

SEVENOAKS DISTRICT
SENIORS ACTION FORUM

Working together in the interests of people aged 50 plus

Newsletter 34

October 2018

Message from Eileen Murray Giles, SDSAF's new Chair

At our AGM in May I agreed to coordinate the activities of SDSAF provided that a strong team of volunteers stepped forward to help. I'm delighted to say that this is happening.

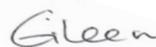
I feel privileged to be involved in our efforts to improve life for the over 50s in Sevenoaks District. Closer involvement has helped me to appreciate all the work and skill that Frank McConnell and his predecessors have put in behind the scenes to give a voice to our Seniors. On behalf of us all, thank you Frank, for giving so generously of your time and talents over the past 5 years. We feel deep gratitude and are delighted you will still be around to give us a steer.

Since our Forum was established in 2010, the focus has been on recruiting members to make us large enough to be taken seriously but still small enough to care. There are now 1,150 of us, we are growing all the time and have sufficient clout to be of use to our community. Now we are entering a new phase when we will focus on making progress in areas that our members say are important:

- Transport, including transport to medical services
- Health and well-being (changes to hospital & community services, better public loos, help for the less mobile)
- Housing for Seniors
- Social life and friendship
- Communications, disseminating key information and preventing our non-digital members from being marginalised

That's a big agenda and we need talented, generous-hearted volunteers who want to use their knowledge and experience for the common good. We are doing well and have recruited a great mix of people so far. Do contact us by phone or email to tell us how you might like to become involved.

With warmest wishes to all,



Babs Watson RIP

We were very sorry to hear of the passing of Babs Watson recently. Babs was one of our active campaigning members, who died aged 98. A long-standing SDSAF member, Babs used to take an active part in our activities whenever she could. Everyone seemed to love her warm spirit, her generous heart, her thirst for what was right and fair and her "can do" attitude that would never take "no" for an answer. Being an impressive and compassionate person Babs was held in high regard in the community and made a real difference to people's lives. Let us all be inspired by her.

WHAT'S BEEN HAPPENING?

In the hottest summer we've had for years, we seem to have been snowed under by Kent County Council consultations. Some of these came up quite quickly and had early deadlines so we could not keep all our Members informed in our usual way, i.e. through newsletters and emails. Because we have always promised NOT to pester you with too many messages, we sent an email special newsletter to our email Members. There wasn't time to print up and post to everyone. So, in case you missed it, here's a summary of the special Newsletter 33 with an update where there is one.

1. **The Local Plan (August to 10 September)** – we studied and responded to the 123–page draft local plan for Sevenoaks District 2015 to 2035.
2. We celebrated **The International Day of Older Persons** with a very well attended coffee morning at the Stag in Sevenoaks organised by Chris Stewart and his team. Some 20 organisations that work with older people and some 200 people attended including the Chair of Sevenoaks District Council.
3. We took **the opportunity to work with forums from across Kent** and decided what we should work on as a whole group. The biggest concerns across the whole of the County were buses and public toilets.
4. We gave you the address of our new website: www.sdsaf.org.uk

This Newsletter is a longer than usual, but we feel that it is important to share this information with you.

IN SEARCH OF PRAISE – PAYING CREDIT WHERE IT'S DUE

When SDSAF is out and about at town and village events we often hear compliments about our public services but these sometimes get lost amongst the complaints. Please let us know what is troubling you, but also let's capture the good bits, for example:

- A very positive report on PALS unit at Kings College Hospital who did a great job in getting one of our blind members to his cardiac appointment.
- A great job was done by Age UK transporting one of our members to and from hospital and sorting out his garden whilst he was incapacitated.
- The very helpful staff at Otford Railway Station ensuring an elderly passenger had a trouble–free journey to Yorkshire.
- A trouble–free journey to a medical appointment thanks to the Volunteer Transport Group based at Sevenoaks Hospital.
- Really helpful and caring service from IT Buddies at Sevenoaks Library

Please tell us your own positive experiences of our public and voluntary services.

WEST KENT CCG'S LOCAL CARE PLAN:

West Kent CCG held a meeting at The Stag on 3rd July to update us on its Local Care Plan and seek feedback. Around 100 attendees (NHS staff, politicians, the external consultants and 40 members of the public) heard that Health Hubs would provide a layer of service between GP Surgeries and Hospitals, bringing some of the hospital services into the community and providing a more integrated approach to wellbeing, not least for people with complex needs such as mental health, dementia and frailty.

We were told that thinking was at an early stage and our feedback was important. Concerns about losing Sevenoaks Hospital were raised after Hospital Road had been mentioned as a potential development site for residential housing in the Local Plan. We were reassured by the NHS representatives that no housing decisions had been taken for the site although an optimisation exercise of the NHS estate was taking place to ensure full use was being made of its buildings.

Edenbridge was excluded from the proposal as the plans there for a combined hospital and GP surgery are well under way. 14 inpatient beds are disappearing in the process and a separate piece of work is taking place to establish the number of community inpatient beds needed in the area. Swanley is not included because they are governed by Dartford Gravesham & Swanley CCG.

Participants put forward a wide range of ideas for services that could be delivered in the hubs e.g. outpatient clinics for diabetes, podiatry, blood tests, MRI scans, falls prevention, cardiology & ophthalmology, also education and housing benefit advice, KCC's One You, health promotion and even a community café.

The general feeling was that the theory sounded good but there can be a vast difference between the theory and reality. Many would prefer to improve what is already being done and avoid further disruptive change. Others welcomed the idea of a "one stop shop" and taking care of people in a holistic and proactive way e.g. medical and housing services working together to help a mental health patient being evicted for not paying the rent. The number and location of Hubs across the West Kent CCG area was discussed and there was a general consensus that good public transport links and adequate car parking was imperative.

The continuing issues of transport and accessibility were discussed and all were encouraged to fill in a questionnaire as both individuals and groups. Sadly, the questionnaire design seemed inappropriate as it did not allow individuals to express the current difficulties they face when attending medical services. The questionnaire focused on the time taken to travel, rather than the more important issue of accessibility.

There does not seem to be any joined up thinking between KCC and the NHS regarding travel to medical services or for the provision of car parking. There was no commitment from the Clinical Commissioning Group to form a transport plan for these new hubs. Your committee members asked about transport plans and were told this would be addressed at the "Big Conversation" on rural bus services. So far this has not happened. Will the Bus Summit on 30th October shed any light?

BUSES: THE BIG CONVERSATION & FORTHCOMING BUS SUMMIT

Written by Alan Dixon, Transport Action Group

The KCC presentation on 4th July concentrated only on the 3% of bus services in Kent that they currently subsidise. Whilst this was explained in their consultation booklet it became clear from questions from the floor that there was more interest and much dissatisfaction with the remaining 97% of bus services. KCC informed the meeting that the Council has no absolute control



over these, but it became evident that they might be able to bring some influence to bear on the bus companies, particularly as a response to public lobbying, including from our own forum.

Who does have control over the operators? No complete answers are readily available. The Traffic Commissioner, Sarah Bell (London & the South East) compiles a registration of operators and regulates their safe operation. The main operators have to apply for and get a licence from the Traffic Commissioner. In the SDC area, Arriva and GO are the main operators and they need to deliver services that are commercially viable, carry most passengers and deliver a profit.

Who decides on these routes? We are not sure, but we will be seeking help on this from the “Campaign for Better Transport”. Their website is <http://bettertransport.org.uk>. Members have expressed a need for more joined up thinking and an integrated local transport policy. This is a subject to which we may concern ourselves within an Action Group. We need to expand on KCC’s own Local Transport Plan – Growth without Gridlock– see www.kent.gov.uk/localtransportplans. No mention was made on funding. We have been advised that there will be no more budget cuts in the 2018/19 fiscal but we anticipate there could be attempts to make cuts in subsidy from 2019/20.

Three ideas for alternative transport were presented and are intended to replace rather than augment some current bus routes. KCC have announced that £500,000 has been allocated to set up pilot tests in 2019. These are:– (1) Feeder Services using small buses or taxis to connect more rural services to larger existing routes (2) Bookable flexible bus services (3) Taxi–bus style services instead of a bus.

We believe that there is a limited potential in these ideas, but would have been better presented as part of an integrated transport policy, rather than just tinkering at the edges. We put forward the view that car sharing was another alternative means of local transport. We expressed reservations about the questionnaire and expect we were not alone. In an e–mail from KCC on 19th September announcing the Bus Summit they state that they received 2,355 responses from across all of Kent from an adult population of 1.2 million i.e. a 0.19% response.

What next? We will have to wait until the questionnaires have been analysed and the results published, which we expect to be at the Summit on 30th October. The full presentation can be accessed on–line from the KCC website. It seems to us that this so–called Big Conversation, whilst a government requirement, was a knee jerk reaction to the debacle that followed the aborted, proposed cuts of Nov/Feb 2017/18. We will examine and comment on the results when they are published. In particular we will look into the sample base of this study in rural areas and see how that reflects a true representation of the population.

Beyond that? The real big issue is that the public at large are dissatisfied with most Local Transport. This is an issue beyond much of KCC’s remit. The committee of the forum has to decide just how far we can take this subject forward, depending on the wishes of our members. We would have to take into account the ramifications of the Draft Local Plan for 2015–2035, examining the differences and similarities between Sevenoaks and the surrounding areas and getting to grips with just who controls the trains and buses. With help from the Campaign for Better Transport, this could lead us to making a proposal for a better joined up local transport policy. We would almost certainly work with the other seniors’ forums across Kent to develop this.

MORE NEWS FROM THE ACTION GROUPS

TRANSPORT: Alan Dixon's full report on The Big Conversation about Transport is available on our website or you can write to Roger Bryan at 10 Greenside, Swanley, BR8 7ER, who will be happy to send you a copy of it. Transport is also high on the agenda of other Kent forums and we took part in a discussion with them earlier this month. The outcome of the Summit on 30th October is awaited when we will decide what action we can take.

We have been told that some of the buses in the area are no longer accessible to those with mobility difficulties and this will be raised at a future meeting with Sevenoaks District Council. If these changes have affected you please let us know.

Over the coming months the Transport Action Group will be looking at what services are available for people attending medical appointments so that these can be publicised and any needs identified. We need to ensure that if services are moved out of acute hospitals sufficient provision is made for people, particularly in outlying villages, to enable them to attend their appointments. Transport to acute hospitals at Darent Valley, Maidstone and Pembury can be difficult and lengthy for those without a car, and we feel that this is something both the bus providers and the NHS need to take on board.

HEALTH & WELLBEING: Our new Health Action Group (led by Margaret Parker) now has to decide what are the main issues we need to tackle and how we can best address them. We are taking every opportunity to work constructively with our health services to improve the quality of life of our members and of the community.

The group asked West Kent CCG what plans were in place to improve the poor service some NHS wheelchair users were reportedly receiving. This was discussed at length by the CCG Board and we are continuing to monitor the situation.

There is a plan to provide Hyper Acute Stroke Units across Kent. Maidstone and Darent Valley hospitals have been identified as possible sites for these in the west of the county, but this plan is being challenged in other parts of Kent. A final decision will be made in January after an implementation plan is put together.

The need for accessible public toilets is still high on our agenda and every opportunity is taken to remind Councillors of the need for these, not only for our members but the wider population. We are working with other fora across Kent on this issue, along with Healthwatch Kent. Good to see Jean Bentley bending the ears of Larry Abrahams and Ian Bosley at the Community Hub meeting at New Ash Green Village Hall in the early summer. They are both District Councillors and both knew what SDSAF feels about this issue. Come on, Councillors, be creative, find a way of opening up public toilets again.

More news is awaited about the proposed Health Hubs – where they will be located, what services will be delivered from them and which services might cease elsewhere.

HOUSING: Committee members publicised Sevenoaks District Council's Local Plan which went out to consultation in August. Members were encouraged to consider the plans and submit their views and we know that many of you did. Sevenoaks District Council's Planning Advisory Committee will meet on November 22nd at 7 p.m. If you wish to take the opportunity to speak at this meeting, which is at the Chairman's discretion, permission needs to be sought before the meeting by contacting Sevenoaks District Council Democratic Services on 01732 227199.

SOCIAL: A very successful Coffee Morning was held at The Stag on 1st October celebrating the International Day of Older Persons. A wide range of clubs, societies and services took the opportunity to show the many activities available in our area, and we were grateful for the live music provided by Frank McConnell and Jean Bentley which contributed to a relaxing and entertaining atmosphere. Many thanks to Chris Stewart and his Team for organising the event which we plan to run annually.

If you belong to or run a Group which could accommodate more members please let us know. We could publicise it on our website to encourage more people to join.

LONELINESS: SDSAF has an on-going concern about loneliness and has been invited to give written evidence to the KCC Committee on isolation & loneliness in older residents aged 65 plus. The Committee's recommendations are intended to lead to policy changes throughout Kent. We are pleased to say that with the help of members we were able to submit a paper offering innovative suggestions which was well received and we look forward to further developments. A full copy of the paper is available on the website and we will keep you posted as things progress.

Age UK are holding 'Pop Up Pop Ins' at various locations in the District and the Chairman went along to one in Penshurst recently and was delighted to enrol some new members whilst enjoying a cup of coffee and doing some gentle keep fit exercises, facilitated by a trained therapist. Details of the time and place of these events are available from Age UK and can be seen on our website.

COMMUNICATIONS: We are delighted to tell you that our new website – www.sdsaf.org.uk – is up and running. We are indebted to our new 'Webmaster' Carol Oakley who, together with the Communications Group, has designed the site with a fresh new look. We hope that, with your input, it will become a valuable resource for our members, giving information on current issues and forthcoming events as well as details about talks and clubs in the area. If you have access to a computer, please take a moment to visit the site, have a browse and let us know your ideas about other topics we could include. You are welcome to email us at comms@sdsaf.org.uk with any suggestions.

We have also refreshed our contact lists for newsletter circulation and a new logo is being developed.

INDEPENDENCE AT HOME – A MESSAGE FROM CITIZENS ADVICE

Most people want to stay in their own homes for as long as they can and they also want to be as independent as possible. Citizens Advice in Sevenoaks & Swanley have been asked by Sevenoaks District Council (SDC) to help eligible people to apply for grants to enable them to remain in their own homes (owner occupied or rented) safely and independently for longer.

To assess what help you need, SDC can visit you in your home and then help you to apply for a non-means tested 'safe and secure grant' of up to £1,000 if you are over 60, or have a medical condition.

Grants can be obtained for anything that will help keep you safe and promote your independence, including aids such as grab rails, chair raisers, bath seats, raised toilet seats, ramps and stair rails. You can apply for additional security measures such as mortice locks, door chains, window locks, even a new front

door. There are aids to help those with memory problems who might, for example, leave the bath running or forget to close the front door.

You can also get help to apply for a non-means tested Accelerated Facility Grant of up to £7,500 which could, for example, pay for a wet room or a straight stair lift. There are also larger, means tested Disabled Facilities Grants of up to £30,000 to pay for more extensive adaptations needed as a result of a disability.

If you own your own home but have a low income so that you claim Pension Credit or Council Tax Support, then the Citizens Advice can help you apply for a Housing Assistance Grant of up to £10,000 for urgent repairs – like a leaky roof, or to buy a new boiler. Some of the grants are repayable but not until the property is sold or transferred, and no interest is added.

The information above just gives an overview of what could be on offer. If you are interested and think you might be eligible please ring Citizens Advice for an appointment or call into one of their drop-in advice sessions:



Sevenoaks

(next to Sevenoaks Library)
Buckhurst Lane, TN13 1HT

01732 454443

Or drop in 10 am–2 pm on Tuesdays,
Thursdays and Fridays

Swanley

38 Swanley Centre,
London Road, BR8 7TQ

01322 875888

Or drop in 10 am–2 pm on Tuesdays,
Wednesdays and Thursdays

AIR QUALITY

Do you suffer from health problems that are made worse by air pollution? Did you know you can sign up for the District Council's 'airAlert' service? You can be sent warning texts when the air quality is poor or going to be poor.

Call 01732 227000 and ask the Council to register you for these texts OR go to www.sevenoaks.gov.uk/airalert OR download the airAlert app by searching for London Air and selecting Sevenoaks. Stay safer by knowing what's happening.

GRANDPARENTS AND NATIONAL INSURANCE

If you have given up full time work to look after a grandchild . . . If you need to protect your National Insurance (NI) contributions . . . If you are below State Pension Age . . . You MAY be able to claim NI credits. You MAY also be able to claim the credits if you are not a grandparent but looking after a family member.

Ring the NI helpline on 0300 200 3500

PAYING TOO MUCH TAX?

Some two million people do not claim Marriage Allowance but should. If one partner pays basic rate tax and the other doesn't pay tax at all, then the lower earner can transfer up to 10% of their full personal allowance to the partner who does pay tax.

See www.gov.uk/marriage-allowance or call HMRC on 0300 200 3300.

The OVER 50s POPULATION in our District will rise from 49,000 to 59,000 by 2035. **OUR MEMBERSHIP** is currently **1151**.

BAT AND BALL STATION

Sevenoaks Town Council is restoring the Listed Victorian Building at Bat and Ball Station opened in 1862 to partner with a refurbished community centre. There will be public toilets, two community rooms, a cafe selling local Kent produce and heritage information as well as flat access to the platforms.

CALLING ALL YARN LOVERS

The 'RVS Otford Yarn Crafters' launched on Tuesday, 23rd October, in conjunction with the Royal Voluntary Service. This is where lovers of yarn crafting can meet and inspire one another twice a month. Share your projects, skills and knowledge and find help and support when your project just isn't going right! Meet Christine and Elaine on the fourth Tuesday of the month, 6pm to 8pm in The Woodman, Otford, and the second Tuesday of the month, 10am to 11am, at the Hospice of Hope Tea Rooms, Otford. Come to either or both meetings. You don't need to book; there are no fees for joining us, but we invite you to purchase a hot or cold drink at the venue.

CONTACTING SDSAF MANAGEMENT PEOPLE

(Please note some changes):

Chair	Eileen Murray Giles	chair@sdsaf.org.uk	
Vice Chair	Merilyn Canet	merilyncanet@talktalk.net	01732 461397
Secretary	Margaret Parker	comms@sdsaf.org.uk	
Treasurer	Brian Gasson	briangasson36@gmail.com	
Membership	Roger Bryan	membership@sdsaf.org.uk	07470 201703
Action Groups	Alan Dixon, Jean Bentley, Chris Stewart		

Write to us c/o Roger Bryan, 10 Greenside, Swanley, BR8 7ER

Please note our new website is
www.sdsaf.org.uk

