



Sevenoaks District Seniors Action Forum



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

Letter from Chair

As we approach the Christmas season, we extend our kindest thoughts to each and every one of our members, your families, friends and all those who have a special place in your lives. Please remember to reach out to neighbours and acquaintances who may be going through a difficult time - a cheery phone call, a hand delivered card, an unexpected little gift or an invitation to meet for a cuppa can help to spread joy and kindness during the festive season.

Save the date!!

We look forward to our singalong at 2.30 pm on Friday 17 January 2025 in Otford Village Hall club room. - make sure to put the date in your new diaries. There will be an opportunity to enjoy some home grown talent as well as plenty of tea, coffee and nibbles. Come and join us and bring your friends!

Many of our members have told us they feel disillusioned about recent government decisions and feel fearful about how they will manage going forward. We wrote to the Pensions Minister and to all the MPs in Kent expressing our disquiet at the effect of the cut in winter fuel payments on over 3,000 pensioners in our district who are just above the cut off point for pension credit. We also expressed our concern about the complexity of claiming pension credit and about the erosion of state pensions due to fiscal drag.

The only MP who responded in any detail was Laura Trott. She suggested seniors should approach the Hero Team at Sevenoaks District Council for help with welfare benefits, housing, and more. Email: hero@sevenoaks.gov.uk

- Phone: 01732 227000 (ask for the HERO service)

She suggested that any members who are tenants of local housing associations may have contacts at their association who could offer support. She also reminded us to use the resources of the Citizens Advice Bureaux.

We have requested meetings with our 2 MPs, Laura Trott and Tom Tugendhat, so that we can put questions to them from our members. Please tell us about any issues you would like us to raise.

In spite of all our protests, we have been saddened to see the removal of community wardens from parts of our District. Let us hope that the positive difference they made can be carried on to some extent by voluntary effort within our communities.

As the cost of postage increases, it becomes more expensive for us to keep our non digital members informed. Some stamps are wasted because we have not been told about changes. It would be really helpful if you could let us know if you have changed address or if you have an email address we could use. This would save us money and enable us to continue sending hard copies to those without computers.

Many thanks to all the organisations that contributed to the Silver Fair at the Stag theatre on 4 October. It was a great way to celebrate our seniors and to pass on helpful information.

With warmest wishes
Gill Shepherd-Coates MBE
Eileen Murray Giles
chair@sdsaf.org.uk



Transport to Hospitals and other venues.

It is self-evident that in an emergency you should call 999 and ask for an ambulance. If, for instance, you have a fall and hurt yourself and you are not sure what to do, call NHS on 111.

At some time or the other most of us will need to attend hospital or other medical appointments and most of us will drive or get a lift and worry about parking when you get there. However, sometimes this may not be possible and public transport can be a nightmare with limited availability and uncertainty about return journeys. The cost of a taxi for long journeys can be mouth-wateringly expensive .e.g. £120 Sevenoaks to Kings College one way.

Please note that the Forum does not offer transport, but for those in need there are some other options Our latest available information, in no particular order is:-Sevenoaks Volunteer Transport Group tel 01732 458931 email soaksvtg@yahoo.com. The group is based at Sevenoaks hospital. Contact them between 9-12 noon Mon-Fri, prices are discussed when you call but are mainly to cover the drivers expenses. They cover most of the SDC area, also Pembury and Maidstone hospitals. There is also a service for Edenbridge tel 01732 865353

Imago Community Dial to Drive. use volunteer drivers to get you to Hospital, clinic and other local trips i.e. shopping tel 0300 7771200. In theory they operate 24/7 but this is subject to the availability of volunteer drivers Contact them between 9.30-3.30 pm. Mon-Fri. Cost £20 annual fee plus 70p per mile to include travel from drivers home, invoiced at end of month, they cover Sevenoaks, Tonbridge and Tunbridge Wells. They will wait for an hour for the return journey any longer will require a separate booking. As a rough guide a return trip to Pembury or Maidstone hospitals would cost £30/35 plus parking fees. In the last 12 months the Sevenoaks branch carried over 1100 passengers, they do not provide wheelchair access, this means clients have to be able to transfer from the wheelchair to the car

Patient Transport provided by G4S on behalf of the NHS for Kent and Medway. It is designed to support you if your medical or physical condition means you cannot use public transport, get a lift,

or drive yourself. You could try phoning 0800 096 0211 to register and discuss your transport needs. Once registered, you or a carer should be able to make future bookings. We think that if accepted there is no charge. You can ask at the hospital where you have your appointment, if transport can be arranged, they will ask for details of your health condition, mobility etc.

Kent Karrier is a flexible dial a ride service now operated by GO, who have taken it over from Compaid. To use it you have to be a member, currently free but will cost £50 p.a. from April 2025 and meet one or more of the following criteria: have a medical condition that makes travelling on public transport difficult, live in a rural area more than 500 meters from a bus route or a railway station, be aged 85+. You can register on line www.kent.gov.uk/kentkarrier or make enquiries by calling 03000 41 35 67

They will collect you from your home and take you to a location such as a supermarket, town centre or hospital. Cost £2.50 for the first mile and £1.00 per additional mile payable to the driver in cash or by contactless card. They may pick up other passengers on route. One of the benefits is that they use wheelchair accessible vehicles. Members can enquire with Go-Coach on 01732 463964 Mon-Fri 09.00 to 17.00 and bookings must be made a week in advance. The service is from 9.30 until 14.45 Mon -Fri. It covers the main Sevenoaks catchment area including Swanley and Edenbridge but not all of the SDC area.

Travel to London Hospitals. If you can it is best to go by train, but you can try and see if the volunteer organisations can help.

Can you get any other financial help? There is The Healthcare Travel Costs Scheme (HTCS) A Department of Health scheme for people on income support, pension credit or universal credit. It's probably best to ask PALS Patient Advice and Liaison Services at the hospital you are attending. Can you be a volunteer? They all need help, it can just be for certain days or time periods, if you can help they would be pleased to hear from you.

We would like to hear from members if they have used any of these services and an appraisal of what it was like

Travel to Europe

Thinking of travelling to Europe? Make sure you prepare for the forthcoming changes and aren't turned away at the border.

EU Entry/Exit System - known as EES (was due to start on 10 November 2024 - revised launch date is awaited)

Requires electronic processing of the travel movements of all non-European citizens in and out of European

countries and includes having a photo of your face taken and fingerprints scanned.

European Travel information and Authorisation System - known as ETIAS

This visa waiver will be required for all non EU citizens travelling to Europe for a short stay of under 90 days. The system is due to start in Spring 2025. Each individual will need to apply online ahead of travel (official website is https://travel-europe.europa.eu/etias_en) providing information that exactly matches their passport. The ETIAS will cost €7 but we understand from ABTA that it will be free for those under 18 and over 71.

To avoid disappointment, make sure you comply with all the requirements before you travel and beware of fake websites pretending to obtain the ETIAS for you.

Note The ETIAS scheme is not yet up and running. Stay in touch with your travel agent for more information.



Healthy Cookies

Autumn is traditionally the time of year when we gather nuts and seeds to add protein and healthy fats to our diets as well as flavour and crunch. You may like to try making these autumnal cookies - though be warned - they may present challenges for those of us with dental issues....

Ingredients

100 gm Peanuts

50 gm walnuts

50 gm almonds

30 gm sunflower seeds

40 gm pumpkin seeds

Additional Flax, sesame and poppy seeds according to taste

1 egg white

1 tablespoon honey (or more) to taste

Method

Preheat oven to 170C.

Chop nuts, add rest of dry ingredients, bind together with egg white and add honey to sweeten. Form into teaspoon sized rounds and place on to a greased baking sheet and press down slightly. Place in heated oven for approx 15 mins.

Remember to keep an eye on your cookies to ensure they don't overcook. Enjoy!!

PS We have also tried blending 160 gm mashed banana with 260 gm mixed nuts, seeds and fruits with equally delicious results



Improving brainpower with essential oils

Here is a brief summary of an article by Rebecca Haynes, sent to us by our friend Lynn Payette in California.

Research at University College Irvine has shown that we can dramatically improve memory, focus and brainpower by inhaling the scents of pure and potent essential oils.

It is important to note that only pure therapeutic grade oils were used - unfortunately many oils supplied in shops and online are adulterated with other substances.

The researchers, led by Cynthia Woo, used diffusers to expose healthy subjects, aged 60 to 85, to one of seven pure essential oils - orange, peppermint, lavender, rose, eucalyptus, lemon or rosemary - for 2 hours as they slept, rotating the oils each night.

After 6 months, there was dramatic improvement in mental functions - memory, perception, reasoning and language comprehension, in some cases by a whopping 226 per cent! MRI scans revealed that oil exposure had strengthened a brain pathway (the left uncinated fascicules) responsible for emotions, thinking and memory formation that becomes less active as we age. The researchers say that the benefits apply equally if the oils are diffused during the day time. This could have important implications for people who may be concerned about Alzheimer's and cognitive decline. Thank you Lynn for sharing.





Praise

- All the dentists who are kind, gentle and patient with those who are fearful
- All the fundraising done for charitable causes at Christmas and throughout the year by choirs and musical performers in our district.
- Thanks to John Clark for telling us about the Man with a pan initiative which aims to help men to develop the skills and confidence to be able to cook and eat good food. The courses are good fun and sociable, encouraging the men to make new friends and feel supported
- [Man with a Pan - Cookery courses- Community Chef](#)
- The churches and other organisations offering warm spaces through the winter time.
- The volunteer drivers offering lifts to those less mobile than themselves
- The HERO Team at Sevenoaks District Council. who assist with welfare benefits, housing, and more. Email: hero@sevenoaks.gov.uk Phone: [01732 227000](tel:01732 227000)(ask for the HERO service)

Should I get a dog for Christmas

Our thanks to Gill Luff for raising this issue with us
With the festive season just around the corner, some seniors may think about getting themselves a domestic pet in time for Christmas. They may also consider getting a pet from a rescue centre. This can be a very rewarding experience but it's essential to weigh the pros and cons carefully.

Gill Luff, a local artist and SDSAF member, told us the story of Poppy, her adorable bearded Tibetan terrier, rescued some twelve years ago via the Dog Trust. 'Poppy has changed my life and definitely makes it better' says Gill. Poppy had two previous owners. The first had to part with her because her allergies were too expensive for them to deal with and Poppy bit the second owners because they teased her by dangling food in front of her then taking it away. When the Dogs Trust arranged for Gill to visit Poppy, it was love at first sight and she hasn't looked back.

A rescue dog can have many benefits for seniors. It can provide companionship and emotional support, which is especially valuable for staving off loneliness. Dogs can also encourage a more active lifestyle, as they require regular walks and playtime. This can promote physical health and mental well-being, offering seniors a sense of purpose and routine. Adopting a rescue dog helps give a home to an animal in need, contributing positively to the community and reducing the number of homeless pets.

However, caring for a dog requires time, effort and financial resources, including food, veterinary care and supplies. For those of us with mobility issues or health concerns, the physical demands of dog ownership may be challenging. Additionally, some rescue dogs may come with behavioural issues or require training, which can be overwhelming for inexperienced pet owners. So it's crucial for seniors to assess their ability to meet the dog's needs and consider whether they have a support system in place for assistance if necessary.

Gill spoke very highly of the support she received from the Dogs Trust. They made sure I bonded with Poppy and that she was the right pet for me. They came to my home to ensure that we were a good match and that my house, garden and lifestyle were suitable for Poppy. She arrived chipped, wormed and spayed and the Dogs Trust stayed in contact monthly to make sure all was



going well' Because of Poppy's allergies, the Dogs Trust gives Gill ongoing financial help with vet bills and medication and she pays for a separate pet insurance for non-allergy issues.

In her free time, Gill knits squares to make colourful blankets for rescued dogs and she encourages her knitting friends to do the same. She gave a donation to the Dogs Trust in exchange for Poppy but she was not required to pay the full market rate for a pure breed which would have been unaffordable for her.

Ultimately, while a rescue dog can bring joy and companionship, seniors should ensure they are fully prepared for the ongoing responsibilities that come with dog ownership. A thoughtful decision can lead to a fulfilling relationship between seniors and their new furry friend and can be the cause of much happiness.

To learn more about the Dogs Trust, visit <https://www.dogstrust.org.uk/> or you may also like to explore Foal Farm, a more local animal rescue centre in Biggin Hill.

[Facebook Foal Farm Animal Rescue Centre53.2K+ followersFoal Farm Animal Rescue Centre | Biggin Hill](#)

If you have experiences to share about your domestic pets that might help other seniors, do get in touch with us.

Crossroads Kent

Are you an unpaid carer looking after a loved one? Crossroads Kent offers a free funded service to help you and your family. They provide a dedicated carer support worker for three hours a week on the same day and at the same time for 6 months, then the service is reviewed by the Care Manger. The same support worker attends each week to provide continuity of care. They can provide personal care, give medication and general support and companionship so the carer can take a break from their responsibilities with peace of mind.

We spoke with Sylvia, one of our members in New Ash Green, who benefitted from the service in the months before her husband went into a dementia care home. She said it was a lifeline for her, enabling her to meet a friend, do shopping and necessary personal errands one afternoon a week. 'I could relax and think about something else without having to worry about my husband for a few hours' she said. 'I appreciated the support and am still in touch with the lovely lady who came to our home'.

Referrals can be made to Crossroadskent.org by yourself, family, friends, GP or any health or social care professional. To make a referral or seek further advice please contact Crossroads on **03450 956701** or email enquiries@crossroadskent.org

Prostate problems in Older Men

Ever since the news that King Charles had prostate problems, local GPs have reported a surge in enquiries about prostate conditions from older men.

There are two main problems affecting this age group. Benign Prostatic Hyperplasia (BPH), is an enlarged prostate gland, which is the most common (50% in men over 60, 90% by 85 years).

About half of men with this condition will develop symptoms and require some form of treatment. BHP is not usually a serious threat to health and does not automatically lead to cancer, although both conditions can occur at the same time.

Prostate Cancer is more serious although less common and Prostate Cancer UK have projected a rise in men in this condition to 15% by 2025. The greatest risk is to males aged 75 to 79 particularly in the black population or if there is a history of prostate cancer in the family.

Both conditions share similar signs and symptoms. These include difficulties in passing urine such as slowness to start, urgency, frequency (e.g. the need to go to the loo several times in the night), pain while peeing, changes in colour of urine and not being able to empty the bladder completely.

If you have symptoms, go and see the GP who is likely to order a PSA blood test (Prostate Specific Antigen) which will indicate the risk of prostate cancer and will need a specialist referral if positive. Prostate Cancer UK has recently launched a national trial programme using scans to catch the disease an early stage.

For BHP a simple examination may suggest 'watchful waiting' to monitor the situation if the symptoms are mild, or otherwise a referral to a Urologist for a scan. Drug treatment can stabilise this condition or there are other surgical options.

Sources of information.

<https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/prostate-enlargement>. <https://prostatecancer.uk>

SDC Local Plan

the gasworks development at Bat Ball was discussed at Development Management Committee on Thursday 7th Nov and granted planning permission on the casting vote of the chairman.

Boundary changes – The Ward boundaries are being changed by the Independent Boundaries Commission to provide roughly the same number of residents within each ward. Along with this change, the number of District Councillors is likely to be reduced from 54 to 48.

The Local Plan is being delayed until the new National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) has been agreed by central government. This follows a national consultation and SDC obviously took notice of your committee's comments regarding the errors in the housing formula which determines how many houses the District must build as that was included in their opening comment.

Achievability of affordable housing is a hot topic nationally, not just within the District and unfortunately is in the hands of the developers - if they put forward an affordability document stating that 40% affordable housing makes the development unaffordable then SDC have to reduce the numbers accordingly. The main problem is that even when we grant permission, we cannot force the developers to actually build the houses - I think that's called land-banking and there is nothing in recent legislation to prevent it.

Oxford Forget-me-not Café Dates

Forget-me-not Cafés
Companionship over a cuppa

Oxford Forget-me-not Café
Oxford Village Memorial Hall
11 am – 12:30 pm

We are delighted to inform you of our café dates for 2025:-

Thursday 30 th	January
Thursday 27 th	February
Thursday 27 th	March
Thursday 24 th	April
Thursday 29 th	May
Thursday 26 th	June
Thursday 31 st	July
Thursday 28 th	August
Thursday 25 th	September
Thursday 30 th	October
Thursday 27 th	November

We look forward to seeing everyone again during the year for more companionship, chats, coffee and entertainment.

If you have any questions regarding our café at Oxford, please call Amelia on 07580 601182

Sevenoaks Area | Dementia Friendly Community

ANGER

(We love it when our members send us their thoughts. Thank you David Brazier for your stylish, perceptive and amusing observations about ageing. Do you share David's views?)

I reached my 77th birthday a couple of days ago. Has the passage of time made me more accommodating, more tolerant and more patient? Yes and no; I can deal a little better with the irritations of daily life that have always been there, but have found new things to enrage me, all very much a consequence of the passage of time. Not having sold my soul to the devil I look the age I am, although like all men, I am in my mind still a muscular, hairy twenty-five year-old sex god.

I am advised by my daughters that I don't seem particularly dim-witted or senile. This, however, does not stop people treating me as though I am, indeed, doolally. This is very much the case in shops and the doctor's surgery, where I am spoken to slowly with a very soft voice by well-meaning people who assume that because I am old I must be demented. This gives them the right, apparently, to hold my elbow or forearm to stop me falling over when they speak to me (I have never fallen over). No-one has yet asked me if I know where I live (it will come), but I was asked quite recently if I was still driving.

I am a working councillor at County Hall and treat everyone with elaborate courtesy. I find, however, that council officers will nowadays try to short-change me with information or promptness of response because they think I will not notice or care. Many other councillors, my contemporaries in age, report the same treatment.

I don't help myself by using a walking cane, an elegant Victorian Malacca, to help with balance. The latter, in my case, was rubbish fifty years ago and the problem can't be cured, although, as I've said, I have never fallen over. (By the way, have you noticed that if you do hit the ground and are seventy or under, you are said to have fallen over: if you are over seventy you have "had a fall", which apparently is much more serious.) The cane is useful in some ways in that it causes traffic to stop, gets me to the front of queues and provides seats on the Underground. Unfortunately, it also means that I get more of the soft voice treatment and it does seem that you can't have one without the other.

If you are ageing, people on the whole try to be kind and offer help, even if you don't want or need it. I should be grateful, but I'm not. Daytime television at the Sunnyfields Home for Distressed Gentlefolk and clothes that don't fit will come soon enough, but meanwhile treat me like a sentient being capable of getting from A to B, making up my own mind and spotting a scam fifty yards away.

FORUM CONTACT DETAILS

To contact the Forum Committee: - email Eileen Murray-Giles at : chair@sdsaf.org.uk, or 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 and an audio version can also be made available