

Sevenoaks Town Council
Minutes of meeting of Finance & Delivery Committee – 20th April 2026

Held in the Council Chamber, Town Council Offices, TN13 3QG

Livestreamed and available to view on YouTube until approved by Council:

<https://youtube.com/live/pYIDsu9fdBw>

Meeting commenced: 19:18 Meeting Concluded: 21:05

Present:

Cllr Nigel Wightman, Chair	Present	Cllr Catherine Daniell, Deputy Leader	Present
Cllr Claire Shea, Leader & Vice-Chair	Present	Cllr Dr Peter Dixon	Apologies
Cllr Libby Ancrum	Present	Cllr David Skinner OBE	Present
Cllr Tony Clayton, Mayor	Present		

Cllr Dr Merylyn Canet	Substitute for	Cllr Dr Peter Dixon
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In attendance: Deputy Mayor Cllr Victoria Granville, Town Clerk, Deputy Town Clerk and Responsible Finance Officer and Senior Committee Clerk.

3 members of the public were present.

PUBLIC QUESTIONS

Andrew Eyre, Chief Executive of the Stag Community Arts Centre, advised that he had written to Sevenoaks District Council (SDC) regarding the Local Government Reorganisation process and in particular the Community Assets Transfer process, as follows:

“The Stag would like to ask two questions before the Cabinet meeting on 21st April 2026. The Stag’s Chairman of Trustees, Nigel Wightman, will be present to ask them.

1. Referring to the Cabinet Agenda Papers for 21st April please could SDC confirm which of the following statements are correct as they are inconsistent with each other:

pg. 20 item 7 *“The Council is not seeking a commercial sale...”*

vs.

p288 item 23 *“... 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.**”*

2. Please can SDC confirm that it will provide its auditors with a full copy (not an annotated summary) of the Sevenoaks Town Council’s Stag Business Proposal and Valuation and ask the auditors that they are **satisfied that it demonstrates the promotion of Best Value – social, economic and environmental well-being of the asset and due to the Market Value of less than £2m the Freehold (subject to**

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overage) can be transferred to Sevenoaks Town Council using the powers invested in Sevenoaks District Council from The Localism Act 2011, General Disposal Consent (England) 2003. Can the District Council report the auditor's response back to The Stag please. "

Andrew Eyre asked whether the Town Council had received a response to these questions.

Cllr Shea confirmed that the following response had been received from the SDC Chief Executive:

"Thank you for your email. By way of clarification at the outset, Sevenoaks District Council's Constitution does not provide for public questions to be asked at Cabinet meetings. Cabinet is a formal executive decision-making body and, as such, questions are not taken from the public during the meeting itself. However, in the interests of openness and transparency, I am responding to the matters you have raised in writing in advance of the meeting.

For the avoidance of any doubt, Sevenoaks District Council is categorically not pursuing a commercial sale of The Stag.

The statement on page 20 of the Cabinet agenda papers is correct:

"The Council is not seeking a commercial sale..."

The reference on page 288 does not indicate an intention to sell the asset commercially, nor does it represent a change in the Council's position. It reflects the Council's statutory duty to demonstrate Best Value and to be alive to market considerations, including acknowledging that enquiries from third parties may be received from time to time.

Local authorities are required to understand market value implications when considering the disposal of public assets, including through a Community Asset Transfer. This does not mean that the Council intends to market The Stag or dispose of it on the open market. Rather, it ensures that decisions are lawful, transparent and can be robustly evidenced.

To be clear:

1. There is no decision, proposal, or intention to market The Stag for commercial sale, and
2. In June 2026, Cabinet will be asked to consider The Stag solely within the context of a Community Asset Transfer to Sevenoaks Town Council.

The Council will ensure that its external auditors are provided with access to the relevant documentation required to support the Council's decision-making and to give assurance around Best Value, probity and governance.

This will include consideration of Sevenoaks Town Council's Business Proposal and Valuation insofar as is necessary for the auditors to satisfy themselves that the proposed approach demonstrates the promotion of social, economic and environmental wellbeing in line with the Council's adopted Disposals Policy, legal

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powers and duties. Please note that the auditors' role is to provide assurance to the Council, rather than to external parties.”

The Town Council was of the view that the response did not clarify the incompatibility of the two statements referred to. There was also concern that there did not seem to be any commitment to full disclosure of information to the auditors. The understanding was that they had been provided with a shortened, redacted version of the Town Council's Business Case for the transfer of the Stag Theatre and it appeared the information provided did not provide the required assessment of Best Value.

31 - APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

RESOLVED: To receive and accept apologies for absence as shown above.

32 - REQUESTS FOR DISPENSATIONS

Noted that all Councillors who were also Stag Trustees had a pre-approved dispensation, reference Minute 36 below insofar as it related to the Community Asset Transfer request for the Stag freehold.

33 - DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest.

34 - MINUTES OF FINANCE & DELIVERY COMMITTEE

RESOLVED: To receive, adopt and sign the Minutes of the Meeting of the Finance & Delivery Committee held on 23rd February 2026 as a true record.

35 – CHANGE TO ORDER OF AGENDA

RESOLVED: That the order of the agenda be amended to facilitate consideration of the following item on Community Asset Transfers for the benefit of the members of public in attendance.

36 – COMMUNITY ASSET TRANSFERS

Councillors considered the detailed report prepared by the Town Clerk setting out the background and concerns relating to the Community Asset Transfer bids (attached as Appendix) for:

- Stag Community Arts Centre
- Hollybush Recreation Ground
- Land at High Street – Sevenoaks Market Rights
- Land at Bradbourne Vale Road (Horses Field)
- The Shambles

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The Town Clerk reported that ahead of expected Local Government Reorganisation the local Community Asset Transfer discussions were ongoing. Sevenoaks Town Council was aware that Sevenoaks District Council would 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 had not been requesting any of the larger commercial assets only those community assets originally donated to the town's people.

Sevenoaks Town Council's aim was to preserve and enhance current community assets for current and future communities. It was 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.**

Councillors noted that the petition initiated by the Chair of Trustees of the Stag Community Arts Centre on Change.org had now received over 7000 signatures:

www.change.org/stagfreehold

In relation to Sevenoaks Market Rights, a statement had been received on behalf of the market traders emphasising strong support for local management of the markets.

RESOLVED:

Sevenoaks Town Council have serious concerns about Sevenoaks District Council's Recommendations for Community Asset Transfers which are due to be considered at their Cabinet meeting tomorrow evening.

The Town Council had hoped to have had a liaison meeting to discuss these concerns with the District Council.

The Town Council believes that the Recommendations do not reflect Best Value for local residents and what is best for the Community in relation to economically, socially and for their well-being.

The proposed charges for land arbitrary set at £5 sqm and potentially Market Value for the Stag at £650k is one of the serious concerns as the funding of these transfers will fall direct to local residents to pay for assets already owned by the public.

It is therefore Recommended that if Sevenoaks District Council does not agree to handing over the following Community Assets (Stag, Hollybush Recreation Ground, Horses Field, Market Rights and Shambles) at nominal value as allowed by legislation, Sevenoaks Town Council will use all avenues and resources available to contest this in the best interest of the current and future generations of Sevenoaks residents.

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It is hoped that other parish councils whose residents will be similarly impacted will join Sevenoaks Town Council.

37 - FINANCE REPORTS - FEBRUARY 2026

37.1 - Statement of Accounts

The Committee received and considered the Statement of Accounts and Responsible Finance Officer's report for the month ended 28th February 2026, including Income and Expenditure by cost centre, Variance Analysis, Fund Balances, Statutory Balance Sheet, Earmarked Reserves and Operating Income & Expenditure, together with:

Suppliers' Accounts

- 1st to 28th February 2026, total gross invoices £326,073.88

List of Payments

- Sevenoaks Town Council Nat West Account: 1st to 28th February 2026 – total £476,912.80
- Mayor's Charity Account: 1st to 28th February 2026 - None

Payroll Account

- 1st to 28th February 2026, total £101,849.23

Petty Cash Account

- 1st to 28th February 2026, total payments £181.21

It was noted that the year-to-date position at the end of February 2026 showed a surplus of £15,674. Key variances to date included:

- Town Council Offices: income £14,166 above budget and expenditure approximately £2k under
- Bat & Ball Station: deficit of £12k due to the Café concession starting in October, rather than April as hoped
- Bat & Ball Centre: income £21,946 above budget but expenditure £33,705 above (due to drainage and maintenance works)

The Responsible Finance Officer estimated that the year-end figure would be £20k surplus.

The following items were also noted:

- to date £13,830 had been allocated from the contingency of £62,000
- outstanding debts of approximately £250 on allotment payments were being pursued

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- Statutory Balance sheet showed total assets to end of February 2026 were £2,704,197, a decrease of £306,909 from January 2026
- Revenue (General) Reserves had increased by £13,586 leaving a balance of £529,987
- £387,152,23 was recalled from Santander 90-day account at 3.65% and reinvested into an Investec 3 month at 3.7%

RESOLVED that the Management Accounts 1st to 28th January 2026 be received and accepted.

37.2 - Hospitality & Gift Register

RESOLVED: To note that no Hospitality or Gifts had been received by Councillors or staff for the period 1st February to 14th April 2026.

38 - SEVENOAKS TOWN COUNCIL FINANCIAL RESERVES

The Committee considered the Town Council's Reserves Policy which aimed to increase reserves by £20k annually, working towards a fund equal to at least 6 months of the current precept. It was noted that in 2026 this would equate to £812,042. At the end of March, the general reserve was £499,542.

It was planned to review the policy once there was clarity on the Community Asset Transfer bids.

RESOLVED: To receive and note the report.

39 – APPOINTMENT OF INTERNAL AUDITORS

The Committee considered the internal audit quotation received from Mulberry Local Authority Services Ltd for internal audits 2026/27, which set out the terms of the appointment, including the scope of the audit and fees

The Chair commented that Mulberry had been highly professional and engaged and provided an excellent service during 2025-2026.

RESOLVED:

- 1) That Mulberry Local Authority Services Ltd be appointed for Sevenoaks Town Council internal audits for a three-year period, commencing 1st April 2026
- 2) That the Mulberry Local Authority Services Ltd Internal Audit Fee of £85 + VAT per hour, be considered and approved
- 3) To confirm that the independence of the internal auditor was assessed, and it was considered that they were independent as they do not have any involvement in any financial decisions, management or control of Sevenoaks Town Council or its financial controls and procedures
- 4) To confirm that the competence of the internal auditor was assessed, and it was considered that they were suitably competent and understand the sector.

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40 - INSURANCE RENEWAL DOCUMENTS

RESOLVED: To receive and accept:

- Sevenoaks Town Council Insurance 2026/27
- Sevenoaks Town Council Motor Fleet Insurance 2026/27

41 - CIL UPDATE REPORT

Consideration was given to the update report on CIL funds and the status of projects, noting the following:

1) Remaining projects for CIL as at 14th April 2026 were as follows:

	Original Budget	Spent	Balance	Agreed	Planned Completion
Public Realm Town Ward	£50,000	£50,000	£0	Reviewed Feb 24	Ongoing
Judd's piece resurfacing	£2,000	-	£2,000	Reviewed Feb 24	2026
Woodside Rd - fencing	£1,000	-	£1,000	Reviewed Feb 24	2025
knole paddock front barn doors	£2,000	-	£2,000	Reviewed Feb 24	2025
Green Link Feasibility	£15,000	-	£15,000	Reviewed Feb 24	Ongoing
Masterplan x2	65000 + £20k	£65,000	£20,000	Reviewed Jan 26	Started
20 mph	£141,967	£111,271	£10,000	10/06/2024	Contingency Left
Dartford Road Crossing	£25,000	£4,170	£20,830	Reviewed Feb 24	2025
Greatness Pavilion	£87,500	Moved	£0	Reviewed Feb 24	133,600 added Sep 25 for green initiatives
Greatness CCTV	£9,000	-	£9,000	Reviewed Feb 24	2026 - linked to the completion of Greatness Pavilion
Vine Gardens Crazy Paving	£10,000	£10,000	£0	Reviewed Feb 24	2025
Balance of cost for Recycle bound resin (Vine Gardens crazy paving)	£13,130	£13,130	£0	Agreed June 25	2025
Greatness Play Area	£150,000		£150,000	Agreed June 25	2025
Solar Batteries	£20,000	£20,000	£0	Agreed June 25	2025
Play Areas inc Buckhurst	£25,000	£27,474	£26	Agreed July 25	2025
Oast House Feasibility Report	£4,500	£4,500	£0	Agreed Sep 25	2025
Portable floodlights for Knole Paddock	£13,000		£13,000	Agreed Nov 25	2026
Permanent floodlights for Knole Paddock	£38,000		£38,000	Agreed Nov 25	2026
Repairs to Raleys Car Park	£36,125	£27,313	£8,812	Agreed Nov 25	2026
Contribution from SDC CIL towards Dartford Road			20,000	Received March 26	Completed awaiting invoice
			£309,668		

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2) STC Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) Receipts

Unallocated CIL Balance (reported to Finance & Delivery Committee 23 rd February 2026)	£832
Less Projects:	
Buckhurst Play Area	-£2,500
Unallocated Balance	-£1,668
Add:	
Add current SDC CIL balance (CIL collections October 2025 to March 26)	£64,517
Total Unallocated Balance (March 2026)	£62,849

The Committee considered whether there were items that could be deferred to free up funds for other projects, to be topped up when funds became available.

RESOLVED that:

- 1) CIL Update Report to April 2026 be received and noted
- 2) Projected unallocated balance of £62,849 as at April 2026 be noted
- 3) That the £15k allocated to Green Link Feasibility and £10k contingency remaining in the allocation for the 20mph scheme, be deferred to free up funds at this time, to be topped up as further funds become available.

42 - RECOMMENDATION FROM OPEN SPACES (COMMUNITY ASSETS) COMMITTEE: NEW FLOODLIGHTS FOR RUGBY PITCHES AT KNOLE PADDOCK

Consideration was given to the recommendations from the Open Spaces (Community Assets) Committee in relation to the tender received for the replacement of the permanent floodlighting for the rugby pitches at Raleys Field.

The Committee noted that £38k had been allocated to this project from the CIL budget but the cost had increased to £60,577.53 due to a higher specification being required.

RESOLVED that:

- 1) A further £22,578 of CIL be allocated to this project

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- 2) That Option 2 of the tender received for a 5-mast permanent floodlighting system with new LEDs at Raleys field, at a cost of £60,577.53 be approved subject to planning permission
- 3) An application be submitted for planning permission

43 - GREATNESS RECREATION GROUND PAVILION: CONTRACTOR'S JCT CONTRACT

In April 2025 the Committee had agreed the signing of the JCT contract for the construction of the community sports pavilion at Greatness Recreation Ground subject to final details.

A formal minute agreeing to sign the contract was required for audit purposes,

RESOLVED: That Sevenoaks Town Council agrees to sign the JCT Contract with Longley Contractors for £2,067,512.12 for the new Greatness Pavilion project.

44 - GREATNESS RECREATION GROUND SPORTS & COMMUNITY PAVILION: LANDSCAPING AND ANCILLARY FACILITIES

It was noted that the Pavilion building project was progressing well and ahead of schedule. Additional costs for finishes had been provided at £173,828.72: working with the Football Club and the contractors this had been value engineered and reduced to £16,900 which the Football Club agreed to fund. This excluded the installation of a solar battery which it was suggested be funded as part of the Town Council's Green Community Investment Plan.

Conditions attached to the planning permission for the new Pavilion required some additional facilities be completed prior to the building opening, including:

	Facility	Estimated Cost
1	Access pathway for emergency vehicles	£22,970
2	Extended pedestrian path from main entrance, alongside car park, linking to Skatepark	£6,100
3	Cycle stand & cover for 4 bicycles	£1,500
4	New bike path along existing Pavilion to new access roadway	£10,800
5	2 x vehicle electric charging Points	£8,000
6	Seven new trees and one hedge planting along pedestrian path	£20,000
7	Green wall and roof maintenance	The Football Club to take out at least a one-year maintenance contract (£5,000).
8	2 x temporary parking grassed overspill – one to right of existing car park, and one past overspill gate Double gate to match fencing.	£3,000
9	Surfacing existing parking area with gravel hogging material	£85,450
10	New overspill parking gate	£3,000

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11	Bird box and bat box	Football Club member to supply and fit.
12	Five wall-mounted down lights	Included within current contract

RESOLVED that Sevenoaks Town Council proceeds using £65,000 CIL funding and £100,000 from Capital Receipts Earmarked Reserve, for:

1. Installation of Solar Batteries at a cost of £9,000 as part of its Green Community Investment Plan
2. Gravel Hogging to Emergency Pathway at £23,000
3. Installation of two electric vehicle charging points at £8,000.
4. Installation of cycle stand and cover at £1,500
5. Installation of pedestrian paths and top dressing with Gravel Hogging at £20,000
6. Top dressing car park with Gravel Hogging at £85,450
7. 2 x new gates at £6,000
8. Trees at £7,000

Total £159,950

45 - STREETLIGHT AT HEATHFIELD ROAD

Following damage by a vehicle to a streetlight column situated within the driveway of a property in Heathfield Road, arrangements were made for the disconnection/reconnection of the electricity supply and replacement of the column. However, on the day a neighbouring resident prevented the works taking place. Unfortunately, the Town Council still incurred costs for the aborted works of £2,229.60 for UKPN disconnection/reconnection and £1,132.50 for the replacement column.

RESOLVED: To proceed with the works from the contingency and that authority be delegated to the Town Clerk, in consultation with the Chair of the Finance & Delivery Committee, to negotiate a contribution to the further costs of replacing the streetlight with the resident within whose property the streetlight stands.

46 - TOWN COUNCIL OFFICES: TELEPHONE CONTRACT

Consideration was given to options for the Town Council's telephone contract.

RESOLVED: That the Town Council agrees a 12-month contract for the 3CX Phone System, at a cost of £208.50 per month and a one-off purchase of handsets.

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47 - GRANT APPLICATION FROM DARENT RIVER PRESERVATION SOCIETY

The Committee considered a grant application received and **RESOLVED** that a grant request be awarded under the General Power of Competence (Localism Act 2011 Sections 1-8 refers) as follows:

Grant Ref No	Organisation	Purpose of award	Grant Application	Grant Awarded
92	Darent River Preservation Society (DRiPS)	Contribution to fees for consultant to work with the various water companies and run modelling software to explore alternative solutions to improve the base flow of the River Darent throughout the year.	£500	£500

48 - MINUTES OF ARTS & CULTURE WORKING GROUP

RESOLVED: To receive and note the minutes of the Arts & Culture Working Group held on 12th March 2026

49 - MINUTES OF COMMUNICATIONS WORKING GROUP

RESOLVED: To receive and note the minutes of the Communications Working Group held on 20th March 2026.

50 - MINUTES OF TOWN TEAM MEETING

RESOLVED: To receive and note the minutes of the Town Team Meeting held on 25th March 2026.

51 - CURRENT MATTERS

RESOLVED: To receive and note updates to the list of current matters.

52 - PRESS RELEASES

RESOLVED: That press releases be issued in respect of the following items:

- 1) Resolution in respect of Community Asset Transfer requests
- 2) Grant award of £500 to Darent River Preservation Society (DRiPS)
- 3) Greatness Recreation Ground, Sports & Community Pavilion Landscaping and related Facilities – funding agreed
- 4) Floodlighting at Raleys Field for Rugby Pitches

There being no further business the Chair closed the Meeting.

Signed

Dated

Chair

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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?	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.
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?	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. 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.
29	What are Sevenoaks Town Council's plans for the future of the Horses Field?	STC has included within its Business Case that the Riding School for the Disabled should continue for as long as it wishes. 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. It is believed that allotments will be even more essential in the future with additional housing developments.
30	What did the independent valuation (Red Book) provide for the Market Value?	£25,000 - £30,000 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>
	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>