



Sevenoaks Town Neighbourhood Plan

Sevenoaks District Council Review of Plan and Proposed Response

September 2022

1. Summary/background

Sevenoaks Town Council have prepared a Neighbourhood Development Plan, which sets out a vision for the future of the Town and planning policies which, once adopted, will be used to determine planning applications locally. Sevenoaks Town Council formally submitted the Sevenoaks Town Neighbourhood Plan proposal to Sevenoaks District Council on Monday 20th June 2022.

Sevenoaks District Council is now publicising the Plan proposal for a period of seven weeks, from Thursday 4th August until Thursday 22nd September 2022.

This report provides a review of the Neighbourhood Development Plan in light of SDC's development aspirations for the Town Centre, and has prepared a draft response.

2. Summary of the Neighbourhood Development Plan

The Vision for Sevenoaks set out in the Plan will be delivered over a 15 to 20 year time-frame through a number objectives set out under the following seven themes:

Theme one: Character, Heritage and Identity

Theme two: Landscape and blue and green infrastructure

Theme three: Movement and public realm

Theme four: Local economy

Theme five: Community and Culture

Theme six: Sports and Recreation

Theme seven: Development Housing

Within each theme sit a number of objects, provided in the table below:

THEMES AND OBJECTIVES

<p>THEME ONE: CHARACTER, HERITAGE AND IDENTITY</p> <p>Objective One: To respect the town's character and heritage and ensure that all new development is responsive to its context and enhances the setting of the town's historic assets</p> <p>Objective Two: To protect the setting of local landmarks and the landscape setting of the town</p> <p>Objective Three: To enhance the gateways / arrival points into the town to create a more welcoming impression</p>	<p>THEME FOUR: LOCAL ECONOMY</p> <p>Objective Ten: To support local businesses and retailers and encourage a more collaborative and entrepreneurial business environment in the centre</p> <p>Objective Eleven: To consolidate and enhance both the town centre and secondary shopping areas</p>
<p>THEME TWO: LANDSCAPE AND BLUE AND GREEN INFRASTRUCTURE</p> <p>Objective Four: To protect and enhance blue and green infrastructure, enhance biodiversity and respond to climate change</p> <p>Objective Five: To recognise the significant contribution that trees and hedges/maze make to the town's character and biodiversity</p> <p>Objective Six: To protect, improve and enhance access to existing publicly accessible open spaces and create new publicly accessible open spaces and green infrastructure</p>	<p>THEME FIVE: COMMUNITY AND CULTURE</p> <p>Objective Twelve: To deliver enhanced community assets for the town</p> <p>Objective Thirteen: To develop and promote a Cultural Quarter in the town centre and to enhance the town's cultural offer and improve access to existing cultural assets</p>
<p>THEME THREE: MOVEMENT AND PUBLIC REALM</p> <p>Objective Seven: To work with the District Council, and Kent County Council, in consultation with neighbouring Parish Councils, to identify a long-term strategic approach to transport in Sevenoaks to respond to and mitigate any impacts of new development on the existing network</p> <p>Objective Eight: To promote a co-ordinated approach to transport and movement that encourages use of sustainable transport modes, including walking and cycling, and reducing pollution levels, whilst ensuring that the centre is still accessible by car</p> <p>Objective Nine: To deliver public realm enhancements to improve the pedestrian experience in the town</p>	<p>THEME SIX: SPORTS AND RECREATION</p> <p>Objective Fourteen: To deliver enhanced recreational and sports facilities for the town</p>
<p>THEME SEVEN: DEVELOPMENT AND HOUSING</p> <p>Objective Fifteen: To promote high quality development that enhances the town and consolidates vacant or under-utilised land</p> <p>Objective Sixteen: To deliver a range of new homes to meet local needs</p> <p>Objective Seventeen: To provide homes that are energy efficient and minimize environmental impact</p>	

Each objective is then made up by one or more Policies or Aims. These are defined as:

- 1) Planning policies related to the development and use of land; and
- 2) Non-planning related policies, defined here as 'Aims', that help to meet the vision and objectives

Policies will be used by planning officers to determine planning applications. Aims represent other strategies that will be pursued by the Town Council over the life of the Plan.

On the whole, the Sevenoaks Town Neighbourhood Plan proposes a similar set of ambitions to those of Sevenoaks District Council, highlighting similar projects and themes that support SDC's current and proposed projects.

This report focuses primarily on the Town Centre projects currently active within the Property and Commercial Team, as well as some more general observations on the Plan's proposals.

For each comment, a screen shot of the report is provided along with a suggested response for SDC to put forward.

Theme 1: Character, Heritage and Identity

Aim C3: The Town Council will prepare guidance on the treatment of locally listed buildings and any other buildings with heritage value*

Aim C3 Response: Sevenoaks District Council fully support the need for a robust review and updated guidance on the treatment of locally listed buildings and buildings of heritage value. However, it is recommended that SDC as Local Planning Authority should lead on this process in close consultation with the Town Council.

Aim C6: The Town Council will normally require major planning applications or proposals on sites within sensitive locations, to be submitted to a Design Review panel for review early in the planning process. The Town Council will either utilise a panel established by the District Council or utilise another established panel*

Aim C6 response: Sevenoaks District Council have recently set up a Design Review Panel to ensure good quality design is embedded in all significant developments in the district. It is now well established and managed by an independent body. SDC recommend that the Town Council utilise the existing Design Review Panel for consistency on design advice and input across the district.

Aim C7: The Town Council will work with the District Council and / or other design advisors to prepare design guidance for areas not included within the Residential Character Area Assessment

Aim C7 Response: Sevenoaks District Council fully support the use of design guides and codes to help provide clarity and direction on design expectations, to ensure developments are delivered in a successful and sustainable way, supporting the needs of the area. As Local Planning Authority, Sevenoaks District Council should deliver these Design Guides working in close consultation with the Town Council and design advisors. A number of the sites listed in the Plan that are outside of the Residential Character Area Assessment are already under review by SDC, and are listed in the draft Local Plan. As Local Planning Authority, SDC have visibility across all developments and planning applications, and so have the visibility and consistency to support the development of design guides and codes for these sites in the most appropriate way for the benefit of the area.

Theme 5: Culture and Community

Policy COM3: The Town Council will promote the development of a cultural quarter in the town centre together with an arts and cultural strategy

Policy COM3 Response: Sevenoaks District Council fully support the proposal to create a cultural quarter in the town centre. There are already a significant number of cultural facilities in the town form naturally form a cultural hub, and so formalising, promoting and sustaining this is supported. SDC suggest that 96 High Street is included as a cultural asset, and should become an integral addition to the proposals for the cultural quarter. Whilst proposals are still in their development stages, SDC are committed to transforming this central and prominent high street unit into a cultural and creative hub to provide a variety of offerings including live music, performances, screenings, artist studios and flexible market space, contributing to both the day time and night time economy. This builds on its current cultural use with Second Floor Studios occupying the upper floors.

Theme 7: Development and Housing

Policy D1: The Neighbourhood Plan recognises that there are sites that may come forward for development, either as windfall or through allocation in the Local Plan, that have potential to deliver benefits that should be secured through the design, layout and use of each site. Planning applications on the following vacant and under-utilised sites within the Neighbourhood Plan area should demonstrate that they will deliver the relevant benefits set out below, in addition to other requirements set out in the Local Plan:

9. Buckhurst Lane (Suffolk Way) sites

- Development proposals to respond to heritage sensitivities (the site is located on the edge of the Sevenoaks High Street Conservation Area) and development will need to respond to the historic development pattern, materials and character of the area;
- Access will need to be maintained to service yards of properties on High Street;
- Potential to provide development that provides a positive frontage to Suffolk Way and Buckhurst Lane;
- Scale and massing of development to respond to the existing context;
- Development should front streets whilst concealing existing service yards from public view; and
- Pedestrian connections through the area to be retained and any trees that are removed to be replaced.

9 BUCKHURST LANE (SUFFOLK WAY) SITES		0.08 AND 0.24Ha
	EXISTING USE	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Car parking
	PLANNING STATUS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Located within designated town centre
	PLANNING DESIGNATIONS / CONSTRAINTS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The site is located on the edge of the Sevenoaks High Street Conservation Area and development will need to respond to the historic development pattern, materials and character of the area • Access will need to be maintained to service yards of properties on High Street • Challenges in terms of interface with some of the existing properties • Loss of town centre car parking / need to relocate • May result in the loss of some trees
	POTENTIAL USES	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ground floor B1 workspace and potential for an indoor market • Residential apartments above
	OPPORTUNITY / URBAN DESIGN PRINCIPLES	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Potential to provide development that provides a positive frontage to Suffolk Way and Buckhurst Lane • Scale and massing of development should respond to the existing context • Development should front streets whilst concealing existing service yards from public view • Pedestrian connections through area to be retained and any trees that are removed to be replaced

Policy D1 Response Site 9: Sevenoaks District Council fully support the proposal to redevelop the underused sites to the East of Sevenoaks High Street, including the Buckhurst Lane car park and adjacent site off Suffolk Way, listed as Site 9 in the Plan. These backland sites are underutilised and offer a poor land use for their central town centre location. They currently fail to optimise pedestrian routes between the town and Knole Park, and offer poor legibility and street frontages. Sevenoaks District Council fully support the benefits identified in bringing forward the redevelopment of these sites. However, SDC strongly suggest that the development boundary of these sites should be extended to include the Suffolk Way car park, the KCC Library site and associated parking, and the Sevenoaks Leisure Centre site and associated parking. Delivered holistically, there is a real opportunity to regenerate this area of the town centre to reprovide and introduce a mix of uses that can create a vibrant and successful area within Sevenoaks Town Centre. As well as the workspace, indoor market (which could potentially be provided in 96 High Street – see above) and apartments as mentioned as ‘Potential Uses’ proposed for this site in the Plan, SDC strongly believe there is potential to introduce additional uses to this part of the town centre. This includes a hotel, educational hub and studio space, a residential quarter and potentially office/retail should it be considered that there is demand for such uses. This is in addition to reproviding the current uses including the library and leisure centre. The holistic regeneration of this area will also help support a number of other objectives within the Plan, including town centre connectivity improvements and to the creation of a Cultural Hub.

The Opportunity and Urban Design Principles listed in the Plan for this site are supported, and agree that the scale and massing of the development needs to respond to the existing context. However, this should be considered with an ambitious and progressive approach.

Proposals in this location should be reviewed to provide a suitable massing and density for town centre sites in this location, setting a precedent that creates a modern, sustainable and successful town centre, whilst being sensitive to its surrounding context.

Summary

In general the Sevenoaks Town Neighbourhood Plan is fairly well aligned with SDC's aspirations in terms of its net zero commitments and appetite for development, particularly where it enhances gateways and arrival points into the town.

The above highlights areas of concern in relation to active sites being delivered by the Property and Commercial Team. Other teams and officers including those involved in Economic Development, Planning Policy, Transport and Housing should also review the Plan and provide comments as required.