

Sevenoaks District Seniors Action Forum

Working together in the interests of people aged 50 plus
email comms@sdsaf.org.uk

Chair's letter

As we approach the festive season, we send Christmas and new year greetings to all of our readers!

We thank all our volunteers and supporters and all those who contribute to this newsletter and work with us throughout the year to help you make life better for our Seniors. We never cease to be amazed at the amount of talent amongst our Seniors, as witnessed at our recent Singalong in Otford (see later) when we celebrated the important contribution older people make to our community.



We miss the guidance of our wonderful Alan Dixon who passed away earlier this year and our much loved John-Edwards Winsor who is currently receiving medical care. They gave such good guidance to our planning and transport action groups. We are aware of the mounting disquiet in our community about the number of new houses being proposed in Sevenoaks District and wonder if there is anyone amongst our members who would like to lead our action groups on local planning and transport? If you feel called to help, please get in touch! We will welcome you with open arms!

Our members are warmly invited to our next coffee morning which will take place on **Friday 23rd January 2026 10 am to 12 noon at Weald Heights Care Home, Bouchier Close, Sevenoaks TN13 1PD**. The focus will be on Veterans and we will have the opportunity to talk with Tony Finch who has kindly written an article for us later in this newsletter. We are grateful to the staff at Weald Heights for hosting us.

Sometimes it's not possible for us to be with the people we would like to be with at Christmastime which can make it a time of longing rather than celebration. Christmas gives us an opportunity to think of others and to include them in our festive celebrations even in a small way - a card, a seasonal gift, an invitation to spend time together - lets see how many people we can bring some joy to this Christmas time.

We wish each and every one of you a blessed Christmas and a new year filled with peace and joy.

Gill and Eileen
Co-Chairs

Mindfulness

In our fast-paced and often noisy world, finding calm and clarity can seem like a challenge—especially when life presents new hurdles or changes in health, hearing, or routine. That's why we're delighted to share an insightful piece on Mindfulness from Jean-Pierre Darque, adapted from one of his excellent newsletters for the Hi Kent Hearing Support Group in Sevenoaks.



Jean-Pierre explores how mindfulness—a simple yet powerful practice of being present—can help us manage emotions, reduce stress, and bring more balance and kindness into our daily lives. Whether you're new to mindfulness or have dabbled before, these ideas offer gentle, practical ways to cultivate peace of mind and emotional resilience at any age.

In a nutshell - mindfulness is the practice of being fully present and engaged in the moment, aware of our thoughts and feelings without getting caught up in them. This practice can help us manage both pleasant and unpleasant feelings more effectively. Here is a sample of some key concepts:

- **Awareness:** Mindfulness helps us become aware of our thoughts and feelings as they arise (that the essence of it). By observing them without judgment, we can prevent them from spiralling into anxiety.
- **Acceptance:** Instead of resisting or trying to suppress unpleasant feelings, mindfulness encourages us to accept them. Acknowledging that "this is unpleasant" can reduce the power these feelings have over us.
- **Balance:** Our brains are wired to focus on negative experiences as a protective mechanism. However, this can lead to a negativity bias, where we overlook positive experiences. Mindfulness helps us notice and savour positive moments, allowing ourselves to feel good about things that go well.
- **Understanding Procrastination:** Procrastination often stems from avoiding unpleasant tasks or feelings associated with them. This avoidance can lead to increased stress and anxiety, creating a harmful cycle.
- **Mindful Action:** Mindfulness encourages us to approach tasks with a non-judgmental attitude. By breaking tasks into smaller, manageable steps and focusing on one step at a time, we can reduce the overwhelming feelings that lead to procrastination.
- **Self-Compassion:** Instead of criticizing ourselves, mindfulness teaches us to treat ourselves with kindness and understanding. This self-compassion can motivate us to take positive action.
- **The importance of pause in mindfulness** lies in its ability to interrupt habitual, reactive patterns and create space for intentional responses. Pausing means slowing down, becoming more aware of our thoughts, feelings, and surroundings. This helps us to make conscious choices instead of reacting automatically.

If you'd like to learn more, there's a wealth of helpful material available online, including apps and free resources. A good starting point is the book 'Mindfulness: A Practical Guide to Finding Peace in a Frantic World' by Mark Williams (also available as a free audiobook online). And of course, if you have any questions, do drop us a line — we're always happy to help.

🎄 Festive Edible Ornaments

(adapted from a Nigella Lawson recipe)

Pretty spiced biscuits that you can hang on your tree — or eat straight away! This could be a fun activity to do with the younger generation.

Makes: about 15–20

You'll need:

150 g plain flour

Pinch of salt

½ tsp baking powder

½ tsp ground cinnamon

Small pinch each of ground cloves and black pepper

50 g soft butter

50 g soft dark brown sugar

1 egg, lightly beaten

2 tbsp runny honey

To decorate: instant royal icing, sprinkles or glitter,
ribbon for hanging

How to make:

Heat oven to 170 °C and line a tray with baking paper.

Mix flour, salt, baking powder and spices. Rub in butter and sugar, then add egg and honey to make a soft dough.

Roll out on a floured surface, cut festive shapes, and poke a small hole near the top for ribbon (we used a straw to make the hole)

Bake about 15–20 min, until firm and lightly golden. Cool completely.

Ice and decorate as you like, then thread ribbon through the holes once the icing sets

Tip: The biscuits keep well for a week in a tin, or freeze the dough for later.



And why not make yourself a healthy **loaf of bread** to counter all the rich food that tempts us in the festive season

300g cottage cheese

200g organic whole oats

50g sunflower seeds

50g pumpkin seeds

2 tbsp ground flax

2 eggs

1 tsp baking powder

Mix all together and bake for 50mins at 170C. Enjoy!



Lift your spirits with music!

We are blessed in our District to have some excellent, free of charge, well-being choirs where we can sing our cares away and connect with others. Why not come along? You would be most welcome



D'VINE SINGERS

WHAT WE DO

The D'Vine Singers promotes wellbeing through singing. We meet weekly for an hour and a half at the Vine Baptist Church in Sevenoaks. We are open to all, membership is free and no audition is required. Come and join us for a fun hour and a half of singing and friendship.

WHO ARE WE?

The Choir was started in 2014 as part of research project at Christ Church Canterbury University.

WHY IS SINGING GOOD FOR YOU?

For mental health in particular, singing has been found to release positive chemicals such as endorphins, dopamine, and serotonin, reducing stress and increasing happiness. It has also been found to help form connections and reduce isolation.

WHERE AND WHEN DO WE MEET?

Weekly in term times on a Friday from 1pm to 2.30pm at the Vine Baptist Church, Sevenoaks, TN13 3UP

CONTACT US FOR MORE INFO

jacky.hintze@outlook.com
07708 237415
www.dvinesingers.org

Kent Community Foundation, Kent County Council, Sevenoaks Town Council, High Hilden Fund, Lawson Foundation, Sevenoaks, Involve, Kent County Council, Kent Community Foundation, Kent County Council, Sevenoaks Town Council, High Hilden Fund, Lawson Foundation, Sevenoaks, Involve, Kent County Council, Kent Community Foundation, Kent County Council, Sevenoaks Town Council, High Hilden Fund, Lawson Foundation, Sevenoaks, Involve

Eden Songsters

★ Sing your cares away! ★
Daytime drop-in for all ages

Develop musical skills for singing in choir or simply come and enjoy the songs in a supportive group.

Discover the benefits of singing for body and soul

Wednesday afternoons
2.00-3.30 pm
at the Eden Centre,
Four Elms Road, Edenbridge



Folk songs, rounds and popular melodies

Open to all — no need to read music
Pop in for a free 'taster' session!

For more information, please contact Jacky Hintze on 07708 237415 or jacky.hintze@outlook.com

Praise

We like to point out some of the good things that go on in our wonderful community - do keep us posted with your good news!

Disability Assist - Sophie Fournel is the CEO and they produce an excellent and informative newsletter for people living with a physical disability - Disabilityassist.org.uk

Sevenoaks Town Council for receiving the Green Flag award for the ninth year in a row in recognition of the Vine as a well managed park and green space.

Sevenoaks U3A for providing imaginative speakers at their monthly gatherings eg a recent talk about the Beatles involvement in Kent and filming they did at Knole Park

We praise all the befrienders in our district who hold out a hand of friendship to those who have become isolated

Praise for all the volunteers in our community who work so hard to preserve the heritage and character of our villages and countryside

Praise for the University of London's Appletree research project focusing on preventing dementia. SDSAF participated in this and was involved in the recent review of the findings held in the House of Lords

Praise for the Forget-me-not cafes that bring such joy to so many on a regular basis throughout our District. And praise for all the other free coffee mornings throughout our district. They enable us to connect with each other and to tackle loneliness and isolation

Praise for Mike Davies and the U3A Computer Group for putting the generations together to share digital knowledge at Sevenoaks School -

SDSAF is working with Sevenoaks U3A on this exciting inter generational project where pupils from Sevenoaks School help Seniors to get the most out of their laptops, phones and other digital devices.

A very successful trial took place in November and the plan is to hold regular sessions at the school in the new year. Priority will be given to U3A members. If you would be interested in attending a session send an email to Mike Davies -

mdknolepark62@gmail.com

Claim your Pension Credit!

Are you 66+ and on low income?

Here's a message from Martin Lewis of Money Supermarket

It is a national tragedy that 700,000 pensioners, many of whom have been paying into the system for years, are missing out on a critical boost to their income. It's called pension credit.

So as we're amidst a cost of living crisis, it's crucial we spread the word as quickly as possible, as this payment is worth on average £2,100 a year, and it can have a real impact reducing the physical and mental health risks hitting many on lower incomes.

it's definitely worth spending five minutes to check if you qualify. You CAN get it if you're a homeowner, claim other benefits or live with grown-up family. The worst that can happen is they say no.

So don't stall, just call. Try www.gov.uk/pension-credit first if you can. If you aren't comfortable online and prefer to speak to someone, then call the **pension credit helpline** on 0800 99 1234 to see if you're due. It's usually open from 8am to 6pm.

Points of View

With a membership of more than 1,200, it's hardly surprising that our readers don't all see eye to eye. One of the joys of the Sevenoaks Seniors Forum is hearing a wide range of opinions — sometimes passionately expressed! Here are two letters we received recently on the topic of government policy and support for older people.



Jane writes:

Dear Sevenoaks Forum, The government's recent proposals are deeply worrying for pensioners. I've read reports suggesting possible driving tests for over-65s, later access to bus passes in line with state pension age, and even more scrutiny of our bank accounts.

Banks are reportedly required to inform HMRC about every transaction, there are limits on how much of our own money we can withdraw, and higher taxes for those who draw out larger sums.

Have I misunderstood, or does it feel as though pensioners are being targeted? It sometimes seems as though the government would prefer us to quietly die — leaving behind healthy bank balances to boost inheritance tax revenues. Where is our voice in all this? When do we get a say?

And from Jenny:

I'm frankly tired of hearing seniors complain about how tough life is for older people or how unfair the government is being towards us. Has anyone stopped to think how hard it is for the younger generation?

In my view, the winter fuel allowance should go to young families who are struggling to heat their homes. Those of us who can afford it should be helping the next generation, not expecting more support ourselves.*

Editor's note:

At Sevenoaks Seniors Forum, we welcome lively debate and thoughtful discussion.

Whether you agree with Jane, Jenny, or have a different take altogether, we'd love to hear from you. Your perspectives make our community stronger — so please keep your letters coming!

Silver Week Singalong

Jacky Hintze kindly read this poem at our Silver Week Singalong event on 3 Oct to celebrate all the untapped treasure amongst our Seniors

'I am not old, she said,
I am rare.
I am the standing ovation
At the end of the play.
I am the retrospective
Of my life as art.
I am the hours
Connected like dots
Into good sense.
I am the fullness
Of existing.
You think I am waiting to die
But I am waiting to be found.
I am a treasure,
I am a map.
And these wrinkles are
Imprints of my journey.
Ask me anything'

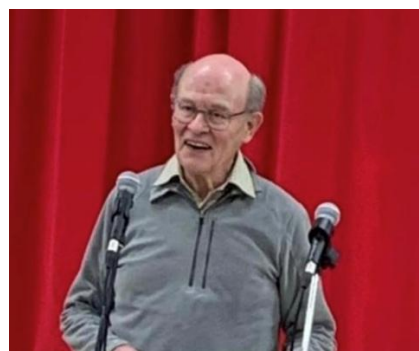




Frank McConnell



David & Jackie Griffiths



Chris Towers



Ken Brown



Jenny Webb



Jean Bentley

It never ceases to amaze us how much talent there is amongst our Senior Community and our Singalong on 3 October in Otford was absolute proof of this. We thank Frank McConnell, our very accomplished guitarist, composer, raconteur and performer who coordinated and presented the event for us and all the gifted performers who so kindly volunteered their time and talents and entertained us so royally with a rich and varied programme.

Our sincere thanks go to Jenny Webb who sang so sweetly, to Jacky Hintze and her choir members who set the room alight with their Eidelweiss and other favourites, Chris Towers who gave a fun rendition of 'Alfred and the Jubilee Sovereign', to Jean Bentley whose melodious tones triggered many memories and reminded us that 'we've got a friend', Ken Brown who raised the roof with his fabulous operatic voice and witty songs, and David and Jackie Griffiths who filled the hall with their amazing acoustic guitar playing. It was truly delightful the way the performers encouraged everyone to join in so that a great time was had by all.

On the catering side, our sincere thanks go to all those who donated cakes and to our lovely (young) volunteer Joana who made and donated some fabulous cakes and did a lot of work serving in the kitchen. We are so grateful to you all for helping us to celebrate Silver Week in such a delightful way

Honour our veterans

We had the pleasure of meeting Tony Finch at a recent event, at Weald Heights Care Home and hearing of the good work that he and his organisations are currently doing for veterans. Tony has kindly written this article and plans to attend our next coffee morning on Friday 23rd January 2026 10 am to 12 noon, kindly hosted by Weald Heights Care Home, Bouchier Close, Sevenoaks TN13 1PD. So if you are a veteran, or would like to know more, come along, meet Tony and enjoy a cuppa with us.

Firstly, I should introduce myself I am Major (Retd) Tony Finch I retired after 48 years of service in December 2024. Although retired I am currently working part time on two veterans 'projects.



I am the Head of the South East NHS Armed Forces Network, my main function is to increase the knowledge of the network in particular our **Service Champion Training - Armed Forces Network** The training is available to all, it is especially aimed at those working in support of the Veteran/Service Community, DWP, Local Authority, Fire and Rescue, Service Charity staff as well as private individuals. We have currently trained around 5000 Service Champions nationwide, promoting and

raising awareness of the support available to the Veteran and Service Community. If you or anyone you know maybe interested in attending the training, follow the link to book, the training is delivered face to face online and currently free of charge and CPD accredited. If you would like to know more, please email afn.admin@nhs.net

The other project I am working on is the "Thrive Together Project" **Thrive Together South East : Armed Forces Covenant Fund Trust** this is a national project, although I am dealing with Kent specifically. This project is the mapping all of the organisations that support and help the Veteran and Service Community, in each local authority area in Kent although this is happening across the country as well. It is to produce a far more coordinated and consistent approach to the delivery of support, making it easier for the Veteran and Service Community to access the correct support they may need. A large part of this is having better understanding of what support is out there, closer collaboration between organisations to provide the correct support.

A key output for both projects is ensuring that there is improved GP registration of Veterans and Spouses/Partners, Dependents and Carers with GP surgeries under the SNOMED codes (SNOMED is a system that categorises medical information). Currently only 5% of the 61000 veterans in Kent are correctly registered with their GPs, and only 0.25% of Spouses/Partners, Dependents and Carers are registered. We need to dramatically need to increase these statistics. If you fall into these categories please ensure that you are correctly registered, if there are any questions or concerns with the GP surgeries please email afn.admin@nhs.net with the name of the surgery.

If you are interested in aeroplanes -

On a recent visit to Lincolnshire RAF Coningsby Memorial Flight Centre, our Co Chair Gill was lucky enough to see the only flying Lancaster Bomber - it was just about to take off for its last flight before departing for Duxford. A Spitfire and a C-47 Dakota accompanied The Lancaster, a magnificent sight, 3 veteran planes in the sky at once!



The Lancaster will have a complete overhaul and refit, at Duxford, over the next 18 months. The work will enable the plane to keep flying for years to come.



Visit from Peter Sansom

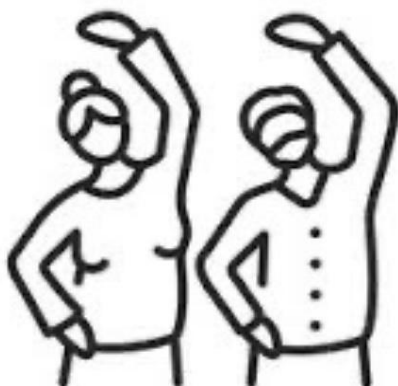


Some of our members will remember Peter who served on our committee for some time. Peter moved to South Wales to live near his family and we were delighted to hear how well he has settled in. He has become very involved in his local church and taken on many volunteering roles in the community including prison visiting. He is also working part time helping to rehabilitate those who have spent some time without their freedom. Well done Peter for showing us that age is just a number

Let's keep moving!!

Why Movement Matters as We Age

Protecting Your Strength, Balance, and Independence.



As we get older, many of us notice it's harder to get up from a chair, carry the shopping, or keep our balance on uneven ground. This isn't just "old age" – it's largely due to a natural process called sarcopenia, the age-related loss of muscle mass and strength.

Sarcopenia usually starts around age 30 and accelerates after 60. On average, we can lose 3–8 % of our muscle mass per decade. Less muscle means less power, poorer balance, slower walking speed, and a much

higher risk of falling. A single fall can lead to fractures, hospital stays, loss of confidence, and the beginning of a downward spiral in quality of life.

The good news? Sarcopenia is not inevitable, and its effects can be dramatically slowed – or even reversed – with surprisingly simple movement.

Research shows that adults over 65 who do regular strength and mobility exercises:

Gain muscle mass and strength (yes, even in their 80s and 90s)

Improve balance and reaction time

Cut their risk of falling by 20–40 %

Stay independent longer and report better mood and energy

You don't need a gym or heavy weights. Two or three 20–30 minute sessions a week can make a real difference. Here are some proven, easy-to-do exercises you can start today:

Sit-to-Stand (strengthens legs and core)

Rise from a chair without using your hands, then slowly sit back down. Repeat 8–15 times.

Heel-to-Toe Walk (improves balance)

Walk in a straight line placing the heel of one foot directly in front of the toes of the other, like a tightrope. Use a wall or railing for safety at first.

Single-Leg Balance (builds stability)

Stand on one leg while brushing your teeth or waiting for the kettle. Start with 10 seconds and build up.

Wall Push-Ups or Seated Arm Raises with light weights/water bottles

Keeps upper body strong for carrying and pushing.

Daily brisk 10–20 minute walks

The perfect “mobility glue” that ties everything together.

Think of movement as the closest thing we have to an anti-ageing medicine that's free, has no side effects, and actually makes life more enjoyable.

Every step, squat, and stretch is a deposit in your future independence account. The earlier you start – and the more consistent you are – the richer that account will be when you need it most.

Stay strong, stay steady, and keep enjoying the life you've worked hard to build. Your muscles – and your future self – will thank you.

Sue Larken

PS Editor note - you may like to join one of Sue's classes starting at White Oak Bowls Club in Swanley BR8 7BF on Thursday 22nd January 10;30am. Just turn up. Entry £5

By Samantha Reynolds (www.bentlily.com)

There's hope for our hearing!



Many thanks to Eve Wiltshire for sending us this good news of research she has read about-

'Stem cells show promise in restoring hearing by regenerating damaged auditory nerve cells in the inner ear. Research has successfully used stem cell injections to repair damaged hair cells and spiral ganglion neurons, which are critical for converting sound vibrations into electrical signals the brain can understand. Early trial participants have reported significant improvements in their ability to detect sounds they hadn't heard in years. However, this treatment is still in clinical trials, and researchers are working to confirm its safety and efficacy before it becomes widely available'. There's hope for your hearing!

Brain Food: 9 Everyday Superfoods for a Healthy Mind

What we eat has a powerful impact on how well our brain works—at every age.

Ocean Robbins, Co-Founder of the Food Revolution Network, recommends including these **nine brain-boosting foods** in our daily meals to help keep our minds sharp and healthy.

1. Green leafy vegetables

Spinach, kale, and lettuce are rich in folate, vitamin K, and antioxidants. These nutrients help protect brain cells and support memory.

2. Beans

Black beans, kidney beans, and chickpeas provide plant-based protein and fibre, which support gut health—and a healthy gut is closely linked to a healthy brain.

3. Berries

Blueberries, strawberries, raspberries, and blackberries (fresh or frozen) are full of flavonoids and antioxidants that may help slow cognitive ageing.

Tip: Always wash berries to reduce pesticide residue.

4. Nuts

Walnuts, almonds, and cashews contain healthy fats, vitamin E, and anti-inflammatory antioxidants. These support memory and overall brain function.

5. Seeds

Hemp, chia, flax, and sunflower seeds are excellent sources of vitamin E and omega-3 fats. Their anti-inflammatory and antioxidant properties may help protect against cognitive decline.

6. Herbs and spices

Turmeric, ginger, and sage have been widely studied for their positive effects on brain health. Turmeric's active compound, curcumin, is especially noted for its anti-inflammatory benefits.

7. Cruciferous vegetables

Broccoli, cauliflower, cabbage, and Brussels sprouts contain vitamin K, beta-carotene, and sulforaphane. These “brain-boosting superstars” may help protect memory over time.

8. Whole grains

Oats, buckwheat, and quinoa provide B vitamins and fibre—key nutrients that help fuel the brain and support steady energy levels.

9. Green tea

Green tea contains catechins and L-theanine, which support focus, calmness, and cognitive function.



With Alzheimer's disease and dementia on the rise, adding more of these foods to our meals can be a simple and enjoyable way to support long-term brain health. For more information, visit the Food Revolution Network. (Foodrevolution.org).

UPCOMING EVENTS

You are invited - Dates for your diary: (highlight in a box)

Coffee morning Friday 23rd January 2026 10a.m to 12 noon Weald Heights Care Home, Bouchier Close, Sevenoaks TN13 1PD. Come and meet Tony Finch and hear about our Veterans

“Planning for the Future – Wills, Inheritance Tax and Lasting Powers of Attorney”

Wednesday 28th January at 2pm at

Emerson Park

Andrea Kershaw from Thackray William’s is returning by popular request to hold this free advice seminar

To book a place, contact Aileen Nimmo,

Emerson Park, Rowhill Rd, Hextable, Kent, BR8 3FP, tel 01322 610 090, email Emerson-park.haa2@cinnamoncc.com



Funded by
UK Government



DIGITAL
Workshops



Digital Skills for Wellbeing Workshop

This engaging and interactive workshop will support you to feel more confident using digital tools to manage your health and wellbeing.

Booking advised - towncouncil@swanleytowncouncil.gov.uk

When: 14th January 2026

Where: Civic Centre, BR8 7BU

Time: 14:00 - 15:00



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DIGITAL
Workshops





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County
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FORUM CONTACT DETAILS

To contact the Forum Committee:- email Chair at : chair@sdsaf.org.uk
or write to SDSAF, c/o Kemsing Library, 72 West End, Kemsing TN15 6QE,

SDSAF Website: www.sdsaf.org.uk