

Sevenoaks Playhouse – your questions answered

August 2006

Who was managing the Sevenoaks Playhouse?

Until the end of July, the facility was managed by the Sevenoaks Playhouse Ltd, a completely independent limited company and a charity. It has its own board of directors that is responsible for its finances and policies.

Who funded the Sevenoaks Playhouse Ltd?

The Sevenoaks Playhouse Ltd was funded by a combination of income generated by ticket sales and other marketing activities (such as the bar, food and drink), grants from three public bodies, Sevenoaks District Council, Sevenoaks Town Council and the Arts Council of England, and a variety of sponsors, donors and fundraising activities.

Sevenoaks District Council also provided the Sevenoaks Playhouse Ltd with a rent free site, funded its business rates and paid for routine building maintenance and improvements to the theatre and cinema complex.

Why has the Playhouse closed?

The Sevenoaks Playhouse Ltd faced financial difficulties and began a campaign in March to raise £250,000 to save the business. This was supported by Sevenoaks District Council. Sadly the campaign did not raise all the money needed and the Sevenoaks Playhouse Ltd announced that it would cease trading from 31 July 2006.

Who owns the theatre and cinema complex?

Sevenoaks District Council.

Will the theatre and cinema complex be redeveloped?

The Council is not looking to redevelop the site or to sell it off. In fact the Council has said that it is committed to a theatre and cinema in Sevenoaks.

What happens now?

The Council is holding a public consultation in the theatre foyer throughout August to find out local residents' views on local arts provision. The Council wants to find out if local people want a theatre and cinema in the town and if they do, what should be provided, such as the mix of professional and amateur theatre, the type of theatre programme and films on offer.

Residents can also take part in the consultation on-line view the Council's website at www.sevenoaks.gov.uk/playhouse or by calling the Council on 01732 227000.

At the same time the Council is looking at the interim and long-term management arrangements for the complex.

A procurement process for a long-term management arrangement will be carried out in the autumn and it is hoped that new management would be in place by early next year.

The Council is working to get interim management to run the complex in the meantime.

Why has the Council not kept the theatre and cinema open?

The Council does not have the skills in house to run a complicated arts facility such as the Sevenoaks Playhouse and is looking for organisations with the necessary skills and experience to do this in the interim and long-term.

What is happening to the Playhouse staff?

Sadly staff employed by the Sevenoaks Playhouse Ltd are no longer employed by the Board as it has ceased trading. However, the Council has spoken with many of the staff and taken contact details of those who wished to stay in touch. They will be notified of any future management organisation who may be looking to employ staff. Their commitment to the operation of the facility has been outstanding.

What happened to the future theatre and cinema programme?

The Sevenoaks Playhouse had finished its summer theatre programme and nothing was booked for August. No future films had been lined up prior to its closure although there are some 'pencilled' theatre bookings for the Autumn. The Council will be getting in contact with these organisations shortly.

What is the Council aiming to do next?

The Council is working to re-open the facility as soon as possible. An appropriate procurement process will be carried out in the Autumn, with invitations to bid for the longer term management of the facility and it is hoped that this would be in place in the New Year.

In the meantime it is hoped that interim management can be provided in the Autumn and the Council is talking to a number of interested people about this.

If you would like further information, please speak with the Council staff in the foyer or call the Council on 01732 227000 or e-mail information@sevenoaks.gov.uk

