



**Sevenoaks District**

**Seniors Action Forum**

***Working together in the interests of people aged 50 plus***

Email: [comms@sdsaf.org.uk](mailto:comms@sdsaf.org.uk)

**Message from the Chair**

**January 2020**

Greetings to all!

So much has happened in the 20 years since the Millennium. We are all, of course, 20 years older and some of us may find it difficult to adapt to the way our society and its values seem to be shifting. Trust in our political and banking systems has taken a battering, concerns about climate change have come to the fore and terrorist attacks are all too frequent. The UK is poised to leave the EU at the end of January and we are not sure what this means for us.

The internet has become an intrinsic part of our lives. Many seem wedded to their smart phones, the President of the U.S. keeps the world updated via Twitter and all the best deals seem to be online. It seems impossible to get a bus pass or Universal credit or sometimes a train ticket without engaging with technology. We may feel perplexed but we need to keep learning and do what we can to help each other.

When times were tough my dear Mum used to say 'Get up, make your bed then do what you can to make the world a better place'. It's not a bad maxim. Let's make each day of our lives count within whatever restrictions we find ourselves. Each day, let's get going and ask ourselves - What will I do today to make life better for myself and others?

Our volunteers in the Seniors Forum will continue to do all we can to help improve the lives of Seniors in our District and we thank all those individuals and organisations who engage with us throughout the year. We look forward to working with our new MP, Laura Trott, and with Tom Tugendhat MP, so that we can highlight the needs of older people in the District, particularly the need for sufficient and right sized housing for the increasing number of Seniors. Our Committee sends warmest wishes for the wellbeing of our whole community as we embark on the New Year and next decade.

*Eileen Murray Giles,*  
*Chair*

**Active Retirement**

Have you thought of joining one of the Active Retirement Associations in Kent? It's amazing what they get up to! A couple of Committee members visited Eynsfara (based in Eynsford) in early December and heard a great talk about MGM film making followed by mulled wine and mince pies. The group meets on the third Monday of each month at St. Martin's church in Eynsford from 2 – 4 pm and has an exhaustive selection of outings to choose from - art galleries, restaurants, quizzes, visits to National Trust properties and to seasonal spectacles such as the winter lights at Canary Wharf. There are other ARAs in our district e.g. at West Kingsdown, Swanley, Hextable and Edenbridge. One member said 'I don't want to support the BBC any more by staring at their TV so I found an ARA near me and they gave me a friendly welcome'. Cost £2 per trial visit, £18 per year.  
Contact: Anne Marie Fereday 01322 869481

## Benefits

**Attendance Allowance** helps with extra costs for people who are state pension age or over and have care needs. It is available to those with a disability severe enough that they require someone else to help look after them. Apparently many pensioners eligible to receive this benefit are not claiming it. It is not means tested and by claiming attendance allowance successful claimants could also be eligible for pension credit, housing benefit or a council tax reduction. If you think you may be eligible Age UK or Citizens Advice can provide help on making a claim and there is a useful 10-minute benefits check-up calculator on the following website:

<https://www.moneysavingexpert.com/news/2019/11/more-than-three-million-pensioners-could-be-missing-out-on-p4-55/>

**Winter Fuel Allowance:** If you were born on or before 5 April 1954 you could get between £100 and £300 to help you pay your heating bills. This is known as a 'Winter Fuel Payment'. You usually get a Winter Fuel Payment automatically if you are eligible and you get the State Pension or another social security benefit (not Housing Benefit, Council Tax Reduction, Child Benefit or Universal Credit). If you're eligible but do not get paid automatically, you will need to make a claim. *The deadline for claiming payments for winter 2019-2020 is 31 March 2020.* Most payments are made automatically between November and December. You should get your money by 13 January 2020 but if you do not get your payment, call the office that pays your pension/benefits - their details are on any letters they have sent you.



*Stay Warm and Well this winter*

## Some of the things on our 'To Do' List for 2020

**Mobile Phones:** Many of us have a mobile phone which we only use on the odd occasion or have in case an emergency arises. It might be advisable to make a short call or text every once in a while to ensure that the service provider hasn't wrongly assumed that the phone is no longer being used and has disconnected you.



**Stop Nuisance Telephone Calls:** If you experience a lot of nuisance calls then the following information might be helpful as there are several steps you can take to help to reduce them:

Firstly, you can join the Telephone Preference Service - TPS. This FREE service will enable you to record your preference not to receive unsolicited sales or marketing calls. If you go to the website below it will take you to the TPS Website home page; here you can read more about this service and register.

TPS Website - <https://www.tpsonline.org.uk/tps/index.html>

Some telephone providers such as BT and TalkTalk offer a Guardian service. This service monitors nuisance calls and automatically prevents them by sending them to a junk voicemail. The BT version of this is called Call Protect and the TalkTalk version is called CallSafe. Other telephone providers may have something similar in place.

TalkTalk - <https://www.talktalk.co.uk/shop/security/callsafe>

BT - <https://home.bt.com/tech-gadgets/phones-tablets/bt-call-protect-free-service-crackdown-nuisance-calls-11364136279348>

**Declutter:** It's amazing how much 'stuff' we can accumulate over the years so while the days are still gloomy why not take the opportunity to have a sort out of things you may have outgrown or have passed their 'sell by date'. There are a number of organisations which are happy to receive them but before you do it's a good idea to check that any 'retro' items have not become collectors' items!

## **The Convenience of using Buses!**

I was recently asked to write a piece entitled 'The Pleasure of using Buses' - but having given the subject due consideration I did think that it would be better entitled 'The Convenience of using Buses'. Why me? About 10 years ago I was diagnosed with a heart condition that could lead to blood clots - and although not told to do so I chose not to drive any more. I was old enough to qualify for a free bus pass so obviously I applied for one and have been reliant on the bus services ever since.

I have no problem getting wherever I want to go. Obviously it sometimes takes a bit longer, but as a retiree, I don't have a problem the majority of the time. Initially I lived in Otford and, although now resident in Sevenoaks, I still meet in town many of the regular bus users that I met at the time and consider them to be friends, having had the time to converse whilst travelling.

About 6 years ago I decided to downsize and move to Sevenoaks. In doing so I prioritised my future location to ensure that I had simple, straightforward access to the local buses. I would recommend this course of action to anyone considering doing so; you may still be able to drive but looking to the future this could change. I can access the town centre in 15 minutes and in doing so have once again met and befriended many like-minded locals who use the buses.

Ironically a few weeks ago I was told that my heart condition had passed, it was no longer a problem. Phew! On hearing this good news my immediate reaction was to get a car again but considering this possibility further I realised that over and above buying it I would then have to tax and insure it, put fuel in it, maintain it and when in town I would have to pay to park it. And, having done so, I would not be able to have a couple of pints with my friends in one of the local hostelrys. Maybe it really is a pleasure as well as a convenience to use the buses!

*Barry Morse*

## **Keeping Active – Walking Football**

Walking football is fun and good exercise for men and women. A group meets at the Sevenoaks Football club on Mondays at 1.30 pm until 3 pm. We usually play 5 a side on an all weather pitch at Greatness Recreation Park, Mill Lane Sevenoaks. Suitable shoes are the only expense as the pitch, changing room, football and nets are provided courtesy of the Football Club. Contact Darren Bramley email home@darren.org. Come and renew old enthusiasms or try something new and sociable.

*Merilyn Canet, A recent recruit to the beautiful game!*

## **KCC Library Services – More than just a good Book**

Following a consultation in 2019 changes have been made to opening hours at libraries across Kent. Many people rely on the library to borrow books, CDs, DVDs and to use their computers and printers. What is not generally known is that your KCC library card enables you to access Press Reader – an online facility giving access to read a wide variety of newspapers and magazines. Housebound clients can also get an 8 week iPad loan and a visit from a volunteer to demonstrate how to use it. Forum Committee members have also used Ask a Kent Librarian to help with their research, either on the phone or on line, and we have been very satisfied with that efficient and helpful service.

## **Financial Planning for Seniors - Being Prepared**

Our sincere thanks go to Mr. Ian Dixon, a retired Bank Manager, who gave a very informative and engaging talk on financial planning, covering a range of topics - the importance of making a will, probate, equity release and Power of Attorney. It was nice to meet the Forum members who attended, as well as people from other organisations. The main message we all took home from this was to give due thought to any future wishes you may want to be carried out, make sure other people know what they are and where to find the instructions, and review them once in a while. The Forum also thanks Nesbit House, the recently opened care home in Badgers Mount for their hospitality on the day. As the talk was such a success we hope to repeat it in a different part of the District in 2020.

## Vintage Bus Outing from Weald Heights Care Home

We were delighted that the residents of Weald Heights came on board the vintage Routemaster kindly donated by Rachel Parr of the London Retro Bus Hire Company ([www.londonretrobushire.co.uk](http://www.londonretrobushire.co.uk)) for a visit to Polhill in October. Committee member Reg Glennon, and Sue Larken of Age UK enjoyed a lovely view of the countryside from the top deck and both residents and carers enjoyed the nostalgic ride through the countryside followed by a browse around the shops and some refreshments at Polhill before returning to Sevenoaks. Please contact Eileen, [chair@sdsaf.org.uk](mailto:chair@sdsaf.org.uk) if your organisation would be interested in benefitting from future vintage bus trips.



## Age UK Pop Ins

We are pleased to report that the Age UK Pop Ins will be continuing next year so if you fancy dropping in to one of them for a cup of tea or coffee Sue Larken would be very pleased to welcome you.

The dates, times and venues are printed here but if you require more information Sue Larken can be contacted on 07867 648667 or by email at [suelarken@ageuksevenoak sandtonbridge.org.uk](mailto:suelarken@ageuksevenoak sandtonbridge.org.uk)

Information about other events and activities around the District can also be found on the Age UK Sevenoaks & Tonbridge website or you can phone them for more information.



**Pop in and see us for tea/coffee and biscuits**

**Meet others, get help to stay independent at home, learn balance & strength seated exercises. Or just chat with us**



**Choose from any of our local venues below:**

**CHIDDINGSTONE** at the Old Rectory, High Street TN8 7AH on **Thursdays (1.30-3.30): 16 January, 27 February, 26 March**

**CHIDDINGSTONE CAUSEWAY** at The Causeway Hall, TN11 8JS **Tuesdays (10:30-12:30): 7 & 21 January, 4 & 18 February, 3, 17 & 31 March**

**COWDEN** at Cowden Village Hall, Chantlers Mead TN8 7HU **Thursdays (10:00-12:00): 9 & 23 January, 6 & 20 February, 5 & 19 March**

**DUNTON GREEN** at Dunton Green Pavilion, London Rd TN13 2UR on **Wednesdays (1:30-3:30): 8 January, 12 February, 11 March**

**FORDCOMBE** at The Orchard, Chafford Lane TN3 0SH on **Fridays (1:30-3:00): 24 January, 21 February, 20 March**

**LEIGH** at the Fleur de Lis public house, High Street, Leigh **Mondays (10:30-12:00): 13 & 27 January, 10 & 24 February, 9 & 23 March**

**PENSHURST** at Peshurst Village Hall, High Street, Peshurst **Thursdays (10:00-12:00): 16 & 30 January, 13 & 27 February, 12 & 26 March**

For more information, call **Sue Larken** on 07867 648667 or email [suelarken@ageuksevenoaksandtonbridge.org.uk](mailto:suelarken@ageuksevenoaksandtonbridge.org.uk)

Age UK Sevenoaks & Tonbridge registered charity number 1088213. 02/19

## Where to find Information about Local Services

Sevenoaks District Council produce a very useful and comprehensive directory containing the details of a wide range of local services across the Sevenoaks District. The latest version can be accessed via the following link [www.sevenoaks.gov.uk/yourlocalservices](http://www.sevenoaks.gov.uk/yourlocalservices) or if you do not have access to the internet the publication is available in print and can be explained in other languages by calling 01732 227000.

## Health Matters: Diabetic Retinopathy

*The following information has been supplied by*

### **The Kent & Medway Diabetic Eye Screening Programme**

which offers everyone aged 12 and over with diabetes an invitation to this service once a year. Eye screening is a key part of diabetes care to check for diabetic retinopathy, a condition that can lead to sight loss if it's not detected early and treated. These eye tests are not the same as a regular sight test at your opticians which you should still attend.



Diabetic retinopathy was, until recently, the leading cause of blindness in working age people in the UK. This is no longer the case due to the successful introduction of diabetic eye screening programmes. Within 20 years of diagnosis, almost all people with Type 1 diabetes will have developed some degree of retinopathy; and nearly two thirds of all people with Type 2 diabetes will also develop some degree of retinopathy.

Once you have been diagnosed with diabetes, your GP will automatically refer you to the Programme for annual screening. You will then receive an invitation letter within 13 weeks inviting you to attend your first appointment. If you cannot make the appointment, we will be happy to change the time, date or venue to something more convenient.

Photographs will be taken of the back of your eye to assess for any signs of diabetic retinopathy. A letter is then sent with your results, and referral to the Hospital Ophthalmology Service is made if needing further assessment or treatment. If no/minimal retinopathy detected, we will invite you on an ongoing basis for annual screening.

You can lessen the risk of diabetic changes to your eyes by:

- Maintaining good blood sugar control
- Exercising regularly
- Giving up smoking
- Keeping your cholesterol levels low
- Eating healthily
- Drinking less alcohol

For more information about our service, please visit [www.kmdesp.co.uk](http://www.kmdesp.co.uk); call our bookings team on 01233 880000; email us at [enquiries.kmdesp@nhs.net](mailto:enquiries.kmdesp@nhs.net)

## Meeting with Sir Michael Fallon

The Management Committee had an interesting meeting with Sir Michael on 18 October and we were grateful that he gave us a slot in his busy schedule. The discussions covered:

- The need for more public toilets and a national strategy to address this issue
- The Sevenoaks District Local Plan, highlighting the dysfunctional formula used to assess housing need and the dearth of social and affordable homes for older people
- Transport in general and particularly to medical services
- Adult social care
- Advantages of Age UK Pop-Ins & Day Centres

Sir Michael listened carefully to our views and undertook to follow up some of them. As Sir Michael had decided not to stand for re-election we felt it was appropriate to show our appreciation to him and Lady Fallon with a small gift of locally grown plants to thank them for their many years of service to our community.



*Lady Fallon, Sir Michael Fallon  
and Eileen Murray Giles,  
SDSAF Chair*

## Transport

On 21 November the Sevenoaks Chronicle featured an article on SDC's ambition to become a carbon zero district by 2030. Part of the way of achieving this "ideal" will require a major shift from car dependency to a greater use of public transport. That as we all know is easier said than done, particularly in our area which is 94% Green Belt. This will need to be accomplished with the District being required to build an extra 6,000 new homes in the same time period.

KCC in August 2017 made a statement that it wanted to promote "affordable, accessible and connected transport – to enable access for all to jobs, education, health and other services".

So what has happened? Pilot schemes were launched as a result of the Big Conversation on Rural Transport in 2018, one of which included a taxi style bus service from West Kingsdown to Sevenoaks, and we await the results. We have also had the introduction and expansion of the Sevenoaks Town Service (No 8 from GO-Coach ). These two initiatives are welcome, but they are too little if the Council's objective of being Carbon Zero by 2030 is to be met.

What will be needed is a major injection of money from District, County and National Government as new initiatives will almost certainly require subsidies, particularly in the initial stages. As an Action Group we are currently conducting search and find prior to making a presentation of ideas to Councils and our MPs. We are consulting with KCC, The campaign for Better Transport and the bus operators Ideas being explored included expanding the Sevenoaks Town Circular to run both clockwise and anti-clockwise and to extend their timetable to provide earlier and later services and also to consider outer ring routes feeding into the Town Circular.

Examine the possibility of supermarkets entering into the local transport market; if they can deliver groceries almost 24/7, they could run taxi style buses to suit not only their own but other shift workers. We welcome ideas from our members, particularly those of you in the more rural areas, and we would urge anyone with an interest in sustainable and public transport to join our Transport Action Group especially if you live in Edenbridge, Swanley or Westerham and surrounding areas.

*Alan Dixon, Vice Chair*

## Praise and Thanks

**Age UK Sevenoaks & Tonbridge**, got a quick response to a telephone enquiry about where people could obtain mobility and safety aids around the District.

**Sevenoaks District Council and North West Kent Countryside Partnership (NWKCP)** proposed a garden project to improve community health and well-being

**Age UK 'Pop In Sue'** invited local nursery school children to sing carols to the Seniors at the December Pop In at Dunton Green. The children had made Christmas cards and cup cakes for everyone. A delightful example of inter-generational connection.

**NRS Equipment Repairs** Carried out an equipment repair within 2 days Although their Helpline was initially engaged a phone number can be left and an operator quickly returned the call.

**Tesco & Sainsburys supermarkets** have adopted the Sunflower lanyard scheme which enables people who need a bit of extra help whilst doing their shopping to get assistance. *Please encourage anyone you know who needs a bit of extra help to ask at Reception Desks for a lanyard!*



**Southeastern** is the first train operator to run schemes for hidden disabilities and has launched a trial of both the **JAM card** and the **Sunflower Lanyard scheme**, to support passengers who require more time or assistance when travelling across services, running on the **Tonbridge to Hastings** route.

## Housing

*Sevenoaks District Council Local Plan: The inquiry into the adoption of the Sevenoaks District Local Plan 2019-35* was put on hold when the Planning Inspector called an unexpected halt to its examination on 17 October. The reason given for this was that the Council were seen not to have met their obligation to confer with neighbouring Local Authorities to see if they could assist in helping with the forecast under delivery of houses in the District. There is evidence to demonstrate that the Council did have discussions with other Councils.

The Forum maintain that the targets set for Sevenoaks are too high and should not have been accepted. We have circulated an open letter on this subject where we have set out, chapter and verse, the flaws in the Government's target setting methodology and suggested that they should be updated and revised. In a response from SDC they acknowledge that we have raised a number of interesting issues and at their suggestion we have sent our open letter to the Secretary of State for Housing. This letter and supporting evidence can be seen on both the Council's and the Forum's website

We recognise and understand the need for more housing in the District, but not in the quantity and type as in the Government's flawed target. We do need more housing but units of the right type to meet a wide variety of demographic and social needs.

*Alan Dixon & Margaret Parker, Housing Action Group*

## Silver Coffee Morning in The Plaza Suite



As part of Silver Week, which celebrates the contribution older people make to society, the Forum held a Coffee Morning at The Stag in October.

We were pleased that Sevenoaks District Council supported this event and are thankful to the many other organisations who sent along representatives to talk individually about their services.

## Forget-me-Not Cafes

We just want to say well done to the Forget-me-Not Cafes. What a lovely setting and what a happy morning we spent in the Hayloft at Knole House. Anyone who has issues with memory loss and related conditions is welcome to attend along with their Carers and family members. The cafe is on the first Friday of every month 10.30-12.00. The December meeting had a Christmas theme with mulled wine and mince pies and the Vine Choir sang some well known and some not so well known carols. All present were invited to join in, which they did with great gusto and wonderful harmonies. The warmth of the welcome from the many volunteers was palpable. This is a great example of Kent being Dementia friendly. There are other cafes at Edenbridge, Hildenborough and Westerham and the details can be found on <http://www.forgetmenotcafe.org.uk/about.html>.

## Sevenoaks District Council Access Group

The aim of this is to identify issues which could make the infrastructure more accessible for people with mobility, sensory impairment or other special needs. The focus of the next meeting will be to consider areas of concern which could be improved to make their lives easier and enable them to communicate and socialise. If you have any suggestions about issues you feel the group should explore please let us know via our [chair@sdsaf.org.uk](mailto:chair@sdsaf.org.uk) or by phone to 07775 568 834.

## Scams & Personal Security

We make no apology for raising the topic of scams and personal security again as it is a sad fact that there are many different ways people, and particularly the older generation, are being targeted by unscrupulous fraudsters who seem to have no shame or conscience in their efforts to 'con' and trick people out of their hard-earned savings or pensions.

We have been made aware of some of the latest scams:

- Callers pretending to be from HMRC saying you are entitled to a refund or owe tax and asking for bank details
- Imposters posing as police officers to gain entry into your home
- Letters to recently bereaved people stating that they can contact your loved one
- Correspondence about inheritances from long lost relatives
- Strangers befriending lonely people on line, and then requesting money to visit from abroad

**Please beware of any unsolicited correspondence either by post, telephone call or on line, and do not reveal your Bank Account details and security codes to anyone and report any incidents.**

## Volunteers Wanted

Your Forum – “Sevenoaks District Seniors Action Forum” would be appreciative of any support you could offer to further our work. If you are interested please email [chair@sdsaf.org.uk](mailto:chair@sdsaf.org.uk).

As it approaches its 21st anniversary in November, Otford Heritage Centre appeals for volunteers, including a Chair for its management committee. If you are interested please phone the present Chair on 01959 522325.

There are many other organisations around the District whose work could be expanded with more help from volunteers, even if it's only for half a day a week, so why not take the opportunity to help and make new friends at the same time?

## IT Support

FREE supportive help and advice at Otford Library on Fridays from 1 pm – 4 pm and on Saturdays from 10 am – 12 noon. You can bring your own laptop/iPad or use the library facilities. To book a place telephone Lorraine Young on 03000 416006.

### Combatting Loneliness in the Elderly Community

Weald Heights invite you to attend the launch of Care UK's initiative to combat loneliness in the elderly community at  
**Weald Heights from 2 p.m. on Saturday, 25 January 2020**  
**Bourchier Close, Sevenoaks, TN13 1PD**  
when Gloria Hunniford will be the VIP

To contact the Forum Committee email Eileen Murray Giles at : [chair@sdsaf.org.uk](mailto:chair@sdsaf.org.uk)  
or write to us “Sevenoaks District Seniors Action Forum”  
22 Lambarde Road, TN13 3HT  
SDSAF Website: [www.sdsaf.org.uk](http://www.sdsaf.org.uk)

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