

Sevenoaks District Seniors Action Forum

Working together in the interests of people aged 50 plus

Email: comms@sdsaf.org.uk

Letter from the Chair

Dear Members

Welcome to the summer newsletter,

The summer is now with us and it is a pleasure to have the longer days, better weather and to see everything beginning to bloom in the gardens.



We would like to invite you to the Annual General Meeting, to be held at 2.00 pm on Friday 4th July 2025, at Sevenoaks Indoor Bowls Centre, Hollybush Close Sevenoaks TN13 3UX.

The afternoon will be an opportunity to meet the committee, be updated on our actions and hear from various speakers. The Green Doctors will be attending, along with Hi Kent, Kent Association for the Blind, the CAB and Kent Police. Tea and cake will be available after the main meeting. Do come along if you can - it is always a pleasant and informative afternoon.

We will be holding our bring and share summer lunch party for our volunteers and potential volunteers on **Wednesday 6 August**. It will be hosted once again in a lovely private garden in Otford. Please alert us to any potential volunteers who might like to attend - we are always looking for new people and new ideas to boost the work of the Forum.

Looking ahead to our Silver Week at the beginning of October, we will be celebrating our Seniors with a Singalong in Otford Village Hall on **Friday 3 October** 2-4pm. Please put the date in your diary for this free of charge afternoon of music with lots of tea and cake. Many thanks to all those members who have offered to lead some singing and/or do a party piece. Do let us know if you would like to contribute your talent.

Since our last newsletter, we have had some very unfortunate news - sadly Alan Dixon died suddenly in May. Alan worked tirelessly for the Forum and tributes are enclosed later in the newsletter.

The recent Event 'Putting your affairs in Order' kindly hosted by Emerson Grange Nursing Home. Hextable, was very well received. Our thanks to Andrea Kershaw for her excellent talk and her expertise. We are going to arrange a further talk in the South of the District later on this year.

We hope you find the newsletter informative and we look forward to seeing as many of you as possible on the 4th July.

Gill and Eileen
Co chairs

Getting Our Affairs In Order

Wills, Estate Planning and Powers of Attorney

Our thanks to Andrea Kershaw of Thackray Williams for her talk on 12 May and to Emerson Grange for hosting us.

We all know how important it is to make a Will but it is all too easy to put off. However, making a Will ensures that your wishes are followed and you can make provision for your loved ones on your death. Every family is different and your Will needs to be tailored to you and your situation to be sure it is right for you

It is not just your Will that you need to be thinking about when planning for the future, you may also want to take advice on how to limit the inheritance tax that might be payable on your estate. This is often done by making lifetime gifts but careful planning is required to ensure that these gifts take effect.

It is also important to consider what might happen if you can no longer make decisions for yourself because you lack capacity to do so or because you are unwell and in hospital or housebound. A spouse or partner will not automatically be able to make decisions for you and so you should put Lasting Powers of Attorney for both property and Finance and Health and Welfare in place so that you can choose the people that you would like to make those decisions on your behalf.

Andrea, who specialises in law for older and vulnerable adults, would be happy to supply further information - call 01732 496496 or e-mail info@thackraywilliams.com.

Some perks for members on benefits



With the current challenges of the cost of living, it is worth claiming any reductions you qualify for. Many thanks to our member, Tim Rankin, for alerting us to the following concessions available to anyone who is on pension credit, universal credit and certain other benefits. Remember to have your National Insurance and other evidence ready when you apply

The Historic Royal Palaces - Hampton Court, Kensington Palace and the Tower of London - are offering tickets at £1 per day (up to 6 tickets per

household) to people in receipt of benefits so that a wider audience can enjoy exploring these historical sites. Kew Gardens offers a similar scheme. Remember to bring proof of ID and a copy of your benefit award letter on the day.

Unfortunately, it's a sign of the times that bookings can usually only be made online so you will need to seek help from the digital volunteer at your local library or from family or friends if you aren't online. The code on your email booking will be converted to a ticket on the day.

South East Water offers a range of reduced tariffs to help with paying your water bill. Call them on 0800 952 4000 (Mon-Fri 8 am to 7 pm) or send them a private message on Facebook -

<https://www.facebook.com/sewateruk>, and ask them to find the best tariff for you

BT offers a reduced price package for people on tight budgets called BT Essentials, with reduced price broadband, or broadband plus calls, or calls only. To sign up, visit

<https://bestbroadbanddeals.co.uk/go/link/bt-home-essentials-1599/> or call 0800 800 150 8am – 8pm

The Digital Divide in contacting your GP practice *(With thanks to John Harris, member of our Health and Social Care Action Group, for this thoughtful analysis)*

Last June this newsletter carried a very helpful article with tips about getting the best outcomes from GP consultations. These included making a list of items you want to discuss, going in with a friend, etc.

However, recent national research from the Institute for Government think tank, found that the percentage of patients actually seeing a GP in person, had plunged from 80.7% in 2019 to 66.2% last year. Telephone consultations have almost doubled over the same period from 13.4% to 25.4 %. Not surprisingly patients' satisfaction with GP services has plummeted. The research concluded that remote communication (e.g. the telephone, the internet) to provide care to patients, that became common as Covid hit in 2020, is now established practice by GP surgeries, even though patients prefer traditional face to face appointments.

However, Covid is not the only influence on more 'remote communication' in patient care. The [NHS Long Term Plan](#), published in January 2019 promoted the importance of technology in the future for the NHS. It states 'Our new digital services and support are empowering people to take control of their health and care through secure online access to clinicians, personalised health information, digital tools and advice that helps them to better manage their conditions.'

While this is intended to increase efficiency in health care, for some elderly people and those with disabilities this can raise a barrier to getting a GP consultation. For example, 29% or 1.7 million people aged 75 & over in the UK, do not use the internet at all. Even those who do use a computer do not necessarily have all the skills and lose out on lots of useful information, but particularly that to do with their health. Older patients are affected more by remote consultations as we are more likely to be living with multiple chronic conditions which require personal examination.

This issue has prompted Age UK to start a petition entitled 'Stop online being the only option'. Their message is that everyone should have fair and equal access to services.

This has been called the 'Digital Divide' and is a major issue for many elderly and disabled people as it can restrict the ability to obtain basic health services, yet at national level there are few legal options to prevent that happening.

You can support Age UK's campaign by signing the petition online

<https://campaigns.ageuk.org.uk/page/135031/petition/1?ea.tracking.id=Website>

or get a friend to download the form for you

<https://www.ageuk.org.uk/siteassets/documents/campaigns/digital-inclusion/offline-and-overlooked-petition.pdf>

Or write to FREEPOST Age UK Campaigns.

So, what can be done locally? The three main reasons patients have for contacting their GP Practice is to book an appointment, request repeat prescriptions and to see their test or scan results. At the moment the best way for people who do not use the internet and cannot go to the practice is the telephone and most practices, but not all, can help with these requests. If people use the same pharmacist regularly most can reorder the next month's repeat prescriptions for them.

Also, some practices have offered to host training events to show their patients how to use the NHS app., but attendances so far have been disappointing. A new idea for those who do have a computer or smart phone but need support is for Practices to have 'Digital Champions' based in the practice who can give

advice and training. This though has only recently been discussed and, as it will require more staff time, will depend on the co-operation of GP practices.

As the statistics show, this is an issue which can cause real difficulties for some elderly and disabled people and yet the responses at national and local level to resolve the problems caused are slow and limited.

Sources

- Patient Satisfaction with GP services in England. Guardian 22 April 2025
- NHS Long Term Plan Jan 2019
- Peoples Health Trust. Digital inclusion and Older People Feb. 2021
- Fact and figures about Digital inclusion and older people June 2024 Age UK
- 'Stop online being the only option' Petition launched May 2025.

Home-made salted honey ice cream



Now that summer is here, it's tempting to indulge in tasty ice creams to cool ourselves down. Although commercial ice creams can taste very good, we can't always be sure of the ingredients they contain. Why not have a go at making your own and keep them on hand for a little healthy treat?

Recipe

- 8 oz soft cheese (cream, curd or cottage cheese)
- 1-2 tablespoons of local raw honey
- A handful of dates (approx 12)
- 1 teaspoon vanilla essence
- Half teaspoon salt (healthy Celtic salt if you have it)

Blitz all together in a food processor and freeze. Allow to mellow for a few minutes at room temperature before serving.

Can you hear me?



Congratulations to Jean-Pierre Darque, organiser of the Hi-Kent Hearing Support Group in Sevenoaks, on the first anniversary of this very successful group which is helping many of our members to come to terms with their hearing loss.

Jean-Pierre (known as JP) organises a monthly programme of speakers on the first Tuesday of every month at 11.00, St John's Hill United Reform Church, TN13 3LW covering topics such as first aid, lip reading, hearing aid devices, the NHS app and mental health aspects of hearing loss. There is also an opportunity to socialise and share experiences over a cup of coffee. JP produces

a very informative newsletter, crammed with tips and practical help and he encourages the group to learn about advances in technology to make life easier. To learn more, contact JP

Email: jpdarque@btinternet.com Mobile: 0788082880

Re-homing our pets



From time to time, our members tell us that they need to re-home their beloved pets. This can be for a number of reasons eg in the case of bereavement or because our member is moving to a residence where animals cannot be accommodated.

First of all, we have been warned that it's not a good idea to advertise openly on the internet as there are unscrupulous people about who might not have the best interests of the animals in their mind.

Secondly, it's important to act quickly, especially in the case of bereavement as the animals will be experiencing feelings of loss if their owners are no longer around.

Fortunately, there are several animal charities in or near our district that may be able to help. Circumstances will be different in each case so it's sensible to put time aside to discuss your situation with the various charities to see if they can help. Sometimes they can arrange fostering whilst trying to find an appropriate home. The following charities have been suggested by our members: -

- The Dogs Trust - Dogstrust.org.uk
 - Foal Farm Animal Rescue Centre, Biggin Hill - Foalfarm.org.uk
 - Battersea Dogs Home, Kent - Battersea.org.uk
 - The RSPCA - RSPCA.org.uk
 - The Jack Russell Rescue Trust - <https://www.jackrussellterrierrescueuk.org/about-us/>
 - Rosina (based on Wrotham) - <https://www.facebook.com/share/1AKfMgZJ3Z/>
- If you have any more information on this subject that can be shared, please let us know.

Praise



- Seal Tea set - meets monthly in Seal Library
A very well organised and friendly group - with tea, cake, raffle, speakers - a great way to keep Seniors interested in life and socially connected.
- VE Day celebrations for 80th anniversary including an excellent Flower Festival at St Peter and St Paul Church in Ash
- Eden Valley Creation – a community based musical production telling the history of Eden Valley interwoven with the biblical creation story -

- VIP Fundraiser Tea at Donnington Manor, Dunton Green in support of Guide Dogs. Sunday 29 June 2 – 5pm contact irene.collins@gmail.com
- Fast responses and excellent follow-up care reported by three members re A&E at Pembury
- New Bereavement Group at Edenbridge 2 - 4 pm on fourth Friday, St John's Church TN8 5PU contact Anthea 07802 746909
- Matt Parker's 86 mile ultra marathon run to fund raise for Hospice in the Weald- a tribute to his Mum, Margaret Parker RIP, who was SDSAF's secretary, newsletter editor and Health coordinator for many years. www.justgiving.com/page/parkeronfire

What3Words

Thanks to Jean-Pierre Darque for drawing our attention to the Whats3words App which is the easiest way to describe any precise location. It has divided the world into 3-meter squares and given each one a unique identifier made from three random words.

For example, the door of 10 Downing Street is “*slurs.this.shark*”, while the area across the road where the press congregate is “*stage.pushy.nuns*”.

You never know when you may need to know your precise location - for instance if you have an accident whilst travelling, or you fall whilst on a walk in the countryside.

What3Words is accepted by over 85% of UK emergency services. To find your What3Words address, open the What3Words app or visit what3words.com in a web browser.

If this sounds double Dutch to you and you want to learn how to be more digitally savvy, enquire at your local library about the KCC Digital Ambassadors Programme or contact us and we will do our best to point you in a helpful direction

Otford Palace uncovers a pre-Tudor aisled building *(Thanks to Roger House for updating us)*

Many people are unaware that sitting in the centre of Otford are the remains of an Archbishop's Palace, and during the custodianship of William Warham it was developed into an ecclesiastical estate building larger than Hampton Court which Warham termed his “Power Home”.

The Archbishop's Palace Trust of which three Forum members are trustees, are delighted to share the news that following an aerial scan the foundation outlines of previously unknown buildings were discovered. Below are excerpts from the Trust's web site written by the Secretary Nick Rushby.



The geophysical investigations of Palace Field in 2023 by the Darent Valley Landscape Partnership archaeological group indicated the presence of a hitherto unsuspected building in the Great Inner Court.

Having obtained the necessary Scheduled Monument Consents, our lead archaeologist Dr Anne Sassin, led a dig consisting of two small trenches, during the week of 22nd April. The excavations were on display to the public during the May Day celebrations on Sunday

27th April where they attracted considerable interest.

Anne Sassin writes:

“The current theory is that it is a large barn tied to the medieval manor. Otford manorial records in the first half of the 14th century refer to several buildings in the area which are likely to not all be within the moated area (an ox house, stable, sheep house and Grange (possibly a granary or barn)). There is a 1323 reference to repairs to the ‘Great Grange’, and 4000 tiles were imported in 1356 for “the roof of the new house between the oxhouse and the haygrange called strawhouse’. The geophysics also suggests there are likely other smaller structures on the same alignment as our hall within the great court, and I expect there is more to the 14th-century complex in Palace Field. Obviously, our interventions were very limited.”

Alan Dixon - A tribute



It's hard to express the sadness we all feel at Alan's sudden passing. Alan was a key player in our Forum and we will miss him hugely.

He was our driving force behind the scenes – always up at the crack of dawn, quietly getting things done: coordinating action groups, writing newsletter articles, designing flyers, ensuring no detail was missed.

We affectionately called him our “Statistical Rottweiler” because of his amazing statistical skills and his utter determination to make things better.

He used his statistical expertise, his sharp mind and strong sense of justice to challenge planners, policymakers and politicians. His reports didn't sit on shelves – they were quoted in council meetings and Parliament.

Alan's work was highly respected and he was still working on Forum business right to the end. The day before he died, he wrote a gutsy letter, with supporting statistics, to MP Laura Trott, asking her to raise concerns with the Housing Minister about the Government's flawed formula for housing targets.

Laura Trott wrote to us this week saying how saddened she was by Alan's passing and promised to keep raising the issues he championed with the Minister and statutory bodies.

Beyond his brilliance, Alan was a kind and generous friend and very sociable. He was always supportive and encouraging to all our volunteers. He had a lovely quiet wit, a dry sense of humour and a twinkle in his eye. He was a true gentleman, a real character and we could always count on him to be positive, committed, and to give honest feedback.

Alan loved tending his garden. His porch was always full of colourful flowers - it was as though they reflected the warmth and energy he brought into our lives.

A devoted family man - so proud of his wife Maureen, their son Peter and daughter Wendy, Alan was always concerned for their well-being. It's hard to imagine how deeply they must be feeling his absence.

Farewell dear Alan. We're so grateful for all you've done and will do our best to carry your spirit forward in our work.

Any donations in Alan's memory can be sent to the British Heart Foundation (Reg charity 225971)

Barry Morse, who volunteered with Alan Dixon on our Transport Action Group, has sent in this tribute

Thank you Alan

I first met Alan many years ago I myself being a new member, to be honest I cannot remember exactly when.

But I can say that having worked with him for several years

I now know an awful lot more now than I did then.

But my time with him was not just interesting, it was both educational and indeed really good fun.

Whatever our subject we always worked to a deadline,
Did we have any problems? Absolutely none!

Alan had significant professional life experience,
he was a real, real master of statistics.
When working we dealt with the realities of our life,
never mind the views of the mystics.

Inevitably Alan became a firm, firm friend,
far, far more than just another member.
Irrespective of our responsibilities I thank him
for what I learnt and indeed what I will always remember.

Subsequently our lives included the occasional pint or two
in one of our local hostelryes, oh what a shame!
We did sometimes discuss our latest society topics
but occasionally maybe others? Please, please, no blame.

Working with Alan was an experience that I will never forget,

Goodbye Alan, and THANK YOU

for being such an influential chapter in the book of my life.

Barry Morse - 30th May 2025

FORUM CONTACT DETAILS

To contact the Forum Committee:- email Chair at :
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Please let us know if you would like to receive the Newsletter in large print