

OUR YEAR IN THE COMMUNITY



1. Introduction

Sevenoaks Town Council has 16 voluntary elected Town Councillors and has paid staff led by the Chief Executive / Town Clerk. Each year Town Councillors elect a Mayor and Deputy Mayor. During the last year the Town Council has for the first time Resolved to also elect a Leader (Cllr Tony Clayton) and Deputy Leader (Cllr Nigel Wightman).

In May 2023 the local elections were held, followed by an immediate by-election. The make-up of the Town Council changed significantly, and all Town Councillors are now from one political party – Liberal Democrats.

EASTERN WARD	ST JOHNS WARD
Cllr Libby Ancrum	Cllr Sue Camp
Cllr Tony Clayton	Cllr Dr Peter Dixon
Cllr Sally Ann Layne	Cllr David Skinner OBE
KIPPINGTON WARD	TOWN WARD
Cllr Catherine Daniell	Cllr Victoria Granville
Cllr Chloe Gustard	Cllr Lise Michaelides
Cllr Nicholas Varley	Cllr Gareth Willis
NORTHERN WARD	WILDERNESSE WARD
Cllr Dr Merilyn Canet	Cllr Nigel Wightman
Cllr Lionel O’Hara	
Cllr Claire Shea	

Since April 2023, the beginning of the year for this report, there have been significant events for the country and also for the Town Council in its operation.

Nationally we have had the Coronation of a new King, and this was celebrated enthusiastically in Sevenoaks with decorations to the town, several street parties including one with thousands of attendants stretching along the High Street.

Also, after many years of consultation and voluntary work, this year Sevenoaks residents had the opportunity to vote on the future of their town. The referendum for the first Sevenoaks Town Neighbourhood Plan was on 4th May 2023 with a good turn out and vote in favour of accepting the long-term plan.

As mentioned previously, also in May were the local elections. The new Town Council has been developing its plans which have been published in the third Sevenoaks Town Council [Community Investment Plan 2023 – 2027](#).

The Town Council has continued to work hard to maintain its functions and facilities as much as possible in a constantly changing society, impacted by Covid, cost of living crises and world events, including the need to help refugees.

This report highlights aspects of the Town Council's regular functions which include allotments, public open spaces, play areas, cemetery, grants to voluntary organisations, markets, community events, supporting local businesses and youth facilities. See the list at the end of this report.

In addition to its normal operations of community functions and facilities, the Town Council has also continued to progress some of its planned key objectives and other projects, including:

- Marking the Coronation of King Charles III
- Continuing with Green Projects including planting numerous trees
- Returning to holding many events, including supporting first Climate Fair
- Operated a portable Speed Indicator Device
- Progressed public consultation on proposed speed limit reduction to 20mph
- Progressed the Sevenoaks Town Neighbourhood Plan towards its successful Referendum, with the document now used to help decide planning applications within Sevenoaks Town
- Commenced Sevenoaks Town Sports Strategy Review
- Commissioned Town Centre & St John's Hill Masterplan
- Commissioned a Feasibility Study of a Green Link (cycling and walking route) between Sevenoaks & Dunton Green
- Refurbished St John's Hill car park public toilets
- Being accredited with the first Town of Sanctuary award for the town of Sevenoaks (under the City of Sanctuary movement).

We hope you will find this report, which provides detailed information relating to Sevenoaks Town Council's performance and activities during the past financial year, interesting and useful.

2. Climate Change Initiatives

In November 2019 Sevenoaks Town Council (STC) resolved to make the following its Number 1 Priority:

- To recognise the Government and Kent County Council (KCC) declarations for aiming for Zero Carbon.
- To integrate this within the vision and throughout the Neighbourhood Development Plan (NDP) [*now known as Sevenoaks Town Neighbourhood Plan (STNP)*] and within the Town Council's general operation.

Friends of the Earth states: "*Parish and Town Councils may not be as powerful as local authorities, but they can 'do their bit' in addressing the climate and nature emergency and be a force for change.*"

STC's overall aim is to put in place affordable and practical initiatives with long-term green benefits for the local community and to support and encourage residents to pursue them

individually. Little steps together, reducing Sevenoaks' carbon consumption footprint = big changes to the planet.

[STC's 2021 Green Community Investment Plan](#) (appendix to previous STC Community Investment Plan 2020-2023) brings together all of its climate change initiatives to publicise and involve the local community and progress practical delivery under the following five themes:

- Theme 1 Buildings
- Theme 2 Transport & Movement
- Theme 3 Making Sevenoaks Greener
- Theme 4 Consumption
- Theme 5 Information & Access to information

Sevenoaks Climate Fair

In 2023 the Town Council assisted SCAN (Sevenoaks Climate Action Group) in holding a successful first Climate Fair on the Vine. A second one is planned for 4th May 2024.

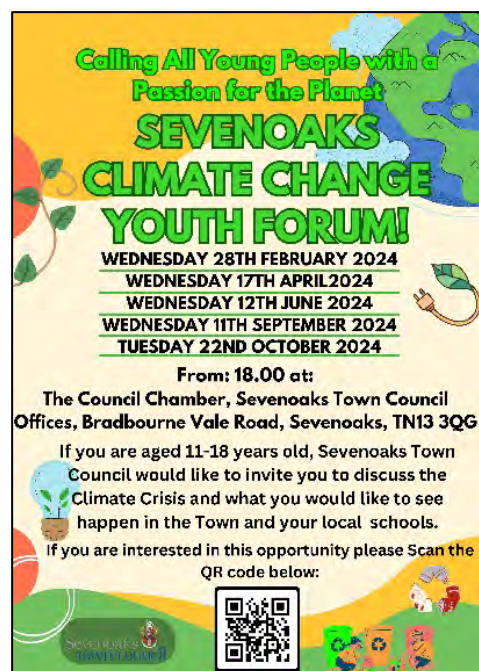


The Town Council has explored the possibility of introducing a **Car Club** in Sevenoaks. Car Clubs are short-term rental services that give members access to locally parked cars which they can pay for by the hour. They offer an alternative model to private car ownership for individuals and businesses and have the potential to reduce car ownership, inspiring a shift away from private car use to walking, cycling and public transport instead. The Town Council is working with Enterprise Cars and hopes to launch this initiative in the near future.

Climate Change Youth Forum

The Climate Change Youth Forum was launched in September 2022 as a place for student representatives from the secondary schools in Sevenoaks to discuss what their schools were doing to tackle climate change and share best practice. It has been decided now to open this up to all young people outside of school hours.

For more information email: youthwork@sevenoakstown.gov.uk



Carbon Footprint

A Carbon Footprint Appraisal for Sevenoaks Town Council for the period 1st April 2021 to 31st March 2022 was undertaken by Carbon Footprint Ltd. This identified (for all its buildings and vehicles) that the total location-based carbon footprint for the period ending 31st March 2022 was 96.01 tonnes CO₂e, and the market-based total was 93.04 tonnes CO₂e. The Town Council has adopted an Action Plan setting out practical methods to reduce its carbon footprint within its general operation, including changes to its buildings and assets.



Renewable Energy

During the refurbishment of the Bat & Ball Centre in 2020, the Town Council's overall aim was to install a system to enable the most cost-effective use of and carbon reduction of energy. The new Centre is considerably more energy efficient than the previous facility and produces some of its own energy via solar panels. The Town Council hopes to be able to enhance the current system if possible, by installing solar batteries and storage.

The Town Council has agreed where possible to replace its vehicles when needed with electric vehicles. A second van has been branded, similar to the first, to enable members of the public to see it more easily around the town.

Look out for Zero 2 driving around the town - the second Electric Van for Sevenoaks Town Council

The new van is fully electric and covers 174 miles and will be used by the Town Wardens who inspect play areas and carry out day to day tasks on the Town Council's public open spaces.



Sevenoaks Town Council has also arranged for publicly accessible vehicle charging points to be installed at its Council Offices site in Bradbourne Vale Road and at the new Bat & Ball Centre, and more potential installations are being researched.

Provision of Drinking Water Fountains

Sevenoaks Town Council as part of its [Green Community Investment Plan](#) (6.3) has resolved to provide drinking fountains at the Vine Gardens and Greatness Recreation Ground. The Town Council is also campaigning as part of the DVCRP (Darent Valley Community Rail Partnership) for drinking fountains to be provided at stations.

The addition of a drinking fountain/fountains will provide environmental and community benefits. Encouraging people to carry and refill a reusable bottle and making it easy for them to do so - an effective way to reduce plastic pollution at source. Every time someone refills instead of buying a bottle of water, it saves resources and CO2 emissions used to produce bottles, and also CO2 emissions from transporting bottles of water. This potentially benefits the town's appearance, as there may be less litter as a result.

Including the option to refill a bottle instead of purchasing a drink may also lead to people making a healthier choice by providing the public with a cost-free alternative to the consumption of sugar-sweetened beverages. In addition to this, the presence of drinking fountains can also contribute to the public's health by facilitating outdoor physical activity, which can improve mental wellbeing as well as physical fitness.



3. Community Investment Plan

NEW COUNCIL = NEW AMBITIONS

In the May 2023 elections, a new Sevenoaks Town Council was created, unusually with all Councillors being from one political group – Liberal Democrats. The Councillors have been working on finalising its aims and objectives delivering projects for the local community (above and beyond its current operation of managing and providing community functions) and these have been formalised in the Sevenoaks Town Council's third [Community Investment Plan 2023-2027](#).

Councillor Tony Clayton, Leader of Sevenoaks Town Council and Chair of the Finance & General Purposes Committee said:

“With its finances on a stable footing, the Council will continue to invest in Sevenoaks, mainly using grants and levies on developers. The biggest items in its £2.7 million Community Investment Plan are a new football pavilion at Greatness, switching the No 8 bus to electric power, a Masterplan for the town's commercial centres, pedestrian crossings, and other measures to make the town safer for walkers and cyclists. In the longer-term Sevenoaks Town Council is looking to the Sevenoaks Quarry at Greatness Lakes development. We will use the use developer levies from it to invest for the whole town, and to integrate the residents in the new homes into the community. Building on the Neighbourhood Plan approved in 2023, the plan will shape a safer, greener, and fairer Sevenoaks.”

The Key Project Aims within the Community Investment Plan are:

- Masterplan for Town Centre & St John's Hill
- Green Link Feasibility Study – cycling and walking route linking Sevenoaks and Dunton Green
- 20 mph Signage Scheme implementation (subject to public survey)
- Pedestrian Crossing at Dartford Road near Vine
- Pedestrian Crossing at Seal Hollow Road
- Electrifying No 8 Bus
- Wayfinding Signage
- Business Improvement District (BID) development
- Greatness Recreation Ground – consider and implement outcome of consultation
- Greatness Sports & Community Pavilion
- Refurbish St John's Hill Car Park Public Toilets
- Redevelop Oast House for Community Use

4. The Mayoral Year & Civic Events



The Mayor, Councillor Claire Shea, was elected in May 2024 and the meeting was attended by existing and new Town Councillors.

The Charities the Mayor has chosen to support are Sevenoaks Welcomes Refugees and Sevenoaks Larder.

The Mayor has attended 88 events so far this year and the Deputy Mayor has represented her on 14 occasions.

At the Annual Council Meeting on 15 May 2023 Able Cadet Scarlet Burgess, Westerham Sea Cadets, was appointed as the Mayor's Cadet for the 2023-2024 Civic Year.

Peppercorn Rent Ceremony

On 21st July the Mayor attended the historic Peppercorn Rent Ceremony at The Vine.

The Vine Cricket Ground is one of the oldest cricket grounds in England. It was given to the town in 1773 by John, 3rd Duke of Dorset, owner of Knole House.

Tradition has it that the Vine Cricket Club must pay Sevenoaks Town Council a rent of one peppercorn per year for use of the ground and the Town Council, in turn, must pay Lord Sackville one cricket ball each year.

The Traditional Vine ceremony took place with Lord Robert Sackville, Mayor Cllr Claire Shea and Chair of Sevenoaks Cricket Club Hugo Tudor.



Garden Party

On 10 September the Mayor hosted a Garden Party at the Bat & Ball Centre in aid of her chosen charities. The Westerham Sea Cadets helped arrange games for the children and a magician entertained everyone during the afternoon.

Civic Events

The Big Coronation Afternoon Tea

On 6 May 2023 Sevenoaks held the Big Coronation Afternoon Tea to celebrate the Coronation of King Charles III. The High Street, decked in flags and bunting, was closed to traffic and a traditional 'red, white and blue' street party was held. Thousands of local residents brought along cake and refreshments and enjoyed an historic and memorable afternoon together.



On **Armistice Day**, Saturday 11th November 2023, the Mayor laid crosses on the War Graves at Greatness Park Cemetery and prayers were said by Fr Robin, Vicar of St John the Baptist Church.

On Sunday 12th November 2023, **Remembrance Day**, the Mayor and Town Councillors, attended the Remembrance Day Service and Parade at The Vine War Memorial. Members of the local cadet forces were present, together with a large contingent of scouts and guides from several local groups.

Many community organisations laid wreaths on the memorial watched by approximately a thousand people who gathered to join in the remembrance service. Also present was Laura Trott MP, HM Deputy Lieutenant of Kent, the Lord Colgrain, Vice Chairman of Sevenoaks

District Council, Kent County Council representative and Sir David Wootton Freeman of Sevenoaks.

The Service was led by The Revd Canon Angus MacLeay of St Nicholas Church assisted by Rev. Angela Rigby representing the free churches in Sevenoaks.

International Women's Day

On 8th March the Mayor hosted an event at the Bat & Ball Centre to mark International Women's Day, an annual global event which aims to celebrate the cultural, political and social achievements of women everywhere. The event, consisting of a lunch and talks from inspirational speakers, was attended by local businesswomen who also sponsored young women from local schools to attend.

Our thanks to the following for their generous sponsorship of this event:

- FM Conway
- Specsavers
- Warners Solicitors

Presentation of Mayoral Painting

In line with Town Council tradition, the Mayor presented a painting to add to the Town Council's Community Art Collection of local scenes by local artists which create a visual social history of Sevenoaks.

The large painting by local artist Lawrence Jenkins is the view from his window when he lived in Bradbourne Vale Road in 1988 depicting the lakes, a Bat & Ball Station train heading to Sevenoaks, the quarry on River Hill, the roof of (at the time new) Sainsburys, the old gas works, and a crow that used to imitate the ring of a mobile phone. Of course, within the painting there are also signs of everyday life from the 80's.

The painting which was also exhibited at the Royal Academy of Arts Summer Exhibition in 1999 is a valuable addition to the Sevenoaks Town Council's Community Art collection.



5. Bat & Ball Centre



Since its reopening in 2021 following extensive refurbishment, the new Bat & Ball Centre has flourished with both regular hirers and bookings for other events. This year we have hosted a wide range of activities including wedding receptions, business conferences, training courses, meetings, support groups, faith groups, birthday and other celebration parties, children's theatre, literary festival events, musical events, fitness groups, and family fun activities. The weekly Tea Dance continues to thrive and this year we saw the addition of monthly Jive and weekly Ceroc dances at the Centre.

We continue to receive positive feedback from hirers:

"A great facility with outside space contained for kids. Parking great. We love this facility and have booked 3 times" (May 2023)

"Booking process was wonderful, facilities great, caretaker assistance perfect, overall impression of building lovely and car parking outstanding" (May 2023)

"The John London Hall is an excellent venue for a party! The lighting, air conditioning, dedicated small kitchen and toilet - perfect. Additionally, the ability to open the doors to the contained outside space is just brilliant - to allow some air and space, but not to let the party disperse. Parking and access is so easy. All absolutely excellent!" 18th (September 2023)

"...The hall itself is spacious, bright and welcoming, all the chairs and tables are clean and in good condition, with all the technology working. Having a large amount of free parking immediately outside the hall is a huge benefit, and in good weather the lovely garden area either provides a great outlook and feel of calm totally away from the nearby busy roads or somewhere to actually go out into." (December 2023)

“5-star rating. Lovely, clean centre with beautiful dance hall. Attractive gardens, plenty of parking and easy access” (January 2024)

Regular hirers continue to attend half-yearly meetings of the Bat & Ball Centre User Group, a forum for users to share their views and, where applicable, make suggestions for improvements.

The Multi Use Games Area (MUGA) has been widely used throughout the year for various sports and sports practice sessions and has also been hired for children’s sports birthday parties.

Harry Garrett Hall



John London Hall



Multi Use Games Area



Rear Garden



For further information on the Centre and other room hire available, please visit our [Room and Hall Hire webpage](#), or contact hallhire@sevenoakstown.gov.uk

6. Bat & Ball Station Building

Following the restoration of the Bat & Ball Station building, Sevenoaks Town Council has developed the building as a community facility with a range of activities for local residents and volunteers, as well as providing a beautiful heritage venue for hire.

Railway Benches



Sadly, due to vandalism, the heritage platform bench at the station needed to be sent off to be restored by specialist carpenters. Alongside this bench, it seemed a great opportunity to get another matching bench in the same Southeastern & Chatham style. In September the benches were secured into their positions on platform 2 at the Station, one replacing a metal modern Southeastern bench.

Our thanks to the Railway Heritage Trust for the £1000 grant for the new bench.

Cycle Friendly Certificate

Bat & Ball Station received another Cycle Friendly Accreditation, reaffirming our commitment to sustainability and being an eco-friendly space. The award means we have secure bike friendly storage nearby, a bike maintenance kit, list of local cycle repair shops, cycle clothing wall hook, and a warm friendly café for cyclists to visit.



Our planter, which is at the entrance of the station, has kindly been planted and maintained by Lynda our local gardener.

The King's Coronation Activity

Prior to the Kings Coronation on the 6th May, we ran a workshop for families to make their own crowns to wear at the Sevenoaks Big Coronation Afternoon Tea celebration. It was a great success with over 30 children arriving and many buying refreshments at the station café during/after. We also had a few regular families attend who have attended other Station events in the past.



Summer Arts & Crafts Workshops

An annual free arts & craft workshop for families in the local area to attend, no booking or tickets required. It was a lively event with over 25 children at each session, making all sorts of train themed crafts: houses and stations, conductor hat, train whistle, lots of trains, and colouring in! Train themed crafts is always a great hit for children under 6 years old! The station café was also busy supplying refreshments throughout the workshop.



Heritage Open Day

We hosted a Heritage Open Day event on the 16th September at the Station, with a blend of activities for families to participate in and an opportunity for anyone to visit the Station. Over the course of the day we had over 300 attendees, a mixture of visitors from the older generation to younger families.

The day was broken down into different parts; a miniature exhibition and activities of Victorian inspired inventions; the telephone, gramophone, camera, and of course a steam engine. We were lucky enough to have Tonbridge Model Engineering Society volunteer their societies loco River Class Tank engine No 800, a Southern loco which was involved in the 1927 derailed crash between Dunton Green Station and Sevenoaks Railway Station, killing 13 and and injuring many more.



Throughout the day Thomas Crampton Tower Museum volunteers Janet and John presented a talk about Railway Engineer Thomas Crampton.

Queen Victoria and Prince Albert also attended, doing walkabouts at the Station and presenting a unique collection of Victorian memorabilia items.

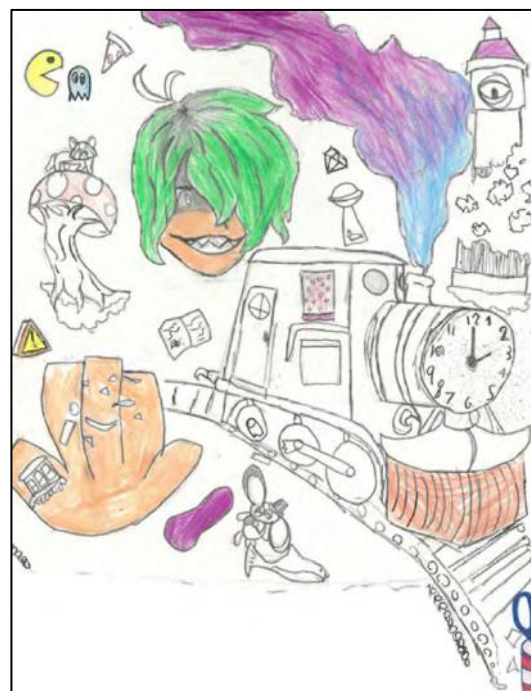
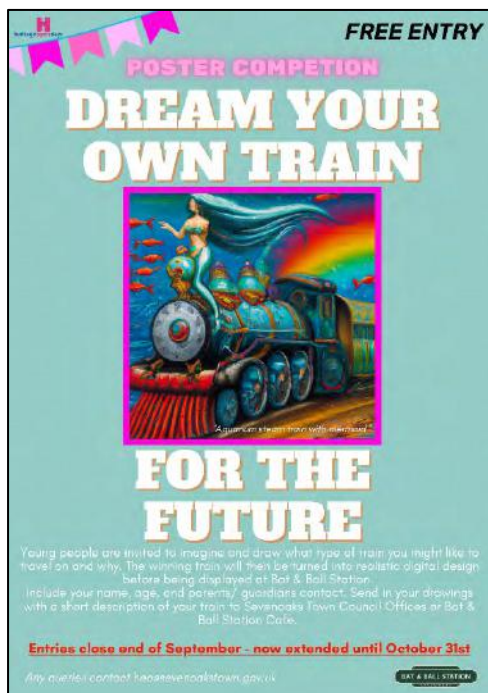
We displayed a collection of the Station's own Victorian clothing dress up.

If that wasn't enough, we also had 2 discovery maps for children and families; trails that enabled visitors to travel around the station and explore the different visual points. We designed a kid-friendly trail, where clues needed to be found, giving children a playful insight into their local history and why stations such as Bat & Ball should be preserved for the future.



Heritage Open Day Poster Competition

As part of the Heritage Open Day we held a poster competition. Young people were invited to imagine and draw what type of train they might like to travel on and why. These trains could be crazy or sensible, up to each individual. A winner will be chosen and turned into a realistic digital design ready for display at Bat & Ball Station.



Darent Valley Community Rail Partnership (DVCRP) & Sevenoaks Camera Club Exhibition

In May the Station hosted a collaborative exhibition with DVCRP and Sevenoaks Camera Club called 'New Views of the Darent Valley'. It was a successful exhibition with higher attendance than at other exhibition sites previously held by the Camera Club.



Darent Valley Community Railway Partnership (DVCRP) Murals

The DVCRP secured funding to create and install murals to highlight the presence of local stations. There are two stations which will be improved by the murals, Sevenoaks Station and Bat & Ball Station, both of which were designed by Ola Sielicka a mural artist from London.



The Bat & Ball Station mural depicts an artist rendition of a Thomas Crampton Locomotive on one side and a Thameslink 700 on the other with the Station logo in the centre.



The Sevenoaks Station mural depicts the short popular journey of travelling from a green and vibrant Sevenoaks Town to London City. Each mural went through a consultation period via an online survey and ballot boxes located in Sevenoaks Town Council buildings; both were well received by the public, with a high percentage in favour.

Work on the Bat & Ball Station mural began in February 2024.

Due to highway regulations, the Sevenoaks Station mural cannot be placed on the roadside bridge but is planned for installation on the brickwork inside the car park.

Friends of Pontoise visit to Bat & Ball Station

We had a wonderful visit from Friends of Pontoise on the 20th May, an association based on the twinning of Pontoise in France and Sevenoaks Town. Formed 59 years ago in 1964, the Friends of Pontoise is an association based in Sevenoaks, Kent, whose membership comes from the town itself and the surrounding villages. During their visit, Friends of Pontoise visited our Station to learn about the renovation work, Thomas Crampton, painter Samuel Palmer, and author of the Railway Children Edith Nesbit. Sarah Newman from Darent Valley Community Rail Partnership presented the Station on our behalf in French, speaking of the importance of the partnership with the local Darent Valley train line and what the history has to offer. The visit went very well, and many left with new knowledge of our Bat & Ball Station.



Following the visit, Friends of Pontoise donated a picture to commemorate the event.

Heritage Talk: St John's- the Past in Pictures

In the Autumn we created a new event called All Aboard Heritage Talks at Bat & Ball Station with the aim to showcase Sevenoaks' rich history and further afield, presented by a selection of historians, authors, and lecturers. Each talk would run on the last Thursday of the month (not every month) in the evenings.

On the 30th November we hosted the first talk by Ed Thompson, local author and historian in Sevenoaks, with a broad collection of published History books detailing the times and changes in and around Sevenoaks. At this evening talk, Ed brought to light the wonderful and nostalgic history of St Johns, remembering the smells of steam engines, small pockets of communities which are no longer there, and even familiar shops which have stood the test of time all through the 20th century.



There was a great turn out of around 25 people, with a few turning up on the day to purchase a ticket. The attendees came from a mixture of backgrounds, including some younger people who had moved to the area and would like to learn more about local history.

Forget-me-not Café

Each month the Station hosts a dementia friendly Forget-me-not café, running every 2nd Wednesday of the month. The Forget-me-not Café is a place where anyone with memory loss, their carers or family may find friendship with likeminded people and also acts as a signpost to more formal help if so desired. Over the year we've had a great selection of speakers from the History of the Station Master, 20th century history of Sevenoaks, Elizabethan dress layers demonstration, and the History of the Stag Theatre. Each session has been supported by our brilliant Forget-me-not café volunteers Hazel, Abby, and Nicola. We've had a mixed turn out, with some sessions more busy than others. For 2024 we've decided to change the date to run on the last Wednesday of the month which will hopefully increase attendance numbers.



Our thanks to Kent County Council for the Cost-of-Living Grant of £840 towards the Dementia Café.

Bat & Ball Station Café Supper Club

At the Café, we hold a Vegan Supper Club run by our Cafe Manager. Supper Clubs are a relatively new way of eating out, sometimes called 'Pop up restaurants' or 'Underground dining', allowing people access into another space that usually wouldn't cater such evenings. They are great for meeting new people, eating different food, and entering spaces that you usually wouldn't get access to or see. During 2023 there were 5 supper clubs, with a minimum of 12 people attending each evening.



Christmas Crafts and Father Christmas Meet and Greet



At the beginning of December, Father Christmas made his special appearance at the Station, bringing all his Christmas cheer and presents for children who visited him at the Station.

The event was free to attend but ticketed to a limited number of 30 children. Children were able to make Santa and elf Christmas tree decorations from loo rolls, a paper wreath, reindeer hats, Christmas cards, and colouring in. Father Christmas greeted the attendees throughout the event, handed out gifts, and received Christmas cards. It was a very successful event, with the support of 3 helpful station volunteers Ben, Edwina, and Mike.

7. Finance

The Town Council approved a budget of £1,954,749 for 2023-24. General reserves brought forward were £459,542 (2022-23 £438,861) and earmarked reserves were £1,112,276 (2022-23 £1,238,778).

The 2023-24 Town Council budget includes income of:

- £1,370,074 from the precept paid for by Sevenoaks domestic ratepayers (council tax).
- £510,433 from fees and charges on facilities and services such as hire of community halls, Business Hub, sports pitches, markets, cemetery, Café on the Vine, rents and leases, and allotments.
- £74,242 from Council reserves (£94,242 to fund Bat & Ball Station Café during initial years of opening, offset by an increase of £20,000 revenue reserves).

The Council does not receive money from central government. As a result, it continues to be creative in the way that it funds and delivers services to the community. Capital projects for new and improved community facilities are funded from capital receipts, earmarked reserves, and grants, where possible. Earmarked reserves brought forward included £572,424.88 capital receipts and £209,821 Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL), income received for specific activities and projects. This money goes towards the funding of approved capital projects including the refurbishment of the skate park at Greatness Recreation Ground, batteries for the solar panels at The Stag Theatre and a tractor mounted disc seeder to help the grounds team to look after the open spaces.

The Council's income streams are positive, and the Bat & Ball Centre, markets and Business Hub are seeing a growing customer base.

Inflation is impacting on the cost of services and café income; however, we do not anticipate the Council's finances to be in a deficit position at the end of the financial year. It has also been agreed to offer a concession for the Bat & Ball Station Café and The Vine Café.

At the Council meeting held on 15th January 2024, Council approved a budget of £1,907,304 for 2024-2025. This will be funded by fees and charges of £428,800 (23%), a precept levy of £1,437,614 (75%), and transfer from reserves of £40,890 (2%) (£40,890 to fund Bat & Ball Station Café during initial years of opening.). For an average Band D house in Sevenoaks, the precept equates to £145.33 per year or £2.79 per week (an increase of £6.16 per year or 11p per week on 2023-24).

8. Sevenoaks Town Council's Grants to Voluntary Organisations

Sevenoaks Town Council continues to provide grants to local groups, who are invited to submit applications in August and January for consideration. The Council is also a major sponsor of the Stag Community Arts Centre and Sevenoaks Summer Festival.

In considering its budget for 2024 / 2025, the Town Council wanted to ensure that voluntary groups and organisations within the town, which provide such valuable services, were still able to access grant funding and to increase the budget for this.

At the same time the Town Council wants to continue to deliver services and retain and increase its General Reserves which are vital when needed to support the local community. Many local organisations benefitted from this during Covid.

The Town Council's Grant Budget for 2024/2025 includes the following:

- £15,000 Grants for Local Organisations (increase of 25%)
- £8,000 Youth Grants (increase of 105%)
- £500 Youth Council
- £5,000 Sevenoaks Summer Festival
- £4,000 Greensands Common (new grant)
- £3,000 Darent Valley CRP
- £15,000 West Kent Community – Youth Projects (new grant)
- £27,000 Stag Community Arts Centre

Groups which have benefited from the Town Council Grants during the year 2023-24 include:			
Sevenoaks Volunteer Transport Group	£750	Sevenoaks PHAB	£450
West Kent Mediation	£800	The Children's Workshop	£540
Friends of Pontoise	£350	Sevenoaks Counselling	£2000
Sevenoaks Three Arts Festival	£600	Hi Kent	£1000
Sevenoaks Literary Festival	£500	Baby Umbrella	£2600
South East Open Studios	£250	STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics), Repair Workshops for HOUSE in the Basement	£375
Art in June Open Studios	£250	Sevenoaks Three Arts Festival, Young Musician of the Year	£600
Kent Youth Jazz Orchestra	£500	Sevenoaks Scouts- Litter Pickers	£250
Youth Resilience UK	£1,600	Sevenoaks Scouts – Room Hire	£1,335

Application forms and guidance notes can be found on the Town Council's [Grant Information webpage](#), with completed forms to be sent to council@sevenoakstown.gov.uk

9. Council Meetings

Most Council and Committee meetings take place on Monday evenings, occasionally on other days, and are listed on the Town Council's [Committees and Meetings webpage](#).

Agendas for meetings are available to view on the website from the Tuesday prior to the meeting. Members of the public wishing to address a committee should notify the Town Council by 12 noon on the day of the meeting.

The Town Council continues to livestream its Council and Committee meetings on [YouTube](#): recordings are retained until the minutes are adopted at the next full Town Council meeting.

The following meetings took place during 2023-24:

Date	Committee	Date	Committee
02.05.23	Planning	30.10.23	Personnel
15.05.23	Annual Town Council	06.11.23	Planning
22.05.23	Planning	08.11.23	Youth Council
05.06.23	Planning	08.11.23	Youth Services
12.06.23	Finance & General Purposes	13.11.23	Open Spaces & Leisure
12.06.23	Town Council	20.11.23	Planning
19.06.23	Planning	27.11.23	Town Council
21.06.23	Sevenoaks Town Team	27.11.23	Finance & General Purposes
26.06.23	Community Infrastructure	04.12.23	Planning
28.06.23	Youth Council	06.12.23	Sevenoaks Town Team
28.06.23	Youth Services	11.12.23	Town Council
03.07.23	Planning	18.12.23	Planning
10.07.23	Open Spaces & Leisure	08.01.24	Planning
17.07.23	Planning	15.01.24	Finance & General Purposes
24.07.23	Town Council	15.01.24	Town Council
24.07.23	Finance & General Purposes	17.01.24	Youth Council
31.07.23	Planning	22.01.24	Planning
02.08.23	Sevenoaks Town Team	24.01.24	Youth Services
14.08.23	Planning	05.01.24	Planning
29.08.23	Planning	12.01.24	Open Spaces & Leisure
06.09.23	Youth Services	19.01.24	Planning
11.09.23	Planning	21.02.24	Sevenoaks Town Team
13.09.23	Youth Council	26.02.24	Town Council
18.09.23	Open Spaces & Leisure	26.02.24	Finance & General Purposes
25.09.23	Planning	04.03.24	Planning
02.10.23	Town Council	06.03.24	Bat & Ball Centre Users Group
02.10.23	Finance & General Purposes	11.03.24	Annual Town Public Meeting
09.10.23	Planning	18.03.24	Planning
11.10.23	Sevenoaks Town Team	20.03.24	Youth Services
18.10.23	Bat & Ball Centre Users Group	20.03.24	Youth Council
23.10.23	Planning	25.03.24	Personnel
30.10.23	Community Infrastructure		

10. Sevenoaks Business Hub



The Hub provides five private, lockable, office pods which means that hirers can operate as if they have their own premises, always leaving their IT and business papers etc. on site.

In the open plan area, there are 13 hot desks, which, as the name implies, means that hirers leave a clear desk each evening.

The facilities include:

- A meeting room for up to eight people
- High speed internet access
- Showers
- Kitchen/café area
- Informal lounge
- Free parking and an EV charger

Booking is extremely flexible with options from just half a day to a full month, and all bookings are renewable.

The office pods continue to be very popular. Whenever one becomes vacant then it is usually a matter of just a few days before it is re-let.

There is still plenty of scope to build on the hot desk business.

During 2023 the Town Team inaugurated joint marketing of the Sevenoaks Co-working businesses to include Lime Tree Workshop and Help Suites. This has resulted in posters being installed in the Town Council noticeboards, representation at the Sevenoaks Business Show and a joint interview on Biz Radio.



For further information, hire rates and to make a booking online, visit the [Business Hub webpage](#) on the Town Council website.

11. Open Spaces

The Open Spaces & Leisure Committee is responsible for maintaining a diverse portfolio of open spaces and facilities, including public open spaces such as Greatness Recreation Ground, Vine Gardens and Sevenoaks Common; play areas at Pontoise Close, Hillingdon Rise, and Mount Close; rugby and cricket pitches at Knole Paddock and Raleys Field; the War Memorial; Greatness Cemetery; Allotments; Sevenoaks Markets; and public toilets at Vine Gardens, St Johns Hill and Greatness. More details available on the [Services webpage](#) of the Town Council's website.

The Vine

Vine Gardens continues to host a range of events making in the heart of the Town. This year we hosted the first Sevenoaks Climate Fair, bringing together parties interested in a sustainable future for our town and planet; an example of the exhibitors was a repair workshop for small electricals and electronics such as games consoles.

We also hosted two vegan Markets, the Lions' Beer Festival, a children's theatre show, Sevenoaks Sings Community Choir, the annual art display on the Railings by Sevenoaks Art Club and our usual programme of free music on the Bandstand during the Summer. A very well-attended tidy up day was held on the Vine as part of our preparations for Sevenoaks In Bloom.

Raleys Field and Knole Paddock

The Town Council was delighted to receive confirmation of a grant from the Football Foundation under its 'Grass Roots' project which is aimed at improving football facilities at the lower club level. This will be spent on materials and external labour or the hire of machinery, enabling the Town Council to purchase more grass seed or fertiliser as needed, or pay for additional aeration by an external contractor, weed kill or apply top dressings or sand. The Grant scheme runs for 6 years which should mean that a steady improvement can be made to the facilities benefiting all sports played.

Our thanks to the Football Foundation for its Grass Roots grant award over 6 years, up to £3,200 in the first two years tapering down to £1,600 in years 5-6.

We are pleased to have this opportunity to improve the facility particularly as we now have a second football team playing regular matches with us at the weekend. Cricket use has also increased steadily with four clubs using the facilities regularly in the summer, this includes occasional 20/20 tournaments and a women/girls team tournament.

Sevenoaks Common

We continue to maintain the Common and where possible to enhance the walking opportunities across it. The opportunity has arisen to extend this by linking Longspring Woods via footpaths, increasing walking opportunities in the area without crossing the highway.

Longspring Woods

Sevenoaks Town Council is currently in the process of purchasing Longspring Woods, located in Kippington Ward where Oak Lane meets Fig Street (see map below).



This site comprises 14 acres of ancient woodland over 400 years old, the majority of which is also identified as a Biodiversity Opportunity Area – meaning that these woods present one of the best opportunities for enhancing biodiversity to provide the greatest possible benefit.

The decision to purchase the woodland was made by the Town Council on 26th February 2024, following a hugely successful pledge campaign that saw £102,975 pledged by members of the public, in addition to £100,000 from the Town Council's Earmarked Reserves from historic disposal of public green space.

The purpose of its purchase is to protect this important asset and enable community use for generations to come, supporting the retention of local wildlife and biodiversity and helping mitigate the effects of climate change.

Next steps for the site include adding it to the Town Council's Woodland Management Plan, and improving access by opening the site up to the public, enhancing the existing Public Rights of Way and creating links between Longspring Woods and Sevenoaks Common.

For more information please consult the [Feasibility Study](#) prepared for the purchase of Longspring Woods.

Greatness Recreation Ground Improvements

From 8th August 2023 to 29th September 2023, Sevenoaks Town Council ran a consultation seeking public views on the following potential improvements to Greatness Recreation Ground:

- New Football Pavilion, as proposed by Sevenoaks Town Football Club (STFC – see next section for more information)
- Subsequent re-use of the existing Pavilion for the local community – with opinions sought on what this use should be
- Refreshment of the play area – with opinions sought on what equipment would be desirable, as well as potential change of location

A Working Group comprising Town Councillors and local stakeholders will analyse the results of the survey, and to make recommendation to a future meeting of the Open Spaces & Leisure Committee on next steps.

If you are part of a local relevant organisation with a material interest in the proposals for Greatness Recreation Ground, and you would like to be included in the Working Group, please contact osl@sevenoakstown.gov.uk.

Sevenoaks Town Football Club – New Football Pavilion

In September 2021, the Sevenoaks Town Football Club applied for and was granted planning permission to construct a new Football Pavilion at Greatness Recreation Ground. The proposed works include new covered stands, a club house and changing room facilities, as well as various landscaping works including car parking facilities and a new cycle/pedestrian path. It will also free up the existing Pavilion for community use, as per the above section.

Sevenoaks Town Council has committed £87,500 Grant funding towards the proposed project, to be taken from its Community Infrastructure Levy* (CIL) Fund. This is match-funding provided in addition to the £787,500 CIL Fund granted by Sevenoaks District Council's CIL Board in December 2023, which brings the project's total current funding to £1 million. Work is expected to commence before September 2024.

Further information on the proposed works can be found on the [District Council's Planning Portal](#).

*CIL is a levy paid by developers to the **District Council**, on new developments. Sevenoaks Town Council receives 25% of all CIL paid on new developments within Sevenoaks Town, which must be used to fund community infrastructure projects that will benefit the local community and support the new development. For more information on CIL visit the [Community Infrastructure Levy webpage](#) on the District Council's website.

The Town Council has the ability to bid for infrastructure projects from the CIL balance held by SDC.

Greatness Recreation Ground Skatepark

A significant refurbishment of the Skate Park at Greatness took place during October 2023. A re-launch event was held during the half term holiday with skateboarding workshops hosted by top county professionals, competitions for different age groups, and live skateboard and BMX demonstrations. It was well attended with approximately 200 young people engaging throughout the day.



Tree Planting

Sevenoaks Town Council has a policy to plant trees throughout the town and to include fruit and nut trees where possible.

It also operates an Adopt a Tree programme which encourages people to consider the purchase or adoption of a tree as a gift for a significant occasion or as a memorial for a loved one. For more information, please see our [Adopt a Tree Scheme webpage](#).

Examples of trees planted include a Rowan at Pontoise Close, A Cherry in the Vine Gardens and a Crab apple on the Vine Waste.



In December, the Mayor planted an Oak tree (*Quercus Robur*) in Greatness Recreation Ground to commence the replacement of trees lost in a fire earlier in the year.

Sevenoaks Society Donation of Trees

Following a generous donation by the Sevenoaks Society, further planting of native trees will be placed at Greatness Recreation Ground, on the bank adjoining Mill Lane and the playground.

Our thanks to the Sevenoaks Society for its donation of £300 for tree planting.

Tree Health and Safety

The year saw an increase in dangerous amounts of dead wood and dead/dying trees which needed to be attended to, some of which were of a size and complexity that tree surgeons were employed to carry out the task.

**If you go down to the woods today,
You are sure to see a nice surprise.....**



In February, the Open Spaces Team repaired the steps on the path from Brittain's Lane to The Middlings and installed a new post and rope handrail to help negotiate the sometimes-slippery path. They also installed a new post and rope handrail at Millpond Wood. Positive feedback from residents included:

"I would like to say a big "thank you" to you for making our steps down into Middlings Wood safer and for providing a new handrail. It is a great asset for those of us less able bodied."

Lower St John's Toilets Refurbishment

Providing and maintaining public toilets is an ongoing challenge, but the Town Council is committed to providing the best facilities it can for the local community.

In February the lower St John's Toilets were completely refurbished. The previous arrangement of male, female and disabled toilets was modified to provide two unisex cubicles with easy access to one for disabled people, along with baby changing facilities in both. The aim was to provide a safe clean welcoming environment for all users.

Rheinbach Gardens

In October, a small group of local residents joined Cllr Granville in planting the garden borders at Rheinbach Gardens with drought-tolerant herbaceous plants, shrubs and bulbs.



Greatness Cemetery



Greatness Cemetery continues to provide a popular and peaceful refuge for the bereaved of all faiths and denominations.

The site has a fine collection of mature trees from the old parkland estate and the Grade II listed Kraftmeier Mausoleum.

Cemetery Chapel

Improvements were made to the Cemetery Chapel this year to help enhance the experience for visitors. Artificial silk flowers were purchased for the vases which stand either side of the dais; two interpretation boards have been installed in the foyer of the chapel to help explain the unique features of the park; and two monitors placed, one either side of the dais steps, to allow the showing of still and video images during a service.



Allotments

Sevenoaks Town is home to two allotment sites which are managed by Sevenoaks Town Council: Bradbourne Vale and Quakers Hall. Both sites offer plots of varying sizes, Bradbourne Vale allotments have about 35 plots whereas Quakers Hall allotments are considerably larger and offer 7 times more plots at a whopping total of 250.



The standard plot size is designed to feed a family of 4 which has been noted to be 250 square metres, however this has changed throughout the years and a plot can now be of

any size; plots of nearly 400 or as little as 40 square metres are currently let to our tenants at our Quakers Hall site; there's something for everyone!

The Bradbourne Vale site is currently full, with a short waiting list, and because the site is so small, plots don't often come up for rent. Whilst the Quaker's Hall site also has a waiting list, the waiting time is significantly shorter, and some tenants have been able to find their perfect plot in as little 2 months.

The Sevenoaks Allotment Holder's Association is the heart of the Quakers Hall Allotments with the trading centre being a longstanding hub for cooperation and friendly advice. The community has enjoyed and continues to participate in numerous events such as the monthly 'Mug and Muffin' and yearly 'Apple Pressing Sunday'.

Due to the increasing challenges facing us from climate change and inflation, having an allotment can play a significant role in the fight to preserve our environment and allows us to become more cost-effective. Being in the outdoors is also vital for our mental health; it can be a source of solace in times of stress - so the benefits don't stop!

If you or anyone you know is interested in taking on an allotment, please contact the Allotments Officer at allotments@sevenoakstown.gov.uk
Happy Gardening!

Play Provision

Each year Sevenoaks Town Council hosts free summer play activities at a variety of locations around the town during the August school holidays.

Family Fun Day (Funded by Sevenoaks District Council)

As part of the District Council's summer play provision, the Town Council hosted a Family Fun Day at Greatness Recreation Ground in August. Additional activities funded by the Town Council were a drummer and a magician.

Children's Theatre Shows

We were pleased to provide our popular free children's theatre shows again during August at the following venues: Greatness Recreation Ground, Pontoise Play Area, Vine Gardens and Bat & Ball Centre. This year's production was Goldilocks & Friends. All shows were well attended.



South & South East In Bloom Awards 2023

SEVENOAKS WINS GOLD!

Sevenoaks celebrated winning Gold Awards for this year's South & South East in Bloom Competition for the Town Centre, The Vine and Upper High Street Gardens.

HOUSE in the Basement Youth Café also won the accolade of 'Thriving' with It's Your Neighbourhood entry.

In Bloom is a great opportunity for volunteers to have an impact on the town: if you would like to help and support as part of the In Bloom team please contact Ann White at Sevenoaks Town Council for details of how to get involved – dtc@sevenoakstown.gov.uk



Vine Green Flag Award



In 2023, The Vine was re-accredited its Green Flag status, the international quality mark for parks and green spaces. The Vine is among 2,127 parks and green spaces in the UK that have received a prestigious Green Flag in 2023.

Roadside Advertising and Highway Banners

The Town Council enables local community organisations to advertise via a highway banner or roadside boards, subject to terms and conditions, for a maximum period of two weeks. This restriction enables more local community members to advertise their events during the year. For more information contact: council@sevenoakstown.gov.uk

12. Sevenoaks Markets

Sevenoaks Town Council manages the following Sevenoaks Markets:

- Wednesday Market next to the Bus Station 8am to 2pm
- Saturday High Street Market 9am to 4pm
- Saturday Bligh's Market 9am to 4pm
- Bligh's Christmas Market 9am to 4pm (every day for the two weeks prior to Christmas)

The Town Council is committed to maintaining and developing the markets in Sevenoaks Town, reflecting its Market Town status.

In March 2022 the Council renewed its 5-year licence to operate the Saturday Bligh's Market; and in April 2023 the Town Council was successful in its tenders to Sevenoaks District Council to continue to operate the Wednesday and Saturday Markets in Sevenoaks Town.

Residents continue to show enthusiastic support and appreciation for our local traders who bring a range of high-quality goods to the town. This year the Mayor was delighted to make presentations to long standing market traders as an appreciation of their dedication and importance to the community of the town.



Billy Westley has been trading fruit and vegetables at Sevenoaks Market for 40 years

John & Alice Woods run a flower stall. John has been a market trader in Sevenoaks for 50 years.



13. Community Events

Christmas Lights Switch On



The Town Council was pleased to hold its traditional Christmas Lights Switch On event on 24th November, ushering in the festive season in Sevenoaks. Despite the cold weather, thousands of residents attended enjoying the live entertainment, fairground, Father Christmas Grotto, stalls, food and drink and, of course, the highlight of the evening, the switching on of the Town's lights by the Mayor and the Panto Cast!



Our thanks to the following sponsors for their generous contributions:

- Manak Solicitors
- Specsavers
- Bligh's Meadow

Thanks also to the following for donations towards the Christmas Lights:

- Oaks Flooring
- Cote Sevenoaks
- Chic et Tralala

Second Design a Christmas Light Competition

Following the success of last year's Design a Christmas Light Competition, Sevenoaks Town Council again invited children under the age of 11 to submit their designs for a new Christmas Light for Sevenoaks Town Centre. There was a great response, and the Town Council would like to thank all the children who took the time to send us their fantastic artwork.



Congratulations go to this year's 6-year-old winner, for her wonderful Christmas Angel which has been turned into a fantastic Christmas Light.

The light was installed at The Stag Theatre, and the winner and her family attended a switch on ceremony with the Mayor, Councillor Claire Shea, and Andrew Eyre, Chief Executive of The Stag.

14. No.8 Bus

In September 2020 KCC agreed to provide two years' funding and operate the No 8 bus. The purchase of an electric No 8 bus is within the Town Council's Number 1 Priority of addressing climate change. The Town Council has campaigned for the continuation of this and other bus services. In November 2023 the Town Council submitted a bid for funding to the District Council's Community Infrastructure Levy Board for the purchase of an electric bus. The bid wasn't successful however the Town Council was invited to re-apply with some modifications to its application.

15. Town Twinning

Sevenoaks is twinned with Pontoise in France and Rheinbach in Germany. The Town Council continues to support both town twinning associations. The Friends of Pontoise and the Friends of Rheinbach promote cultural understanding and exchange visits, and welcome new members. For more information, please visit their websites:

www.friends-of-rheinbach.org.uk

www.friendsofpontoise.com

16. Youth Provision



The Youth Services Committee oversees the management and development of the HOUSE in the Basement Youth Café (known as HitB). It is a safe space for young people to relax, meet with their friends, make new friends, get

information and advice and support with homework, and take part in a range of activities including music, art projects, chess, pool, board games and video games. Low-cost hot meals are available.

The Youth Café is open: Tuesday 5.00 - 8.00pm (SEN Club); Wednesday & Friday 4.00 – 8.00pm; Saturday 2.00 – 8.00pm.

Our thanks to Kent County Council for the Cost-of-Living Grant of £1,160 towards the staff costs for the SEN evenings.

The manager, Daren Mountain, is supported by casual staff and volunteers from Sevenoaks Area Youth Trust.

During the last year HitB has seen a steady increase in attendees. The youth workers have undertaken out-reach work to local schools and detached work at events such as the Coronation celebrations, and Christmas Light Switch On.

Over the course of the year a range of events, activities and trips were held, including:

- In April 2023, House in the Basement celebrated its **10th anniversary**, having seen over 1700 young people come through its doors since opening in 2012.
- With funding from the Youth Services Committee, **Repair Workshops** provided by Team Repair were held, with young people repairing retro games consoles.
- 40 young people took part in a **visit to Broadstairs** during the summer holidays.
- Working with West Kent Housing Youth Services, House in the Basement held a **Halloween Silent Disco** at the Bat & Ball Centre.
- Following the refurbishment of the **Skate Park** at Greatness Recreation Ground by the Town Council, a **re-opening event** was held, provided by Kings Ramps with pro-skaters and BMX riders demonstrating their skill. The event was also an opportunity for an outing for HiTB's amazing inflatable dart board!
- A number of amazing meals through the year, including a **Christmas Party**, with food being provided by Perfect Cuisine.





The Youth Café is also available for hire.
For further information contact: hallhire@sevenoakstown.gov.uk
Or check out the [House in the Basement website](#).

Youth Mentoring Project

In the 2023 HitB continued to work with Sevenoaks District Council on the Young Mentor Project. The project was awarded Youth Group of the Year by Sevenoaks District Council and was given a Certificate of Excellence by the iese.



Grant to West Kent Youth Services

Following Kent County Council's decision to stop funding voluntary sector youth services across Kent districts, the Town Council agreed to provide a contribution of £15,000 for the West Kent Housing, Sevenoaks District Detached Youth Work Project for 2024-2025, to enable West Kent Housing to maintain the detached youth service in Sevenoaks District during 2024/25.

The funding was approved for one year, to enable West Kent Housing to continue to provide the service whilst developing a funding plan for a long-term project starting in April 2025.

The Chair of the Youth Services Committee commented:

"The timing of KCC's decision to withdraw funding for all external youth services placed West Kent Housing's detached youth worker position under threat. Their street-based service has been key in managing anti-social behaviour in Sevenoaks over the summer months. Sevenoaks Town Council took the decision to provide interim funding alongside other partners to ensure a continued service whilst WKHA source more long-term funding options."

Sevenoaks Youth Council

Sevenoaks Youth Council meetings are held approximately every six weeks in either the Town Council Offices or the HOUSE in the Basement Youth Café. Since its inception in 2009, the Youth Council has been a valuable forum for initiating and developing ideas and events and raising awareness of issues of concern for young people in Sevenoaks. All young people aged 11 to 18 who live or attend school in Sevenoaks are welcome to attend. Meetings are held at 6pm on Wednesdays.



Elections for the current Youth Council were held in Autumn 2023. 18 young people were elected for the two-year term of office, 2023-2025, representing the following schools: Cobham School, Knole Academy, Radnor House, Sevenoaks School, Solefield School, Tunbridge Wells Boys Grammar School, Trinity School, Walthamstow Hall, Weald of Kent, Whitgift, and Judd School.

The new Youth Council held a workshop to share ideas and identify the priorities for their term of office; these included environmental concerns, mental health and wellbeing and community.

Being a Youth Councillor is an opportunity to gain an insight into local democracy, to provide a voice for young people in our town, to work together and make a real contribution to your local community. If you are interested in joining please visit our [Sevenoaks Youth Council website](#), or contact: council@sevenoakstown.gov.uk

17. Planning

Planning Committee

Sevenoaks Town Council is a Statutory Consultee to the Local Planning Authority, Sevenoaks District Council, on planning applications received within Sevenoaks Town area. As such, it is consulted for its **recommendation** on most types of planning applications, which primarily consist of Full, Householder and Listed Building Consent. The Planning Committee's recommendations help to inform the District Council's decision on whether to approve or refuse a planning application by adding a local perspective.

The Planning Committee meets every two weeks to discuss planning applications submitted within the Sevenoaks town area, and a wide array of associated planning matters.

The Committee actively seeks to maintain and enhance the positive features of Sevenoaks town, while promoting sustainable growth to help maintain the long-term economic and social stability of the town.

Meetings are open to the public, who are able to register to speak on either an item or planning application on the Agenda, or on any other related planning matter.

Planning Committees are held primarily at the Town Council Chambers, although the Bat & Ball Centre may be used as an alternative for meetings when a larger number of public is expected to attend. The venue will always be announced on the Planning Committee Agenda, which is published on the Tuesday preceding each meeting.

Meetings are live-streamed and uploaded onto YouTube, where they remain available for public to watch until the Minutes of that meeting have been ratified by the next meeting of the Town Council. This audio-visual feature also allows for hybrid meetings so Committee members or registered speakers and/or presenters may attend virtually. Members of the Committee attending via Zoom may take part in discussions but are not permitted to vote on matters under consideration, as they do not legally constitute as being 'present' at the meeting.

Planning Applications

During 2023/2024 the Town Council will have commented on circa 400 planning applications submitted within the Sevenoaks Town Council area. It has supported Sevenoaks District Council in its refusal of applications via a number of virtual and in-person representations at Development Management Committee.

Sevenoaks Town Neighbourhood Plan (STNP)

The Sevenoaks Town Neighbourhood Plan went to Referendum on 4th May 2023 – the date of which was decided in order to coincide with the 2023 District and Parish elections, with the hope that it would encourage a larger number of people to engage with the document and respond to the Referendum. The turnout did indeed end up being slightly higher than the last reported average (2019) of 32%, with **38% of Sevenoaks Town’s electorate having voted, and 4,294 votes having been received in its favour.** Full breakdown of the results can be viewed below:

	Number of Votes	Percentage
Number of votes cast for 'No'	1,292	22.0%
Number of votes cast for 'Yes'	4,294	73.1%

The number of ballot papers rejected was as follows:		Number of ballot papers
A	want of an official mark	0
B	voting for more answers than the voter was entitled to	13
C	writing or mark by which voter could be identified	1
D	being unmarked or wholly void for uncertainty	271
Total		285

Electorate: 15,185 Ballot Papers Issued: 5,871 Turnout: 38.66%

The Plan was subsequently adopted, or “made” by the Local Planning Authority (Sevenoaks District Council) and now forms part of the local development framework. It has since been used by District Council Planning Officers to decide over 160 plans, supporting over 150 approval of planning permissions and over 10 refusals. It has also helped Planning Inspectors to decide the outcome of various local appeals, adding weight to the local development framework.

The Town Council has set up a Monitoring and Implementation Working Group to oversee the successful application of policies against local development proposals, as well as to review and make recommendations on future projects as supported or committed to by the STNP. Membership is fluid and open to any local business or organisation within Sevenoaks Town who wish to be represented and have a say in future projects to improve Sevenoaks.

The STNP will be kept up to date via a Review, to take place 5 years from the date of its adoption (23rd May 2023). This will be fed into by Annual Reports, which will track how the STNP has been applied throughout the year. The first of these is due to be published in May 2024, following its approval by the Monitoring and Implementation Group on 7th May 2024, and the Planning Committee on 20th May 2024.

Further information, as well as Agendas and Minutes of the Monitoring and Implementation Group can be found via [Working Group’s webpage](#).

Proposed 20MPH Speed Limits in Sevenoaks Town

On 30th September 2022, Kent County Council (KCC) launched a consultation on proposed 20mph speed limits within Sevenoaks Town. This had been preceded by the receipt of five petitions from the public to KCC and Sevenoaks District Council (SDC), requesting various 20mph speed zones and thus providing sufficient evidence of a local desire for speed reductions.

The results of KCC's consultation were received by SDC's Joint Transportation Board (JTB) in December 2022, who decided that, due to the mix of responses, the proposals should be amended by a Working Group and reconsulted on.

A Working Group was formed, consisting of Joint Transportation Board members (on which Sevenoaks Town Council did not have a representative), and Kent County Council Officers. The plans were amended as per feedback received from the initial public consultation, with roads which received high support being retained, and those strongly opposed being eliminated.

Having recently progressed the STNP, which supports 20mph zones near schools and some residential areas, as well as being the proposed financier of the scheme, Sevenoaks Town Council felt it was best suited to conduct this second consultation as required by the JTB. A special edition of the Town Crier was produced and sent to all residences within Sevenoaks Town, containing an Information Pack and survey. The consultation ran between 1st November 2023 – 14th December 2023, with over 2500 responses having been received.

The results of the consultation have been provided to KCC and the Sevenoaks JTB for their consideration.

Although the current key promoter, as well as proposed financier of the scheme, Sevenoaks Town Council is not the decision-maker and does not have an input on whether it be approved, rejected or amended. This authority belongs to the JTB and KCC, via the legal process entered into by the creation of a Traffic Regulation Order, as part of the initial public consultation. The results of STC's second consultation are due to be considered by the JTB on 20th March 2024, and a decision expected forthwith. Details of the meeting can be found via the [Sevenoaks JTB webpage](#) on the District Council's website.

Sports Strategy Review

In 2015, Sevenoaks Town Council published its Sevenoaks Town Sports Strategy, which was created as part of the evidence base for the STNP and made recommendations on key projects to improve sports provision within Sevenoaks Town. This document has since resulted in over £1.2 million being invested into sports provision for the Town, with most of the priority projects having since been delivered.

STC is now looking to create a second Sevenoaks Town Sports Strategy, to update and build upon the previous one. A Working Group has been set up to facilitate this process, with representatives of local sporting organisations and businesses being invited to be involved. Membership is fluid and new representatives may join at any to input into the second Sports Strategy.

On 22nd January 2024, STC launched a survey to audit existing facilities as well as future need for local sports provision. Results of this will be presented to the Sevenoaks Town Sports Strategy (STSS) Working Group, when next steps shall be agreed.

Further information, as well as Agendas and Minutes of Sevenoaks Town Sports Strategy Group can be found on the [Working Group's webpage](#).

Highway Improvement Plan

Kent County Council's Highway Improvement Plan process provides local town and parish councils the opportunity to list and receive support in progressing their top priorities for highway improvements. STC is optimistic that it will be able to deliver, alongside KCC and with support from KCC Cllr Richard Streatfeild, a number of its smaller priorities throughout the next financial year. Its most significant and top priority will be subject to the decision of the JTB, as this relates to 20mph speed limits.

Copy of the most recent version of STC's Highway Improvement Plan is available to view via the link at the bottom of the [Planning Committee's webpage](#), with any updated versions to be uploaded underneath.

Speed Indicator Device

In February 2023, Sevenoaks Town Council invested in a Speed Indicator Device (SID) to be installed and periodically moved between the below three locations within Sevenoaks Town. The purpose of this device is to reinforce the 30mph speed limit in roads near schools which had been identified by the previous term's (2019-2023) Town Councillors as being especially prone to speeding:

- Bradbourne Vale Road near the entrance to the riding school (facing West)
- St Johns Hill near the Church (bidirectional)
- Brittain's Lane near Beaconfields (bidirectional)

The equipment remains in each of its five allocated positions for 8 weeks each before being moved to the next location. This is in order to comply with traffic sign regulations, with the added benefit that it limits the effects of "sign blindness". Also known as "inattentive blindness", this can occur when a driver sees the same traffic signs every day, and therefore stops being as aware of and adhering to them.

The following schedule for when and where the SID will be located is outlined below, and will be reviewed again in February 2025:

Bradbourne Vale Road facing WEST (affecting East-bound traffic)	22 nd November 2023 – 17 th January 2024
St Johns Hill near Holly Bush Lane NORTH (affecting South-bound traffic)	17 th January 2024 – 13 th March 2024
St Johns Hill near Holly Bush Lane SOUTH (affecting North-bound traffic)	13 th March 2024 – 8 th May 2024

Brittains Lane by Beaconfields facing NORTH (affecting South-bound traffic)	8 th May 2024 – 3 rd July 2024
Brittains Lane by Beaconfields facing SOUTH (affecting North-bound traffic)	3 rd July 2024 – 28 th August 2024
Bradbourne Vale Road facing WEST (affecting East-bound traffic)	28 th August 2024 – 23 rd October 2024
St Johns Hill near Holly Bush Lane NORTH (affecting South-bound traffic)	23 rd October 2024 – 18 th December 2024
St Johns Hill near Holly Bush Lane SOUTH (affecting North-bound traffic)	18 th December 2024 – 12 th February 2025

18. Sevenoaks Town Team



Established in 2011, Sevenoaks Town Team is a Sevenoaks Town Council initiative bringing together a wide range of people

from the local community to establish Sevenoaks as a prosperous and vibrant place to visit, shop, and do business. Cllr Tony Clayton is Chair, and Maxine Morgans of Specsavers is Vice Chair.

Contact townteam@sevenoakstown.gov.uk for further information and details of events.

Town Team Projects in 2023

High Street Safaris

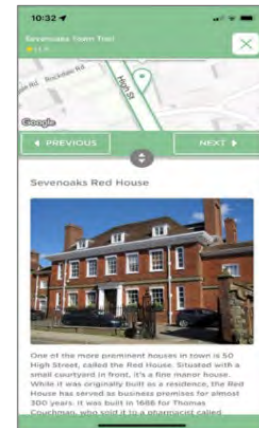


These interactive digital trails are provided for families to have fun, and at the same time encourage pedestrians into the town centre to visit town centre shops and leisure facilities. Two trails were held this year, one for the Coronation and the second for Christmas. Interest in the trails is growing steadily with a good number of businesses offering to host the trail vinyls and increasing numbers of people taking part – 300 at Christmas 2023.

Sevenoaks Town Trail

In 2021 Sevenoaks launched a self-guided walking trail taking in 23 historic sites and buildings, mostly in the town centre.

The trail is on the TrailTale app which is a free to use attraction.



Sevenoaks Business Awards

Sevenoaks hosts an annual Business Awards celebration at the Bat & Ball Centre. It is the centrepiece of the business year in the town, and well supported by both sponsors and competing businesses.

In 2023 the event reached new heights with 28 businesses entering and 22 featuring in the “Customer Choice” category. The Awards event was sold out with 120 guests attending. Barry Dennis of The Anchor pub won the award for a significant contribution to the economy and life in Sevenoaks.



Public Realm Improvements

During 2022 a major scheme was undertaken to refresh the public realm in the town centre. This included painting 80 lamp posts, 55 bollards, belisha beacons and some of the waste bins.

During 2023 the highway railings at Seal Hollow Road/High Street were painted and in 2024 the railings at Pembroke Road/London Road will be done.



In 2023 a secondary scheme was undertaken to similarly treat the street furniture in St John's Hill, Wickenden Road and St James Road.

We were very grateful to receive Levelling Up funding for:

- Bollards for St John's Hill pavement
- Painting of lampposts, Belisha beacons and bollards in St John's Hill and the Hollybush end of Dartford Road

Sevenoaks Business Show

This is another annual event which is held at the Bat & Ball Centre. Around 30 businesses take part and the majority plan to return in 2024. For the third time, Clive Emson Auctioneers were the main sponsor.



Our thanks to the following sponsors for their generous contributions:

- Clive Emson Auctioneers
- Sevenoaks District Council
- Thackray Williams
- FM Conway

Vegan Markets



In addition to Sevenoaks' three traditional town centre weekly markets, Vegan markets have been introduced. Each event attracts about 30 stalls. They are held in Vine Gardens, which provides the opportunity for live music to be played on the bandstand. These markets are held on the first Saturday of April and October.

Best Dressed Window Competition

Competitions were held in 2023 for both the Coronation and Christmas. These competitions generate a great deal of interest, and many businesses take part. One theme which is developing is the painting of windows and recognising the efforts of the charity shops to use "recycled" materials there are now three categories to be judged, retail, non-retail and charity shop.



Shop Survey

A survey of all the ground floor "shop" properties in Sevenoaks was undertaken in March 2023. This included businesses such as dentists, Stag, car dealership etc. Of the 313 premises identified, just 6.1% were vacant at that time. This was against a national average of 14.1%.

The survey categorised business into type such as restaurant, charity, estate agent etc and will be used in subsequent years to track changes and trends.

Holly Party



Recognising that not every business can afford typical staff party costs of perhaps £60-80 per person, the Town Team has created an event which is far more manageable. In 2023 at just £25 partygoers enjoyed an evening with a Jersey Boys tribute band and June B entertaining, with a superb buffet provided by Perfect Cuisine.

Wayfinding Scheme



The directional signage in Sevenoaks is very poor so the Town Team is leading a project to address that. The broad parameters and matters to consider have been identified and a detailed scheme is now being designed. The search is on to secure funding to implement this project.

19. Town of Sanctuary

In June 2023, Sevenoaks Town Council and Sevenoaks Welcomes Refugees were delighted to have been accredited with the first Town of Sanctuary award for the town of Sevenoaks.

Cllr Claire Shea, Mayor of Sevenoaks said: 'I am delighted that Sevenoaks has been recognised by the City of Sanctuary programme. Through Sevenoaks Welcomes Refugees and through the individual actions of Sevenoaks people opening their homes and lending their time and skills, I believe we extend a warm welcome to those who arrive here in very difficult circumstances. I am so glad that, as a Town Council, we have worked with Sevenoaks Welcomes Refugees to achieve this status and to weave care for refugees into the fabric of all we do'.

The City of Sanctuary movement is to encourage a more welcoming UK for people forced to flee their homes.

City of Sanctuary is a vast network of ordinary people around the country stepping up to support people seeking sanctuary in our communities. From community groups to schools and universities, local councils to libraries and theatres, City of Sanctuary works with individuals, groups, and organisations in every area and in every sector to encourage inclusivity, solidarity, and compassion for people from a forced displacement background. The Sanctuary Awards programme recognises and celebrates the organisations and institutions going above and beyond to create welcome, compassion and empowering opportunities for people seeking sanctuary.

The City of Sanctuary Local Authority Network is a movement of local councils who are working to create a culture of welcome, inclusion and empowerment for people seeking sanctuary. City of Sanctuary status is normally accredited to principal councils e.g., Districts and County Councils.

Maggie Filipova-Rivers, Regional Coordinator, City of Sanctuary said: *‘We all have a part to play in building a culture of welcome, inclusion and empowerment for people seeking sanctuary. We are thrilled that our very first Town Council has received recognition for its ongoing work to support those fleeing violence and persecution. They have clearly demonstrated that they are embedding inclusion and welcome across a variety of council services and that they are working collaboratively with key local organisations and people with lived experience to enable them to rebuild their lives in Sevenoaks’*

Chris Hix from Sevenoaks Welcomes Refugees said: *“Sevenoaks Welcomes Refugees is delighted that our town has been officially recognised by the City of Sanctuary movement as a Town of Sanctuary, the first one in the whole country. Since we started SWR in 2017 it has been wonderful to see the support of people across the whole district in welcoming and helping refugees from many countries, and the backing of the Mayor and Town Council will help us to strengthen the welcome to people who are in so much need”.*

Cllr Libby Ancrum, Deputy Mayor who initially recommended applying for the Town of Sanctuary said: *“As a member of the Town Council, I am particularly pleased to see STC recognising and collaborating with the work being done towards inclusivity in our community. This award helps us to set a framework for cooperation together as a community to welcome refugees as our neighbours. A proud moment for Sevenoaks”.*



20.Summary

In 2024 Sevenoaks Town Council will celebrate its 50th year since creation in the 1974 reorganisation of local government.

This reports only highlights what has been achieved in the last year.

We take this opportunity to thank all the past elected Town Councillors over the past fifty years who gave up their time voluntary to help make Sevenoaks the place it is today.

Who knows what the next fifty years will bring for Sevenoaks, our hope is that the Town Council will remain central to bringing local government, local voluntary organisations, local businesses, and residents together to protect and enhance the local community.



Functions & Facilities provided by Sevenoaks Town Council

Precept

Sevenoaks Town Council's total revenue budget for the 2024/25 financial year is £1,437,614 per annum. The average Band D house would pay £145.33 per annum equating to £2.79 per week.

OPEN SPACES & LEISURE

- ALLOTMENTS:
Bradbourne Vale Road
Quaker's Hall Lane
- BETHEL ROAD BURIAL GROUND
- BRITTAINS COMMON
- BRITTAINS LANE WOOD
- GREATNESS RECREATION GROUND
- THE GREEN, HILLINGDON RISE
- HANGING BASKETS
- HORSE TROUGHS (*Old Police Station, Rheinbach Gardens, St Botolph's Road*)
- JUDD'S PIECE
- LAND AT:
Letterbox Lane
Littlewood
Tonbridge Road
- MUGA (Multi Use Games Area)
- MIDLINGS WOOD
- MILLPOND WOOD
- PLANTERS (*The Shambles, Dorset Street, Pembroke Road, London Road, Buckhurst Lane*)
- THE POUND, POUND LANE
- RALEY'S FIELD & KNOLE PADDOCK
- RHEINBACH GARDENS
- SEVENOAKS COMMON
- SPORTS PITCHES
- UPPER HIGH STREET GARDENS
- VINE CRICKET GROUND & PAVILION
- VINE GARDENS
Public toilet, telephone kiosk with defibrillator

- WAR MEMORIAL
- WHITE HART BEECHES
- WOODSIDE ROAD OPEN SPACE

CAR PARKS

- RALEYS CAR PARK

PLAY AREAS

- BUCKHURST LANE PLAY AREA
- GREATNESS RECREATION GROUND & PLAYGROUND
- HILLINGDON RISE PLAY AREA
- JULIANS MEADOW & PLAYGROUND
- KIPPINGTON MEADOW
- MOUNT CLOSE OPEN SPACE & PLAYGROUND
- PONTOISE CLOSE OPEN SPACE & PLAYGROUND

SERVICES

- BAT & BALL CENTRE
(formerly Sevenoaks Community Centre)
Available for hire: meetings, conferences etc.
- BAT & BALL STATION BUILDING (*including Café and rooms available to hire*)
batandballstation.com
- BUSINESS HUB
- BUS SHELTERS (*Dartford Road x1, Bradbourne Vale Road x2, London Road x2, Tonbridge Road x1*)
- CAFÉ ON THE VINE cafeonthevine.com
- CONSULTEES (*Planning, Highways, etc.*)
- GRANTS TO LOCAL ORGANISATIONS
- GREATNESS PARK CEMETERY

- HOUSE IN THE BASEMENT (HITB) YOUTH CAFÉ (*available for hire*)
 - INFO-PODS & DIGITAL DISPLAY SCREENS
 - LITTER BINS AND GRIT BINS
 - MARKETS (*Wednesday and Saturday*)
 - MASTERPLAN FOR NORTHERN SEVENOAKS
 - NEIGHBOURHOOD DEVELOPMENT PLAN
 - ORBITAL NO 8 BUS
 - PUBLIC CLOCKS (*Jubilee Clock Old Market House and Warren Clock above Brewers*)
 - PUBLIC SEATS IN VARIOUS LOCATIONS
 - PUBLIC TOILETS (*The Stag, The Vine, Lower St Johns, Greatness Recreation Ground*)
 - SEVENOAKS TOWN TEAM
sevenoakspartnership.org
 - STAG COMMUNITY ARTS CENTRE
Defibrillator in foyer
stagsevenoaks.co.uk
 - STREET LIGHTS IN SOME UNADOPTED ROADS
 - TOWN COUNCIL OFFICES/CHAMBER
Available for hire: meetings, conferences etc.
 - TWINNING WITH PONTOISE AND RHEINBACH
 - YOUTH COUNCIL sevenoaksyouthcouncil.com
- ## COMMUNITY EVENTS
- CHRISTMAS ILLUMINATIONS IN TOWN
 - CIVIC FUNCTIONS
 - VINE BANDSTAND/FREE SUMMER CONCERTS

Town Councillors 2023-2027

NAME	PARTY	NAME	PARTY
EASTERN WARD		ST JOHNS WARD	
Cllr L Ancrum	Liberal Democrat	Cllr S Camp	Liberal Democrat
Cllr A S Clayton	Liberal Democrat	Cllr Dr P Dixon	Liberal Democrat
Cllr S Layne	Liberal Democrat	Cllr D Skinner OBE	Liberal Democrat
KIPPINGTON WARD		TOWN WARD	
Cllr C Daniell	Liberal Democrat	Cllr V Granville	Liberal Democrat
Cllr C Gustard	Liberal Democrat	Cllr L Michaelides	Liberal Democrat
Cllr N Varley	Liberal Democrat	Cllr G Willis	Liberal Democrat
NORTHERN WARD		WILDERNESSE WARD	
Cllr Dr M Canet	Liberal Democrat	Cllr N Wightman	Liberal Democrat
Cllr L O'Hara	Liberal Democrat	To contact a Sevenoaks Town Councillor, please use the following email format: Cllr.surname@sevenoakstown.gov.uk eg. to contact Councillor Ancrum, the email address would be: Cllr.Ancrum@sevenoakstown.gov.uk	
Cllr C Shea	Liberal Democrat		

Town Clerk/Chief Executive:

Linda Larter MBE:

townclerk@sevenoakstown.gov.uk

Deputy Town Clerk:

Ann White:

dtc@sevenoakstown.gov.uk

The Town Council or its Committees meet on most Monday evenings at 7pm and members of the public are welcome to attend. For further details of the meetings please contact the Town Council Offices on 01732 459953.

council@sevenoakstown.gov.uk

Sevenoaks
TOWN COUNCIL




Sevenoaks Town Council

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