

**Notes of the Sevenoaks Town Team Executive Virtual Board Meeting
Wednesday 16th June 2021**

Meeting started 6.30 p.m.

Meeting concluded: 7.55 p.m.

Executive Board Attendance:

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| Cllr Simon Raikes | Sevenoaks Town Council | Present |
| Cllr Victoria Granville Baxter | Sevenoaks Town Council | Apologies |
| Linda Larter, Town Clerk | Sevenoaks Town Council | Present |
| Cllr Avril Hunter | Sevenoaks District Council | Present |
| Cllr Tony Clayton | Sevenoaks Rail Travellers Association | Apologies |
| Austin Blackburn | Go Coach | Present |
| Elliott Waters | Southeastern | Apologies |
| Jane Parish | Sencio | Absent |
| Hannah Kay | Knole, National Trust | Present |
| Andrew Eyre, Chairman | Stag | Present |
| Kathryn McKerney | Chamber of Commerce | Present |
| | Blighs Meadow | Absent |
| | Sevenoaks Chronicle | Absent |
| Roger Walshe | Sevenoaks Society | Absent |
| Maxine Morgan Vice Chairman | Specsavers | Present |
| Roberta Ware | Francis Jones Jewellers | Present |
| Elizabeth Dolding | Warners Solicitors | Apologies |
| Glenn Ball | Architect | Present |
| Cllr Elizabeth Purves | Hollybush Residents Association | Absent |
| Byron Brown | Bradbourne Residents Association | Absent |
| | Round Table | Absent |
| | Police | Absent |

In attendance: Mayor Cllr Dr Canet , Cllr Richard Parry, Emily Haswell, Dawn Blee, Jim Hughes, Barney Bibb and Mike Reid

- 1. Apologies for Absence:** as indicated above.
- 2. Declaration of Interest:** none received.
- 3. Minutes of the Previous Meeting – 7th April 2021**
Agreed as a true record.
- 4. Post Lockdown – Sevenoaks being ready and encouraging use of local businesses.**

Dawn Blee reported that the results of applications for the Re-start Grants to SDC should be made available in the third week of June. The overall sum which could be awarded to the District is £107,000. Dawn had received a good number of applications featuring a wide range of projects. Dawn was pleased with the content of the application from STC and assuming a positive outcome to the overall application expected to be able to support the items relating to promoting local green spaces and Christmas in Sevenoaks.

As tourism ranks high in the Government thinking Dawn is looking to rationalize the six or seven “What’s on in Sevenoaks” websites into one coherent offering.

5. Buckhurst 1, Pop – up Market review

Linda Larter gave an overview of the outcome of the market which had not been a success. There were a number of reasons for this starting with “critical mass”. Many potential traders wanted to see how busy the market was before deciding whether to take part. The first days of trading did not attract many traders or customers and then followed by appalling wet weather almost every day in May, the event was a wash-out. As SDC were not going to be receiving any parking income for the intended lifespan of the market Linda has asked SDC if free parking could be made available as another way of building trade. She had yet to hear from the SDC portfolio holder.

One benefit of the market project is that there are now some new traders using the regular Wednesday market.

6. Vegan market review

There had been 24 traders at Buckhurst 1 for the first vegan market in the town. Aesthetically this was considered to be a great success, though the traders had mixed results in term of business done. Part of the reason for this is that Vegan Markets UK usually market an event for 13 weeks, but had half this time for both they and STC to promote this market.

It was noted that the only complaint about this market related to one of the hot food stalls having a very noisy generator, and this will be reported back to the organisers.

A second vegan market is now booked to take place at The Vine on Saturday 6th November. If the weather forecast for that day is bad, then it will be postponed to a couple of weeks later.

7. Business Hub update

Mike Reid reported that the hub was officially opened by Mayor Canet on Tuesday 8th June. The Chamber is now based there and the hiring of the first pod has taken place.

Work is progressing on the booking software which will enable users to book online using an app which functions with an interactive plan of the hub showing availability and pricing. Payments will be taken online.

While marketing is taking place, Linda Larter explained that care has to be taken on numbers using the hub due to Covid and the delayed date for when restrictions should be lifted on 19th July.

Emily Haswell suggested that details should be put on the Locate in Kent database.

8. Refill Day

Andrew Eyre commented that he had seen a lot of promotion of the day through STC. World Refill Day was on 16th June and STC were using the occasion to raise public awareness. Presently there are 24 places in Sevenoaks where the public can refill water for free or buy coffee at reduced prices.

Hannah Kay reported that the facility is available, and well used at Knole.

9.0 Sevenoaks in Bloom

The judging takes place on 15th July. Linda Larter is apprehensive of the outcome as this year events have conspired to reduce enthusiasm and work around the town. She had wondered whether Sevenoaks should not enter for 2021, but to retain a presence for future national competitions it is necessary to enter consistently.

10. Social media

For some months the STC and TT Facebook pages have not been working and it has been necessary to create new ones. However, post-Trump, Facebook is cautious with allowing any new public body pages and is checking all such applications. This process is taking several weeks.

In order to promote the hub and local business events STC now has a LinkedIn presence. The facility has just been created but not yet used.

11. Public Realm

The winning design for a sculpture at M&S has been chosen by SDC. It is the "Seven Oaks of Sevenoaks", by Matthijs la Roi and Simone Tchonova. Planning permission will be required for the sculpture and then time will be needed to build it, so it will not be seen for some months.

Mike Reid then reported on the derelict red phone box outside HSBC in the High Street. It has been adopted by a charity, The Friend of Water Search and Rescue. They intend to install a de-fibrillator but do not have the funds to undertake the project. Round Table have though been volunteered to paint the box and are happy to do this. STC will be paying for the paint. Round Table and FOWSART are liaising to take this forward. Dawn Blee said the Restart Fund might be able to help with the provision of the defibrillator.

Mike advised that the former M&Co shop at 96 High Street (now owned by SDC) is under offer on a short term lease, that Starbucks is opening and that the former Edinburgh Woollen Mill shop is in the process of being sold. Andrew added that things are going well with the opening of the fish shop and butchers now in hand. The general view was held that Sevenoaks has been very fortunate to retain so many of its businesses and in being able to attract new ones in this period of Covid, although noting that for individual businesses this is still a challenging time

12. Footfall Counting

A briefing paper on this subject had been circulated with the agenda. The general options on the subject are:

- To use the High Streets Task Force offer of free generic analysis using statistics gathered nationwide to forecast footfall in Sevenoaks, though to create authenticity some physical counting would be needed. This to be augmented by a camera system for more accurate assessments.
- To use either a camera or phone sensor system. Mike Reid reported that such systems had an entry level cost of £5-6000 pa, though increasing for more coverage, and ongoing annual payments.

Maxine Morgan was asked about Specsaver's use of footfall counting. They have an instore device used to track traffic flow and spend, which then enables optimum staffing levels to be put in place. It works very well.

Hannah Kay said that they use pressure pads at the 16 entrances to Knole and though basic, it gives them a good idea of the public's parking preferences.

Dawn Blee can offer car park gathered information relating to volumes, times etc as produced by the ticket machines. Dawn also reported that the District had investigated the use of footfall counting systems though discarded it as being too expensive for the size of towns involved.

A general discussion followed on how any footfall information would be used. It was agreed that the results can be very interesting, but how to use them? The idea of using a system was originally generated by TT as a means for tracking the success those events and initiatives created by TT. It might also be useful for making future funding applications.

Andre Eyre suggested that Mike Reid keep a "watching brief", but no more.

13. Proposals for Business Show and Business Awards

Linda Larter advised that the Business Show will take place on 22nd September at the Bat & Ball Centre. Plans are now being worked up to create the event. She took a straw poll on whether speakers were to be booked. There were mixed feelings on this as a poor speaker/s or would detract from the success of a show whereas a good speaker could clear the exhibition area with delegates often not returning to the exhibition.

Maxine Morgan felt that people could be lured to a speaker event by offering attendees a free lunch, glass of champagne etc.

Andrew Eyre suggested that before deciding on a speaker scenario that we should sell as many stands as possible, then look at the situation.

The Business Awards will also take place at the Bat & Ball Centre in March 2022. They will need to be announced at the Business Show and TT will need sponsors in place for that to happen. As the next TT meeting will fall too late to discuss the event at the Executive Board meeting of 18th August a separate TT meeting will be held in advance to discuss the detail.

14. Reports from TT Members

Andrew Eyre suggested a change from the usual routine of asking all parties for a report on their subject/sector to discuss the effect of the Covid restrictions extension to 19th July.

The Stag is faced with a number of difficulties relating to audience size. Some events are now inadvertently over-booked, and numbers will have to be culled and/or more shows put on to accommodate.

At Knole, one-way systems will have to be maintained. Ticket prices were reduced in line with restricted access to some parts and will not be able to be returned to normal until after 19th July. But visitor numbers to the house are good. Coach parties still cannot be accommodated. Catering is a problem with a severely reduced number of covers being available. Knole had planned to resume use of proper crockery and will have to continue with single use disposable. Maintaining three cleans a day makes for additional expense too.

Austin Blackburn said that the extension would not pose any particular difficulties. Ridership is recovering but not at the rate he had expected and this of course will now extend the time when Go Coach might be back to normal.

15. Date of next meeting

The next meeting will be held on Wednesday 18th August 2021.

16. Press release

STC will produce a press release announcing the Business Show and subsequent Business Awards.

There being no further business the Chairman closed the meeting at 19.55pm.