



SEVENOAKS TOWN COUNCIL

Annual Report

2008 / 2009

Introduction

Sevenoaks Town Council continues to be committed to providing facilities and services of the highest possible quality for the benefit of the town and its visitors. The Town Council consists of 16 elected Town Councillors and a staff headed by Linda Larter, MBE Chief Executive/Town Clerk.

This report provides an opportunity for Sevenoaks Town Council to account to the residents of Sevenoaks on the way it has discharged its responsibilities and managed the Council's assets in the previous twelve months.

The Mayoral Year

The Town Mayor, Councillor Pam Walshe, has represented the Town Council on 149 occasions so far this year and a further 19 events have been attended by either the Deputy Mayor or other Councillors representing the Town Council.

The Town Council has experienced some real challenges during the past year in providing facilities for the town, including open spaces, new playgrounds and, the most ambitious, the Stag Community Arts Centre; additional information is provided later in this report

The Town Mayor opened the Summer Festival in the Town and also greeted the Mayor and other cyclists from our twin town Rheinbach, who had cycled all the way to be there on the day. The Mayor held a Coffee Morning for Macmillan Nurses in September that was well-attended and raised a good sum of money.

On Remembrance Day the town remembered and prayed for the brave men and women of our armed and supporting Services who sacrificed so much so that we might live in a free and just society. The Mayor took the salute during the march-past at this year's service at the Vine War Memorial. Later in November the Mayor switched on the town's Christmas lights and also judged the town's festive window displays.

The Town Mayor nominated two organisations as her charities during her year of office: the Citizens' Advice Bureau and Guide Dogs for the Blind. A Charity Concert was held in November with the Eynsford Concert Band and the Kreato Band, on a visit from Belgium. It was a great success and raised a large sum of money which was distributed between the Mayor's charities and the Alheimers Society, nominated by the band.

The Annual Quiz, held in February was also a great success, as also was a piano recital in March, with a visiting Italian concert pianist. Both were well attended and raised substantial sums towards the Mayor's charities. The last fundraising event

will be a Dinner at the Plaza Suite on April 23rd with an Elizabethan and English theme. This will benefit the Mayor's charities and the Stag.

The Town Mayor would like to thank all those organisations and charities who invited her to such a diverse range of events and to congratulate and thank all the volunteers in the town who give their time for the benefit of others.

Finance and General Purposes Committee

1. Financial Information

In 2007/08 the Council's net actual expenditure was £609,504 – a reduction of £26,395 against budget, and resulting in an overall deficit for the year of £38,304 (compared with a budgeted deficit of £64,699). The improvement was due to a number of factors including the following savings (positive variances):

planning appeals (£7,379), lettings of sports facilities (£4,124), graffiti removal (£4,171), election expenses (£8,568), Playhouse grant not given (£10,000), tourist information office (£9,782), contribution towards PCSOs (£8,852).

However, these were to some extent offset by a number of overspends (negative variances) including:

open spaces maintenance (£6,633), cemetery security (£3,300), additional staff costs at the town council offices (£12,683), void letting period of a Council property (£7,350) and lower net contribution from the gym (£4,168).

The Council has a capital reserve that enables it to spend on major assets and projects without calling upon funding from ratepayers. In 2007/08 this reserve was used to finance capital projects totalling £57,244, including the building of a new patio at the Sevenoaks Community Centre (£15,255), CCTV equipment at the Vine Pavilion (£6,407), pathway resurfacing at the Cemetery (£5,550), and further costs associated with the Raleys site redevelopment (£6,600).

Capital expenditure in 2008/09 includes £124,064 on a major programme to re-equip three playgrounds acquired from Sevenoaks District Council, £101,625 on the new Skateboard Park at Greatness, £27,000 on the acquisition of the open land at Brittain's Lane from Kent County Council, and a contribution of up to £50,000 for equipment at the Stag Community Arts Centre. The Council has received a grant of £40,000 in respect of the Skateboard Park.

Preliminary figures for 2008/09 indicate that the Council's net expenditure may exceed the budget of £674,932, due to unbudgeted increases in staffing at the town council offices resulting from staff changes and additional working (£17,640). The effect will continue into 2009/10 as mentioned below, although the pressure on staff resources may alleviate when administration and management of the Stag is

handed over to the new charitable trust later in 2009. Savings are being made in other departments, and it is still possible that even with the additional staffing costs the Council can contain the total net expenditure within budget.

The budget for 2009/10 is £29,612 (+4.4%) higher than the current year, caused mainly by additional staffing costs at the Open Spaces department (+£13,302) and the town council offices (+£17,189), reflecting increased service provision and some staff changes. In addition it is anticipated that there will be a substantial reduction in income (£14,500) caused by the fall in interest rates. The Council's budget for 2009/10 will be financed by an additional £25,000 (+3.7%) on the precept, with the shortfall coming from existing reserves.

The cost per resident for the services to be provided by the Council in 2009/10 is forecast at £37.72 (2008/09 forecast = £36.37). The council tax band D equivalent will be £76.29 (2008/09 = £73.96).

2. Community Centre

The Community Centre Management Sub-Committee meets three times a year and considers any requests from users or other suggestions for the improvement of facilities.

The regular bookings are numerous and varied with some groups having been using the Centre for over 10 years. The two halls and small meeting room/bar room remain a popular venue for private functions as well as for clubs and societies.

In October 2008 a celebration event was held to commemorate the 25th anniversary of the centre.

3. Grant Aid

The Town Council remains the principal sponsor of the Sevenoaks Summer Festival. In 2008 the Festival again proved extremely popular, with a range of diverse events including a community event at the Sevenoaks Community Centre.

Any Voluntary Sector Organisations wishing to apply for a grant should contact the Town Council offices. Applications are considered in March and September each year and the Town Council is also willing to consider any items of publicity from the voluntary sector for inclusion within its quarterly newsletter.

During the year the Town Council has continued to support a number of voluntary organisations in the town including the Sevenoaks Three Arts Festival, the Sevenoaks Young Musician of the Year, Victim Support, the Sevenoaks Literary Celebration and the Sevenoaks Christian Counselling Services. This is in addition to the support given annually to the Friends of Pontoise and the Friends of Rheinbach.

4. Christmas Lights

For Christmas 2008 the Town Council again included £18,000 in the budget for Christmas Lights and entertainment in the town. This has allowed the lighting display to be improved again. The Christmas Lights stood up extremely well to the severe winds experienced during December.

The Late Night Shopping / Switch-on Event was a great success, with street entertainment. Bligh's provided entertainment and the children's Fair Rides were again present. The Town Council has put in place a process to gradually change over to LED bulbs. These bulbs use less energy and are therefore more environmentally friendly.

5. Twinning

Sevenoaks is twinned with Pontoise in France and Rheinbach in Germany. Both twinings continue to be supported by Sevenoaks Town Council. Contact with Friends of Rheinbach or Friends of Pontoise can be made via the Town Council Offices or the information can be found via links on the Town Council Website.

Friends of Rheinbach

During 2008 the Town Mayor hosted a visit from the Town Mayor of Rheinbach and colleagues all of whom had cycled the journey. The Rheinbach Town Mayor presented the Town with a signpost to indicate the route to cycle back. The sign post will be erected in the Rheinbach Gardens.

Friends of Pontoise

The Sevenoaks/Pontoise twinning operates to a 24 month calendar, with Sennockeans visiting Pontoise for a long weekend one year, Pontoiseans visiting Sevenoaks the next. In 2008 it was the turn of Les Amis de Sevenoaks to visit Sevenoaks.

A trip to the Naval Dockyard at Chatham was very successful. The official dinner was held at the Plough at Leigh, providing a typical pub atmosphere that many in the French party appreciated.

It is worth mentioning that we would not be able to offer our visitors the kind of hospitality necessary in a twinning weekend without the continued support of the Town Council, which is much appreciated.

We remain committed to widening the scope of the twinning whenever sporting, cultural, educational or business opportunities present themselves.

6. Tourist Information Centre

The Sevenoaks Tourist Office has gone from strength to strength since the Kaleidoscope Project removed the wall with the Library.

Visitor numbers have vastly increased not only from library users, but also from people coming to “events” at the library, museum and gallery. Initially this was simply people using us as a through route to get to the library but many of these people are now looking at what we’ve got, making enquiries and buying things which is generating more income for the Town Council.

A new range of books and maps has been introduced, using our prominent display space, which has proved successful. Guides to visiting gardens and public transport continue to sell well. We are also aiming to publish a new guide for children this summer. Our aim has been to stock items that cannot be purchased elsewhere in Sevenoaks. We have also a wide selection of souvenirs related to Sevenoaks, which are popular with residents and visitors alike.

We have played a major role in “raising the curtain” at the Stag by helping to sell theatre tickets for shows there and also for events elsewhere in the town such as the Mayor’s Charity Concert. We have positioned the Tourist Information Centre as the main place to provide information about what’s on in the town and surrounding area. We have made agreements with several local magazines to provide them with their events listings in exchange for free advertising space for the Tourist Information Centre and have built a good relationship with them. We also continue to display posters on our notice board and flyers on our leaflet racks for events organised by local groups and at the Stag.

Despite the internet we still receive frequent calls from people regarding accommodation in the district. We send out hundreds of copies of the Heart of Kent holiday brochure, which promotes the district, as well as advising people on using their website.

We also help people with their travel arrangements, with wide ranging questions from public transport, to the congestion charge, and local residents continue to buy coach tickets from us. Our guide to days out by bus and train from Sevenoaks, which we compiled, has sold like hot cakes and is meeting a much-needed demand by residents and visitors alike for better information about public transport, especially those with a bus pass!

We continue to promote the town and the district to residents and visitors.

7. Youth Services

The Youth Services Sub Committee continues to consider applications for grants from a variety of organisations. A total of over £10,000 was awarded, including

grants to WK 8-12's Project, Raleys Judo Club, Sevenoaks Area Youth Trust, Rainbow Out of School Club.

During October 2008 a new Youth Council was launched. The Youth Council consists of the following 16 young people Roberta Stephens, Holly Miles, Heather Barnett, George Payne, Naomi Sparks, Edmund Davies, Sarika Breeze, Emma Power, Frances Ainsworth, Amy Borrowman, Charlie Conn, Tamanna Miah, Laura Brooker, Zoe Duffy, George Pearce and Daniel Sabin. and is chaired by Heather Barnett. Meetings take place approximately every 6 weeks and in a short space of time the Youth Council has arranged an event and highlighted areas of concern for young people in the town.

8. Council Chamber

The Town Council Chamber remains a popular venue for local groups and commercial organisations. A total of 138 bookings were made in 2008/09 together with 2 civil marriages.

The venue is available to hire and anyone wishing to consider the venue for an event should contact Sevenoaks Town Council offices.

9. Street Lighting

The Town Council continues to maintain 148 street lights in various roads.

10. Events

The Civic Service on 15th June, 2008 was held at St Nicholas Church. The service was led by Andrew McClellan and the sermon was read by the Revd. Angus MacLeay. The service was very well attended, both by Councillors and local people, including representatives of many voluntary groups within the town.

Once again the Town Council organised the Annual Remembrance Day Service in November led by the Revd Angus Macleay assisted by Father Richard Harvey and Prayers of Remembrance and Peace in the Future by the Revd Peter Hills. There was a large gathering for this very moving event.

11. Publicity

The Town Council website is regularly updated and refreshed at www.sevenoakstown.gov.uk. The Town Council's newsletter is being re-branded as Sevenoaks Town Crier and goes from strength to strength and can be obtained either in hard copy or read and listened to online.

12. Local Policing

The Town Council continues to provide £14,942 per annum towards the cost of two Police Community Support Officers (PCSOs). One working solely within the town and the other working in Sevenoaks, Riverhead and Chevening (the latter is also part paid for by Riverhead and Chevening Parish Councils).

Our local PCSOs continue to be a great asset to the town. They undertake valuable work as a visible presence within the community liaising with groups and organisations to reduce crime within the town and responding to our residents and visitors concerns.

13. Administrative Staff

Unfortunately during the past year, a key member of administrative staff has needed long term sick leave. This together with new activities has added strain on the present staff however the Town Council is fortunate to have an extremely committed and able team who rose to the challenges to maintain a high level of service.

Open Spaces & Leisure Committee

14. Open Spaces and Cemetery Staff

Both departments are fully staffed. The Town Warden has kept the town clear of graffiti, undertaken minor repairs and general environmental improvements around the town. The stability of staffing levels has helped the team to absorb all the recently acquired open spaces into the existing maintenance routine and include a programme of improvements.

15. Allotments

Both the Bradbourne Vale Road and Quakers Hall Allotments are now 100% let and both maintain a waiting list.

The Town Council continues to work with the Allotments Association at Quakers Hall and the site is a hidden gem in the middle of Sevenoaks.

16. Raleys Gym and Fitness Centre

The Gym continues to provide a popular location for a variety of classes in particular the afternoon children's gym classes, after school sessions and weekends as shown below:

	Attendance Numbers
Gym Tots	6-8
Pre-School Gym	52
Junior Gym	175
Judo	90
Pre-school Dance	12

Once again the holiday courses in Gym, Art and Craft and Mini Tennis were again well supported.

	Attendance Numbers
Art and Craft	32
Gymnastics	85
Mini Tennis	66
Pre-school Gym	36
Gym Tots	No longer run in holidays

In 2008 the Town Council following a long period of consultation reviewed the long term viability of the Raleys site. The condition of the buildings would require considerable capital investment in the future. It was agreed to in the long term dispose of the site once the economic climate improves. The funds raised from the disposal of the site would be reinvested in recreational and sporting facilities within the town.

17. Raleys Centre

The Raleys Centre is now let to Barnies Ltd who provide full day care and out of school facilities and also crèche facilities for use in conjunction with Raleys Gym. Following the decision to dispose of the site, this is now on a short term lease.

18. Raleys Field / Knole Paddock

The pitches at Raleys Field/Knole Paddock continue to be well used by Sevenoaks Rugby Football Club, Wilder Park Football Club and the Association of Kent Cricket Clubs during the summer.

A number of sporting events were held at Knole Paddock including Wildernesse School rugby tournament in April, Rugby Club annual schools tag festival in May, the junior Kwik cricket tournament in June and Junior Cricket and Rugby summer schools.

19. Vine Cricket Ground and Gardens

During 2008 the long term Vine Gardener, Mr Reeves, retired. Ms Merry has been appointed as his replacement.

There has been major work in the Vine Gardens to replace the rotten timbers on the pergola and enhanced and improved repaving in the pond area. This work is being undertaken by the Open Spaces team.

20. Sevenoaks Common and other Woodland

The woodland management plan is being implemented with around 2 hectares of woodland off of Windmill rd, being thinned. Other works include path and glade widening on the common close to Fernside Road, also thinning road side trees in this area. Thinning and supplementary planting at Julians meadow woodland, and selective felling, clearing of rubbish and replanting at Littlewood in Hillingdon avenue.

21. Greatness Recreation Ground

A management plan has been produced in consultation with the local residents association, this is available from the Town Council Offices or on the website

22. Children's Playgrounds

The project to refurbish the three playgrounds, transferred to the Town Council from the District Council was undertaken during the year. The Town Council engaged a local project manager with considerable experience in this work to oversee the scheme. As a result play areas at Julian's Meadow, Greatness Park and Hillingdon Rise had new play areas installed to a value of £130,000.

23. Skatepark

The Town Council was awarded a grant of £40,000 by the Big Lottery to provide the skatepark at Greatness as part of a larger grant to the District Council for improving play areas. In addition, a sum of £10,000 was paid by Sevenoaks District Council when the play areas were transferred and the Council allocated up to a further £50,000 to provide a reasonable size facility. The scheme was progressed with the help of young people to design the skate park guided by a professional provider of skating facilities in Caterham. Following considerable debate the new skateboard park was opened in October 2008. The new facility has been very much welcomed and used by young people.

Planning Committee

24. Planning Applications

During 2008/09 the Town Council has so far been consulted on 474 planning and treework applications on sites within the town. There continues to be pressure for development of sites within the town, particularly demolition of one building and replacement with two or more dwellings.

25. Local Development Framework

Sevenoaks District Council continues to work on the Local Development Framework. The Town Council will continue to endeavour to ensure that the development documents for the town of Sevenoaks reflect the wishes of local residents and the Town Council's aspirations to maintain and enhance the area.

26. Public Transport

The Town Council will continue to lobby wherever possible to ensure that an adequate public transport infrastructure is maintained.

The Town Council is represented at District Council meetings to discuss bus and train services in the district and also at South Eastern Trains Stakeholder meetings

27. Parking Review

The Town Council was consulted by Sevenoaks District Council on the Sevenoaks Parking Review. The Council welcomed the holistic view of the majority of the recommendations but voiced several concerns when commenting fully on the proposals. The Council will be keeping a watching brief on the introduction of the new parking regulations and reporting any problems arising to the District Council.

28. Stag Community Arts Centre

In July 2008 the private company operating the facility closed.

Sevenoaks Town Council recognised that not only was the Stag an iconic building in the town, it is also of considerable economic and social benefit to the town. For this reason as a safeguard for its future the Town Council submitted a bid to manage the facility.

Several months of debate subsequently took place and in November 2008, Sevenoaks District Council voted for the Town Council to take over the management of the facility on a 25 year lease. The alternative option being considered was for its demolition and re-development.

The Town Council physically took over the management of the Stag on the 2nd January 2009 and intends to run it as a Community Arts Centre. This is an ambitious project for the Town Council, however the overwhelming community support to date has encouraged Town Councillors that it was the correct decision to be made. It is hoped that this facility will remain at the centre of the community for many years to come.

Conclusion

In conclusion it has been a very active year for Sevenoaks Town Council providing new facilities for the town and a change over of staff.

The Town Council has also prioritised its strategy for the future (details attached to this document) and would welcome comments on this.

TOWN COUNCILLORS 2007 to 2010

EASTERN WARD

Cllr Mrs S Camp [Lib Dem] – 36 The Crescent, Sevenoaks TN13 3QY	Tel: 464674
Cllr A S Clayton [Lib Dem] - 75 Bayham Road, Sevenoaks TN13 3XB	Tel: 451087
Cllr Mrs P C Walshe [Lib Dem] - 8 Crownfields, Sevenoaks TN13 1EF	Tel: 454769

KIPPINGTON WARD

Cllr A Eyre [Con] – 63 Brittain Lane, Sevenoaks, TN13 2JR	Tel: 464865
Cllr R J Parry [Con] – Burntwood Road, Sevenoaks TN13 1PT	Tel: 461392
Cllr R L Piper [Con] – 3 Beaconfields, Sevenoaks TN13 2NH	Tel: 455355

NORTHERN WARD

Cllr J G Brigden [Lib Dem] - 41 Robyns Way, Sevenoaks TN13 3EB	Tel: 463066
Cllr M Canet [Lib Dem] – Holly Cottage, 29c Hollybush Lane, Sevenoaks TN13 3TU	Tel: 461397
Cllr P E Towell [Con] – 230 Seal Road, Sevenoaks TN15 0AA	Tel: 459953

ST JOHNS WARD

Cllr Mrs A E Dawson [Con] - 9 Camden Road, Sevenoaks TN13 3LY	Tel: 457716
Cllr R Hogarth [Con] – 15 Churchfield Cottages, Landway, Seal TN15 0DR	Tel: 760325

Cllr S Raikes [Con] – Becketts, 38 Woodside Road, Sevenoaks TN13 3HF	Tel: 451707
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TOWN WARD

Cllr P Allen [Con] – Flat 5, The Old Courthouse, 168 High Street, Sevenoaks TN13 1XE	Tel: 742124
Cllr J F London [Con] - 18 Knole Way, Sevenoaks TN13 3RS	Tel: 456327
Cllr M G Short [Con] – 10 The Landway Kemsing Sevenoaks TN15 6TG	Tel: 760263

WILDERNESSE WARD

Cllr Mrs M E Crabtree [Con] – Oakend, 17 Knole Road, Sevenoaks TN13 3XH	Tel: 461511
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**SEVENOAKS TOWN COUNCIL
STRATEGY 2008 – 2012**

1. **The aim of the Council will be to offer community leadership to ensure Sevenoaks develops into the best market town in Kent, the objective will be realised in two ways. First, by engagement in local initiatives and forming relationships with other stakeholders. Secondly, by promoting the well-being of residents of the town through support for leisure, sporting and cultural activities, by improving the environment and infrastructure of the town and by fostering its commercial prosperity.**

2. To achieve these objectives the Council will each year give priority to:
 - 2.1 New leisure and sporting facilities or the expansion of existing facilities.
 - 2.2 Acquiring additional green open spaces.
 - 2.3 Increasing tourism, supporting live cultural events and initiatives to promote commercial activity.
 - 2.4 Grant-aiding voluntary organisations undertaking community activities especially those targeted at lower income groups.
 - 2.5 Actively promoting environmentally friendly and 'green' procedures for all Town Council facilities and functions, subject to available resources.

3. Achieving our strategic aims

- 3.1 Leisure and Sporting Activities
- 3.2 The Council will provide additional or improved facilities for its existing sports and recreation grounds. It will also *consider assuming* responsibility for existing grounds from the District Council *subject to available funding*.
- 3.3 Open Spaces
- 3.4 The Council will endeavour to purchase land within the Town boundary or land adjacent or near to the boundary which might be used to promote its objectives, including the prevention of unwanted development and to improve public accessibility to Council owned land.

3.5 Commercial Development, Tourism and Cultural Events

3.6 The Council will increase its sponsorship and grants for cultural events and other initiatives which promote community and commercial activity and enhancing the image of the Town and for measures which combat anti-social behaviour.

3.7 Voluntary Activities

3.8 The Council will *consider* increasing the size and number of grants for voluntary organisations which meet its strategic objectives.

4. Resources

To achieve these ambitious aims the Council requires a matching financial strategy to raise additional income and capital. This strategy would combine the following elements, rather than treat the precept as a first recourse to funding :-

4.1 Raising rents, fees and charges within the limits set by the market.

4.2 Using grants, in most cases, for pump-priming.

4.3 Contracting out facilities and services where appropriate.

4.4 Consider disposing of assets where appropriate which are not relevant to our strategic Objectives.

4.5 Borrowing for major capital projects or purchases.

4.6 Applying where appropriate for external funding to underwrite town projects.

4.7 Consider entering into agency agreements to carry out contracts on behalf of other organisations for the benefit of the town – either through an improved service and / or cost saving.