings were originally very slow the event was sold out. There were 33 exhibitors and eventually a waiting list of two more. The main hall was full to capacity and for future shows consideration will have to be given to using the centre for exhibition space only and without speakers.



The event was opened by Alfie Best who also made a presentation, followed by Thackray Williams, Social Fireworks and Go-Coach. Go-Coach had provided a free shuttle bus service for the day.

New feather banners were purchased at £725 & VAT and will be used in future years and at other events.

Income generated was £4690. The final costs are awaited and a profit of about £1000 is anticipated.

12. Wellbeing Show

The Well Being Show has previously been successful but in 2020 it had to be cancelled due to Covid. We will be reviewing when it is appropriate to run this event again.

13. Sevenoaks Business Awards

The 2020 event was cancelled because of Covid. Plans are beeing put in place for the Awards Evening to take place once again on 25th March 2022.

14. Public Realm

The Town Team has improvements and enhancements to the public realm firmly in its sights.



A recent example of how such changes can be brought about is the refurbishment of the old red High Street phone box outside HSBC. The box was very dilapidated and following investigation it was discovered that it had been adopted by The Friends of Water Search and Rescue with the intention of installing a defibrillator. The project had stalled through a lack of funding. The Town Team facilitated the restoration through obtaining the help of members of Sevenoaks Round Table who undertook the work to the box. The materials were funded by Sevenoaks Town Council. Sponsorship donations have now been secured to fund the installation of the AED and the project should be complete before Christmas.

The Town Team is now working with Sevenoaks District Council and our Kent County Councillor to identify and find ways of enhancing the ambiance of the town centre. The following quote relates:

Well planned improvements to public spaces within town centres can boost commercial trading by up to 40% and generate private sector investment ... and increase footfall by 10% (CABE).

16.Sponsorship / Grant Funding

Sevenoaks Town Council supported the creation of the Sevenoaks Town Partnership, now known as Sevenoaks Town Team, and continues to do this by providing facilities and staff resources. In addition, the Town Council provides funding of £5,000 for each financial year. This however is subject to matching sponsorship either in cash or 'in kind' services.

17.Friends of Bat & Ball Station

The Friends of Bat & Ball Station was created in 2014 with the following Strategic Aims.

Aims for Bat & Ball Station Friends Group

1. Support regeneration of Bat & Ball area, highlighting benefits of the station.
2. Promote the station.
3. Promote the building as a venue/facility.
4. Encourage integration with other community/business projects e.g. Britain in Bloom, Vintage Bus, Summer Festival/Arts.
5. Protect and inform re Historical/Conservation importance.
6. Provide information to the public.
7. Improve community safety and perception of community safety.

The Friends Group has not met during the pandemic. The refurbishment of the Station has achieved national and local awards.

18. Events Committee

The aim of the events committee is to share experiences, resources, and volunteers among those who arrange events in the town. At the meetings there is also the opportunity to provide talks on relevant topics.

The Events Committee has not met during the pandemic.

19.Town Team

In the Autumn of 2019 Sevenoaks Town Partnership changed its name to 'Town Team' to update itself and become easier for the public to identify with, which has work well to date.

20.The future of the Sevenoaks Town Team

The primary aims of the Town Team remains the same, to support each other and local businesses to make Sevenoaks the best place to live, shop and do business.