

## Sevenoaks Town Council rescues the Stag Theatre and Cinema – for a second time

At the Sevenoaks Town Council Meeting held on 29<sup>th</sup> June 2020 Town Councillors unanimously voted to provide the Stag Theatre and Cinema with a financial lifeline to enable it to re-open and progress with its Recovery Plan from the impact of COVID 19.

The Mayor, Cllr Nicholas Busvine OBE said *“It was a tough two hour meeting – as anyone watching on You Tube will have seen – but I am very glad to say that your Town Council was able to reach a unanimous consensus on a strategy to Save Our Stag. However, this still relies on ongoing participation from the local community.”*

In 2008 Sevenoaks Town Council took the bold step to take over the management of Stag using a different business model following its second bankruptcy by other management companies.

The Town Council’s original aims were set out in its 2008 Business Plan and remain the same today:

- i) Assisting the sustainability of the local economy of the town, particularly the night-time economy and tourism economy.
- ii) Retaining the valuable social and leisure facility for both performers and audiences.
- iii) Enabling the development of youth services both in performing arts and youth outreach services.
- iv) Retaining an iconic building in the town and preserving the street scene.

An independent charity was subsequently created to operate the Stag and the Town Council supported with an annual grant of £27,000. Town Councillors, Trustees, Staff, Volunteers, Customers and Local Businesses invested considerable time and effort to make the Stag the success it had become, a vibrant local leisure facility underwriting the local economy. Pre COVID 19 the Stag was 99% grant free and debt free.

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Town Clerk

Unfortunately, the Stag as per many leisure facilities finances are now critical due to the impact of COVID 19 and social distancing restrictions.

Town Councillors initially considered financially assisting the Stag at a Meeting on 8<sup>th</sup> June 2020. At the meeting Town Councillors stated that they wanted to see evidence of public support for the facility both in communications and fundraising.

Three weeks later Town Councillors were delighted to receive 1,600+ emails of support for the Stag and offers of practical help. In addition, that the public had raised £18,000 to date via the Save Our Stag campaign.

Sevenoaks Town Councillors unanimously voted for the following:

Sevenoaks Town Council is committed to keeping the Stag open and operating for the benefit of the residents of Sevenoaks. Therefore, Sevenoaks Town Council proposed to help the Stag achieve funding in the current fiscal year, in line with the Stag's Recovery Plan. It is noted that the Stag's Recovery Plan will develop as circumstances change and will need to demonstrate how the Stag will recover to a viable operation, as follows:

1. Sevenoaks Town Council will initially grant the Stag £65,000 in line with the request in the Recovery Plan, to cover the first three months of the Stag reopening.
2. The Stag launches a fundraising appeal, with Sevenoaks Town Council agreeing to match fund up to £60,000 achieved by the Stag.
3. Sevenoaks Town Council commits to revisit the Stag's financial situation on a quarterly basis, offering further grants if needed at the same time being mindful that the Town Council's revenue reserves should not fall to levels which would put at risk its own services to the Town.
4. A Working Group of 4 Town Councillors and appropriate Town Council and Stag officers to regularly review the financial position of the Stag and its Recovery Plan.
5. A Working Group of 4 Town Councillors and appropriate Town Council and Stag officers to review alternative governance arrangements to those currently operated.

Members of the public can donate via the Stag's website <https://stagsevenoaks.co.uk>



Due to COVID 19 Sevenoaks Town Council has had to hold meetings virtually rather than within the Council Chamber. For the first time Sevenoaks Town Council streamed its meeting on YouTube which can be viewed at <https://youtu.be/BANwquqPOh0> or searching for Sevenoaks Town Council on YouTube. Over 100 people viewed the meeting live, by the following morning views had risen to 400+.

Linda Larter MBE  
Chief Executive / Town Clerk  
30<sup>th</sup> June 2020