



**Notes of the Executive Board Meeting**

**Wednesday 23<sup>rd</sup> February 2022**

**Sevenoaks Council Chamber  
Bradbourne Vale Road**

**And by Zoom**

**Meeting started 6.30 p.m.**

**Meeting concluded: 8.25pm**

**Executive Board Members:**

Cllr Simon Raikes	Sevenoaks Town Council	Present
Cllr Victoria Granville-Baxter	Sevenoaks Town Council	Zoom
Linda Larter	Sevenoaks Town Council	Present
Cllr Avril Hunter	Sevenoaks District Council	Apologies
Cllr Tony Clayton	Sevenoaks Rail Travellers Association	Apologies
Austin Blackburn	Go Coach	Present
Elliott Waters	Southeastern	Absent
Jane Parish	Sencio	Apologies
Cllr Andrew Eyre, Chairman	Stag	Present
Hannah Kay	Knole	Present
Andy Sims	Savills (Blighs)	Absent
Editor	Sevenoaks Chronicle	Absent
Roger Walshe	Sevenoaks Society	Zoom
Richard Baxter		Absent
Maxine Morgan, V Chairman	Specsavers	Present
Elizabeth Dolding	Warners Solicitors	Apologies
Roberta Ware	Francis Jones Jewellers	Zoom
Glenn Ball	Local Architect	Absent
Dawn Blee	Chamber of Commerce	Present
Jim Hughes	Resident Association	Present
Helen O'Sullivan	Resident Association	Zoom
Cllr Elizabeth Purves	Resident Association	Apologies
Mike Williams	Round Table	Absent
Police	Police	Absent

**In attendance:** Mayor Cllr Dr Canet, Cllr Richard Parry, Cllr Richard Streatfeild (part meeting), Rebecca Ibbotson, John Ingram, John Levett, Ben Thornewell, Mike Reid. Apologies: Byron Brown

It was agreed that the Executive Board position for a KCC representative should be reinstated.



1. **Apologies for Absence** – as noted

2. **Declarations of Interest** – None received

3. **Minutes**

To receive and approve the minutes of the Town Team Annual Board Meeting of 6th October 2021.

Agreed as a true record

4. **Presentation by Chris Burchell SDC Head of Economic Development speaking on:**

- The role of the Economic Development Team
- Some economic facts about the District
- The emerging new Economic Development Strategy

Chris spoke to the PowerPoint presentation which is attached to these Minutes.

In the ensuing Q&A session the main points were:

A brief review of Chris' experience and take on the Guildford (where he was last employed) BID. He said there were about 500 members and that the BID is now in its second term. He considered it to produce successful outcomes. Most of the members were independent traders and that because of the pandemic there are issues with affordability especially amongst the retailers. The efforts of the BID had now produced a "Pride of Place" feel about the town.

He was asked how Sevenoaks might gain access to LEP funding. Sevenoaks had made a good case for the STC Hub but was unsuccessful, most probably for being seen as an affluent area. There was discussion on "appearance being deceptive" as even in Sevenoaks there are areas of poverty, and that the town should not be ignored in the era of "levelling up".

Chris was asked to return to another TT meeting to advise specifically on how Sevenoaks could make a successful application for LEP funding. The Wayfinder street signage project (more later in these notes) would be the kind of scheme for which LEP support would be sought.

5. **Post Lockdown**

The Town Team has been fortunate to secure Welcome Back funding for a number of small but important projects aimed at attracting people back into the town centre.

Despite a slow start in STC gaining funds from this source, the end of the pandemic has meant that SDC could use monies originally held back as reserve. Dawn Blee, in her SDC role, was thanked for her assistance during the application process and particularly for having enthusiastically helped with late additions to the programme which have essentially used all the reserve. All monies need to be spent and projects completed by 31<sup>st</sup> March 2022.

### *Bus back advertising*

Since the New Year ten Go-Coach vehicles have been operating in the District carrying messages to encourage people to shop, eat and relax in Sevenoaks. These adverts feature Life on High, La Manica and Sevenoaks Bookshop. Funds have recently been released for two further adverts, one for the Business Hub and one for The Stag. Austin had the actual adverts with him, and he showed them to the meeting.

Our thanks go to Go-Coach for hosting these adverts free of charge.

### *Hand sanitisers*

16 hand sanitiser stations have been installed in STC owned buildings

### *Litter Pickers*

Following the success of Clean Up 2021 when STC funded the purchase of litter pickers, which were given to the volunteers, STC has been able to fund the purchase 100 more pickers.

### *Guided walk app*

Following a recommendation of NALC concerning an app provider with a good track record, Trailtale has been appointed to create a walking tour of the town. Work on this has started and source material is being sought.

## **Christmas 2021**

This was a busy period for TT and STC. The major event was of course the Christmas Lights Switch-on which, though the attendance seemed slightly down, proved to be every bit as successful as in recent years. The event sponsors were Manaks, Specsavers and Blighs.





The Best Dressed Window was won by Sevenoaks Bookshop, though, if their toy train had been running The Chocolate Shop might have succeeded. In the non-retail category Life on High were the winners with NFU coming second.

A Christmas Town Trail was run for the youngsters and an outcome report is attached. The prize winners were Primrose and Poppy Clucas, and the event was sponsored by Warners Solicitors. Maxine represented TT at the presentation at Warners office. The post reached 525 on Facebook and 195 on Instagram.

## 6. Business Hub update

By the nature of the hub, hiring levels of the space vary from day to day. At the time of reporting all five private pods are let producing £1450 per month. There are presently 35 signed-up members, with 12 already joining in 2022 though some have yet to actually use the facility. On any given day there are about 2-3 hot desk users.

Income from the Hub is now exceeding outgoings and running at about 60% of target.

Go - Coach are now using the hub and finding a good environment in which to work without interruption and very good value for money.

## 7. Social media

The problems with the replacement STC Facebook page have been resolved and it is performing to expectation. The previous Facebook page is now closed.

The new Town Team Facebook page is still not operating properly due to log-in problems.

SDC has re-launched [Visit Sevenoaks | Places to visit & things to do in Sevenoaks District](#)

## 8. Public realm

The joint project involving TT/STC/SDC and KCC is moving forward but very slowly. The agreed path to making improvements called for a condition audit of all the publicly and privately owned assets in a designated town centre area. To enable this Cllr Streatfeild offered to fund that work through his Members Grant. The application process has however been lengthy and while the principle has been agreed with the KCC Strategic and Corporate Services the funds have still to be received.

Mike Reid outlined how the audit will be reported and having undertaken part to see what it actually involved. He had been surprised by quite how many assets needed to be recorded, especially litter bins. He also opined that if the work to improve the presentation of the town is to be undertaken before the Britain in Bloom judging, then the audit work should be short circuited in respect of some of the very obvious items such as the repainting of 17 blue lampposts in the immediate town centre.



The Britain in Bloom national competition adds a dynamic to this work. The judging of the competition takes into account the overall appearance of a town or city – not just the floral attributes.

Using money from CIL (Community Infrastructure Levy) STC has allocated £50,000 towards improvements to the public realm. This money is not generally intended to be used on “catch up maintenance” of the public realm but for improvements and additions to infrastructure, though that might include an element of maintenance.

The audit is intended to identify assets for:

- removal
- cleaning
- repainting
- renewal

It will also shortlist those buildings which are in poor repair or require decoration.

Since starting this project in the summer of 2021 the following things have happened

- Sevenoaks Round Table volunteered to refurbish the redundant phone box outside HSBC. The outside is complete and they intend to finish inside this month. Funding for a defibrillator has been given by a local business and this project should be completed around Easter.
- The white lamp posts at The Vine have been cleaned
- The white bollards and railings in the Upper High Street have been cleaned
- The Sevenoaks Society is undertaking a survey of the signs it has on historic and listed buildings – for the most part they need repainting.
- Consideration is being given to creating a new signage scheme for the town.

Though not directly attributable to the project these are updates on developments happening since the project started regarding some of the poorly presented buildings in the town:

- The M Store has been let and is now occupied by Hospice in the Weald
- Work has started on the refurbishment of the former Edinburgh Woollen Mill premises
- Work is nearing completion on the redevelopment of 48 High Street and a sale has been agreed on the top floor flat.



- No 43-45 High Street, (formerly Swinton Insurance) which requires a very substantial investment has been To Let but is now For Sale through new agents.
- The former dilapidated warehouse building in Lime Tree Walk is in the process of being converted to a business centre. [LIME TREE WORK SHOP](#)
- No 8 London Road has been refurbished and is about to open as a high class restaurant.
- The bus station has been repainted by SDC and the materials funded by Go-Coach. The question was asked whether any progress had been made on refurbishing the public conveniences and the answer is “No”. They are however considered to be clean.
- “I have noticed that some of the junctions around the town centre have started to wear so I have requested these to be refreshed. Budget depending, I will also see if we can refresh the rest of the white lining along London Road, Pembroke Road and High Street” – Highway Steward, KCC.

Additionally it was reported that the sculpture which is to go outside M&S will be installed in June/July and that SDC will be attending the pouring of the bronze in Matfield. Another installation is being considered for The Shambles.

### **Britain in Bloom**

Sevenoaks has reached the finals in the Business Improvement Districts, Town Centres and City Centres category of the National competition. The other finalists are:

- Bury in Bloom, Suffolk
- Ulverston BID, Cumbria
- Orpington 1<sup>st</sup> BID, London
- Blackburn Town Centre, Lancashire
- Shaftesbury in Bloom, Dorset
- Sevenoaks, Kent
- St Austell BID, Cornwall

A meeting of interested parties has been to develop ideas for the Sevenoaks entry.



The colour theme which is being adopted is purple and gold to tie in with The Queens Platinum Jubilee celebrations and STC purchased 10 wrought iron crowns to be used as part of garden displays. These are about 18” high and cost £16 each. The response from the Britain in Bloom committee was so enthusiastic that five 2m crowns and a further 13 small crowns have been ordered.

### **The Queens Platinum Jubilee Celebrations, 2-5 June 2022**

On 8<sup>th</sup> February a meeting of 30 people discussed plans for the Jubilee. The headline topics were:

- ❖ Lighting of the Jubilee Beacon
- ❖ A children’s High Street Safari, Jubilee Trail similar to those held in 2021
- ❖ A Jubilee edition of Town Crier similar to that produced for the Diamond Jubilee
- ❖ A children’s literary competition based on “If was king or queen for a day....”
- ❖ A Big Jubilee Lunch to be organised at Vine Gardens
- ❖ Highway decorations to be developed

A full copy of the meeting notes is available on request.

### **9. Business Awards**

Due to the proximity of the original March date for the Awards and the then unknown effects of Omicron the date has been postponed until Friday 10<sup>th</sup> June.

Richard Streatfeild was thanked for offering KCC funds to sponsor the final category, and the entry forms can now be completed and printed.

A highly successful business person with a very interesting back story is likely to become the speaker for the evening, and confirmation is awaited on that too.

Once the confirmations are received the entry forms will be distributed through all the media channels. Printed versions will also be distributed to town centre businesses.



The 2022 categories are:

2022 Category	Outline Criteria
Independent Business	Open to all independent businesses with fewer than 50 employees operating within Sevenoaks town.
Larger Business	50+ Employees
Green Business Award	Demonstrating commitment to climate change initiatives
New Business	Set up within last 5 years
Customer Choice – Local business or local business person of the year	Open nominations -no criteria Voted by public
Micro Enterprise	Home working or Business Hub small business
Judges Choice	The Judges retain the ability to present an award to a business or person that has provided a significant contribution to economic development and the local community.

### 10. Greening Sevenoaks Survey

STC has launched its Green Community Investment Plan and to measure what progress is made over the years a baseline survey has been created and is being distributed. It is intended that this will create a picture relating to various measures of “green-ness” now, and into the future.

The survey has been emailed to all Town Team Members with a request not only to complete it but also to circulate to friends and family in Sevenoaks. Social media is also being used for this purpose. To make the survey meaningful at least 2-3000 responses are wanted.

CLlr Clayton was thanked for his help in designing and wording the survey.





## **11. Wayfinder Signage**

It is common ground that Sevenoaks has very poor signage and in recent days TT has been researching the market for expert designers and suppliers. Since circulating the Agenda for this meeting a very good proposal has been received from an independent consultant. The consultancy proposal is set out in stages from briefing to overseeing and snagging the installations. In order that the full consultancy role can be tendered (it is likely to cost over £25,000), it is probable that the consultant will be appointed to scope the project and produce the scheme.

Part funding of £2300 for this first stage has been sourced from The Welcome Back Fund and STC will soon be discussing the balance.

## **12. Reports from Town Team Members**

### **Maxine Morgan Retailer**

Business at Specsavers remains busy.

### **Austin Blackburn Go-Coach**

In line with the experience of other operators' ridership is now at about 50-60% of pre-pandemic levels.

Due to a reduction in its grant from Government KCC is reducing its subsidy for school transport. As the schools' contact is coming up for re-tendering this is a concern.

The Go 2 service is working well and building.

The company is painting one of its buses in a "Jubilee" livery. There will soon be 3 electric buses on trial and at least one will remain with Go-Coach.

Infopods are going into the train stations meaning that rail travellers can book a bus directly without needing a phone.

### **CLlr Canet – Senior Resident Associations**

"Pride of Place" is very important, and we must build on that. Schools could become involved in promoting the "Greening Sevenoaks" survey and promotion of the Jubilee celebrations.

### **CLlr Streatfeild - KCC**

The school bus services will be subject to consultation before any decisions are made.

20mph speed limits are being introduced across towns in Kent. The first few schemes were hurried and there was much public backlash. For further towns, such as Sevenoaks a proper consultation will be undertaken and will focus greatly on the views of Residents Associations.



**Roberta Ward – Independent Trader**

Welcomes the end of the Covid restrictions and the opportunity to rebuild, as much income had been lost especially at the busiest period at Christmas. Her business Francis Jones has just suffered a burglary and while good wishes were expressed by TT members, she also said that she had received much kindness and some flowers from customers.

She asked for help in having the front of the Linen House cleaned and the removal of many months rubbish from the rear of the premises. Though she is on the case, it was suggested that Environmental Health ought to be people to deal with the problem.

**Roger Walsh – Sevenoaks Society**

Requested a copy of the map being used as the basis of the Public Realm audit. The Society is gearing up for the Jubilee.

**John Levett – Summer Festival**

The Festival will run over the period 18<sup>th</sup> June – 3<sup>rd</sup> July with many of the acts booked for the cancelled 2019 event becoming involved again. The Festival is looking for sponsors.

**Dawn Blee – Sevenoaks & District Chamber of Commerce**

The Chamber has come through the pandemic very well with membership numbers only down by 4. There are presently about 200 members. Members are though worried about the impact of price increases.

**CLlr Raikes - SDC**

The SDC Council Tax precept increase has been agreed at 2.2% on Band D.

The SDC masterplan for the town centre is still in development.

**Hannah Kay and Rebecca Ibbotson - Knole**

Knole is enjoying a substantial return in visitor numbers, especially at weekends, though staffing is proving difficult and business opportunities are being lost for that reason – especially in the café which often has to close through lack of staff. Across all categories, including skilled professionals there are presently 15 vacancies.

They have a very busy events programme for the year.

The new SE Water main has given rise to the discovery that the firefighting water supply to the house was inadequate and this is being upgraded.

The ice house, built in 1720 is being excavated and proving to be an interesting attraction.



**Andrew Eyre - Stag**

An industry wise survey has found that visitor numbers to venues such as the Stag are down by about 50% on all demographics compared with pre-pandemic levels. The Stag had faced recruitment problems too but is now up to quota.

**Linda Larter – Sevenoaks Town Council**

STC is working hard on preparations for Britain in Bloom. The Green Community Investment Plan should receive approval next week. The Bat & Ball Station cloakrooms have won the “Loo of the Year Award” and the scheme has been recognised by the Design Council Award for best practice in project management. It is hoped that the delayed Neighbourhood Development Plan will be completed soon.