

Sevenoaks District Seniors Action Forum

Working together in the interests of people aged 50 plus

Email: comms@sdsaf.org.uk

Newsletter 37

September 2019

Message from the Chair

As we approach Silver Week at the beginning of October, it's a good time to celebrate the huge contribution our seniors make to life in our District. Many do voluntary work, care for their friends and neighbours and help their families with childcare, emotional support and access to the 'bank of Mum and Dad'. Our seniors have so much to offer society - time, wisdom, skills and knowledge - yet many can feel invisible, lonely and as if the zest has gone out of their lives.

We know from our members that little things can make a big difference - a smile and a kind word, a friendly phone call, a cup of coffee, an offer to help with difficult tasks and conversation that respects the true worth of our Seniors. And we mustn't be afraid to make the first move. If each of our 1,200 members reaches out to one person in Silver week - old or young - what a difference we will make. By connecting with each other we can enrich all of our lives.

We will be hosting a Silver Coffee Morning on Monday 7 October between 10 a.m. and 12 noon at the Plaza Suite in the Stag Theatre, Sevenoaks. Our celebration is one of 650 similar events across the country to mark Silver Week. We will also be celebrating the Forum's 9th birthday, so why not bring one of your friends or neighbours - all are welcome. There will be stalls showing services available for Seniors, free coffee and tea and a complimentary raffle. Do make a date in your diary and join us!

Out and About Gathering the Views of our Members During a busy summer, blessed with good weather, members of the Committee attended the Otford Fete and New Ash Green Village Day. These provided great opportunities to find out at first hand about the issues which matter most to older people, recruit new members and catch up with our members across the District.

Our membership has been boosted to over 1,200, ensuring that discussions held with service providers and decision makers cover a broad spectrum of views of the older people in the District. Our thanks go to the lovely people we met and to all of our helpers who made the days such a success!

Otford Fete



New Ash Green Village Day



*Eileen Murray Giles
Chair*

Facebook Group

We are planning to have a more active presence on Facebook so that it can become another channel for us to keep in touch with our membership and for you, our members, to keep in contact both with your Committee and with one another. That way we should become a real community. Our group is definitely for two-way, or even multi-way communication!

If the idea appeals do join our group, follow what's going on and have your say.

The group address is <https://www.facebook.com/groups/334374977485761/>

All Aboard - Vintage Bus Outing to Polhill Garden Centre!

Residents of Rockdale in Sevenoaks were invited to take a trip down memory lane on a vintage Routemaster bus in early September. They were joined by members of SDSAF's committee and took a scenic route to Polhill Garden Centre before enjoying coffee, lunch and shopping. The bus trip was kindly donated to the Forum by Rachel Parr of the London Retro Bus Hire Company - www.londonretrobushire.co.uk. The Company, which is based in our District, has generously offered to donate more bus trips to the Forum. If you belong to or manage a group that could benefit please contact us at comms@sdsaf.org.uk or ring Eileen on 07775 568834.



Sevenoaks District Council Access Group

SDC's Access Group held its AGM at Knole House mid-July and heard about the many innovative projects run by staff and volunteers to make this historic building as accessible possible to all member of the public. The Access Group has a big agenda for change and the Forum looks forward to contributing ideas to improve access around the District.

SDSAF has raised various issues that our members say need to be addressed - the need for more public lavatories with disabled facilities, accessibility on our buses, more seats in supermarkets to make shopping less tiring and an appropriate number of accessible disabled parking spaces for our Blue Badge holders. Issues raised by various members of the group include Access to Polling Stations and allotments, more awareness of autism and dementia.

If you have issues that you feel the group could usefully address, do let us know so that we can put them forward.

Age UK Pop Up Events - Please help spread the word about Age UK's Pop In events hosted by Sue Larken and if you haven't been to one yet do consider going along to experience at first hand the warm welcome everyone receives. Over the past year the help and advice Sue Larken has offered many older people has been invaluable. Together with gentle exercises to help improve strength and stability (which are tailored to each person's ability) the Pop Ins provide the opportunity to have a coffee and socialise.

Sue has also been able to get guest speakers to give short talks on a range of issues from Scams, Fire Prevention and Armchair Yoga and is always open to suggestions about what other topics people would like to hear more about, in addition to the vast range of services and help offered by Age UK to older people in and around the Sevenoaks District.

Benefits

Post Office Card Accounts: DWP are sending out letters to persuade pensioners to switch their pensions and benefits to a bank account if they are currently using a Post Office card account. This is optional, not compulsory, although the letters do not tell people this. In 2021 Post Office card accounts are due to be abolished though people will still be able to pay into and withdraw money from bank accounts at their local Post Office; they won't have to go to a bank. The Government have said that if people don't want to set up a bank account, they will put in place some other alternative but this is as yet unspecified. It might, for example, mean switching their payments to a shop offering Paypoint facilities. The best advice at present is that people don't have to switch. If you already have a bank account it might be worth switching your pension and benefits into it but if you haven't **you don't have to set one up.**

Dementia

Antonia Knifton from the NHS attended our Committee meeting in July to collect ideas from members about ways to help people with dementia stay happy at home for longer. A lively discussion covered views on the services currently available and potential ideas for improvement including local dementia nurses and assistance from technology. All agreed that dementia prevention is a top priority.

Memory Problem Research: We have been approached by researchers at University College London who would like to interview older people who are experiencing memory problems. They want to find out how older people decide whether to make lifestyle changes (more social, physical and mental activity, eating more healthily, reducing alcohol) to improve wellbeing and maybe reduce dementia risk. They plan to use this information to develop a dementia prevention programme. If you are willing to take part, you will receive a £20 voucher plus travel expenses or a researcher can visit you at home. For more information phone 020 7679 9311 or email m.poppe@ucl.ac.uk

Dementia Research: The following is a link to Join Dementia Research. The website contains details of how to volunteer to get involved with various research initiatives which it is hoped will result in finding out more about the condition: <https://www.joindementiaresearch.nihr.ac.uk/>

Health Matters

Health Hubs in the West Kent Clinical Commissioning Group (CCG) area: In July 2018 we attended a meeting at The Stag where the proposal to establish Health Hubs was discussed. 12 months down the line and we have heard nothing more. At the June Board meeting of West Kent Clinical Commissioning Group it was stated that there would be more information about these Hubs in the Local Care Plan, no date for which has yet been announced.

Atrial Fibrillation: There is a campaign called 'Know Your Pulse' which is trying to get the message across about the importance of early detection and treatment of Atrial Fibrillation. You can learn how to take your pulse and find out much more information about this important campaign by visiting www.knowyourpulse.org. People with Atrial Fibrillation are at significantly higher risk of stroke and the strokes suffered by people in AF are often more severe.

BLUE BADGE RENEWAL

If you have a Blue Badge to help you or your relative get out and about it is a good idea to check the expiry date and allow plenty of time to make an application to renew it. **Applications can be made 12 weeks before the expiry date but can take up to 8 weeks to process.** So to minimise any stress make a note of the expiry date in your calendar so that your badge will be renewed in good time.

BBC Television Licensing

The BBC's decision in June to cease providing free television licences to households with someone over the age of 75 who does not receive Pension Credit was a surprise. Earlier in the year we publicised the BBC's 'consultation' and encouraged members to participate.

You may already have received one of the notices shown on this page. It is genuine and was received by one of our members whose licence was renewed in July.

It is **important** to note that if you are over 75 and in receipt of Pension Credit you will still be entitled to a free TV Licence.

We will monitor how the 'means testing' element of the proposal will be carried out. Will the BBC be able to access the government records of the benefits those over 75 receive to check their entitlement to a free T.V. licence?

The fact that so many pensioners do not claim Pension Credit was alarming news and we would urge anyone on a low income to consider seeking advice to find out whether they could be eligible for this valuable benefit. There are various on-line tools to do this anonymously but Citizens Advice and Age UK can also help to guide people through the process, so please do consider reviewing whether you might be eligible for Pension Credit.

N.B. This is correct at the time of going to print but given the outcry about the BBC's decision it may be subject to change!

Volunteering Opportunities

Even if you have only a few hours to spare each week your time could make all the difference to the many charitable and voluntary organisations around the District. These are really too numerous to mention but amongst those actively looking for volunteers are the National Trust, Kent County Council Libraries, Hospice in the Weald, British Heart Foundation and Age UK.

Praise and Thanks

Kent County Council Library Service for the Ask A Librarian Service and the Press Reader Facility
Maidstone & Tunbridge Wells NHS Trust Oncology for professional cancer services
Kent Community Health Foundation Trust for achieving CQC Outstanding status
Dartford & Gravesham NHS Trust for making rapid improvements, achieving a CQC status of Good



IMPORTANT INFORMATION ABOUT YOUR TV LICENCE

Next year arrangements for free TV Licences are changing. In 2020, the government's funding for free TV Licences for the over 75s comes to an end. This means that your enclosed over 75 licence will expire on 31st May 2020. From then, anyone aged 75 or over who receives Pension Credit will still be entitled to a free TV Licence which the BBC will pay for. Households where there is no one aged 75 or over that receives Pension Credit will need to pay for their TV Licence.

You do not need to do anything now. You are fully licensed until 31st May 2020. We will write to you in good time before then, to let you know what you will need to do. There is no need to take any action, or contact us, in the meantime.

Committee Members Meet with Tom Tugendhat M.P.



We were delighted that despite the frenetic political events during the spring Tom Tugendhat, M.P. for Tonbridge & Malling, who represents our members in the areas around Edenbridge, made time to meet with us and discuss various topics, ranging from health services to housing plans. We look forward to meeting him again and if you have topics of concern to you please let us know and we'll happily ask the question for you.

Housing

The SDC Local Plan for 2015-35 is based on building 14,000 new homes over this 20 year period. However, the Council have reported that they can only accommodate approximately 10,000. We are hopeful that when the plans come before the Planning Inspectorate this Autumn this lower target might be adopted, even though we have made a case for an even lower target in our submission.

Whatever target is adopted we all have concerns about the type of housing that is being built and hope that our Council will take note of Shelter's report published earlier this year. We also have concerns that the required developments in the infrastructure are not taking place to keep abreast of the housing expansion.

Members of the Forum's Committee will be making representations and attending the Inspectorate's hearings that will take place between late September and November. The final outcome will not be known until 2020. These hearings are being held in Sevenoaks and are open to the public so you may wish to attend and listen to the representations being made in respect of any sites listed in the Plan in which you have an interest.

Transport

One aspect of this is that Transport facilities will need to be developed. In August 2017 KCC issued a report entitled "Growth without Gridlock" which contains a policy statement that they aim to "Promote affordable, accessible and connected transport to enable access for all to jobs, education, health and other services". Our own observation is that these ideals are not being met. The key point is that KCC believe that this is what should be happening and some attempts to improve things were made as a result of The Big Conversation on rural transport last year but much more needs to be done to meet these ambitions.

Following our AGM in May four members joined our Transport Action Group and our plan is to examine existing data sources and put together a discussion document with ideas on how to achieve some of these ideals. It will not be easy and will almost certainly be controversial.

Money Matters

Energy bills: Last winter which was not generally as cold as usual and during the summer we have had some weeks of exceptionally hot weather resulting in lower energy consumption. If you pay your fuel bills by Direct Debit it might be worth contacting your provider to find out if you are 'in credit' if you have used less energy than anticipated, and if you find you have got a substantial

amount of money which has built up because your consumption was lower than expected you do have the option of asking for a refund.

Scams & Security: We receive almost weekly updates and sometimes daily news about various scams targeted at people across Kent. The brass-necked front of these fraudsters is unbelievable. Most recently there was a case of someone throwing a brick onto someone's roof and then offering to repair the damage! There was another case where, unbidden, workmen started digging up a driveway and doing the garden, then asking for money for the work.

Please, please beware of people knocking on your door offering cheap services like cheap mattresses, clearing your gutters, tree surgery or repairing your roof or chimney stack: more often than not they will be on the look out for vulnerable and trusting people and not deliver or even worse do damage that they can come back and charge for. Trusted Traders or recommendations from relatives, friends and neighbours might be a more secure way of getting the work done by competent contractors.

Financial Planning for Seniors - 4th November 2019

Like most of us, you probably have made arrangements for the future, but have some doubts as to whether or not they are as complete as they should be, or if they can be improved. You may know where your records are, but if anything should happen to you, would others know where to find things? It's the sort of subject that we all mean to get round to, but tend to put off for another day. With this in mind the Forum will be holding a seminar - that's a presentation on making and reviewing your will, inheritance tax, equity release, savings, probate, Power of Attorney, followed by a tea and coffee break and a question and answer session. We plan to make it easy to understand and there will be no selling at the end.

The presentation will be given by Ian Dixon a former Sevenoaks Resident, now a retired Bank Manager who runs a totally independent Financial Services Company. We have been given the use of a room and refreshments by the owners of:

**Nesbit House,
Orpington Bypass, Badgers Mount TN14 7EJ
on November 4th 2019 (2 pm – 4 pm)**

You can just turn up on the day, but it would help to know numbers for seating and catering arrangements. You can email us at comms@sdsaf.org.uk. If you would like any further information Alan Dixon would be happy to hear from you on 01732 452719. Please do come along - we promise to make this seemingly boring but essential topic interesting and informative.

KEEPING KEYLESS CARS PROTECTED FROM THIEVES!

As soon as something is invented to make life easier these days there are always a minority who think they're entitled to take someone else's property. If you have invested recently in a car with a keyless mechanism do be aware that a great number of cars have been stolen because the thieves have intercepted and boosted the signal being transmitted from the key to the car.

One way to prevent this happening is to block the signal when you're away from the car. The recommendation is to shut off the engine at the button, then lock the car with the key signal close to the car and only then put the key into a Faraday bag so its signal is blocked. The Faraday bags are quite reasonable to buy but some people have made their own strategy for making a Faraday cage – it's up to you!

Vibe Dance

Congratulations to the Forum's Social Team for a very successful Vibe Dance at the Alexandra Suite in Swanley on 1 July. SDSAF was supporting the Royal Voluntary Services "First Time for Everything" initiative, funded by Prudential. Dance is good for us physically and mentally and is a great way of overcoming loneliness. It may even play a part in staving off dementia.

Many of the 40 attendees hadn't danced before but were soon helped to do a bit of rock 'n' roll in a friendly social setting and many are now determined to 'keep dancing!'. Raffle prizes included a book donated and signed by Len Goodman and a pamper session for tired feet. A highlight of the afternoon was the delicious tea donated by the Riverside Tea Room in Eynsford <http://www.riverside-tearoom.co.uk/>. A big 'Thank You' to them for their community spirit and generous support.

Sevenoaks District Seniors Action Forum AGM

We would like to express our gratitude to Sevenoaks District Council for granting us the use of their meeting room to hold our AGM on 31st May. We were pleased that the Chair of the District Council, Cllr. John Edwards-Winsor, was able to be present, participate in the discussions and pay tribute to the work of all the volunteer organisations across the District.

Members enjoyed presentations from Mr. Austin Blackburn, Managing Director of Go-Coach, who gave a lively insight into the challenges faced by bus operators and shared some innovative ideas as to how public transport in rural areas could be provided, and SDC's One You facilitators who also gave an interesting presentation about their services, which provide social prescribing opportunities across the District to improve people's health. A big thank you to the presenters for giving their valuable time to engage with Sevenoaks District Seniors Action Forum members and making the meeting a great success.



Sevenoaks District Council One You Team



Austin Blackburn - Go Coach MD (left) with Cllr. John Edwards-Winsor (right) Chair SDC

SDSAF Committee Contacts

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| Chair | Eileen Murray Giles | Chair@sdsaf.org.uk | |
| Membership Secretary | Roger Bryan | roger.bryan@me.com | 07470 201703 |

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

SDSAF Website: www.sdsaf.org.uk

By the way . . . The newsletter is available in large print; please let us know if you would prefer to receive a large print version.

Sevenoaks District
Seniors Action Forum

Celebrate Silver Monday with us at our

Coffee Morning

Monday 7th October – 10 a.m to 12 noon
in the Plaza Suite of The Stag Theatre
Sevenoaks

Coffee, tea & entry are free of charge and all age groups are welcome

A range of organisations will be on hand to give advice and provide information about public and other services available to Seniors and the wider community

There will also be a complimentary raffle and some cake to celebrate the Forum's 9th birthday

Silver Week is a special time to celebrate and value older people and provide a chance for them to get out of the house, keep their minds and bodies active, learn new skills, make new friends and connect with the communities and generations around them. Many thanks to Sevenoaks District Council and the Stag Theatre and other organisations for supporting this event.