

Check our website for information: www.sevenoakschamber.com
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SEVENOAKS TOWN CENTRE REVIEW GROUP – COMMENTS PLEASE

We have heard much talk recently about the second-rate transportation system in the country as a whole, with poor bus, train and tube services frequently highlighted, together with the high cost of fares. For those travelling to London, safety is a great concern with overcrowding on most rail routes. Now we hear the Government has decided to widen some motorways to carry yet more cars and heavy goods vehicles - what is the answer?

Much has been written in the Kent Messenger recently regarding the shortage of car parking in Maidstone, with some businesses threatening to move out as staff are experiencing difficulty finding somewhere to park whilst at work during the day. This is a problem for many towns. More and more of us use our cars to get to work as public transport isn't available or convenient, and we drive in from surrounding villages.

The Chamber held a meeting with the District Council at the beginning of the year to discuss a number of issues raised by members, parking being one of them. The outcome is the formation of a Task Committee comprising two Chamber members, two representatives from town residents' associations, two SDC officers and two SDC members. Among the objectives is to discuss and implement improvements to current parking arrangements and look at enhancing parking provisions for the future.

Chamber members have been e-mailed asking for their comments and suggestions and we can report a considerable number of replies have been received. If you would like to add your opinion and views in the next two weeks, e-mail the office or send direct to Jeremy Treliving, Sheffords, London Road, Sevenoaks or Helen Page, Sevenoaks Business Services, Lime Tree House, Lime Tree Walk, Sevenoaks, who are the Chamber representatives on the Committee.

Parking is something frequently discussed and a survey is currently being carried out in Sevenoaks. We are looking for positive solutions, which will not happen overnight, but we must work together to safeguard the vitality of our town.

· **Would retailers support a car park refund scheme with say a £10 qualifying purchase via an arrangement with SDC? We look forward to hearing from you.**

ONE IN FIVE BUSINESSES TO LAY OFF STAFF DUE TO THE RISE IN NATIONAL INSURANCE

One in five businesses is planning to lay off staff in order to cope with the recent rise in National Insurance Contributions (NICs) according to the British Chambers of Commerce Productivity Survey. The problem is even bigger for small and medium sized enterprises (SMEs), one third of which expects to have to cut jobs. The survey, undertaken by the Chambers of Commerce network, looks at businesses' attitudes to productivity, the barriers to increasing productivity and what they want from Government in order to be able to raise productivity. The survey covered almost 1,000 chamber members.

President of the British Chambers of Commerce, Isabella Moore, said:

"The Chancellor could not have picked a worse time to introduce this increase in National Insurance Contributions. He announced this last year to be implemented now, but the fact that one in five employers is considering cutting staff to deal with this increase is of great concern. Those companies that are not looking to cut jobs are intending to cut wages, investment or research, their only other option is to increase debt. Already burdened by rising regulation, more business tax and an acute skills shortage, this could be the final nail in the coffin for some businesses."

The Productivity Survey also found that:

- Businesses believe that to improve UK productivity, the Government should reduce the tax burden on business (67%), reduce the regulatory burden on business (63%), provide more incentives for training (50%), provide more incentives for investment (49%) and improve the transport system (40%).
- 20% of businesses are considering dealing with the rise in NICs by cutting jobs. Other ways to meet these costs are likely to be wage cuts (15%) and reducing investment spending (17%).
- The top five barriers to productive business in the UK are business costs (including insurance, 51%), the tax regulatory burden (47%), a shortage of skilled workers (36.4%), uncertainty about consumer demand (35%), and a lack of affordable finance (21%).
- UK business believes that other countries are more productive because they have less of a regulatory burden (46%), they have a more entrepreneurial culture (38%), they have a more advantageous tax structure (37%), and that they have a higher-skilled workforce (36%).
- 11% of businesses have considered moving abroad.
- 13% have considered moving to another part of the UK, but there is no common popular destination.

David Frost, BCC Director General, said: "When we asked British business what Government could do to improve productivity in the UK the consensus was overwhelming. Reduce tax, reduce regulation or jobs will be lost to our competitors. We accept that the Chancellor has some tough choices to make, but his calculations from previous Budgets now seem too optimistic. His raids on the coffers of business in recent years mean that UK plc has no more money to bail him out."

The Commission for Integrated Transport has just issued its 10-year plan. If you would like further information go to: www.cfit.gov.uk

A WARM WELCOME TO NEW MEMBERS

Ceramica Tiles

Proprietor Peter Lawrence invites you to take a look at his superb range of quality wall and floor tiles. He is ready to offer any help or advice needed and looks forward to welcoming you at his premises 147B High Street, Sevenoaks.

Telephone: 01732 464406; e-mail: peterlawrence@ceramicatiles.co.uk; www.ceramicatiles.co.uk

Broughton Blair Ltd

Broughton Blair is a new resource for local businesses, providing an intelligent and cost-effective approach to your marketing and communications needs. With over 30 years' experience in marketing, communications and media, the partners – Gary Broughton and Paula Blair – aim to help small to medium size businesses spend their money more wisely for the best returns. A key difference in the approach taken by Broughton Blair is to simplify the whole marketing process.

“We provide organisations that have low levels of in-house marketing expertise with access to honest, strategically based, intelligent marketing solutions whether the requirement is for a one-off project or ongoing support. From a business card design, through brochures, logos and websites, to marketing planning and activity, we attach the same importance to each and every element of our clients' communications and strategic thinking.”

Contact Gary or Paula on 01959 569 526; e-mail: contact@broughtonblair.co.uk www.broughtonblair.co.uk

Workplace Creations Ltd

A warm welcome to Ross Wilkinson of Workplace Creations, based at Unit 39, Blue Industrial Park, London Road, West Kingsdown.

He is keen to discuss your office design and interior requirements. Improved planning with better use of space could enhance your workplace areas and achieve a more comfortable working environment for you and your staff. He is happy to discuss your requirements and offers good, sound advice. Thinking of reorganising? Give him a call and improve the overall performance of your office.

Ross can be contacted on 01474 850880; e-mail: rwilkinson@workplace-creations.co.uk

Acorn Recruitment Consultancy Ltd

Welcome to Geoff Newman, Managing Director of Acorn Recruitment in Sevenoaks. If you feel in need of a career change or simply have a requirement to recruit more staff, give Acorn a call. Telephone 01732 464469 or e-mail geoff@acornrecruitment.net or log on to their web site at www.acornrecruitment.net. They are based at 46 High Street, Sevenoaks.

Tax Assist Direct

Chris Bannister of Tax Assist Direct is a local accountant. He is based at 76 Mill Road, Hawley, Dartford, DA2 7RZ. Chris specialises in all aspects of taxation, so if a little one-to-one assistance is your requirement, Chris is happy to help. Call him on 01322 276527 or e-mail chrisbannister@taxassist.co.uk

FIT, FIT, FIT!

One of the directors of new Chamber member Broughton Blair Ltd is more than simply an expert in marketing and communications. Gary Broughton is a qualified, experienced personal fitness trainer, who takes on private clients as well as running classes in local health clubs – look him up at Nizels, David Lloyd, or Sevenoaks Leisure Centre.

For private clients, an initial consultation is taken in which personal fitness goals are discussed and agreed - whether these be weight loss, general fitness, posture improvement, or higher level strength or sport-specific training. An individual session costs £40.00 - a £5 discount is offered to Chamber members quoting this article! Further general discounts are available for full courses.

For anyone needing the discipline, motivation and focus of working with a personal trainer – all seasoned with a spirit of good humour and encouragement – it's worth talking to Gary. **Contact Gary** on 01959 569 526 or at gary@broughtonblair.co.uk

CLAMPING DOWN ON UNTAXED VEHICLES

Nearly 90 vehicles were taken off the streets in the middle of June as part of a combined effort to rid the Sevenoaks District of the problem of untaxed or abandoned vehicles. Sevenoaks District Council, West Kent Housing, Kent Police, Kent County Council and DVLA ran "Operation Cubit" jointly.

In the two weeks starting Monday 9th June, some 87 vehicles were removed from Edenbridge, Sevenoaks and Swanley, bringing the total number of vehicles removed this year to 169.

PC John Boyden, Sevenoaks Town Centre Community Officer, says: "Not only are abandoned vehicles unsightly, they present a serious community safety risk as they are often set alight.

"The message of Operation Cubit is clear for car owners who fail to tax their

vehicles or obtain the necessary documentation – their cars will be treated as abandoned and dealt with accordingly."

Operation Cubit is a direct response to the concerns of residents about joy riders using untaxed vehicles to drive recklessly, and the public call to remove abandoned vehicles that become a target for vandalism.

Vehicles not displaying a tax disc or without a Statutory Off Road Notice are clamped and then removed to a car pound. The vehicles are scrapped if owners (backed up with the correct documentation) do not claim them. The scheme runs throughout the year.

Abandoned vehicles can be reported to Sevenoaks District Council on 01959 562936 or 01959 565489.

NEW CHAIRMAN OF THE DISTRICT COUNCIL

The new Chairman of the Council for the Civic Year 2003/2004 will be Councillor Donald Spence. The Chairman's escort will be his wife, Mrs Bridget Spence. Councillor Spence is the Member for Penshurst, Fordcombe and Chiddingstone.

Councillor Clive Bruce was elected Vice-Chairman and his wife, Mrs Christina Bruce will be his escort. Councillor Bruce is the Member for Ash.

FITZPATRICK

Chamber member Fitzpatrick's order book at the moment looks like a European "Who's who" of construction projects.

Their civil team is refurbishing Europe's longest pier (Southend) and Europe's longest street market (Walthamstow High Street). Work is also underway with £2.5m external finishes contract as part of the redevelopment of London's Paddington Basin, one of the largest regeneration schemes in Europe.

The Building Division is also heading for the record books, working with newspaper giant, Trinity Mirror; they are constructing what is thought to be the most advanced newspaper printing facility in Europe. The monumental development features a 72m-long, reinforced concrete table that will support the presses. The staggering combined weight is 200 tonnes.

Their Rail operation is equally busy, currently working with M40 Trains on a new maintenance facility close to the Wembley Stadium area. This comes hot on the heels of delivering Siemens biggest UK project to date – a £25 million facility in Southampton.

“AGENTS REQUIRED”

The Catalan Trade Centre in Great Britain (COPCA) is a non-profit making organisation and part of the Catalan Government, in north-eastern Spain – Catalonia. COPCA is the commercial executive branch of the Catalan Development Department of Trade and Industry and its aim is to establish business relationships between Catalan companies and those of other countries.

COPCA is currently working on behalf of M MOLEIRO EDITOR (www.moleiro.com), a Spanish publisher specialising in the reproduction of manuscripts and maps dating back to the middle ages and the Renaissance.

Moleiro already holds a client portfolio in the UK but due to the success of its expanding business, the company is seeking agents to represent it in England.

If any member might be interested in this, please contact COPCA direct by phone or e-mail on Tel 020 7583 4000; e-mail: copca@btclick.com

The Chamber was very sad to learn of the death of John Buckwell.

John was a long-standing Member and staunch supporter of the Chamber of Commerce, and was President in 1978/9. His total commitment and dedication to the town was constant. He often called in the office to find out what was happening and never ceased to take an interest. Always busy attending various Council meetings, he nevertheless took time to chat.

He was a kind, gentle, caring man and a true treasure. Sevenoaks will greatly miss him. Our sympathies and a floral tribute were sent to his wife and family.

DATA PROTECTION WARNING

As reported previously, warnings are issued from the Information Commissioner of the Government's Data Protection Agency regarding companies using various official sounding names demanding payment for failure to comply with Data Protection Registration.

These approaches are still continuing and we urge members to be extremely careful. The recommendation is only to deal with the official body, whose annual statutory fee is £35.00 on which no VAT is payable.

Further information can be obtained through the official website (www.dataprotection.gov.uk), information line: 01625 545 745 or notification helpline: 01625 545 740. The address is: Office of the Information Commissioner, Wycliffe House, Water Lane, Wilmslow, Cheshire SK9 5AF.

WEB SITE UPDATE

John Hubbard, of Otford.net, has almost completed re-vamping the Sevenoaks Chamber of Commerce website.

Our new web address will be operational from the beginning of August:
www.sevenoakschamber.com

We are also getting a new e-mail address: info@sevenoakschamber.com. Please note these changes, although the old contact details will still get you through to us, as you will automatically be re-directed.

The "Chamber Events Calendar" can be used as a useful tool for members to advertise any forthcoming promotional events. Please ring Vanessa or Carol on 01732 455188 if you would like an event included.

A Chamber Café will soon be available where members can advertise office space availability, meeting rooms for hire, items of business interest, and general useful business information.

We hope members will use this useful connection to market their business and promote any future events.

The website is a very useful promotional tool.

Statistics show us that over the last eight months alone we have received over **36,000 hits** on the site (an average of just under **200 hits per day**). Enquiries have come from as far afield as Canada, Italy, Poland, France, Netherlands and 29% from America.

CHAMBER LUNCH

A networking lunch was held at Pollo in Bank Street on 9th July with 49 Chamber members attending. New members were introduced and welcomed and it was good to have representation from KMF, Image Wizard, Tax Assist Direct, D'art Galleries and many others. Whilst Sevenoaks Travel continues trading under that name, it is under new ownership, (Baldwins Travel) and we welcomed Chris and Nick Marks and hope they enjoyed their first experience of the Chamber network lunch. They look forward to meeting many more members in the future. See the web calendar for next date.

CHUNNEL'S "MOVE TO CALAIS" PLEA

Eurotunnel insists that its idea to encourage thousands of British commuters to settle in northern France is no "pipe dream". The Channel Tunnel operator has unveiled its daring plan to boost business, reduce non-physical barriers and ease Kent's housing crisis.

Eurotunnel – backed by Kent County Council – would like to see at least 10,000 British people settling in under-populated northern France (a cheap land paradise) and commuting daily to Kent and London.

When the Channel Tunnel Rail Link is completed in 2007, commuters will be able to enjoy a 75-minute journey time between Calais and London. Eurotunnel, a substantial land-owner in Nord-Pas de Calais, has already held discussions with French officials about developing its sites for housing, shops, conference centres, wind farms and other purposes.

Chief Executive Richard Shirrefs of Eurotunnel said: "Many people commute further within England and go to places that are many times as expensive as the villages around Calais. It is important for real people, living in real houses and having real jobs to move to France. This scheme is not about second homes or retirement homes. There will need to be decent transport services at prices which people can afford every day, otherwise clearly it can't happen."

Mr Shirrefs added; "This is not a pipe dream but something that can be attractive. Whether we will get enough people, whether there will be enough political consensus remains to be seen but it's fundamentally a decent idea and deserves to be pursued."

KCC Leader, Sir Sandy Bruce-Lockhart, welcomed the plan saying it would take some of the pressure off Kent. He would be speaking to his French counterparts about the idea. Sir Sandy recently called for a reduction in fares between Kent and France to encourage more people to travel.

"To build the links between Kent, Nord-Pas de Calais and the Euro region, we have to make crossing the Channel easier and cheaper for ordinary citizens and businesses", he said in Lille. "It is easy and cheap to cross from France to Belgium but it is not so easy or cheap to cross the Channel. Therefore, it is a great challenge for Eurotunnel, Eurostar and for the shipping industry to really take that up. If we are to make a difference, we must make it an everyday event to cross the Channel."

LATE SHOPPING EVENING

Please note in your diary

FRIDAY 28TH NOVEMBER 2003,

**to include the switching on of the Christmas lights
with Aladdin star Cheryl Baker.**

COUNCIL TO REVIEW SECOND STAGE OF BLIGHS

Sevenoaks District Council is to take a fresh look at the next stage of the Blighs development in Sevenoaks.

The decision to look again at the proposals comes after local people raised concerns over planning proposals that were submitted to the Council for approval last year. The Council says it is determined to bring much-needed commercial space and housing into the town in a form acceptable to residents.

All existing commitments and alternatives open to the Council will be reviewed in the coming months. The Council has agreed to help Sevenoaks Volunteer Bureau find a new location, possibly in the next stage of Blighs, and is also looking to incorporate Sevenoaks Town Council in the development.

Cllr Alison Cook, the Council leader, said: "The next stage of Blighs, which will complete the town square and enhance London Road, is crucial to the continued success of Sevenoaks town. We want to commission a development of quality, one we can all be proud of. We believe that it is important to get these proposals absolutely right at this stage even if this means delaying the start of the project."



CHRISTMAS LIGHTS FOR SEVENOAKS

The Chamber and Sevenoaks Town Council are starting to plan this year's Christmas lights. We would like to build and improve on last year's display by adding a lot more illumination. The Town Council has agreed to increase its contribution, but we need YOUR support if we are to have a decent display. Any contribution towards the lights would be most gratefully received. You could purchase a Christmas tree frame for the brackets outside your premises (at a cost of £150.00) or alternatively, a bracket snowflake for £85.00. If you would like to make a donation it could be put towards extra decorations, the festoons and illuminated harnesses that we plan to have across the High Street and London Road. A personal letter to all businesses in the town will be delivered soon.



PLEASE HELP US LIGHT UP SEVENOAKS FOR CHRISTMAS!

WOULD YOU LIKE THE OPPORTUNITY TO REDUCE YOUR SUBSCRIPTION?

For each new member you introduce to the Chamber you will get a discount of £10 off your subscription for next year. The more new members you introduce, the more discount you receive. GET BUSY!