

Sevenoaks District Seniors' Action Forum

Working together in the interests of people aged 50 plus



Over the last year we have been beavering away in meetings and in our action groups to make life better for Seniors in the Sevenoaks District. People often ask what we do. It can be a bit difficult to grasp as we don't have any buildings or staff or any income to speak of. Basically, we are a membership organisation for people aged 50 plus who live in the District. All members are "The Forum" and are welcome to participate in our activities. There is a small management team, all volunteers, who provide information and run action groups in response to surveys and consultations or in response to requests from members.

Currently we are working on a response to the District Council's consultation for the Local Plan covering the years 2022-40. Where an issue is beyond the scope of local Government we meet or correspond with our MPs and the various Ministries, in particular Housing and Transport.

The Forum is independent of party politics and as such provides impartial commentary and we deal with all levels of government or appropriate people in the Health Services. The Forum has representatives attending the monthly meetings of the Joint Voluntary Sector and we have formed informal partnerships with other groups such as Mind, Arts Without Boundaries, Every Step Counts and Forget Me Not Cafes.

Looking Ahead

More opportunities to meet

We have been asked to provide more opportunities for our members to meet, network and socialise. So an aim this year will be to start by holding a series of informal, unscripted Forum meetings in pubs and cafes around the district to hear member views and have a good chat. Watch this space!

Some recent projects

Personal Safety:

John Clark, who manages our membership data base, is also a Martial Arts black belt and feels passionately about senior safety. He has designed a short course to raise awareness and teach some practical self defence moves. The first course was run in Otford and Paul Robertson, Community Warden, attended to give a police perspective. John would be willing to roll out these sessions to small groups of members and friends in Swanley, Edenbridge and Westerham. Let us know if you are interested, they might well be part of our social events.

Digital support:

We worked with Sevenoaks U3A Computer group and a KCC support team to help seniors who are struggling to keep up with digitalisation and computers. We participated in a coffee morning and a lunch club in Otford and were able to show seniors how to make better use of smart phones and tablets e.g. how to take photos, use satnav, do online banking. If other community groups would like a team to come along, just let us know.

Green Doctors:

We met with the Green Doctors at a fair in Swanley, thanks to an introduction from local councillor Jackie Griffiths. They have offered free information and practical help to save on energy costs. They visited community groups in Otford during November and are willing to visit other parts of the district. Just let us know if you are interested.

Silver Sunday & Open Day:

This was held in Swanley in early October, we had a talk from Peter Fleming, the leader of the District Council on the future plans for the area and how they hope to be carbon zero by 2030. There was an exercise session with "Pop up" Sue Larkin and music from Frank McConnell and Jean Bentley, former committee members. There was also an opportunity to learn or play bowls.

Sad News:

We have worked under a cloak of sadness this year with the passing of our Founder Roger Bryan, our Secretary Margaret Parker and two action group members, Elaine Elston and Alan Wheatley. We all feel their loss very deeply. Margaret was brilliant at holding us all together and somehow managed to be our Secretary, edit these newsletters and chair our Health Action Group. We will also miss Peter Sansom who contributed in many ways as a member of the committee. We wish him well in his move to Wales to live closer to his family.

More volunteers urgently needed- *(a message from Barry Morse)*

This should come as no surprise following our losses. We continue to do what we can with the resources available. There is no shortage of action for us to take but we need further volunteer support to coordinate some of our activities and help to run them. The more help we get, the more we can do. So please don't be shy about offering your services.

Our forum is here to help seniors, not just our members but all seniors in the district, with the many and varied problems that could or indeed do already surround us. ***We are your voice!***

Meanwhile, we ourselves currently have our own problems. We desperately need an editor for this, our newsletter, in addition to committee members for several of our areas of activity. We need help, please seriously consider volunteering!

Furthermore, whilst asking for your help with the above we are also asking for your help in recruiting new members. We often say "***the more members we have the more influence we have***", If every one recruited just one new member we would double our membership, ***simple!***

WE NEED YOUR HELP!

Laura Trott on Benefits

Laura Trott MP sent us the following message after we met with her, encouraging us to claim any available benefits

"I want to stress how important it is that everyone claims the help they are entitled to.

Across the country around 25% of people who are eligible for Pension Credit are not yet claiming it. As you will be aware, Pension Credit is a top up for low-income pensioners which is worth an average of £3,300 per year. As well as a cash top up to the State Pension, it also entitles pensioners to help with housing costs, council tax reduction schemes, cold weather heating payments, and a free over-75s TV licence. Do please direct people to my website for more information"

Laura Trott also recognised the particular difficulties face by Carers 'Carers are under huge strain and play such an important role. I know there is always more that can be done and I would ask you to urge your members to raise individual cases with me so that not only can I help where I can but also have real life examples of individual problems which I can raise with colleagues in order to highlight gaps in the system.

What has happened to our buses *(Submitted by Alan Dixon)*

Not a lot! The SDC "Local Plan Consultation 2040" contains a few hopes and promises, but no detailed information on the long term. There is a hint that they plan to improve bus connectivity between Sevenoaks and Edenbridge, Westerham and New Ash Green but there is no accompanying strategy. With the exception of New Ash Green they are already covered by the bookable bus services from GO. In the short term it looks like the current limited bus services will be in operation until March 2023 when the bus service recovery grant (to help operators post Covid) runs out. The only further cut in the SDC area will be the Edenbridge Town Circular from 18th Feb.2023.

If you need to use buses over the Christmas/New Year you will need to check with your operators as to what services may be available

As most of our local services depend on subsidies there is some doubt about what may be available after this date, particularly with KCC needing more funding from Council Tax and Central Gov to avoid bankruptcy. We will have to wait until we know the outcome of the KCC budget meeting in Feb 2023.

Arriva will probably introduce the proposed maximum bus single fare of £2 for Jan-Mar. GO already have a maximum single fare of £2.50 and feel that to reduce it by 50p only to put it back up again in April would create a backlash of complaints.

Let's keep moving! *(Submitted by Diana Beamish)*

Forum member Diana Beamish has drawn our attention to an article in the British Medical Journal written by Scarlett McNally and a group of medical specialists showing evidence that regular physical exercise can stave off old age. The group of experts claim that the need for social care is not inevitable and disability, dementia and frailty can be prevented or delayed by staying active.

The key is to stay fit enough to do the vital activities of daily living - washing, dressing, feeding ourselves, getting to the toilet - for as long as possible. The cost of care increases five fold once this threshold is crossed. Loss of fitness increases the risk of needing social care

Regular exercise has been shown to help older people increase fitness levels to that of a person 10 years younger. The UK Chief Medical Officer's guidelines recommend 150 minutes a week of moderate physical activity (including gardening and walking) plus twice weekly strength and balance training for adults of all ages.

So let's make an effort to keep moving if we can, so that we can maintain our independence as long as possible and reduce the costs of social care.

Contacting Emergency Services - 999 BSL (British Sign Language)

Please be aware of a new service where Deaf people can call 999 BSL in their first language.

How does it work?

You use the 999 BSL app or website to make a call to 999, it will go to a British Sign Language (BSL) interpreter first, who will appear on the screen. The BSL interpreter will then call the 999 operator through landline and will relay the conversation.

Staying Warm this Winter *(Submitted by new member Tara)*

Many people on fixed incomes have been worrying about how to afford their energy bills and get through the winter ahead. Thankfully there is some light at the end of the tunnel. The government is subsidising energy bills (initially £400 per household paid in instalments from October 2022 to April 2023; this might be more depending on your age), and you don't need to do a thing as your energy provider will credit your monthly discount to your bill. So, if you have any dubious emails purporting to help you get your discount, please ignore them.

Message from SDSAF Committee

We will be out and about over the next few months visiting various warm spaces throughout the whole District just to say "hi", have a chat and listen to what's on your mind. Do take advantage of any warm spaces in your locality. It's a great way to cut our heating bills and make new friends. We look forward to seeing you there

Opera or Ballet at The Space, Sevenoaks School *(Submitted by new member Tara)*

Did you know, Sevenoaks School has an arrangement with the Royal Opera House to screen opera and ballet performances at The Space? The Space is located at Sevenoaks School and these screenings take place on specified Sundays from October to June. The screenings start at 2pm, there is no need to book in advance and tickets cost £10 for children and students, £15 for subscribers, £17 for concessions and £18.50 for adults.

The next two performances are both ballets – the *Nutcracker*, always popular with adults and children, is showing on December 11th; and on January 22nd you can watch *Like Water for Chocolate*, a more modern ballet. The Space (also known as Pamoja Hall) is located behind the main Sevenoaks School buildings and there is ample parking available. To access the parking area, turn left from Tonbridge Road having passed the school on the left.

For further details and online booking visit <http://boxoffice.sevenoaksschool.org/showhome.php>

Beware of Scams! *(Submitted by Frank McConnell)*

Unfortunately, scams seem to be on the increase and we need to be constantly alert. Millions of people have been targeted amidst the cost of living crisis. Frank McConnell, our former Chair, has warned us of a text message entitled UK HELP.

It reads '*GOVUK: You are eligible for a discounted energy bill under the Energy Bills Support Scheme. You can apply here (It then gives a link to click upon).*

Identity Theft, Contactless cards, Online Shopping) and gives lots of tips for z

If you are not able to access an online copy, contact us (details at end of this newsletter) and we will do our best to get some hard copy guidance to you.

DO NOT CLICK ON THE LINK AND DO NOT GIVE ANYONE YOUR BANK DETAILS. This is a scam. The Government says that £400 off energy bills for households in Great Britain will be paid from October 2022. This automatic, non-repayable discount will be applied in six instalments between October 2022 and March 2023 to help households through winter.

There is no need to apply for the scheme and you will not be asked for your bank details.

While fraud and scams are not new, advances in technology give criminals more ways to attempt to access your money. Knowing the techniques they use can help you protect you and your money. Santander bank has produced a very useful guide to frauds and scams that can be accessed via the following link

<https://www.santander.co.uk/personal/support/fraud-and-security/spotting-fraud-or-scams>

The guide mentions the top scams to look out for (eg to do with HMRC, Investments, Romance

Plan 2040- A new Plan for Sevenoaks District *(Submitted by Alan Dixon)*

A consultation document was issued by SDC on the 16th of November, covering the period 2022-40. It is a lengthy piece of work comprising 265 pages and there will be a further part of this consultation next year before a final report is made to government. All members of the public can respond, the council prefer this to be on-line at www.sevenoaks.gov.uk/plan2040

Paper response forms (free of charge), along with printed copies of the Plan (£20) are available from the SDC offices. The documents can also be viewed at Town and Parish Councils and Libraries, where response forms are available. If you have any problem getting the forms let us know, here at the Forum. The consultation lasts from Nov 16 to Jan 11th 2023. It has been increased from the statutory 6 weeks to 8 weeks to allow for the Christmas period. There will be an on-line consultation (via zoom) on Wed 4th Jan at 2.30-5.00pm and 5.30-8.00pm for which a link will be published on the SDC web site nearer the time .

The document comprises 10 chapters; Development & Strategy, Housing, Employment & Economy, Climate Change, Design, Health & Wellbeing, Historic Environment, The Natural Environment, Infrastructure, and Transport. You can pick and choose which parts you want to respond to. Each part has a consultation question which focuses on the comments you can make. On behalf of the Forum we will be commenting on the overall plan that states that 13,566 new homes are required, a 26% increase on the current housing stock. We will let SDC know that our MP has campaigned to have a mandatory reduction on these targets to maintain the Districts Green credentials. We will comment on the type of housing planned and in particular for older people – see chapter 2. We will also cover some of the other topics such as Transport and Infrastructure.

Praise

Macular Society

The Macular Society has issued an invitation to anyone affected by macular disease to attend their monthly support group. It is held at the Stag Theatre cafe every fourth Thursday 10.30-12.00. It's a great place to go for practical and emotional support. There are interesting speakers and coffee is available in return for a small donation.

Unsung Heroes

Congratulations to Dee Bryan for being nominated as “Unsung Hero of the Year” in the Third Sector Awards for her great work with “Action for Pulmonary Fibrosis’. We applaud Dee and all the unsung heroes around us.

Green Doctors

Many thanks to the Green Doctors, a team of energy advisors, for their two visits to Otford where they helped many residents save money on their gas and electricity bills and answered lots of energy queries. They did follow up visits to certain homes and gave away energy saving gifts like radiator foils, torches and light bulbs. All of their services in Kent are free of charge. For further information, call 0300 365 3005

Air Quality

Our thanks to Mary who alerted us to the new way of finding out about air quality in our District. This is very important for any of us who may have breathing difficulties.

<https://uk-air.defra.gov.uk/forecasting/> **Freephone: 0800 55 66 77**

Mary tells us

“I have tried the DEFRA website to check air quality in my area in recent days and found it very helpful and easy to use. I put in my postcode and quickly had the report for that day in the immediate area, the map also covering about a 6 mile radius - helpful if travelling. On a separate page is useful health advice according to the severity of the pollution and there is a Freephone number for people without online access, I would definitely recommend this website”

Cutting the cost of living (Submitted by Geoff Parsons)

Congratulations to Geoff Parsons, one of our long standing members, who has produced a very comprehensive document “Swanley Savers” packed with tips for reducing our living costs, getting free help and creating some income. It was originally intended for Swanley residents but we can all benefit from Geoff’s careful work. We are sure there will be ideas in there that you haven’t thought of. The document is on our website www.sdsaf.org.uk. If you do not have on line access, contact us and we will see what we can do to get this useful information to you.

The Stag Sevenoaks (Message from Andrew Eyre, Chief Executive)

The Stag is providing an opportunity for people to see a film at selected times on Mondays for £3 per person. Whilst not listed on the SDC Warm Spaces Directory it is the Stag’s contribution to this initiative. Detailed dates and timings are not publicized more than a week or two ahead as they are subject to change according to demand. You can find out more including making a booking on the website stagsevenoaks.co.uk or telephoning 01732 450175 (limited times).

At the time of going to press with this newsletter we have for Monday 12th December “Matilda The Musical” at 13.30 and “She Said” (subtitled) at 13.15. Then on Monday 19th December there is “Avatar, The Way of the Water” at 10.30 and “Strange World” the timing to be announced. It is likely that this initiative will continue into the New Year and you can get regular update information on the website [News- The Stag Sevenoaks](http://News-The Stag Sevenoaks)

Gardening Corner

The Forum's Treasurer, Chris Towers, won first prize this summer in Otford's Annual Front Garden competition which took place just before the hosepipe ban came into effect. The judges were members of the Otford Recreation and Open Spaces Committee and the Chairman of the Otford Society who were all very inspired by the different styles of garden that were presented to them. Well done Chris .

Chris's Tips

Our talented Chris has given us some timely tips on How to Grow Beautiful Tulips. He has also shared with us one of his very attractive tulip paintings

"I buy a lot of bulbs each year as I enjoy making watercolour paintings of them and like to have different colours and shapes to choose from.

It may be a little late to plant tulips by the time you read this, but it is still well worth planting some, they may just flower a little later than others, but will still be a delight to see.

If you have a fairly big pot, I suggest you buy one packet of a tall variety and another shorter one. Tulips come in early, mid and late season varieties, so be sure both packets will flower at the same time and the colours go well together.



Put a few inches of peat free compost into the pot and plant the tall tulips so that just the tops are showing. Now plant the shorter variety on top of the compost and between the ones in the lower layer. Fill the pot with more compost and cover it with chicken wire if you have trouble with squirrels. The taller ones will now grow up between the shorter ones making a good display in the spring. The taller ones will now grow up between the shorter ones making a good display in the spring.

Recipe - Serves 4 *(Submitted by Eileen MG)*

Mulled fruits

This could make a delicious alternative to Christmas pudding, either on its own or with a dash of cream. Chosen as a source of Vitamins C and E, folate and polyphenols, this dish is good for our brain health.

1. 125 ml red wine
2. 50 ml orange juice
3. 50gm soft brown sugar
4. 6 cloves, 1 bay leaf, 1 cinnamon stick
(or a sachet of mulling spices)
2. 2 teaspoons arrowroot
3. 250 gm ripe purple plums, stoned & thickly sliced
4. 25 gm blackberries
5. 150 gm raspberries



Place the red wine, orange juice, sugar and spices in a pan and heat gently until the sugar has dissolved, then bring to the boil and simmer for about 5 minutes. Remove and discard the spices /sachet. Mix the arrowroot with a splash of water and mix to make a thin paste. Stir into the spiced wine and continue stirring over a medium heat until thickened. Add the plums and blackberries and simmer 2-3 minutes. Stir in the raspberries. taste for sweetness and add a tiny bit of sugar if the fruit is too tart.

REFLECTIONS

I was born in Shoreham in nineteen forty eight
I'm told that I was in somewhat of a hurry
Surely that's far better than being late ?
We, Mum and I, had no problems, so no worry !

My parents had the local village store
We had the Post Office, the newsagents
and indeed so much, so much more
Our lives were full of so many, many events

Most folks did not have a car, they all
banked at the post office - *that was us !*
Most folks did not have a television, they
all had a newspaper - *that was us !*
There were no supermarkets so for nearly
everything else - *that was us !*

I worked in the shop from a very early age
I absolutely loved every minute of it
I could write a book, yes, page after page
Maybe one day when I'm not so fit !

It was then pounds, shillings and pence
and indeed we had no mechanical till
I didn't just learn a lot of common sense
My arithmetic was quite good, a very useful skill

But the greatest skill without any doubt
was dealing with such a variety of folks
Whatever, whenever, whoever was about
No problem, I had learnt a lot of strokes

That's just two of the favours from my early years
What a tremendous start to life I had
I enjoyed every minute of it, no stress, no tears
What else can I say but ***thank you Mum and Dad !***

Barry Morse - November 2022

FORUM CONTACT DETAILS

To contact the Forum Committee email Eileen Murray Giles at : chair@sdsaf.org.uk, write to "Sevenoaks District Seniors Action Forum" C/O 22 Lambarde Road, TN13 3HT or ring 07784 677626
SDSAF Website: www.sdsaf.org.uk

Please let us know if you would like to receive the Newsletter in large print.