



Town Clerk's Update



Council news and information from Sevenoaks Town Clerk, Linda Larter MBE

8 April 2026

Local Government Reorganisation & Community Asset Transfers

As we head towards the uncertainty of Local Government Reorganisation in Kent, expected to start to take place a year from now, what does the future hold for Sevenoaks?

Reading Sevenoaks District Council's Finance and Investment Advisory Committee agenda papers for 7th April it could look like the following:

- **Stag Community Arts Centre** - sold off to the highest commercial bidder or public charged £650,000+ (43% on Precept) to own its public asset*
- **Hollybush Recreation Ground** - used for residential development* on this treasured public open space originally gifted to the town
- **Land at Bradbourne Vale Road (Horses Field)** - used for residential development* making the Riding School for Disabled homeless
- **Town Centre Markets** - operated by distant local authority who knows little about the town, we have had similar disastrous operations before
- **Parishes** being charged for public open spaces in their villages

What a legacy SDC will leave behind.

The public seems to have little say. Thousands have signed a petition for the Stag freehold to be handed to the Town Council / Charity who have had the Lease since 2009 and invested £1.5m into it. Currently SDC have said they will not accept the petition.

It doesn't even seem that SDC elected members want this. However, we are told this is the requirement of the Council's auditors Grant Thornton UK! We seem to have moved into a different kind of democracy.

All of these assets have been vested in SDC due to the previous Local Government Reorganisation. Custodianship of these community assets moved from one local authority to another at that time at no cost, surely this should happen again and not be an additional financial burden on the local community both in Sevenoaks town and in local parishes.

*income from these commercial activities would go to the new Unitary Authority

The Town Council is very concerned about local community assets, and that ownership and management of them should remain as local as possible. The Town Council has requested from Sevenoaks District Council to transfer the following community assets – to date it has only recommended that the Shambles be transferred.

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

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This week I sent the following email to **Laura Trott** our local MP:

Following the publication of SDC Finance and Investment Advisory Committee 7th April agenda papers I am writing to you as the Sevenoaks MP on the following matters.

It is a sad situation that Sevenoaks community finds itself in as we head into Local Government Reorganisation. History may well reflect that not only did SDC not protect treasured community assets and functions by enabling them to be kept under local custodianship but in the case of assets such as the Stag and Hollybush Recreation Ground (HRG) actively promoted commercial or residential development.

Please see below in relation to the recommendations within SDC agenda papers:

Hollybush Recreation Ground - SDC states that

- HRG is income generating – **yes but not mentions it currently operates at an annual loss.**
- The Depot is required for operational use – **yes but STC in its Business Case provides a no cost solution to this.**
- The public open space gifted to the town could have residential development! – **this has not been considered as any part of Local Plan allocations, public consultation or even SDC member’s debate.**

These details are not being presented to SDC Members in its papers.

Land in High Street – Market Rights

- SDC registered the Market Value on HM Land Registry (TT156981) on 14th July 2023 at £10,000
- STC obtained an independent professional Market Value of £15,000.
- SDC officers are now stating that the Market Value is £100,000 with no alternative independent professional valuation to support this. Does this also mean that the first point is incorrect?

Stag Community Arts Centre

- *“...The Council (SDC) should dispose the freehold but at market value...”*

The Market Value could be £650k+. Sevenoaks Town Council does not hold such funds in its reserves. Although the recent petition (rejected by SDC) of 4,000+ signatures has shown support from across the District it would be the local Sevenoaks town ratepayers who would need pay for this to retain their current public asset. This could result in a Precept increase of an additional 43%+ next year.

- *“...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 of the transfer of the Stag and if indeed it may need to market the disposal of the asset on the open market”.*

It appears now that Sevenoaks District Council are actively considering a commercial offer / disposal for the Stag rather than a Community Asset Transfer.

SDC does not currently receive any income for the Stag, and it does not appear on its financial balance sheet. There is 8 years left on the lease.

The future of Hollybush Recreation Ground and the Stag seems in contrast to your own article in last week’s Sevenoaks Chronicle in which you state

“Sevenoaks District Council would never sell off such a valued community asset [The Stag] for development. Yet both the District and Town Council are now actively considering how best to safeguard it – precisely because there is no such confidence that a large cash-strapped Unitary Authority would take the same view when faced with difficult financial pressures.....decisions about our communities should be shaped from the bottom up.”

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SIGN THE PETITION

Petition for Sevenoaks District Council to transfer the freehold of the Stag Community Arts Centre to Sevenoaks Town Council at no further cost



Please sign the petition here:
www.change.org/stagfreehold

New Stag CEO

The Stag has announced that Tony McEwen will take over as Chief Executive when Andrew Eyre retires. The Stag held an open recruitment process and had applications from across the country. Tony will take on interim responsibility from Monday 6th April and full responsibility from Wednesday 1st July 2026.

Nigel Wightman, Chairman of Trustees at The Stag said: "When Andrew announced his retirement, the Trustees felt it important to conduct a full search for his successor. We advertised the position widely and had more than 70 applications. From that number we established a short-list of five people to interview, all of whom had strong relevant experience. I am very pleased that Tony has emerged from the interview process as the person to take The Stag forward. He will become Chief Executive on July 1st and in the meantime, Andrew will gradually be handing over his responsibilities to Tony in an orderly way. The hand-over should be a smooth one – they have worked together for many years!"

The Trustees have full confidence in Tony's ability to take The Stag forward and I know that Andrew feels the same way. You will all be aware of the difficult discussions that we are having with Sevenoaks District Council about the freehold of The Stag, ahead of the abolition of SDC and I know that Tony will be as forthright in his support of the Trustees as Andrew has been."

Tony has been working with the Stag since the Town Council acquired it in 2009. I am delighted he will be the new CEO and very much look forward to working with him in his new role.



Vine Gardens

During the winter months, the Open Spaces Team have fenced off and worked on the lawn at the Vine Gardens.

It now looks very lush for the summer.



Greatness Pavilion

Sevenoaks Town Council and Sevenoaks Town Football Club have secured over £2m of funding to build a new Community Sports Pavilion at Greatness Recreation Ground.



This has been a wonderful achievement however it is only to build the carcass of the building. There is further fundraising and support needed to fit it out.

We are delighted that local businesses such as Premier Alarms have offered to provide services free of charge. Premier Alarms have generously offered to provide all intruder and fire alarms; this is a very generous offer. We are hopeful that there are other local businesses who might be willing to assist with this community project.

In Week 22 to summarize, the carpenters finished all roof gutter and soffit details and began framing the first-floor ceilings ahead of installing the fire-rated boarding. The curtain wall glazing framework was fitted on the first-floor pitch side, moving the building closer to enclosure. The roofing team also installed the VCL barrier, Bauder insulation, and single-ply membrane, pushing the roof build-up forward and helping the structure become weather-tight.

Next week, the roofing team will continue weathering the roof, lining the box gutters, and installing outlets to advance overall weather protection. Carpenters will complete the remaining first-floor ceiling framing and finish the high-level soffit cladding, while window suppliers return to install the remaining window and door frames.

Vine Cricket Pavilion

I am pleased to say that the new replacement skylights have finally been fitted to the Vine Cricket Pavilion.

They are of toughened glass so hopefully will withstand any anti-social behaviour which happened with the polyurethane previous skylights.



My meetings

My meetings since the last update are:

- Stag CEO Interviews
- SDC & Stag
- Community Assets Committee*
- Sevenoaks Town Football Club Chair
- Wildlife Reserve official opening
- SOLAR Conference
- Planning & Environment Committee*
- Bradbourne Lakes Meeting
- Youth Services Committee

*All of Sevenoaks Town Council's main meetings are open to the public and available to watch live on YouTube see www.sevenoakstown.gov.uk for details.



Forest School at Quakers Hall Allotments



Sevenoaks Town Council's Quakers Hall Lane Allotment site has seen an impressive community collaboration thanks to a partnership between allotment tenants and pupils from St John's CE Primary School, which adjoins the site.

Over the past year, Simon Aguss, an allotment tenant, and Ed Grobel, Forest School Teacher, have worked together to deliver a series of outdoor learning activities as part of the St John's Forest School programme.

Around 90 pupils have taken part in a hands-on environmental project using timber from a tree felled on site. The tree had become overgrown and was casting significant shade over neighbouring plots, affecting crop growth. The timber from the pruned tree was all put to good use – to create stakes, construct a dead hedge, cover a hedgehog hibernaculum, build a habitat pile for amphibians and reptiles, craft seating for Forest School sessions, and provide firewood for allotment holders.

Over three days in December, January and March, students learned how to safely use tools such as bowsaws and loppers, construct the hedge, and build a fire – over which they enjoyed roasting chestnuts, marshmallows and even allotment-grown sprouts.

The initiative has delivered significant benefits for both people and nature. As well as enhancing biodiversity and improving the amenity of the allotment site, it has provided pupils with valuable life skills.

Ed Grobel, St John's Forest School Teacher, commented, *"St John's pupils have loved being involved in this project and have benefited in all sorts of ways. They have acquired practical knowledge; developed skills like teamwork, communication and problem-solving; and it's been wonderful to witness them grow in confidence, independence and resilience. If nothing else, they've enjoyed being outdoors having fun with their friends! And I know they've felt very proud to be able to contribute to a real-life community project that helps local wildlife. I'm very grateful to Simon Aguss, Sevenoaks Allotment Holders' Association (SAHA) and the Town Council for facilitating this and I am looking forward to similar projects in the future."*

Cllr Dr Marilyn Canet, Chair of the Community Asset (Open Spaces) Committee at Sevenoaks Town Council, remarked, *"We're delighted to see such a strong connection between the allotment community and St John's, giving children a truly special opportunity to learn in the open air. It's wonderful that knowledge is being shared across generations and young people are learning new skills and getting involved in environmental projects like this. People of all ages and circumstances are welcomed at our allotment sites – they are a real centre of community life."*



Save the date

Visit our events page for more information: www.tinyurl.com/STCNewsEvents

Date	Event	Venue
Saturday 2 May	Climate Fair	Vine
Saturday 30 May	Health & Wellness Fair	Vine
Friday 5 June	Sevenoaks Business Show	Bat & Ball Centre
Friday 12 and Saturday 13 June	Beer on the Vine	Vine
Tuesday 4 August	Family Fun Day	Greatness Recreation Ground
Friday 20 November	Sevenoaks Business Awards	Bat & Ball Centre

Wishing you a good week,
Linda

