

Issue 16 Spring 2013

The Assembly Times

Newsletter of the Older People's Assembly



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DEAR READER ...

WELCOME TO THE FIRST EDITION FOR 2013. The bad weather in December and January regrettably meant we had to cancel both the original winter meeting and also the rescheduled date last month—our sincere apologies. Safety and wellbeing must be our priority but we have missed seeing you all so we hope that you will join us on March 6th for the AGM (see page 5 for more details). We are delighted that our agenda will include some of the issues from the previous programmes and our article 'What Time Will My Bus Arrive?' hopefully gives you an initial insight into what's happening with the transport support services.

We are currently working to improve the look and content of your website and already we have added some more items. Please do let us know what you would want us to include on the site. We would also welcome articles for the newsletter and website from members ... so please write to us.



WHAT TIME WILL MY BUS ARRIVE?

Times are a changing for our Bus Service..... no not the timetable but its all change for the passenger information system, some revamping of bus stations, moving some bus stops and even introducing an oyster card style system. Paul Mathieson of Southend Borough Council tells us: *Essex County Council, with its partner authorities Southend Borough Council and Thurrock Council have funded a Real Time Passenger Information (RTPI) system in Greater Essex since 1999 and although the system has worked well, technology is overtaking it and the cost of maintaining the system is leading it to be economically unviable. A review of the system also showed it was at near capacity despite not being able to show all the services and only covering a small amount of the bus operators operating services in Greater Essex.*

So the system will be upgraded using existing display signs and this time using GPRS instead of a radio network. In Southend the radio network has already been ceased and the passenger information displays advise us to refer to the printed timetables. The new system provider will be working to make sure that the GPRS solution is introduced and hopefully be up and running in June 2013 and this will give us live departure information on the display as well as to mobile app's, websites and other locations where the public seek the information. Although to start with the departure information will be time-table information, later becoming live departures as the operators equip their vehicles with the electronic ticket machines that provide the location information. Paul will be updating us on the full programme for change at a future meeting of the OPA but in the meantime we have asked a number of questions: *What will the new system be able to do that the old one couldn't?/Will the buses run more reliably?/Are there any benefits for people with disabilities?/How can we get involved further in this?*

Come along to the March meeting and we will tell you more.

If you are interested in supporting the OPA and would like to be more involved and join our committee please contact our Chairman **Derek Iles** on .07760183633/01702 337034

HANDS OFF OUR BENEFITS

Hands Off Our Benefits !! Yes the debate continues and still there remains a very real threat to our pensioner benefits and in particular the call from many in government and elsewhere to means test our bus pass concession, winter fuel payment and the over 75 Free TV licence. Our colleagues from NPC lobbied parliament in October, Age Concern continues to highlight the issue and many voluntary sector groups including the OPA are speaking up.

Age UK says 'The relatively modest amount of support provided through universal benefits helps tackle income and fuel poverty and promotes social participation, improving the health and wellbeing of our older population. This is likely to be beneficial to society and could save resources in terms of the need for health and other services'

I would recommend to those of you with internet access Age UK's Question and Answer briefing paper on the subject which offers some very sound arguments against the proposals: www.ageuk.org.uk/documents/olderpeoplesuniversalbenefits. Here for all to consider are a few extracts from that article :

Means-tested benefits are expensive to administer. In 2010-11 each new Pension Credit claim cost £351 and existing claims £47 compared to £91 for a new state pension claim and £14 for existing claims⁶.

Taxing universal payments would limit the support for those with moderate and higher incomes but would greatly increase the complexity of the tax system and could, for example, require more older people to fill in tax returns.

Taxing bus passes would be difficult given their value depends on the number of journeys people made. People do not get a bus pass automatically. Bus operators are reimbursed based on how much older people travel on their buses. Therefore it does not cost the state anything unless it is used. Research shows that ownership and use of the concessionary bus pass is highest for those on the lowest income. The concession allows older people to reach key services, friends and family without having to make difficult financial decisions.

The TV is an important source of information and entertainment for isolated older people and a free licence ensures no-one over 75 worries about this expense.

Winter Fuel Payments - of course there are some who do not need extra help towards fuel bills but the fact that there are a handful of very rich people who get payments should not be used as a reason to get rid of a straightforward scheme that works well for the majority of pensioners with low or modest incomes .

I hope that this has given you 'food for thought' and if you want to say 'hands off our benefits' or have a different view then write to your MP and make your voice heard.



Did You Know?

FREE LEGAL ADVICE

The Echo has joined forces with Lloyd Green Solicitors to offer readers free, no obligation, legal advice. Issues that can be dealt with include accident claims, medical misdiagnosis and errors, nuisance neighbours, defective goods and holiday claims. In fact, advice is available on any matter except criminal cases Call 01206 931420. Source D Stansfield SPC



DID YOU KNOW??

AGE UK Essex Announce New Service

Active Lives

Age UK says: *after a life changing event such as illness or bereavement, it can often seem like something you have always seen as “normal” has been taken away. It’s often the simple things in life that are hardest to adjust to again. Active Lives service is all about keeping people active, independent and in touch with the outside world by supporting those who may have lost all confidence in getting out and about independently. The service, offered for a maximum of 12 weeks, provides a trained volunteer to help achieve personal goals including providing company for key activities such as*

- » *Attending a lunch club*
- » *Short shopping trips*
- » *Walking or using local public or community transport*

**To find out more contact:**

Age UK Essex Information and Advice Hotline: 01245 346 106

Nearest Office Tel: 01268 525 353 or email: ann.sparks@ageukessex.org.uk



Library Review Update



Our report in the Winter Newsletter explained about the review and how you could have your say through the initial consultation process. That consultation element of the first phase of the review has formally closed and the council advises us that they have had in the region of 1500 responses and are in the process of inputting the paper copies of the survey into the online consultation portal. Once that has been completed they will undertake a full analysis of responses to feed into the development of proposals.

Representatives from the OPA committee also attended a meeting on your behalf with councillors and officers where we were able to offer our thoughts and suggestions about the service that we believe the older people of Southend would want for the future.

Survey information and representative responses will be used by the Cultural Advisory Working Party in conjunction with all the other data that has been gathered to date; enabling a wider view to be taken. The Cultural Advisory Working Party will be putting their report of the review to the March Cabinet; this will contain all the information gathered during the course of the review, including the analysis of the consultation, and will make proposals for cabinet to consider on possible future options for the service.

The report will seek approval to go out to formal consultation on those proposals. If cabinet agree to that then they will prepare the next stage of consultation and will probably start that around late Spring.

Once the report goes to Cabinet, the information will be in the public domain and the OPA will be able to have sight of the initial proposals which we will circulate to all our members. On your behalf we will continue to speak up and proactively participate in the ongoing development of the service.

Please do let us have your comments/thoughts so that our voice is your voice.

KEEP SAFE - BE SECURITY AWARE

*Michael Armstrong - Crime Reduction & Architectural Liaison
Officer Southend Police District writes....*

Different times of year offered different opportunities to burglars. Spring is on its way and day light gets longer but if you are not going to be home before dark ensure a light is left on or set on a timer light to come on.

Thieves know a dark house is empty. Put the light on in a room not the hallway. It also helps to leave a radio playing so a thief cannot be sure the house is occupied or not.

Burglar Alarms, or as they are sometimes known, intruder alarms can often be a good deterrent and this editions article aims to provide you with some basic advise about choosing and installing an alarm to protect your home and alert others to intruders. The vast majority of the commercially available systems, whether professionally installed or installed by the householder incorporate three basis products.

1). *Door and window sensors; they are a two piece device which sit together, forming a circuit. When they are pulled apart, by the door or window opening, the circuit is broken and the alarm activated.*

2). *Passive Infra Red sensors; The PIR is triggered by a combination of heat, movement and mass. Pet friendly sensors are available.*

3). *Vibration sensors; commonly called "vipers" which are attached to windows or doors and trigger when a level of vibration is achieved, i.e. someone forcing the door or window open.*

The next important factor is what level of response is required. Many factors influence this decision, the location of the premises, the likelihood of an audio alarm being heard, and risk factors due to any prevailing crime trends in the area. The three basic levels of response are

a). *Audio alert only, a bell or siren sounds for no more than 20 minutes.*

b). *An activation of the alarm causes a telephone message to be sent to a nominated person. This process is commonly referred to as an auto dialler. Different models use either the land line or a mobile telephone link. It also triggers an audio alarm as in (a).*

c). *Monitored alarms. There are two levels of service; the lower level goes to an alarm receiving centre whereupon the centre will contact nominated persons, not including the Police, to inform them the alarm has activated. The higher level involves the alarm receiving centre being able to confirm the alarm is genuine, by a combination of a more complex alarm and active test at the time, which as a "confirmed alarm" will be forwarded to the Police for urgent action.*



Both levels of response involve a monitoring charge, paid to the alarm company.

The installation of an alarm is a substantial, but worthwhile investment in enhancing the security of your home. Free, impartial advice about what system may meet your individual needs best is available from your local Police Community Support Officer (PCSO) or Crime Reduction Officer.



You don't stop laughing because you grow old, You grow old because you stop laughing!

So keep on laughing with us... I said to this train driver "I want to go to Paris". He said "EUROSTAR?". I said, "I've been on the telly but I'm no Dean Martin"!!!! '

**Important
DATE!**

**OLDER PEOPLES ASSEMBLY
ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING
WEDNESDAY 6TH MARCH 2013**

**PLEASE SUPPORT THIS IMPORTANT OPA MEETING
MAKE A NOTE IN YOUR DIARY NOW !**

Your support and involvement in the AGM is important because you, our members, are the voice of the organisation and it is you who elect our committee and decide our priorities for the coming year.

More than ever your support and involvement is needed - the current austere times are having a big impact on services and finances for us Older People and without organisations like the OPA our/your voice isn't heard.

We have committee vacancies - will you join us? Do you have time to spare or perhaps you are approaching early retirement and need something challenging, fulfilling and worthwhile then please think seriously about stepping up and taking the baton so that the OPA can continue to be a voice in the town. For more information about what's involved or to register an expression of interest please call our Chairman Derek Iles on 07760183633/01702 337034 or alternatively to receive an application form email derkiles@btinternet.co. Closing date for receipt of applications is 28th February 2013.

This year our annual general meeting will be held on Wednesday 6th March 2012 in the Council Chamber of Civic Centre at 1.30. At this meeting as well as electing new committee members we will review the OPA year, present the financial report and as always we will have a guest speaker and the usual Q&A session. Full details of the Agenda are printed on the reverse of your invitation letter and are published on our website: www.southendopa.org.uk Please, please do come along, support your committee, have your say and hear the views of others.

**Important
DATE!**

In response to the observation that volunteers are too often seen as amateurs: "Just remember: Noah's Ark was built by amateurs..... The Titanic was built by professionals!!!!"

The Social Fund and April 2013 Changes

The Welfare Reform Act 2012 changes some of the provision of the Social Fund and these changes come into effect from April 2013. So anyone receiving Income Support, Family Credit, Disability Working Allowance, Housing Benefit or Council Tax Benefit can still receive help with additional expenses from the Social Fund for: Cold Weather Payments/Funeral Expenses/Crisis Loans/Community Care Grants/Budgeting Loans but some benefits will have a

new name or in some cases either administered by a different department or merged with another grant.

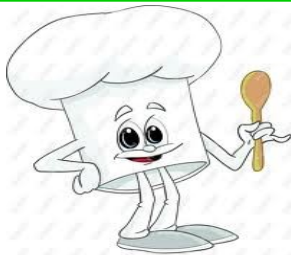
Cold Weather Payments are automatic but others need to be applied for. Application forms are available from the Council, Libraries, Post Offices, Job centre Plus and on line.

Community Care Grants and Crisis Loans for general living expenses will be abolished. A new local provision will be administered by the local Council.

Crisis Loans where there is issues with benefits will be replaced with a new national scheme of **Short Term Advances**. Administration is by DWP.

Budgeting Loans will continue to be available until **Universal Credit** is fully rolled out. **Universal Credit** will merge the out of work benefits and in-work support payments.

Source, "It's all FREE for Seniors" by John Clarke. © MMIII de Swartes Ltd.#



COOKS CORNER

Maureens Moroccan Lamb Casserole

600g lean lamb leg steaks (cut into 2-3cm pieces) 2 onions (peeled & chopped)
 3 large carrots (peeled & cut into bite-size pieces) 3 cloves garlic (crushed/peeled & chopped)
 2 400g tins chick peas (drained & rinsed) 8 dried apricots
 1 400g tin chopped tomatoes 300ml lamb stock
 4tsp Ras-El-Hanout* spice blend (from large supermarkets)
 Salt and freshly ground black pepper to taste. Chopped fresh coriander to garnish (optional)

Cover **Apricots** with boiling water and leave to soak. Heat a small amount of oil in a large casserole dish and add **onions** and **garlic** and fry gently for 2-3 minutes. Next add **lamb, carrots** and **spices** and cook for a further 3-4 minutes over a low heat. Add enough of the **stock** to cover the meat and vegetables, bring to the boil and simmer gently for one hour. Now add drained **apricots, chickpeas, tomatoes, salt** and **pepper** and simmer gently for 30 minutes.

Serve garnished with coriander (if using), with couscous, rice or vegetables as preferred.

**If Ras-El-Hanout not available replace with 2 tsp smoked paprika, 2 tsp ground ginger, 1 tsp ground cumin, 1 tsp turmeric.*

From Maureen McCutcheon OPA Secretary

Coming in the next edition – Maureen's Easy Apple & Banana Crumble....



Keep Our Blood Services Local

ARE YOU AWARE..... of the proposal by NHS East and Midlands to move most of OUR pathology services to Bedford from April 2013? This will mean that all non-urgent blood samples taken from you and me will be transported to Bedford for testing rather than as at present dealt with locally. That equates to approximately 80% of all samples. Campaigners are rightly concerned that this will cause delays because Bedford some **88 miles away** would require a journey via both the M25 and M1. Doctors have said they recognise the need to make savings in the NHS but they believe this has been made purely on financial grounds and commented: "We believe this move may have serious implications for patient safety. This includes delays to GPs receiving unexpectedly abnormal blood results, and risks of erroneous results due to degradation of blood samples with transport delays." The move has been described as madness from across the medical and local community."

The Echo is campaigning to keep these pathology services local to Southend and Basildon and more than 4,700 have signed the Echo e-petition and hundreds more sending in paper petitions. The letter has also been sent to local MPs Mark Francois, James Duddridge, David Amess and Rebecca Harris.

Dr Velmurigan, who is also a Southend councillor, said: "This is most outrageous. It is action taken by a top down administration at the SHA (Strategic Health Authority) who haven't got a clue. Dr Vel says "I'm definitely supporting the Echo's campaign. If like us you have concerns and want your voice to be heard **PLEASE ACT NOWSIGN THE ECHO PETITION, WRITE TO YOUR MP, LET YOUR GP KNOW AND LOBBY OTHERS.**

TO SIGN THE ECHO PETITION:

<http://epetitions.direct.gov.uk/petitions/43260?ref=fetp>.

If you don't have access at home to email then perhaps ask family or friends to do it on your behalf. Don't forget this change will affect them as well so maybe they will sign up too. Remember your local library also has internet access.



EVACUEE?

Were you an evacuee and happy to share your memories? If so Brian Davis would love to hear from you. he is planning to publish a book of reminiscences of former evacuees and is keen to hear from anyone wishing to contribute, He writes in the January edition of Mature Times and says: *its now 70 plus years since some three million children were moved from target areas to places of comparative safety in the country. Carrying gasmasks, sandwiches and a change of clothes it was a journey into the unknown.*

Billeted with strangers, adapting to new environment, some treated as unwanted intruders and others welcome members of a new family it was an experience never to be forgotten.

If you are interested then email Brian with your name and address and he will contact you:

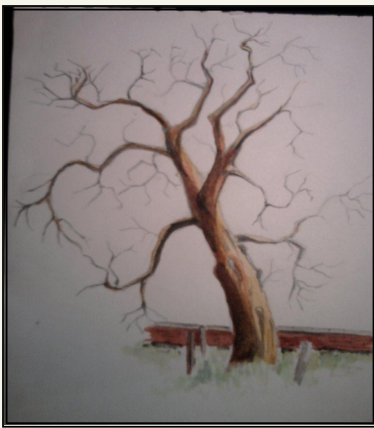
brianwayletts@yahoo.com or alternatively send your details C/O Mature Times, Highwood House, Winters Lane, Redhill, Bristol BS40 5SH.

WHY IS HAVING A HOBBY GOOD FOR YOU?

Using activities, hobbies passions, talents that you enjoy or are naturally good at on a regular basis can boost your well being according to various research findings. The reports say 'What you create or learn through your hobby gives you something to share with others. It does not matter as much what your hobby is; than having a hobby of your own. Interestingly, when you have a hobby, you will strive to create quality time for yourself and with many subjects engage with others as well as bringing pleasure to others particularly with things such as card-making and pottery Hobbies like music and theatre enable you to share the fine experience of the arts. People who like photography often like to click pictures and share their photos. It gives you a reason to reach out and share with another person. Invest some time in cultivating a hobby. It is a gift you can give to yourself that shall be an enriching and rewarding experience for the rest of your life'

So we thought that perhaps members might like to share their interests with others through a series of articles and we begin today with review from our Chairman Derek Iles who writes.....

What to do on a winter evening, or a summer day maybe, Why not try painting? No not the lounge, bedroom, or kitchen try having a go at a landscape, a bowl of fruit, or maybe more challenging like your cat or dog. Not so difficult



Barren Tree by D Iles.

as you might think.

A visit to a local art shop will set you on the right path if you do take up the idea. There are many books available either from the library or from bookshops at a range of prices to suit all pockets , which give a wealth of information. Southend Adult Community College offers beginners courses and the Open University also has a range of options. Both mediums of oil and watercolour are suitable for beginners. Oil paint requires more preparation and takes longer to achieve a result, but Watercolour can give quick and rewarding results. If you choose the latter all you require is a small box of paints, two or three brushes and



Kidmore End Church by D.Iles.

a book of blank watercolour paper. I started painting because as a residential carer I often found myself looking after a client situated deep in the Oxfordshire countryside and not able to get into a village or town on my time off. Having purchased the required items & following some basic tips from a reference book I was quite surprised and pleased with the initial results of my labours. All I can say is "give it a go" and be surprised at what hidden talent might be revealed .

Now you have heard about mine lets hear about yours

OLDER PEOPLES ASSEMBLY MEETING DATES 2013

CIVIC CENTRE – THE COUNCIL CHAMBER

Come and join us 1.00pm registration for 1.30p.m. start

WEDNESDAY 6TH MARCH 2013

WEDNESDAY 5TH JUNE 2013

WEDNESDAY 4TH SEPTEMBER 2013

WEDNESDAY 4TH DECEMBER 2013

Visit our Website at www.southendopa.org.uk