

SCRUTINY COMMITTEE
21 November 2013 at 7.00 pm

At the above stated meeting the attached documents were tabled for the following items:

9. Questions to the Portfolio Holder for Strategy & Performance (Pages 1 - 24)
10. Work Plan (Pages 25 - 28)

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Sevenoaks District Council
Corporate Plan

01

Introduction

We are determined to ensure Sevenoaks District Council is an organisation that each and every one of our residents and businesses can be proud of.

By understanding what is important to you we will ensure the council is focussed on doing the things you need. We will cut down on the things that aren't so important and be a council that you can trust to make improvements in the right areas.

Our ambitions will not be tempered by the significant reductions in funding that we have endured since 2010 as the UK looks to balance its books. Instead we will innovate and seek not only new ways of working but new ways of making the money we do have grow and work better for you.

We will need council tax and business rates to be paid and at times these bills will need to increase to match the demands you place up on us. In return, we will remain customer focussed and determined to ensure all of the services we deliver are of the highest quality.

This Corporate Plan tells you about the type of organisation we are and sets out the actions we will take to deliver on our vision and our promises to you over the next two years. It will help us to build on our successes and push us on to break new ground and reach new heights in the quality of the services we deliver to you.



A white handwritten signature of Cllr Peter Fleming on a purple background.

Cllr Peter Fleming
Leader of Sevenoaks District Council

A white handwritten signature of Dr. Pav Ramewal on a purple background.

Dr. Pav Ramewal
Chief Executive, Sevenoaks District Council

02

Your Council

Between 2010 and 2015 when this plan reaches its end our reduction in funding from government will have exceeded 50%. This has posed significant challenges, but challenges we have faced head on.

This has only been possible because of strong political leadership and a unique work place culture where staff have embraced change.

To get us to where we are today, as one of the best ranked local authorities in the country with Gold Standard Investors in People and resident satisfaction levels pushing 70%, we have tried, tested and trusted plans.

Our plans help us to manage our money, people and other assets to deliver on the promises our Council makes to residents and businesses.



Central to the council's success is its belief in customer service and the empowerment of its staff.

'The customer is anyone who isn't me' is everyday language and known by all of the staff. It drives us to value every interaction with our customers and leads us to challenge the way we deliver our services to ensure the customer is at the heart of everything we do.

Where we get it wrong we have an open and transparent complaints process. Where complaints highlight our shortcomings or errors we work quickly to learn those lessons and improve our approach to customers and the way we deliver our services.

As a service provider, the quality of our services is very much dependent on the

quality of the people that deliver them. We seek to employ people that understand our culture, that believe in customer service and have a desire to learn and improve. In return we have a keen focus on staff development through empowerment. We trust our staff to take decisions, to take informed risks and to innovate. We don't look to blame, but instead focus on what can be done differently next time.

This approach has allowed us to reduce our budgets and our workforce whilst seeing improvements in productivity, performance and satisfaction with services.

For more information about the Council's customer standards, plans and strategies visit the Council website at www.sevenoaks.gov.uk

03

Money Matters

Financial management is one of our greatest strengths. We were the very first in local government to introduce a ten year budget framework, a tool that allows us to plan our finances over the long term and removes the need for knee jerk decisions when our government support is reduced or our income levels decline.

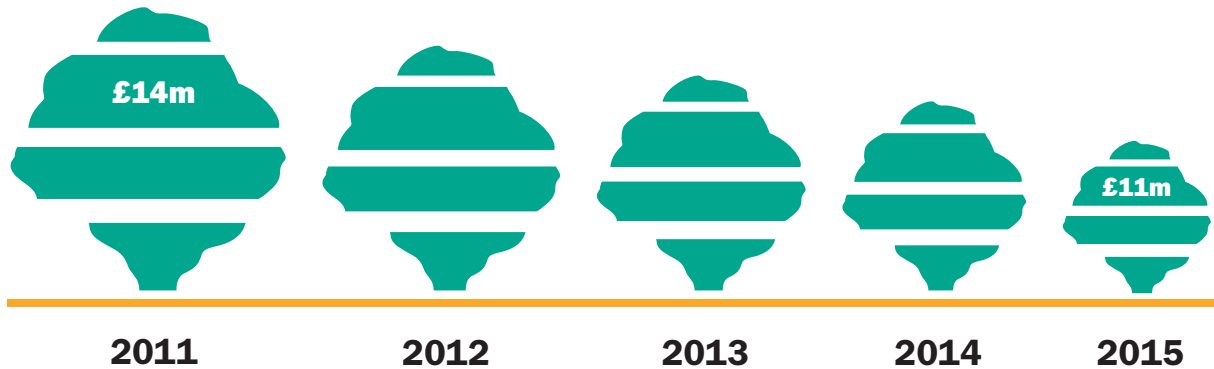
Our budget assumptions are reviewed each year and Cabinet Members take responsibility for ensuring any growth in budgets is identified and counter balanced by sufficient savings. Cabinet is supported by our Advisory Committees who can highlight additional areas of growth and help identify new opportunities for savings. Our Scrutiny Committee is able to call-in Cabinet decisions to help the Council to sustain a balanced 10 year budget.

Since 2011 we have delivered savings in excess of £4 million. The savings plan took the bold decision to deliver significant up front savings. By making on going savings from our budget in the first year of our savings plan we prevented the need for an additional £2.5 million in savings had those early decisions not been made.

Our financial management practices support our promise to deliver value for money and have been recognised by peers and external auditors as some of the best in local government.

Budgets

Budget Chart 2010 - 2015



Savings – £4.3m between 2011 and 2014



Average Council Tax - 2011/12 to 2013/14

2011/12 - £181.89 (£3.50 per week)
 2012/13 - £181.89 (£3.50 per week)
 2013/14 - £185.49 (£3.57 per week)

We have worked extensively to deliver savings in excess of £4m in the last three years but we have also been investing and protecting the most valued services.

We have...

- Brought a successful Torch Relay and Paralympic Cycling events to the District in 2012
- Continued the Community Grant Scheme which awards £150k annually to voluntary and community groups
- Continued to collect all of your rubbish and recycling each and every week

- Worked hard with partners to keep levels of crime amongst the very lowest in the County
- Strengthened our approach to supporting business and bringing new businesses in to the District
- Secured £1.8m of funding to support rural businesses through the West Kent Partnership
- Pioneered a unique HERO Service, supporting residents with their housing and work needs

04

Vision & Promises

Our vision for Sevenoaks District is **'to sustain and develop a fair, safe and thriving local economy'**.

We want to ensure that Sevenoaks District remains a great place to live, work and visit and to help us achieve this we have made five promises to the District, these are:



To provide value for money



To work in partnership to keep the district of Sevenoaks safe



To collect rubbish efficiently and effectively



To protect the Green Belt



To support and develop the local economy

The following pages set out what these promises mean, what we have done so far to meet them and what we will be doing next.



Our Promise 1



Providing value for money



Cllr Brian Ramsay

Portfolio Holder for Finance & Resources

What does it mean?

Keeping costs low whilst delivering the services that people want at the best quality.

Track Record

We were rated by the Audit Commission as being in the top two per cent of all Councils for delivering value for money.

Our external auditors continue to praise our approach to value for money and have highlighted our 10 year budget and 4 year savings plans

Over the last two years we have:

- Saved £400,000 a year by providing our services in partnership with other Councils. This includes audit, anti-fraud, council tax, business rates and benefit services, Environmental Health services and the Licensing service
- Reduced costs by sharing management and staff in services such Building Control, CCTV and Parking
- Shared our office space with partners including the Police and Kent County Council
- Buildings that we no longer require have been sold or passed on to Town and Parish Councils
- Transferred services to community groups to ensure their future, including minibuses, youth services and the ever popular family fun days
- Reduced our workforce, changed staff terms and conditions and reduced the number and cost of senior managers

Future plans

We will continue to make cost reductions and savings in the way we deliver our services. To protect the services that you tell us are important to you from the impact of on going cuts to our funding we are determined to break new ground, seek new ways of working and find new ways to raise income.

We will...



Improve our website and make more services available online



Continue to investigate working in partnership and sharing our services with others



Move towards a paperless office, making us increasingly efficient



Raise income from letting out vacant space in our offices



Invest in land and buildings that can increase our income



Be prepared to borrow at low rates of interest to enable investments that generate good levels of return

Council Tax has increased by just 1.98% since 2011

All of your District Council services for £3.57 per week

Our Promise 2



Keeping the District Safe



Cllr Michelle Lowe

Portfolio Holder
for Housing and Community Safety

What does it mean?

Working with the Police and others to prevent crime, address anti social behaviour and make the District a safe place to live, work and travel.

Track Record

The Community Safety Partnership has been working to reduce crime across Sevenoaks District for the last 10 years, helping to make it one of the safest places to live in the UK. But we are not complacent. We know that crime and community Safety issues exist in the District and we work hard with others to try and prevent it.

Over the last two years we have:

- Worked more closely with the Police, including providing a Police Station and dedicated Community Safety Unit within the Council Offices
- Worked with communities through Partners & Communities Together (PACT) panels to address community safety concerns in local areas
- Investigated and addressed more than 350 reports of anti social behaviour across the District
- Supported local people to address speeding vehicles through the Speed Watch scheme
- Improved technology in our CCTV room to reduce costs and ensure more of the people committing crime can be identified

Future plans

We will continue to improve the way we work in partnership to reduce crime across the District. Through our Community Plan and Community Safety Action plan we have set out clear actions to keep the District safe.

We will...



Tackle anti social behaviour, including fly-tipping and graffiti



Deliver a low crime rate across the District



Support victims of crime, domestic abuse and anti-social behaviour



Tackle speeding vehicles and improve safety for all road users including pedestrians and cyclists



Work in partnership to assist the “Troubled Families” project in the District



Work positively with young people to reduce bullying and help them feel safe

For more information about Keeping the District Safe please visit www.sevenoaks.gov.uk/communityplan and www.sevenoaks.gov.uk/communitysafety

Less than 6,000 crimes a year

95.4% of residents feel safe

Our Promise 3



Collecting rubbish efficiently and effectively



Cllr Ian Bosley

Portfolio Holder for Planning & Environment

What does it mean?

Collecting your rubbish and recycling every week and keeping streets clean

Track Record

You consistently tell us that having a District that is kept clean and tidy is important and we know a vast majority of you like to have both your rubbish and recycling collected every week.

We have prioritised these services through all of our recent funding cuts and managed to do so by seeking more efficient collection routes and making sure street cleaning occurs most regularly where it really is needed.

Over the last two years we have:

- Collected your rubbish and recycling every week (unless deep snow got in the way!)
- Improved our garden waste collection service
- Taken on more business customers for our trade waste service
- Responded within our target times to all fly-tips and abandoned vehicles that are our responsibility to remove
- Saved £100,000 a year by reviewing our refuse collection rounds and making them more efficient

Future plans

We are committed to maintaining a clean and tidy District. By employing our own staff we can continue to be responsive to delivering the services that meet your needs and we can continue to seek ways to keep costs within our budget levels

We will...



Continue to collect your rubbish and recycling each week



Seek ways to increase the amount of rubbish that is recycled



Continue to replace our oldest refuse vehicles with new ones that are more efficient and better for the environment

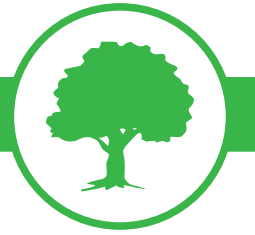


Increase the amount of your waste that is used to generate electricity.

More than 40,000 tonnes of waste collected each year

33% of waste is recycled

Our Promise 4



Protecting the Green Belt



Cllr Ian Bosley

Portfolio Holder for Planning & Environment

What does it mean?

Managing the housing and business development the District needs whilst protecting the beauty and character of the local area

Track Record

Sevenoaks District covers 142 square miles, of which 93% is categorised as Green Belt. Much of the District is rural in character with 60% of the landscape within the Kent Downs and High Weald Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty.

This presents significant challenges to find the land that is required for new development for housing and for businesses that will continue to make for vibrant local communities.

Over the last two years we have:

- Seen more than our minimum requirement of 165 new homes built across the District each year
- Granted planning permission for new housing in the District that exceeds our minimum requirement for each of the next five years
- Increased the number of Conservation Area Management Plans from 5 to 13
- Prepared the Districts Allocations and Development Management Plan

Future plans

We will continue to review and update the planning policies we have in place. And we will continue to manage development across the District in accordance with those policies.

We are very fortunate to live and work in a District with such beautiful towns, villages and countryside which we are committed to preserving as far as possible for future generations.

We will...



Review our Planning Service and seek to make the decision process as consistent and transparent as possible



Review our Statement of Community Involvement and clarify how people can get involved in shaping local planning policy



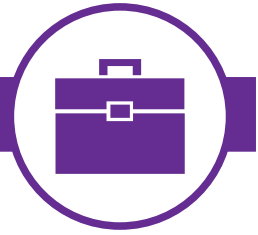
Work with Town and Parish Councils that wish to adopt Neighbourhood Plans

For more information about our local planning policies please visit www.sevenoaks.gov.uk/ldf

2,000 planning applications processed each year

75% of planning applications processed in target time

Our Promise 5



Supporting and developing the local economy



Cllr Roddy Hogarth

Portfolio Holder for Economic & Community Development

What does it mean?

Supporting our local businesses, seeking to enhance infrastructure and attracting new business to the District

Track Record

The need to support businesses across our District has been brought in to sharp focus in recent years. It is obvious now more than ever that the Council has a real role to play in supporting businesses that are already here and seeking to bring new businesses to the area to provide job opportunities to the District.

With limited resources we have been seeking out and securing additional Government and European Union funding to enable us to achieve our ambitions for businesses. We are also working hard to review all of our own services to ensure we give businesses the right level of support when they need it.

Over the last two years we have:

- Secured the Marks and Spencer's development in Sevenoaks
- Supported rural businesses with grants through the £1.8m Leader programme
- Campaigned strongly to bring better broadband provision to the District
- Hosted business events to ensure we are actively consulting and networking with local businesses to learn more about what matters to them
- Provided funding to Visit Kent to promote the District as a tourist destination for the benefit of our businesses
- Supported apprenticeship schemes and offered young people looking to get in to work the opportunity to gain work experience at the Council

Future plans

We will shortly be concluding work on a new Economic Development Strategy and Action Plan for Sevenoaks District. Consultation with businesses will help us to prioritise our ambitions and help us to provide long term support for our local economy and for people seeking work in the District. Alongside completing our Strategy and Action Plan

We will...

	<p>Bring a share of £5.5m of funding to Sevenoaks District to help current businesses with zero or low interest loans to grow their business</p>		<p>Bring £450,000 of funding to the District to help local businesses improve their energy efficiency and reduce their overheads</p>
	<p>Consider our own initiatives to bring broadband to parts of the District that major suppliers are unable to prioritise</p>		<p>Develop a consistent programme of business support</p>
	<p>Promote the District as an excellent place for businesses to locate and grow</p>		<p>Continue to support tourism and the rural economy</p>

1.7% of people in the District are unemployed

05

Community Plan

In addition to the actions set out against each of our Promises we are committed to delivering on each of the priorities set out in the Sevenoaks District Community Plan.

‘Making it happen together’ sets out the actions we will be taking to address what you have told us is most important to you. To do this we work in partnership with the County Council, the health service, the police, the fire and rescue service and housing associations together with voluntary groups, businesses and faith representatives.

The six priorities identified in the Community Plan are complimentary to the Council’s vision “to sustain and develop a fair, safe and thriving local economy’.

Community Plan Priorities

Safe Communities A safer place to live, work and travel	Caring Communities Where children have the best start and where people can be supported to lead independent and fulfilling lives
Green Environment Where people can enjoy clean and high quality urban and rural environments	Healthy Environment Where people have healthy lifestyles and where health inequalities are reduced
Dynamic Economy A thriving local economy, where businesses flourish and people have skills for employment	Sustainable Economy People can live, work and travel more easily and are able to shape their communities



06

The next steps

Our Corporate Plan has set out what we will do to make progress in delivering our promises to you over the next two years.

To help us get there we want to go further, to be truly ambitious and seek to become financially self-sufficient. We want to break new ground and make the Council less reliant on Government funding, instead funding our services from the money we generate locally such as business rates, council tax and income from our investments and from charges for our services.

With less need for money from central government the more we can achieve for freedom from national constraints and increase our ability to deliver what local people and local businesses want.

This is our ambition for the future of Sevenoaks District Council and we will start taking steps in this direction almost immediately. We strongly believe that this is the right thing to do. It will increase our ability to protect the quality of our services and deliver improvements across the District that will take us ever closer to our vision of a fair, safe and thriving local economy.

To do this we will:

- Improve efficiency and cost effectiveness of the services we provide by working in partnership with others, increasing income, reducing running costs, finding new ways of working with a dynamic approach to financial management.
- Buy and build new assets that help improve the way we provide services and at the same time generating return on our investments. To support this strategy we will use our available reserves and take advantage of low interest long term borrowing.
- Place an even greater emphasis on providing better customer service through channel shift and improved access to our services.

- Invest in attracting, generating and supporting business, particularly through the development of broadband across the district.

It is only right that we keep you informed on how well we perform in delivering what we have set out to achieve.

We will regularly review progress against the actions we have set out and we will report back on the progress we make.

We hope our Corporate Plan is clear about the actions we are committed to take as we continue to work hard to deliver further improvements across the District.

If you have any comments on our Corporate Plan we would welcome your feedback to policy@sevenoaks.gov.uk

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Scrutiny Committee 21st November 2013

Parking Scrutiny Working Group

Interim Report

At its meeting on 18th July the Scrutiny Committee agreed to the establishment of a Working Group to look at Parking Issues Relating to the Provision and Management of On Street and Off Street Parking, and Parking Enforcement.

With the incidence of the summer holiday period starting immediately after the agreement to set up the working group, it did not meet initially until 2nd October for the initial scoping and decisions on initial evidence required. We also received background information from Richard Wilson and Gary Connor.

A second meeting was held on 4th November at which evidence was heard from Cllr Hogarth as Cabinet Member, Cllrs Fittock and Brookbank, representing Swanley, Richard Wilson, Gary Connor and Adrian Rowbotham.

Context

Broadly speaking parking can be categorised as **on street** or **off street**.

On street parking, stating the obvious, is on the highway. It may be controlled or uncontrolled. Control may be by the familiar yellow lines or by restrictions in designated areas. Controls are usually put in place for traffic purposes or to protect residential or other amenity. Any revenue from parking machines or permits can only be used for the maintenance and control of on street parking and therefore for practical purposes should be revenue neutral for budget purposes.

Off street parking may be owned by SDC or by other operators such as Waitrose, town or parish councils, Network Rail and so on. Net parking revenue to SDC from off street parking is approx. £1.5m, so it is a very significant budgetary item

Approx. 61% of on street parking revenue arises in Sevenoaks Town area, the figure for off street parking is approx. 95%.

Given the budgetary implications, the working party has to date focused mostly on off street parking.

Role of Scrutiny

Judging from comments received, there remains some confusion over the difference between the roles Scrutiny and Advisory Committees – one councillor phoned to ask why there was a Scrutiny Group looking at parking when it was already on the agenda of the Economic and Community Development Advisory Group.

In scoping this Scrutiny, we are looking to see whether:

- Parking policy is properly formulated within the regulatory environment
- It is consistent with Community Plan
- It is consistent with the Economic aspirations SDC has for the District

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- It is properly implemented and administered in accordance with policy and the regulatory environment

Depending on the outcome of the Scrutiny, it may be that the Advisory Committee will see fit to set up a working group to make recommendations on how (for example) to address a perceived shortfall in long term parking.

Evidence to date

As we have focussed so far on off street parking, let us start by acknowledging that we are for the most part talking of Sevenoaks Town. Sevenoaks is both a destination town for shoppers and a train hub for commuters. The bulk of attention seems to focus on the “destination” aspect. Off-street income this year, including season tickets but excluding PCNs, breaks down (figures in brackets are pay & display only) as follows:

Sevenoaks Town Centre	75%	(82%)
Sevenoaks Station	20%	(12%)
Sevenoaks St John’s	1%	(1%)
Swanley	2%	(2%)
Westerham	2%	(2%)

This shows that the vast majority of shoppers’ parking is in Sevenoaks Town Centre

SDC parking spaces total 1658 (excluding Pembroke Road, being redeveloped for M&S) of which 1262 or 76% are Sevenoaks Town, Station or St John’s, 162 are in Swanley and 145 in Westerham.

Although there is quite a lot of basic data available, the inability of the suppliers to provide data for Blighs before the end of 2012 makes comparative analyses difficult. With the exception of May and June, total other ticket sales for Sevenoaks Town Centre are ahead of the corresponding period a year earlier, suggesting that visitors are not necessarily put off visiting the town centre by the increased charges. That said, there has been a suggestion that parking durations may have changed. Cumulative income had fallen slightly below target as a result of a poor July. However from comments made by the Cabinet Member for Economic and Community Development, there is work to be done to improve the data available and allow a better understanding of factors which may impact on usage and revenue. What is clear is that weather, special events such as the Olympics and the closure and reopening of the Waitrose car park can all have an impact on revenue.

The evening parking charges within Sevenoaks generate c. £45,000 net (after deduction of VAT) on an annualised basis.

The working group sought evidence from councillors representing Westerham, Edenbridge and Swanley. Westerham was unable to attend and Edenbridge councillors stated that as SDC did not have any car parks in their town they had no wish to be involved. Swanley was represented by Cllrs Fittock and Brookbank, who averred that SDC is a small part of the overall Swanley provision, most shopper parking is free, there are perhaps 30 commuter spaces so that commuter parking may overflow onto neighbouring streets, but that overall there is little difficulty. It was clear from the presentation to the Economic and Community

Development Advisory Group that the Westerham Town Partnership sees scope for a more nuanced approach to car park tariffs to benefit business in the town.

Sevenoaks is already represented within the working group. There was a suggestion from one member that increasing parking charges discouraged people from visiting the town, a view also expressed by some retail businesses at various times. The parking statistics do not necessarily support this view. Some businesses have also complained that there is insufficient parking provision which also discourages trade, which also would suggest the contrary (one retailer was heard to express both views more or less in the same breath).

We also heard the view that the evening charge was a major deterrent to the night time economy, though this was not a universal view of the group, and Cllr Eyre who is General Manager of Stag stated that in his experience, patrons were more concerned about availability/proximity than the cost.

Sevenoaks Town Council has regularly voted against increases in parking charges. There is a strong feeling that it is a cash cow from which the remainder of the District benefits.

It was noted in our evidence gathering that Ventnor had bid to take over the town's car parks, but had to prove that the "donor" authority would not suffer. If it did, then compensation would be payable. Sevenoaks Town Clerk has a different view.

Adrian Rowbotham made the following points:

- On street parking revenue is applied according to the appropriate guidelines to the management of on street parking – this has to be justified.
- Off street parking revenue can be applied to finance SDC's other activities and is a vital source
- The 10 year budget includes a 3.5% increase in parking revenues p.a.
- 3.5% currently equates to c.£90,000 (or £900,000 over 10 years) equivalent to (say) 3 staff members
- Most other charges are directly or indirectly controlled/regulated, severely limiting options for replacing any lost parking revenue

Interim Conclusions/Comments

Themes that have emerged so far mostly relate to off street parking:

1. Parking policy has hitherto been largely driven by budget considerations
2. Although there were some encouraging signs at the last Economic and Community Development Advisory Committee, there has been little indication in the past of joined up thinking in parking policy. For example, how does it further (or work against) the aims of the Community Plan and our ambitions for economic and business development within the District?
3. There is a marked lack of partnership working with towns and parishes – for example Westerham would like a more nuanced approach to raising the same amount of revenue to encourage visitors to businesses in the town. Sevenoaks has ambitions to be a Purple Flag town (the car parks do assist in that by being well maintained, CCTV, well lit and so on, but coincidentally rather than as a policy of working together).

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- They are consulted on proposed increases in charges and then feel their comments are ignored, rather than being engaged the proposals or policy are formulated.
4. Parking signage is currently hopeless and potentially a major barrier to visitors. When Stag has a popular event (e.g. Pantomime) strangers who have difficulty parking behind the theatre have no idea where else to go.
 5. There appear to be no credible plans to deal with increased demand leading up to Christmas, especially in the face of reduced provision resulting from the M&S development.
 6. Whilst the real time notice boards promised as part of the M&S development will help, they seem to have taken a lot longer than expected for reasons not entirely clear – is there effective project management?
 7. There appears to be divided opinion about whether charges or inadequate provision are greater disincentives to visitors – in the absence of any substantive evidence or data, the group is unlikely to be unanimous as to whether either is myth or fact at this stage.
 8. Our PR is poor. The reaction to the recently proposed parking charges was very negative as it focussed purely on the increased costs and what some would regard as the myths surrounding parking. Efforts, if any, to place these in context were clearly not effective, leaving the impression that we are not proactive in our PR policy. This is not to suggest that we should indulge in misleading spin – far from it as it will come back to bite us.
 9. There is a move to increase parking provision in Sevenoaks which is currently perceived to be inadequate. A detailed parking survey was conducted in support of the M&S development which suggested otherwise. The working group has yet to see data to support an increase, or identify what provision is needed – anecdotally for example there is a shortage of long term provision for low paid workers commuting into Sevenoaks and logically the Pembroke Road spaces lost to M&S could be replaced. How much more is needed?

The foregoing comments are not intended to be critical of officers, who have been extremely helpful and supportive. They do however indicate a direction of travel largely predicated on the budgetary imperatives set by the Council. It may be that on completion of this Scrutiny, the Council will seek through the appropriate advisory groups to adopt a more nuanced and coordinated approach while still meeting the budget imperatives.

In the meantime the working group will be seeking more evidence from other interested groups such as businesses and residents associations, and taking a more detailed look at on street parking and enforcement before finalising its report to the Scrutiny Committee