

Sevenoaks District
Seniors Action Forum

Working together in the interests of people aged 50 plus

Email: comms@sdsaf.org.uk

Message from the Chair

The last 15 months have been challenging for all of us. It's good to be able to look ahead and plan events like our Silver Day and AGM on 7 October. Please save the date!

It's also good to look back and savour some of the highlights. During lockdown, many of us chatted more frequently by phone or online with family and friends. I recall very animated exchanges with my siblings as we shared our childhood memories.

We would remind each other about life before central heating, automatic washing machines and integrated fridge freezers. Bedrooms that were so cold that we could write messages on the frosty windows; Dad making a fire to heat the house before we went to school, using coal delivered in hundredweight sacks by sooty coal men; Mum washing our clothes by hand every Monday; visits to the corner shops to collect a day's fresh supplies to feed the family.

We felt very lucky compared to those born before us who had endured the ravages of war. We wished we knew more about previous generations and the experiences they had

Some of our Forum members have decided to write their life stories to ensure that these precious memories are not lost. Reg Glennon, born July 1930, has written a riveting account of his life and has given us permission to reprint excerpts. We have included a piece in this newsletter where he recalls his wartime evacuation as a child to a farm in Wales.

Have you written all or part of your life story? We will be happy to consider printing excerpts in future newsletters. Do send us a few paragraphs so that we can share your memories with our members.

With warmest wishes.

Eileen Murray Giles

SDSAF Membership

We are pleased to report that our membership currently stands at a healthy 1,163. This is despite the fact that for two summers we have been unable to attend local fêtes and fairs - our normal recruiting ground - but we continue to recruit new members and to remain resilient.

We are very sad to say that some of our members have passed away in recent times but have been fortunate to have welcomed 27 new members since May, so it's great to know that we are still a relevant and vibrant organisation for Seniors in Sevenoaks District. **Thank you** for continuing your membership and giving us support to ensure the voices and opinions and needs of older people across the District are heard. Please do encourage any eligible friends or neighbours who have not heard of us to join, so that we can keep growing and campaigning.

Silver Coffee Morning & AGM – 7th October 2021

We are pleased to advise that we have booked the Plaza Suite at The Stag Theatre, Sevenoaks, to host a Coffee Morning on Thursday, 7th October during Silver Week. This will be followed by our formal AGM in the afternoon. We will be inviting representatives from various organisations across the District to host a table and join us so that they can inform people about their work. Precise timings will be circulated nearer the date, but in the meantime you may like to consider joining the Committee or one of our Action Groups, and if so please contact us to discuss the nomination process.

Singalong Concert - 24th April 2021

An entertaining evening, via Zoom, was had by all at our second Singalong evening. Our gratitude goes to all our talented volunteer 'stars' who sang, strummed and recited, to the delight of an appreciative audience. The concert really lifted everyone's spirits, during what has been a difficult 18 months. Although we were glued to our screens it did feel like a shared experience and broke down the barriers of isolation and loneliness. The audience said they would like us to organise another event, so if you have a musical skill or other talent you would like to entertain Forum members with please get in touch.

Good News about Sevenoaks & Tonbridge Age UK Pop Ins

Pop Up Sue is back and looking forward to helping everyone! Anyone needing help with mobility, Strength & Balance or gaining confidence after a fall with a fully qualified, friendly instructor is welcome to join at any of the following venues:

Chiddingstone Causeway Hall (TN11 8JS) - Mondays - 10.45 a.m. - 12.15 p.m.:

July 19th, August 2nd, 16th & 30th, September 13th & 27th
(£3.50 a session including cup of tea /coffee)

Cowden Village Hall (TN8 7HU) Thursdays – 10 a.m.-12 noon:

July 22nd, August 5th & 19th, September 2nd, 16th & 30th
(£3:50 incl cup of tea/coffee)

Dunton Green Pavilion TN13 2UR – 1.30 p.m. – 3.30 p.m.

Every 2nd Wed of the Month, starting Wednesday July 14th.
Including a cup of tea/coffee if restrictions allow.

Classes will be run in accordance with government guidelines in a Covid-safe environment.

Going for a Song!

One of our members recently came across some inherited items and had no idea of their value. Having watched some auction programmes on television they decided to put them into an auction and were very pleasantly surprised to discover how easy it was to do this locally.

Auction houses regularly hold valuation days when you can book an appointment to take items along to get an estimate of their worth. For bulky items they can arrange to view them in your home so you can consider whether it would be worth your while going down this route. Seller can choose to accept the valuation and agree a reserve price for entering the item into the auction catalogue or decide not to sell. There is a fee for entering goods into the sale and the auction house also takes a percentage in commission if the item sells.

Viewing days are held prior to auctions and currently auctions are being held on line, but it is hoped that these will revert to face to face bidding while also continuing to be accessed on line so that a wider audience can make a bid.



WHAT'S HAPPENING WITH OUR BUSES AROUND SEVENOAKS?

Over the past couple of months, we have received quite a number of letters and emails regarding the decline in the number of timetabled buses provided by Go Coach following their service update on 12th April. Concerns have also been expressed about the limited use of Concessionary Bus Passes on the bookable buses. To aid us in responding to your concerns, we arranged meetings with both Austin Blackburn of GO Coach and Councillor David Brazier, Cabinet Member for Highways and Transport at KCC. We were informed that:

- *All bus operators are required to operate their services to make a profit or at least break even so that they are sustainable.
- *KCC, contrary to public perception, do not run the buses, but as our local Transport Authority have certain statutory requirements to help with the provision of bus services. Among these are to help finance the provision of School transport through its KTS and 16+ schemes (a major part of the GO services in our area) and to administer the English National Concessionary Travel Scheme (ENCTS) bus passes.
- *KCC also help to fund other non-statutory travel concessions, e.g. the bookable bus/taxi services that GO provide together with subsidies for routes that are considered Socially Necessary Bus Services (SNBS), some of which are in our area serving the rural communities. This is discretionary and not a statutory requirement.
- *KCC also have to consider the needs of elderly and disabled individuals. The new GO bookable bus taxi service has wheelchair access.
- *SDC and the Town and Parish Councils can and do operate some bus services, but this is not statutory.

WHY ARE THERE “NOW” SO FEW TIMETABLED BUSES? It comes down to the need to run these routes sustainably using the limited funds available. Between October 2020 and March 2021 Go passenger numbers declined from about 1,000 a week to 150/200. At that time the Government recommended the population not to use them. Passenger numbers are slowly recovering, but are not yet back to pre-lock down levels. It's a catch-22 “Use them or lose them Syndrome”. GO do expect to increase some services, mainly from September onwards, but conversely there could also be more cuts.

Longer term we will have to wait for the outcome of the latest Government initiative to improve local and rural bus services which is for a new National Bus Strategy called “Bus Back Better”. KCC will be publishing a proposal for an Enhanced Partnership between Local Authorities and the bus operators. They will be seeking firm commitments on issues such as expanding socially necessary buses, more late and evening buses and an increase in ‘on demand’ transport. This needs to be completed by October 2021 for implementation in April 2022, with Cllr. Brazier as the lead.

WHY ARE THERE NO TIMETABLED BUSES AFTER 3 P.M. FROM GO? During lockdown GO had to give priority to school bus services. To maintain social distancing, they were not allowed to have a mixed passenger load of school children and adults. With the end of lockdown mixed use could be reintroduced, probably from September and subject to KCC approval. Passengers can of course still travel by a bookable bus, but the cost of this means paying the full fare between 3 p.m. and 5 p.m. weekdays, for example to get from Sevenoaks Railway Station to Sevenoaks Bus Station and back costs £7 on a shared bus during that time.

CONCESSIONARY FARES ON TIMETABLED ROUTES: You can use your bus pass in England from 9.30 a.m. on weekdays and any time at weekends. There is no statutory obligation to provide concessionary fares on pre-bookable services. However, KCC and other councils have provided some subsidy for GO's pre-bookable bus and taxi services and it is hoped that this will continue and possibly expanded following the Bus Back Better- enhanced partnerships. Concessionary pass holders receive 50% discount on go2 shared buses and 20% discount on go2 private taxis outside of school times.

WHAT NEXT? A KCC Questionnaire on buses can be found at: <https://letstalk.kent.gov.uk/busfuture> - closing date 25 July or request a copy by post on 03000 421553 and leave a message on the answerphone. It can be completed by both bus users and non-bus users. With these initiatives we have high expectations for improvements in the future. Do consider responding to the questionnaire. If you are not IT connected ask a friend or relative for help. Full details of Cllr. Brazier's response to our meeting, and a detailed summary of your issues with GO and current services is published on our web site: www.sdsaf.org.uk or call Barry Morse on 07584 420700 or Alan Dixon on 01732 452719 if you would like a copy by post.

Praise

- Gillian Shepherd-Coates who has retired from Age UK Sevenoaks & Tonbridge, having given many years dedicated service to help older people around the District. Gillian was awarded an MBE in the June 2021 Queen's Honours List for services to charity and for helping to reduce loneliness and isolation in the community. We wish Gillian well in her future ventures.
- Rev. Hannah Adams, Rector of St. Botolph's Church, Chevening, for conducting a survey of community needs and how the church can better serve and work with the community.
- Sevenoaks District Council, working with West Kent Extra and Compaid, have secured funding for a Digital Inclusion Officer managed by Compaid. The officer will be working with any individual or family that does not have access or enough access to lap tops/tablets etc and can help them feel more inclusive by being digital. The officer will also do training workshops across the District. If you feel isolated due to not being able to be online, or know of anyone who is, please get in contact with communities@sevenoaks.gov.uk or phone the Council on 01732 227000 when a referral can be made to the Digital Inclusion Officer, who will then contact them to do an assessment form.
- Cross Light Advice for helping people to manage and overcome their debts in these challenging times.
- John Edwards-Winsor who has completed two years as Chairman of the District and supported our Seniors throughout.
- Dr Marilyn Canet, our Vice Chair, recently appointed as this year's Mayor of Sevenoaks Town.

Adopt a Tree in Sevenoaks

Memories of the Great Storm are still likely to be fresh in many people's minds, together with the toll it took on both buildings and trees. We were pleased therefore to hear about the opportunity to Adopt a Tree. The tree can be planted at various sites around Sevenoaks Town. Adopters will receive a certificate with a picture of the newly planted tree and a plan showing its location. The cost of a standard tree is £100, which will be a 10/12 cm bare root wrapped tree. This price includes the purchase of the tree, digging a hole for its roots, adding compost, installing an irrigation pipe, backfilling, mulching and staking. Once the tree is planted Sevenoaks Town Council will be responsible for maintaining the tree but cannot guarantee the lifetime of it, and will be unable to replace any trees which do not establish themselves.

As the best months for planting trees are December and January the deadline for applications is 30th September 2021 which will give the Council enough time to order trees, agree and mark the final locations and organise planting. Application forms can be obtained from Sevenoaks Town Council offices in Bradbourne Vale Road or alternatively contact the Forum and we will arrange for an Interest Form to be sent to you.

Passports

You may be planning a holiday in the near future but you need to be aware that some countries are demanding that your passport is valid for 6 months from the date of entry, for example China, Thailand, Egypt, Turkey and Northern Cyprus need to be valid for at least 6 months. This information was correct at the time of going to print but in this fast-changing environment any travel requirements may be subject to last minute changes.

Wartime Evacuation Memories – Reg Glennon, Born 1930

It was surprising that our school was evacuated to Wateringbury with all the war activity in the skies above. It was even more surprising when the school was moved to Llandysul in West Wales at the end of the doodlebug period when all was calming down. It did me a tremendous favour. Living on a farm gave me an even greater appreciation and love of the countryside.

The day before we were due to leave Wateringbury we were told to take our belongings to the railway station. I transported my suitcase on foot balanced on a bicycle. It was well over a mile and the case was heavy. My possessions were duly placed in the luggage hall to be put on the train the following morning.

Early next day the whole school assembled at the station. The train arrived pulled by a steam locomotive. It was full of children. We had no idea where we were going. This was accepted in the war. Everything was secret. There were posters everywhere saying ‘careless talk costs lives’. We travelled all day. Stops were made where food and drink was handed out. We were taken to Llandysul grammar school where we would eventually attend classes and spent the night on camp beds in the gymnasium.

The following morning the local people who were to give us shelter came to collect us. Amongst them were farmers looking for fit lads who could do some work. My friend and I came into this category. For me this was the beginning of a fantastic year.

Mr. Jones’ farm was stepped into the side of a hill. A spring issued from one of the steps and was the sole source of water. The water quality was excellent - clean and warm in the winter and cold in the summer. The farmhouse was typical of those in the area - hundreds of years old with walls about 2 feet thick. It had an open wood fire with a griddle and a large oven. The chimney went straight up from the fire so that you could see the sky. Sides of bacon hung from the living room ceiling. The farmer was permitted to slaughter two pigs each year in lieu of the family’s bacon ration. In the corner stood a piano which mounted a large family Bible having the family genealogy inscribed on the early pages.

Butter was churned in a dairy room at the back of the house. A giant vat of isinglass stood in the corner to store dozens of eggs. There was no refrigeration and this clear liquid prevented the eggs deteriorating. A bakery led from the dairy. Here Mrs Jones made bread and Welsh cakes. Another annex featured a long dining table where we ate. Imagine just how different was this life from what I’d been used to.

A wartime recipe from ‘Favourite Ration Book Recipes’ - Date and Potato Tart

Although dates were rationed, they were available as part of the monthly points allowance and with some ingenuity were turned into tempting dishes

6oz whole meal flour
3oz margarine
4 oz dates
4 tablespoons mashed potato
1 dessert spoon honey
1 egg (reconstituted)
1 teaspoon almond essence
A little water



Soak dates in splash of water for 4 hours then drain and reserve juice. Preheat oven to 200C/400F/Gas 6 and grease a 6 inch flan tin. Rub margarine into flour till the mixture looks like fine breadcrumbs and add a little water to make a stiff dough. Roll out three quarters of the dough and line the flan tin. Layer the drained dates over the bottom of the tart. Mix the date juice with honey, egg, almond essence then fold in mashed potato and mix well. Spread potato mix over the dates and decorate with remaining pastry. Bake in oven for 20 minutes or until topping is golden brown.

Health

Access to Face to Face GP Appointments

The Forum have been made aware of difficulties getting a GP appointment or even a call with a doctor to get urgent medical advice. Practices seem to have different processes: some have adopted questionnaires on their websites or on-line submissions and call back, while others operate a first come, first served process for same day appointments, postponing the ability to get an appointment. We appreciate that the Covid pandemic has caused extreme pressure on the NHS, not least GPs, who are now having to deal with patients, many of whom have postponed seeking care over the past 18 months. Getting through on the phone to speak to a receptionist on occasion seems to be a challenge in itself, with lines being constantly engaged. The receptionists are doing sterling work in difficult circumstances and we applaud their efforts.

We acknowledge that some issues can be dealt with via a phone call but the experience of one of our members has been brought to our notice. They were in severe pain and tried numerous times to speak to their doctor. After hours of trying a doctor's appointment was not offered and they were told to take paracetamol. This advice appears to have been incorrect as they were admitted to the hospital as an emergency the next day, having suffered a burst appendix. An operation subsequently took place followed by a stay in hospital. Needless to say this ordeal caused a great deal of anxiety and stress. **We would urge members whose GP surgery declines them an appointment but believe that they need to receive urgent medical advice to ring 111 for advice, dial 999 or to go to Accident and Emergency.**

SDC Health & Wellbeing Partnership Action Plan 2021/22

The Forum was pleased to be asked to provide feedback to the proposals contained in Sevenoaks District Council's Health and Wellbeing Partnership Action Plan for 2021/22. We carefully reviewed the 28 page document and submitted comments about the five objectives which are:

Objective 1: Support residents to make positive lifestyle changes

Objective 2: Support healthy and sustainable environments and communities

Objective 3: Support the improvement of wider determinants of health

Objective 4: Make Every Contact Count

Objective 5: Target services to improve health inequalities

GP Patient Data

There has been a lot of publicity and debate about the intention of NHS Digital to have access to the medical records held by GP surgeries. The decision has now been postponed until the beginning of September. The following is a statement from Healthwatch England.

"We welcome today's move by the Government to extend the deadline for the GP data opt-out and allow NHS Digital and colleagues across the NHS, particularly those in primary care, to have the time and space to engage properly with patients and the wider public on these plans.

In previous engagement work the public have told us that they are in favour of the NHS using their data for medical research if they understand how this information will be used and can opt out if they so wish. However, ongoing public support for this depends on complete transparency and clear communication from the NHS when things change."

"Over the next few months we need to see a proper nationwide campaign on this, reaching out to people so they can make an informed choice about how their own individual medical records are used to support research. This is a complex issue, and so we will all be working with the NHS to help build awareness and understanding."

From the NHS England Website

"If you don't want your identifiable patient data to be shared for purposes except for your own care, you can opt-out by registering a [Type 1 Opt-out](#) or a [National Data Opt-out](#), or both." These opt-outs are different and they are explained in more detail on the NHS England website which also states "Your individual care will not be affected if you opt-out using either option."

Celebrating the Amazing Work of Hospices

Hospice in the Weald cares for local people with a terminal illness, and those important to them, across a range of Services. Established in 1980, the local charity has grown over the years and now offers patients and their loved ones care in their own homes, in-patient care, and much more.

Services include In-Patient Care across the In-Patient Ward and the Cottage Hospice, support in the community from the Hospice Outreach Service team, Counselling and Support Services and a wide range of therapies and groups to help patients meet their goals. Each year, the Hospice meets more unmet need with the support of their community, and they will continue to grow their services in the future.



Throughout the pandemic, Hospice in the Weald has remained open with infection prevention and control measures in place to keep staff, volunteers, patients and those important to them safe. Now, more than ever, it is important that people living with a terminal illness get the support they need and do not feel afraid to do so. Hospice in the Weald is still caring and will be there to ensure each and every person gets the outstanding Hospice palliative care that they deserve.

Hospice in the Weald continues to support local families despite the challenges of the varying levels of restrictions which remain. This includes ensuring that patients have access to one of 25 in-patient beds across the In-Patient Ward at Pembury and Cottage Hospice at Five Ashes when they need it. Throughout the pandemic, Hospice in the Weald has guaranteed outstanding Hospice care, no matter what, maintaining high levels of safety, providing compassionate, personalised care, to those who need it.

The challenges of living with a terminal illness don't stop during a pandemic. Hospice in the Weald will be here for all who need them, now and in the future.

The following is a quotation from a patient: "Cottage Hospice has enabled us to progress without fear - we can do it together, comfortably, with the family. The family can come any time and it's really helped us. We know we have the instant nursing care on hand if we need it - it's literally press a button and there would be a nurse there by your side."



The picture above shows John and his wife Beverley who stayed at Cottage Hospice earlier this year. You can read more of their story on Hospice in the Weald's website.

If you would like to know more about the work of Hospice in the Weald, or would like support and advice for yourself or a loved one, you can visit their website www.hospiceintheweald.org.uk, or call 01892 820515 to speak to a member of their team.

Alexa (Amazon Echo Dot Smartspeaker)

Alexa seems to have found her way into many households who have wi-fi. A neighbour has two and finds that he can request his favourite music to be played and ask lots of questions. However some of the answers should be considered with caution, but during lockdown the ability to interact with Alexa provided much needed company and entertainment for many people

One of our readers has provided some quiz games which are available via Alexa which might help to keep the grey matter sharp:

Trivia Hero. “Alexa Open Trivia Hero”.

True or False. “Alexa Open True or False”.

Pointless. “Alexa Open Pointless”.

Harry Potter Quiz. “Alexa Play Harry Potter Quiz”.

The Daily Quiz. “Alexa, open the Daily Quiz”.

Beat the Intro. “Alexa play Beat the Intro”.



It still seems surreal to be speaking to an artificial intelligence resource but there's been a real leap in the development of this and you might be tempted to check out the above to see if they are your cup of tea.

Kent County Council Public Libraries

KCC have a range of resources available to make their services accessible for everyone, including:

- induction loops (for people with hearing-aids)
- large print and audiobooks (for people who are blind or partially sighted)
- a range of easy access books including the Books Beyond Words range for people who prefer pictures to words (for adults with learning disabilities)
- overlays (for people with dyslexia)
- access to eBooks using the dyslexic font feature on the OverDrive app
- accessibility software on library computers and computers suitable for wheelchair users
- access to books and online information about disabilities and mental health
- reminiscence boxes and Pictures to Share books for people with dementia
- audiobooks by post (for blind and partially sighted people)
- the home library service, which includes the Touch a New World Scheme to borrow iPads and access to guided sessions with a dedicated volunteer

If you have a disability or mental health problem you also qualify for an **exempt card** with which you can enjoy a 6 week loan period for books and audio books CDs, no overdue fines if you return items late, no charges for borrowing CDs and free computer use for 2 hours a day with accessibility software to support planning, reading and writing and you can access free black and white printing and photocopying (up to 20 pages).

FORUM CONTACT DETAILS

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If you would like to receive the Newsletter in large print please let us know