

Sevenoaks Town Council Annual Report 2010/11

Introduction

Sevenoaks Town Council is committed to providing the finest services and best value for money for residents, businesses and visitors to the town of Sevenoaks within the current financial constraints. The Town Council will continue to work with the community to increase service delivery under the new Powers being devolved by the Government.

In September the Town Council 2010 received re-recognition of its Investor of People status and the review highlighted an ethos within the Council which results in staff being very committed to the work of the Council and serving the public

The Mayoral Year

The Town Mayor, Councillor Simon Raikes, has represented the Town Council on 182 occasions so far this year and a further 14 events have been attended by either the Deputy Mayor or other Councillors representing the Town Council.

The Town Mayor planted the second of seven new Oak trees on Brittain's Common in November. The Mayor hosted a guided walk on Sevenoaks Common during June and Nicholas Cave, Open Spaces Manager, talked about the flora and fauna, the history of the Common and its recovery since the storms of 1987. The Mayor also hosted a concert for Armed Forces Day at Sevenoaks Community Centre during June which was very well attended and funds were raised for the Help 4 Heroes Charity.

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 his charities during his year of office: Sevenoaks Area Youth Trust (SAYT) and The Stag Community Arts Centre.

The Town Mayor would like to thank all those organisations and charities who invited him 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.

The Stag Community Arts Centre

Theatre

The original annual target for bookings for the theatre per year was 100. For the current financial year this is 190. Bookings are now in place up to the end of 2012.

A diverse programme is provided from drama, musical theatre, school shows, comedy, bands, ballet, pantomime, classical and folk music etc.

Within resources available the Stag Community Arts Centre continues to provide improvement to technical equipment, this is assisted greatly by the Friends of Stag fundraising.

A sponsor a seat scheme for refurbishing theatre seats has recently been launched.

Cinema

We are being informed on a regular basis by customers that the Stag Community Arts Centre is now their cinema of choice.

In addition to showing first release films, there is Parent and Baby screening on Tuesdays and also a regular Classic Film Club generously sponsored by Warners Solicitors.

The Stag Community Arts Centre has enabled amateur films to be shown produced by the Youth Outreach groups and also at Dartford House.

A considerable investment was made in 2010 summer for the installation of 3D to Screen One. The business rationale for this was that additional income would recoup the expenditure within one year. The Stag Community Arts Centre is pleased to report that this has been achieved within 5 months.

The Cinema is now performing well above target.

Plaza Suite

The original target for bookings (per session) per annum for the Plaza Suite was 147. Bookings for the current financial year stand at 229. Bookings are in place until the end of 2012.

The Plaza Suite is currently in the process of being redecorated and curtains will be purchased from profits raised at a recent fashion show.

Kiosks and Bars

These continue to provide a healthy profit mainly due to being manned by volunteers. Business is however now at such a level that we might need to consider some assistance for this in order not to over burden our volunteers.

Marketing

The Stag Community Arts Centre continues to heavily invest in marketing for the venue.

In September 2010 a new on line ticketing system and website www.stagsevenoaks.co.uk were purchased at a value of £15,000. It is difficult to indicate in monetary terms the return on this, however the Stag Community Arts Centre has received numerous compliments and the facilities are heavily used with over 50% of business coming via these methods.

The new on line ticketing enables data to be held and targeted marketing to take place.

Due to the funding via the Future Job Fund the Stag Community Arts Centre has additional marketing staff who promote the venue and its activities via social media methods, tweeting and face book etc.

Local businesses continue to be generous in their sponsorship of the facility in return for advertising their businesses to up to 20,000 potential customers per month. To date grants and sponsorship (including Future Job Fund) totals approx £180,000.

Production for the What's On Guide has now reached a quantity of 25,000 with a reprint required for the last edition.

Tourist Information Centre

The facility was relocated from Kaleidoscope to the Stag Community Arts Centre in September 2010. Business for the Tourist Information Centre has improved in the new venue and is now used by increased numbers of visitors, previously the main business had been from local residents.

Youth Outreach

During the past 12 months the Youth Outreach provision has developed and become well known and accepted not only within the local community but also throughout the district with local schools.

The Pantomime Youth Outreach work interacted with over 3,000 children and 40 schools and 3 libraries.

School Holiday youth outreach has grown in popularity and will continue to take place.

Sevenoaks Youth Theatre takes place on Mondays during term time and now covers three age ranges.

Inset days were arranged for teacher training last Autumn and will be provided again in the Autumn of 2011.

Local schools are provided with reduced rates to enable them to perform in the theatre providing both the students and audiences with a live theatre experience.

Soundwaves a monthly band night for under 18s has recently started and has already proven popular.

Charity

The Stag Community Arts Centre Charity (number 1137420) was established in August 2010.

The Charity enables the Stag Community Arts Centre to save money on non domestic rate payments and other goods purchased.

Patrons for the Charity are as follows – Cheryl Baker, Graham Cole, Gloria Hunniford and Graham Webb MBE.

During 2011 the Stag Community Arts Centre will be working on advertising in ways for people to donate to the charity using Effective Tax Giving methods:-

- Gift Aid
- Payroll Giving
- Legacies
- Share Giving

Volunteers

Volunteers continue to provide a considerable resource to the venue equating to approx £30 - £40,000 per annum. The number of young volunteers is also steadily increasing.

Programmes of training and social events are planned for volunteers. In addition they receive a weekly email newsletter.

Professional services are also provided on a voluntary basis for example from Warners Solicitors.

Future Job Fund

The Future Job Fund scheme has provided the Stag Community Arts Centre with approximate £150,000 of paid staff during the current financial year, this is obviously of real benefit to the venue and will be missed when the scheme comes to an end.

It is also satisfying to see these young people developing and moving onto jobs.

Conclusion

The Stag Community Arts Centre has achieved all of its original targets with the exception of the provision of a youth café for which funding continues to be sought.

Development and investment will continue to take place working on the successes to date.

The Stag Community Arts Centre has recently been described by an Arts Professional as a strong, sustainable and unique model for an arts complex. For the foreseeable future the Trustees will continue to operate on its original business model, particularly as this has proven to be successful during these difficult economic times.

Youth Council

The second Sevenoaks Youth Council came into being in November 2010. Youth Councillors are aged between 11 – 18 years and must live or go to school in the town. Youth Council meetings are held approx every 6 weeks in the Council Chamber. Since its conception in 2009 the Youth Council has become increasingly involved in initiating and developing events for young people.

During the year the Youth Council won the Kent County Council Try Angle 'The Citizenship and Environment Award'.

In 2010 the Youth Council sponsored a Ukulele Workshop, a skate event and a Kart Grand Prix for the benefit of the young people of Sevenoaks.

Current projects include:-

- Soundwaves – Under 18 Live Band Nights at The Stag Community Arts Centre
- Sponsoring an Assault Course, 18th June 2011 for 6 – 18 year olds as part of the Summer Festival.

The Youth Council remains committed to the provision of a Youth Café and is fundraising by collecting used ink cartridges – these can be donated to Sevenoaks Town Council offices or Sevenoaks Computer Shop.

If you know someone between the ages of 11 and 18 who would like to improve the welfare and leisure opportunities for other young people in the town, there are currently vacancies for 4 Youth Councillors

Finance

Finance and General Purposes Committee

In 2009/10 the Council's net actual expenditure was £710,258 resulting in an overall deficit for the year of £7,462 (compared with a budgeted deficit of £4,544). There were a number of both positive and negative factors that contributed to this result. The majority of the savings made (positive variances) related to the following:

Property maintenance (£10,362), open spaces and play areas (£4,030), street lighting (£2,617) and legal fees (£9,810).

The majority of the negative variances that were offset by the above savings related to the following:

Gym classes and courses (£13,156), cemetery income (£7,004) and additional computer support services at the town council offices (£9,890).

The results of the Stag Community Arts Centre for the year ended 31 March 2010 have been reported separately and are not included in the above.

From 1 October 2010, the Stag Community Arts Centre has been given a Charitable Trust Status by the Charity Commission. Although there has been a change in its legal status the Stag Community Arts Centre continues to be financially supported by the Town Council with an annual grant of £27,800.

In the first ten months of 2010/11 the Council has utilised funds from the Capital Receipts Reserve to successfully relocate the Tourist Information Centre to the Stag Community Arts Centre and to replace and modernise the equipment used by Open Spaces in accordance with the Rolling Capital Programme. A provision continues to be made for further spend on the redevelopment of the Raley's site.

Preliminary figures for 2010/11 indicate that the Council's net expenditure will exceed the budget of £715,062 by £5,724. This is largely due to the By-Election costs that were incurred following the unexpected Town Councillor vacancy that arose in the year.

The budget for 2011/12 is £1,629 (+0.23%) higher than the current year. The Council's budget for 2011/12 will be financed by the precept, which is to remain unchanged from the 2010/11 precept, with the small shortfall coming from existing reserves.

The cost per resident for the services to be provided by the Council in 2011/12 is forecast to remain unchanged at £38.53 (2010/11 forecast = £38.53). The council tax band D equivalent will remain at £77.49 (2010/11 = £77.49).

Sevenoaks Community Centre

The Community Centre has two halls and a bar room providing comfortable accommodation for large and small meetings or events. Various regular users continue to support the venue, and this year three new users have started classes, these being in the form of Zumba dance classes, Irish dance classes and rugbytots. Information relating to the regular users can be accessed through a link on the Town Council website.

At the week-end the Community Centre hosts various events including private parties, wedding receptions, conferences and children's parties. Events at the

Community Centre are helped to run smoothly by the Caretakers who are there at the start of a booking to answer any questions the hirer may have.

The Community Centre Café is now open every Tuesday between 10am to 2pm and offers a varied menu including coffee/tea, cakes and sandwiches all provided and run by Self Unlimited, 'Choices for people with learning disabilities'.

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.

Grant Aid

Sevenoaks Town Council continues to support the Big Society by providing grants to local groups, it is also a major sponsor of the Sevenoaks Summer Festival.

This year the Council is arranging for bands to play on the Vine bandstand on Sundays during the summer.

Groups who have benefited from Town Council grants include, Relate West & Mid Kent, Sevenoaks Volunteer Transport Group, Sevenoaks Literary celebration, Sevenoaks Citizen Advice Bureau, Friends of Pontoise, Friends of Rheinbach, Sevenoaks Three Arts Festival, Sevenoaks Home Library Service, Sevenoaks Community Theatre, Sevenoaks Christian Counselling Service, Sevenoaks Art Club Sevenoaks Historical Society and Sevenoaks Rugby Football Club

Christmas Lights

This year's Christmas lights switch on ceremony was enjoyed by some 4,000 people. The Town Mayor switched on the lights in the company of stars from the panto cast of Jack and the Beanstalk, and dancing and singing groups. Local schools led a colourful parade carrying colourful banners they had made during panto workshops. Traders benefited from the late night shopping and a variety of stalls lined the High Street, together with side shows. The Council is very grateful to businesses and local organisations who donated towards the cost of the lights in spite of the current economic climate making it such a successful community event.

Twinning

Sevenoaks is twinned with Pontoise in France and Rheinbach in Germany. Both twinings continue to be supported by Sevenoaks Town Council. Contact information can be found on the Town Council's website.

Friends of Pontoise

The Sevenoaks French twinning association, "The Friends of Pontoise" had another busy year. Centrepiece was the arrival in our town, on Thursday 13 May, of their guests from Pontoise, a party of "Les Amis de Sevenoaks", who had come to

experience a little of our life and culture. As usual on these occasions, the Friday visits were chosen for their contrast. One into deepest Kent, to explore the gardens at the confusingly similarly named Godinton House and Doddington Place, with a pub lunch in between. The other into the outskirts of London, to Hall Place and the Red House near Bexley, with lunch in the Danson Stables. Ever keen also to show off a little of Sevenoaks itself, on the Saturday morning a visit was also arranged to the Quakers Hall Lane Allotments.

The official dinner also focussed on Sevenoaks at the Plaza Suite at the Stag CAC. As a venue it was the perfect size and very comfortable. Increasingly garrulous French & English chatter bore witness to an enjoyable evening.

The rest of the year, members met to play boules, view French films and to enjoy dining together

Friends of Rheinbach

In June 2010, 41 members of the Friends of Rheinbach visited Rheinbach. Nine of these members cycled from Sevenoaks taking six days to travel the 355 miles. This was inspired by the visit to Sevenoaks in 2009 by nine cyclists from Rheinbach led by Stefan Raetz the Burgermeister of Rheinbach. Most of the remaining members travelled by coach that was used on the first full day in Rheinbach for a trip to the Moselle Valley, with a guided tour of the impressive Buresheim Castle and a splendid lunch in the delightful town of Cochem overlooking the Moselle. Our hosts looked after their guests on the second day and in the evening the Friends of Sevenoaks hosted a wonderful dinner in the refectory of the university campus in Rheinbach.

In September 2011, the Friends of Sevenoaks will be travelling from Rheinbach by coach to visit Sevenoaks. Our visitors will be looked after by members of the Friends of Rheinbach. Current plans are to visit Chatham Dockyard and historic Rochester by coach on the first full day. The Friends of Rheinbach will be hosting a dinner for our visitors on the second day and plans are to hold this at Knole Academy West as the visitors will be bringing 18 students who will be meeting with students from Knole Academy. Both twinning organisations are delighted that students are being involved in exchange visits as this is seen as the way forward for developing friendships linking the two towns.

Council Chamber

The Council Chamber is regularly used by Councillors on Monday evenings for Council meetings at which the public are welcome to attend. The meetings are listed on the Town Council website and advertising regularly in the local paper. The chamber is regularly hired to local organisations and charities and is also registered as an Approved Premises for civil ceremonies.

Street Lighting

The Town Council currently maintains 96 street lights in unadopted roads in the Town.

Events

Civic Service

On 27 June 2010 the Town Mayor of Sevenoaks, Councillor Simon Raikes, held his Civic Service at St John The Baptist Church, Sevenoaks which was during the Patronal Festival of the church making it a very memorial day. Town Councillor were joined by several Mayors representing other areas of Kent and Sir Brandon Gough Deputy Lieutenant of the Kent Lieutenancy

Remembrance Day Service

This year's Remembrance Day Service was held on 14 November 2010 at the Vine War Memorial. The Service was led by Revd Angus Macleay, from St Nicholas Church, assisted by Father Richard Harvey of St Thomas's Church and Revd Ken Thom from the United Reformed Church and was followed by local organisations laying wreaths in remembrance. A large number of local townsfolk turned out in the rather miserable weather to join in the service.

Raleys Gym and Fitness Centre

Raleys Gym continues to be well-liked by children and adults alike. Some of our children's instructors have been with the Town Council for 15/20 years and are teaching their second generation of children which proves our popularity. Our staff are very enthusiastic, committed and intent on Raleys continuing to be successful whilst competing with larger leisure centres, but equally retaining its small, welcoming atmosphere.

Gym Tots and Pre-School Gymnastics have both increased in numbers. We have a full gym class on Mondays and are recruiting for a further instructor to increase the number of classes available.

New fitness classes are being introduced on a regular basis to keep pace with current trends

Hall Hirers

Zumba classes have started every Friday and Saturday with a qualified Zumba Instructor.

A former employee, who is a Nia Dance Instructor, has returned from her travels and has now booked three sessions every week and a weekly Kettle Bell and Nutrition class

Easter Holidays

The Easter Term Holiday courses are now open for booking and will include our usual variety of gymnastics courses.

Netball and tennis courses are being planned for the summer

Planning Committee

The Planning Committee meets every 2 weeks to discuss planning applications in the town and associated planning matters. It actively seeks to protect and enhance the character of the town. To this end this last year the committee worked in conjunction with Sevenoaks Society to list and photograph the Victorian postboxes which add to the visual attractiveness of the street scene. The Town Council attempted to obtain National Listing of these historic assets but continues to urge the District Council to produce a Local List to protect the valuable architectural assets of the town.

Planning Applications

During 2010/11 the Town Council has so far been consulted on 442 planning and treework applications. The Town Council has supported the District Council in several written planning appeals.

The Town Council works tirelessly to preserve the sylvan nature of the town and regularly sends comments to the Sevenoaks District Council's Arboricultural Officer using the local knowledge of Town Councillors and also requesting Tree Preservation Orders.

Blighs Development

The Town Council was consulted on the land west of Blighs Meadow being developed for multiple use. Whilst welcoming the supplementary planning document proposal, the Town Council expressed concern at the loss of 58 parking spaces and visual domination of the proposed blocks of flats being detrimental to the character of the area

Local Development Framework

During the course of the year The Town Council responded to the Local Development Framework consultation documents to ensure that the proposals for the town of Sevenoaks reflect the wishes of local residents and the Town Council's aspirations to maintain and enhance the area.

Development Control Meetings

The Town Council is frequently represented at Development Control meetings at Sevenoaks District Council when there is a contentious planning issue and has successfully put the views of local residents across to the Committee.

Kent Highways

The Town Council actively supported local residents and made representations to Kent Highways on several road safety issues. The Town Council regularly reports damaged road surfaces to Kent Highways and is consulted on any road works in the town

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

Open Spaces Committee

Public Toilets:

In May responsibility for the District Council toilets at lower St Johns was handed over to the Town Council, they have since then continued to provide a valuable facility in the north of the Town.

Brittains Common:

In April the Council elected to start the exciting project of "Seven Oaks planted by seven Mayors". A specimen Oak "Koster" with a compact, upright habit was chosen and two have now been planted, with each successive planting to take place in autumn.

Greatness Recreation Ground:

The Sevenoaks Town Council continues to be very well used, with skateboarders, and bike riders, enjoying the site, alongside the active football club, and visitors to the playground.

We continue to have strong associations with the residents association, and last July and October held working parties with the GRA, Town Church, and junior section of Sevenoaks Town football club to clear litter and fly tipping, and plant bulbs.

In February we planted 3 trees close to the play area to help meet a request for shade around the play equipment.

Knole Paddock:

Rugby, Football, and Cricket continue to be very popular as in previous years. Junior tag rugby festivals and kwik cricket tournaments continue to attract participation from a large number of local schools.

Vine Gardens:

The external decoration of the Vine Pavilion and Band practise room is just coming to completion. This has included substantial replacement of the rotten timber in the

band practise room, but will ensure its continued structural stability for the coming years.

Last year's season of concerts at the bandstand on Sundays was the most ambitious in recent years with a concert every week, from the start of the Summer Festival until the end of August gathering an increasing audience throughout the summer.

This year will see Sunday concerts commencing from 19th June through to the August Bank Holiday.

Town Centre:

Despite the difficult trading conditions, local businesses have continued to support the hanging baskets in the Town Centre; with their assistance we have adjusted the basket numbers to improve the display in London road.

Sevenoaks Common and other woodlands:

A total of 10 interpretive information boards have now been installed at entrances to the common, the majority of the money coming from a Forestry Commission grant.

Further thinning has taken place in an area of Common close to the Windmill cottage to help the development of the young trees planted in the recent past.

At Millpond Wood and area of mature sweet chestnut coppice has been re-cut, with the timber cut being split and cut to provide simple rustic posts and rails for use on other projects.

In Middlings Wood a dense area of over mature Norway spruce is being felled to allow regeneration with native species such as Hazel Hornbeam and Oak. 25 Saplings of these species having been supplied by the Kent free trees scheme.

The Future

The Town Council is developing a proposal with local businesses, the Chamber of Commerce, Transition Towns and Local Authorities to form a Town Centre Partnership to market the town as a great place to live, shop and visit.

During 2011 the Town Council intends to enter the Britain in Bloom competition and hopes that its splendid flower displays will be officially recognised.

During these difficult economic times Sevenoaks Town Council will continue to provide local facilities and support local voluntary groups who do likewise.

TOWN COUNCILLORS

KIPPINGTON WARD

Cllr A Eyre [Con] – 63 Brittain's Lane, Sevenoaks, TN13 2JR Tel: 464865
Cllr R J Parry [Con] – Highfield House, 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] – 44 Dartford Road, Sevenoaks TN13 3TQ Tel: 740216
Cllr M Canet [Lib Dem] Holly Cottage 29c Hollybush Lane, Sevenoaks TN13 3TJ 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 Church Field Cottages, Landway, Seal TN15 0DR Tel: 760325
Cllr S Raikes [Con] – Becketts, 38 Woodside Road, Sevenoaks TN13 3HF Tel: 451707

TOWN WARD

Cllr Mrs M London [Con] - 18 Knole Way, Sevenoaks TN13 3RS Tel: 456327
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

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

WILDERNESSE WARD

Cllr Mrs M E Crabtree [Con] – Oakend, 17 Knole Road, Sevenoaks TN13 3XH Tel: 461511

The Town Clerk/Chief Executive Officer is Linda Larter

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