

**Sevenoaks Town Council
Finance & Delivery Committee - 20th April 2026**

Ahead of expected Local Government Reorganisation the local Community Asset Transfer discussions are ongoing. Sevenoaks Town Council is aware that Sevenoaks District Council will be required to transfer all major commercial assets e.g. large car parks, commercial office buildings, hotel to the new Unitary Authority. For this reason, the Town Council have not been requesting any of the larger commercial assets only those community assets originally donated to the town's people.

It is difficult to see how the two Sevenoaks local authorities will be able to align when they approach the transfer from different aims.

Sevenoaks District Council has stated publicly that under direction of its auditors*, Grant Thornton UK it has to aim to maximise income and future development opportunities from community assets and charge Market Value to town and parish councils for these.

Sevenoaks Town Council's aim is to preserve and enhance current community assets for current and future communities. It is requesting that community assets be transferred at '**Best Value**' which takes into account social, economic and environmental well-being. Community Assets can legally be transferred at a **nominal or nil transfer value if valued under £2m**.

STC Community Asset Transfers – Frequently Asked Questions

Key

STC	Sevenoaks Town Council
SDC	Sevenoaks District Council
UA	Unitary Authority
Red Book Valuation	A Red Book valuation is a formal, highly accurate property appraisal prepared by a Royal Institution of Chartered Surveyors (RICS) registered valuer in accordance with the RICS Valuation – Global Standards. Used for legal, tax, or lending purposes, this objective, detailed valuation provides a reliable, defensible market value.
Legislation	The Localism Act 2011, General Disposal Consent (England) 2003, and Public Services (Social Value) Act 2012 provide strong statutory support for transferring local assets where there is demonstrable community benefit. Properly structured, such transfers can fully comply with the Section 151 Officer's duties while improving financial resilience.

	Community Asset Transfers	
1	What is a Community Asset Transfer?	Community Asset Transfer is the transfer of a publicly owned asset (normally buildings or land) to a community organisation at less than Market Value , or at nil consideration (no cost). <i>Locality: Understanding Community Asset Transfer.</i> The Localism Act 2011, General Disposal Consent (England) 2003, and Public Services (Social Value) Act 2012 provide strong statutory

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		support for transferring local assets where there is demonstrable community benefit. Properly structured, such transfers can fully comply with the Section 151 Officer's duties while improving financial resilience.
2	Why has this recently become an issue?	<p>Local Government Reorganisation is happening throughout the country and is expected to begin to take place in Kent in 2027 when a shadow Unitary Authority is created to replace current Borough, District and County Councils.</p> <p>The Community Asset Transfer process was created to enable local assets to remain in local custodianship and management.</p>
3	Which assets has the Town Council submitted Expressions of Interest for under the Community Asset Transfer process, and why?	<p>STC is mindful that large income generating assets will be required by the future Unitary Authority e.g. large car parks, commercial buildings for rent, hotel etc.</p> <p>STC has asked for the following Community Asset Transfers:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Stag Community Arts Centre • Hollybush Recreation Ground • Land at Bradbourne Vale Road (Horses Field) • Land at High Street – Market Rights • The Shambles • St John's Hill Car Park & Public Toilets* • St James Road Car Park* • Bradbourne Lakes* <p>*These were originally rejected by SDC and not currently pursued by the STC.</p> <p>Full Business Cases and independent Market Value Reports have been obtained and submitted to SDC (although not passed to auditors).</p> <p>Sevenoaks Town Council aim is to preserve and enhance current community assets for current and future communities.</p> <p>See below for current status of individual Community Asset Transfers</p>
4	Are there examples of other District Councils transferring assets to Town Councils at no cost?	<p>Horsham District Council Community Asset Transfer Policy: <i>"Transfer to Town and Parish Councils will be at no cost or a nominal sum."</i></p> <p>Swale Borough Council has transferred the following assets Freehold to Faversham Town Council at no cost and without overage.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Town Warehouse (formerly known as T S Hazard)

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		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Town Quay <p>Swale Borough Council currently lease the Oare Gunpowder Works, and the lease has been transferred to Faversham Town Council with £60k funding</p> <p>The National Association of Local Councils have produced a Report NALC Devolution case studies on how this has been achieved elsewhere transferring Community Assets at nominal costs and the successes of local ownership and management.</p> <p>Locality have also produced a relevant report as referred to in item 1.</p>
5	Do Community Asset Transfers need to take place at a charge of the Market Value?	<p>Community Asset Transfer is defined as the permanent or temporary transfer of land or buildings from the Council into the ownership of a community organisation – including town and parish councils.</p> <p>The Govt. General Disposals consent 2003 allows the Council to transfer the ownership and management of land and buildings they own to local communities at ‘less than best consideration (<i>less than Market Value</i>) where it can demonstrate the promotion of Best Value – social, economic and environmental well-being and has a Market Value of less than £2m’.</p>
	Future of the Stag Community Arts Centre (Theatre & Cinema)	
6	What are the terms of the Town Council’s current lease for the Stag, and what happens when it expires?	<p>STC initially had a one-year lease from 2008 – 2009.</p> <p>The current lease is from 1st January 2010 for 25 years on a peppercorn rent. It has options for a 5 yearly rent reviews (so 9 years remaining).</p> <p>The current lease is not within the Landlord & Tenant Act’s automatic Right to Renew.</p> <p>In the current situation when the lease finishes it will be up to the owner of the then Freehold – SDC or UA to agree whether or not to provide a new lease and on what terms.</p>
7	Why does the Town Council want the freehold of the Stag rather than a long-term lease?	<p>STC wants the Freehold of the Stag for the following reasons:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The Stag is a vital part of the economic and social value and life of Sevenoaks town and the surrounding district. The Stag initiates secondary spend in restaurants, cafes, retail and car parking income.

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		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Stag is a social venue for all ages and interests from cinema, dance, comedy, theatre, meeting spaces and youth café. • Waiting for the renewal of the lease on new terms will prevent long term investment and or obtaining external funding towards this. • STC has ambitious plans to provide additional facilities including extra theatre seating (attracting touring shows), Art Gallery, disabled access to the stage, Fly Tower, and an extension above Plaza Suite to enable tertiary education. • Since taking over the Lease in 2009, STC and the Stag charity have invested £1.5m into the facility also thousands of local volunteer hours. • When STC took the Lease in 2009 the Stag’s operation was severely restricted due to the historic debts that had been accrued previously during the operation by SDC and the commercial operator. STC had to negotiate and enter into expensive 5-year financial bonds with Disney, Paramount and Sony just to be able to show films. Some performers still will not return to the Stag due to historic debts. In 2008, the last time the Stag went bankrupt, local suppliers and performers were owed thousands of pounds. STC with the Stag charity has managed the Stag in a prudent and sustainable manner. • SDC has not received any income from the Lease, and it is not on its Balance Sheet so there will be no financial revenue change for them. • STC currently is mid-way between a term of a lease and SDC are stating that they need to discuss with a commercial interest – STC would not want a repeat of this in the future. <p>STC believes local ownership of the facility removes uncertainty for the future both for the Stag and the local economy for the reasons outlined above.</p> <p>STC believed the Stag clearly meets the government test for ‘Best Value’ providing locally demonstrating social, economic and well-being for the local community and being an asset under £2m.</p>
8	<p>Is there a risk that the Stag could be sold to a commercial operator, potentially meaning the end of the Stag as a community arts centre?</p>	<p>Included within the SDC agenda papers for 7th April 2026 was the following (para 23) <i>“During the intervening period the Council has received an enquiry about the asset from a commercial organisation. As such the Council will need to carefully consider how it applies a market value to the freehold community asset transfer of the Stag and if indeed it may need to market the disposal of the asset on the open market”</i></p> <p>When STC took over the lease of the Stag in 2009 this was following a long and arduous open tender process, it is therefore a shock that</p>

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		the lease could be reconsidered due to one unsolicited expression of interest. This makes STC more determined to seek Freehold to avoid this happening again.
9	What are the Town Council's plans for improving and expanding the theatre?	<p>STC has ambitious plans to provide additional facilities including additional theatre seating (attracting touring shows), Art Gallery, disabled access to the stage, Fly Tower, extension above Plaza Suite to enable tertiary education. Click here.</p> <p>When STC took over the Stag it had the following aims. These remain as important now as they were in 2008:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Assisting the sustainability of the local economy of the town, particularly the night time economy and tourism economy • Retaining the valuable social and leisure facility for both performers and audiences • Enabling the development of youth services both in performing arts and youth outreach services • Retaining an iconic building in the town and preserving the street scene • Creation and support to an independent charity to operate the venue with volunteer support.
10	What concerns has the Town Council raised regarding loading bay access at the Stag?	<p>The original discussion with SDC regarding the transfer of the Stag excluded the area of the loading bay. If this is not provided theatre shows would not be able to operate as they use this for equipment etc.</p> <p>SDC are currently considering a different temporary permission, this would not provide long term security and there is a risk the town could end up with a theatre that it could not operate.</p>
11	How does this Community Asset Transfer affect House in the Basement youth café, located under the Stag?	<p>The House in the Basement Youth Café is a facility provided and underwritten directly by STC. STC provides considerable financial support for youth provision in the town see here STC Youth Services Report The youth café is expensive to operate as it receives little or no income. Currently there is no rent payable. If the rent for the Stag became unviable it is unlikely that STC would be able to find another rent free property in the centre of town for young people – this was one of the main reasons for STC taking on the Stag in 2009.</p>
12	What would be the likely financial impact if the Town Council were required to purchase the Stag at market value?	<p>SDC are currently stating the Market Value at £650,000. This would fall to the residents of Sevenoaks Town to pay, STC has no jurisdiction over any other rate payers.</p>

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	<p>Would the Town Council's precept increase?</p> <p>Does the Town Council have sufficient reserves to buy the Stag?</p>	<p>Options are to borrow funds or increase the Precept (Council Tax at approximately 43%) or a combination of both.</p> <p>STC has accumulated reserves although these are below the Best Practice requirement of 6 months working capital. To use most of these reserves would put the financial viability of STC and many community assets at risk.</p>
13	<p>What is the Town Council's response to the District Council saying, "The Council (SDC) should dispose the freehold but at market value" (written in the Finance & Investment Advisory Committee agenda papers of 7th April 2026)?</p>	<p>SDC has stated that its auditors Grant Thornton UK has instructed that the Freehold of the Stag can only be transferred to STC at Market Value i.e. pay £650k.</p> <p>This seems contrary to all previous advice where Best Value consideration is required.</p> <p>STC have now received copies of correspondence between SDC and Grant Thornton auditors, this correspondence indicates</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Grant Thornton auditors did not state assets should be disposed of at Market Value as per SDC Agenda Papers 7th April 2026. • Grant Thornton required SDC to provide a Best Value Assessment including financials for Community Asset Transfers • STC's Business Case and Valuation for the Stag was not forwarded to the auditors. <p>STC agree with Grant Thornton auditors that Best Value should be demonstrated in a full assessment – STC believes its Business Case and independent valuation would assist with this.</p>
14	<p>Did the District Council pay to acquire the Stag and other community assets the Town Council is asking for, and how is that relevant to the current proposal?</p>	<p>Margaret Durdant-Hollamby's Sevenoaks Theatre Action Group (S.T.A.G) were searching from the mid-60s for a theatre site in Sevenoaks (at one time they tried to put a theatre on the developing site of the Community Centre on Cramptons Road but planning permission was refused). This eventually led in the early 80s to the potential that part of the new Waitrose site would become available. Planning permission for a 300-seat theatre was eventually granted in July 1982. Coincidentally in August 1982 The Rank Organisation decided to close the ACE cinema (as it had become by then) and they approached S.T.A.G. to see if they would take on the lease (from Rank). At that time the South Park car park was owned by Rank but leased to Sevenoaks Urban District Council. The Urban District Council was dissolved in 1974 and replaced by Sevenoaks District Council.</p> <p>It is understood SDC bought the freehold of The Stag (and of the South Park car park) in August 1983, the Stag Theatre opening initially on December 18th, 1983.</p>

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		STC believes that public funds have been invested into the facility and additional public funds should not be used to transfer from one local authority to another.
15	What did the independent valuation (Red Book) provide for the Market Value?	STC obtained and paid for an independent Red Book valuation (as requested by SDC) which provided a Market Value of £450,000 SDC had a separate Red Book valuation which provided a Market Value of £650,000.
16	Why is the Stag continuing the Change.org petition given the District Council's position that it does not meet their formal petition requirements?	In order to start a petition with SDC their permission needs to be provided, this seems contradictory to the process. SDC's preferred petition method is a paper petition. It should also be noted that SDC petition policy only accepts entries from those who live or work within the District. This is shortsighted for an asset which underpins the local economy. The Stag necessarily has to stretch beyond TN13 for its audience. About two thirds of the audience comes from TN13, TN14 and TN15 but significant come from TN8 – TN12 (Edenbridge but also Tonbridge) and from BR5 – BR8 (Orpington and Chislehurst). The petition demonstrates the support and indicates the visitors to the town who will no doubt have secondary spend if only on car parking. It has been noted that previous petitions have been submitted via the Change.Org system and this is the modern platform accepted by most other councils including KCC. It is hoped that SDC will accept the petition, however even it doesn't it has over 6,600 signatories and is a public record of the strength of community feeling and may be required to demonstrate this if the process moves onto other processes.
	Hollybush Recreation Ground	
17	What is the current situation relating to the Recreation Ground?	SDC have stated that this should not be transferred because 1) Income generating – however, operates at a net loss, 2) There is an operational depot on site – however STC have provided an ongoing solution to this 3) It is recommended by SDC for future residential development – however no details have been provided previously not to SDC Cllrs nor the public or within the Local Plan 4) No covenants – however there are historic covenants. SDC have referred the asset to its Cabinet to review the recommendation.

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18	How did the Recreation Ground come into ownership of Sevenoaks District Council?	<p>The main Freehold of the land was donated in 1910 with restrictive covenants not to be used for any other purpose than Hollybush Recreation Ground.</p> <p>There were then subsequent areas of land with covenants donated.</p>
19	What are the concerns of Sevenoaks Town Council?	<p>STC are concerned that a larger UA might not see the recreation ground as a priority, might under invest and could take the SDC suggestion of residential development.</p>
20	What is Sevenoaks Town Council proposing for the future of the Recreation Ground if the Community Asset Transfer is successful?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide improvements to reach Green Flag Status • Tree survey and management • Premises Licence to enable community events • Annual Community Fun Day • Community engagement programme for volunteer gardeners • Enhancement to play area (consider water park similar to Swanley) • Improve biodiversity and register for Biodiversity Net Gain.
21	What did the independent valuation (Red Book) provide for the Market Value?	<p>£0 nominal value due to planning restrictions</p> <p>SDC Report states: <i>“The valuation states that the market value is nominal and focusses principally on the operational costs associated with Hollybush stating that there could be an annual operating savings of £7,750 p.a. to the District Council if it were to transfer the asset to the Town Council.</i></p> <p><i>The District Council does not believe this to be the case and viability work suggests that:</i></p> <p><i>Hollybush Park has a significant and existing use value as a multi-use recreational estate</i></p> <p><i>Parts of the site (including car parking areas and ancillary land) have development value in enabling contexts, subject to planning and covenant considerations</i></p> <p><i>The café, tennis and leisure elements, if re-let or reconfigured, would attract materially higher rental values.”</i></p>
	Land at High Street – Sevenoaks Market Rights	
22	What is the current situation relating to the Market Rights?	<p>The District Council Finance Agenda Papers for 7th April 2026 recommended no change.</p> <p>This would mean that the Sevenoaks Market Rights would be by default automatically passed to a new</p>

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		<p>Unitary Authority if and when created, expected to commence in 2027.</p> <p>At the SDC meeting (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ApKE0r3JHmo) Officers stated that the Sevenoaks Market was a Strategic Asset and the new Unitary Authority would want to combine markets from the four combined districts and go out to tender to a commercial entity for increased income. This previously happened in Sevenoaks with disastrous results before the Town Council managed the market.</p>
23	How did the Market Rights come into ownership of Sevenoaks District Council?	<p>Sevenoaks has functioned as a market town since before the Norman Conquest. The Saturday market originated under the Manor of Otford and later Knole and was acquired together with the associated land and rights by Sevenoaks Urban District Council in January 1925. The 1925 indenture expressly permits market rights on ‘any legal days’.</p> <p>In 1974 it passed to Sevenoaks District Council following local government reorganisation – at no cost.</p>
24	What are the concerns of Sevenoaks Town Council?	<p>The concerns are that the mistakes of the past will be repeated. A commercial entity will think there is an opportunity to obtain large sums from the market, pricing the market traders out of business and ultimately lead to the loss of the market.</p> <p>This happened previously at a huge financial loss to SDC and following a petition STC took over the management of the market.</p>
25	What did the independent valuation (Red Book) provide for the Market Value?	<p>£15,000</p> <p>SDC had previously registered the Market Value in 2023 at £10,000 with Land Registry it is now stating the value is £100,000 but without any independent valuation.</p>
	Land at Bradbourne Vale Road (Horses Field)	
26	What is the current situation relating to the Horses Field?	Currently leased to the Riding School for the Disabled. SDC stated it should not be transferred and should be used for future residential development.
27	How did the Horses Field come into the ownership of Sevenoaks District Council?	The land became into the ownership of Sevenoaks Urban District Council from 1927 when development took place to create the current ‘Bradbourne Estate’. The land is currently considered a natural conventional barrier and Green Belt.

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28	What are the concerns of Sevenoaks Town Council?	<p>STC is concerned that either the Riding School for the Disabled will not have a long-term sustainable future if their lease is not continued and the land used for residential development.</p> <p>Also, if the Riding School for the Disabled decided to leave the land will not be used as per Policy L8 of the Sevenoaks Town Neighbourhood Plan voted for at public referendum for allotments.</p>
29	What are Sevenoaks Town Council's plans for the future of the Horses Field?	<p>STC has included within its Business Case that the Riding School for the Disabled should continue for as long as it wishes.</p> <p>Should the Riding School decide to leave the land would be utilised for allotments as per Policy L8 of the Sevenoaks Neighbourhood Development Plan voted for at public referendum.</p> <p>It is believed that allotments will be even more essential in the future with additional housing developments.</p>
30	What did the independent valuation (Red Book) provide for the Market Value?	<p>£25,000 - £30,000</p> <p>SDC Report states (without any independent Red Book assessment): <i>"the unrestricted value is estimated at circa £350,000 - £500,000, subject to planning outcomes"</i></p>
	The Shambles	
31	What is the current situation relating to the Shambles?	SDC recommending to transfer to STC.
32	How did the Shambles come into the ownership of Sevenoaks District Council?	1964 conveyance to Sevenoaks Urban District Council with covenant restricting the land for use as footpaths or public open space.
33	What are Sevenoaks Town Council's plans for the future of the Shambles?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Protection of the historic market function • Improved day-to-day management and trader engagement • Reinvestment of income into maintenance and enhancement • Long term safeguarding of community use
34	What did the independent valuation (Red Book) provide for the Market Value?	£0
	Community Action	
35	How can the community	Sign the Stag Petition: https://www.change.org/stagfreehold

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<p>support the proposals to transfer the Stag and other Community Assets to the Town Council at no further cost?</p>	<p>Write to the Leader of SDC: Cllr.maskell@sevenoaks.gov.uk</p> <p>And Laura Trott MBE MP laura.trott.mp@parliament.uk</p>