



Bedford and District Group Newsletter - June 2025

I'm not sure how this Newsletter will turn out, we have been asked to use a different format by HQ for ease of publication, but here goes nothing!

We are living in very strange and worrying times with numerous conflicts happening in many areas of the world with no apparent ends in sight. Disasters happen, earthquakes, fires, floods, killing thousands of innocent people, illustrated by graphic photographs, fill the news channels and newspaper columns for a couple of weeks and then we hear no more until the next one.

But we soldier on! Celebrating this year the 80th Anniversary of VE Day and the campaign to erect a statue of Vera Lynn has been backed by the Prime Minister. I am off to the USA for my holiday soon and with some trepidation I have to say! It was booked before the current controversial President was elected.

The titbits I have used are all from my newspaper and are items that caught my attention, I think are interesting and sometimes even informative. You will have your own opinions.

Have a wonderful summer - **Romy Neeves**

Chair Report: We have just received notification of the CSPA 2025 National Annual General Meeting (AGM). Those group members whose email addresses that I have will already have received notification of this and asking for nominations to the CSPA Executive, drafts of Motions for debate at the AGM, and amendments to the CSPA Constitution. The CSPA Executive is keen to ensure that more members exercise their democratic right to be involved in the CSPA's operations, through contributing to the national AGM, even if they are unable to attend in person. I now take this opportunity to publicise this information more widely by means of this June newsletter to our group members who either do not have email, or whose email address I don't have. The deadline for submission of the above items to the Executive is 4th July 2025. However, it is a condition of the CSPA constitution that these have been presented to and accepted by a general meeting of the group. Our last group meeting before the above deadline is Friday 13th June 2025. Therefore, if any member wishes to propose a motion for debate, suggest a constitutional amendment or a nomination as detailed above, please ensure that these reach me before 13th June. Any that reach me after that date cannot be considered. My contact details are at the end of this newsletter.

At the group AGM in March, I announced that I intended this to be my last year as Chair of the group. *Anno domini* is catching up, and I wish to begin to cut back on my voluntary workload. I am prepared to remain on the Committee and look after the membership records of the group for a while longer. I am taking this opportunity to publicise my decision more widely in the hope a member will come forward to take on the duties of Chair. I make the point that we have just under 800 members at present, and we are about to absorb the members of the Cambridge group which is closing down. I believe there are only three functioning groups left in the Eastern region of which Bedford is one. We don't wish to see it fold.

John Abington, Chair

Science and health – Drinking white wine and champagne, eating more fruit and keeping waistlines slim could drive down the risk of sudden cardiac arrest

Experts say that thousands of cardiac arrests – where the heart suddenly stops beating – could be prevented by tackling health and lifestyle issues. They found that a higher consumption of champagne or white wine, more fruit, maintaining a positive mood, staying a healthy weight and keeping blood pressure under control seemed to protect against cardiac arrest. People who were more educated also seem less prone to cardiac arrest, suggested a report in the Canadian Journal of Cardiology.

I hope they didn't spend too much time and effort on this report!

Health – Charities and the patient watchdog have warned that patients could face delays to referrals for care for conditions including endometriosis and irritable bowel syndrome (IBS) under plans to shake up the NHS waiting lists. The Government is expanding a scheme to divert patients off lengthy hospital waiting lists and instead have them seen by GPs to accelerate their care.

Family doctors will work more closely with hospital specialists to access expert advice quickly for patients with certain conditions that have long waiting lists, mentioned above, rather than have them waiting for treatment or referrals. But concerns have been raised that the “advice and guidance” scheme could worsen poor relationships between doctors and patients and fear the changes could even lead to a delay in GP referrals if advice is all they can offer at a first appointment.

The scheme aims for patients to be directed to more appropriate care – such as being prescribed medication or accessing blood tests or scans via their GP – rather than being put on long NHS waiting lists.

The Guild of Healthcare Pharmacies (GHP) practices are able to claim £20 for each “episode of care” which could include several interactions with specialists. The Department of Health and Social Care said the advice and guidance scheme **diverted 660,000 treatments** from hospitals into community care between July and December 2024.

Environment – A groundbreaking project has been launched to suck carbon out of the sea off the south coast of England (Dorset).

SeaCURE, the innovative pilot scheme devised by the University of Exeter, is one of fifteen projects funded by the Government aimed at developing technologies to capture and store greenhouse gases and limit global warming. The ocean absorbs about a quarter of the carbon dioxide (CO₂) emitted into the atmosphere, but carbon capture technologies typically focus on absorbing it from the air. Seawater holds a greater quantity of carbon than air – about 150 times more, according to Dr Paul Halloran, who is leading the project. Removing it and storing it then allows the sea to absorb even more. The project is not without its problems however because the energy requirements to generate the products that are required to do this from seawater are huge. The seawater is treated in a tank, the CO₂ is removed and stored, and the low-carbon seawater released back into the sea. Once returned, it can begin absorbing CO₂ again. Sounds a bit Sisyphean to me!

Environment and Consumer – UK households are in a solar boom with sales increasing by 37 per cent this year to their highest level in a decade, figures show.

There were 58,386 installations of rooftop solar panels in homes and small businesses in the first three months of the year – bringing the total in the UK to 1.7 million, according to the MCS Foundation, which certifies the quality of renewable energy in UK homes. This is the highest number since the record set in the final three months of 2015.

Installing solar panels saves a typical three-bed home around £330 on annual electricity bills over the 30-year lifespan of the product, factoring in both the upfront costs and all the bill savings over that period, according to Solar Energy UK. It says adding solar panels will also push up the typical house prices by between £1,891 and £2,722.

Panel prices in the UK could be pushed down further as China (first mention) redirects goods due to US tariffs.

I watched this week as a neighbour was having their solar panels pressure-washed on the surface and in the space between the panels and the tiled roof. I wonder if this cost has been factored into the overall savings!

Consumer – If you eat a chocolate digestive biscuit with the chocolate facing up, you are doing it wrong, according to the product's manufacturer. About 80 million packets of the treat – which is marking its 100th birthday – were made in 2024, enough for one and one-third for every person in the UK. The General Manager at McVitie's chocolate refinery and bakery in Stockport, described it as "the world's most incredible debate – whether you have the chocolate on the top or the chocolate on the bottom". He added "One of the first things he learned when he got to join McVitie's was that it should be chocolate side down to eat the digestive. It starts to melt, you start to get the flavour and away you go – it makes sense, right?"

Five years ago, the BBC quiz programme QI made the same revelation. It's a bit of a jam or cream first situation in my opinion!

Motoring – Private parking companies are on course to issue a record 14.5 million tickets to drivers in Britain in a year, according to analysis. The RAC, which conducted the study, said just five businesses are responsible for nearly half of all tickets issued. It found requests to the Driver and Vehicle Licensing Agency (DVLA) by car park management companies reached 7.2 million in the six months to the end of September 2024 – an average of 41,000 requests per day.

Private companies chase vehicle owners for alleged infringement in private car parks and each ticket can be up to £100. Private parking businesses have been accused of using misleading and confusing signs, aggressive debt collection and unreasonable fees.

And Also – Drivers across England say they are being sent demands for up to £170 from private parking companies because of faulty machines.

The Transport Secretary, Heidi Alexander, said "the problem needs to be tackled", while the RAC also called for a government-backed code of conduct to be reintroduced.

Many car parks require the user to input their vehicle registration when purchasing a ticket from a machine. But the Press Association News agency uncovered numerous cases of drivers who insisted they entered their registration correctly but still received parking charge notices.

I can speak from experience on this issue. I received a fine together with a photograph of my registration plate, for allegedly parking and not paying, but luckily was in the habit of keeping the receipts issued by the machines. I struggled to find an appropriate address of where to send my evidence and submission, but persevered and didn't hear from them again. The parking company was Euro Car Parks, one of the companies listed by the RAC in their study.

Television – Pensioners in a residential retirement block say they are prepared to fight a court battle with the BBC after a 102 year-old woman was hit with a "shocking" £167 licence-fee increase.

In an ongoing dispute, TV Licensing has been sending "threatening letters" to elderly residents at the St Crispin Village in Northampton, telling them their discounted licence is being axed. Until now, each resident in St Crispin's 270 bungalows and apartments, sharing one communal TV aerial, paid just £7.50 a year for the licence. But TV Licensing did not renew the Accommodation for Residential Care (ARC) discounted licence because a storage room in the complex had been converted to provide extra guest accommodation for family and friends. TV Licensing said this change violated the rules for the discounted rate. Residents were told that they would now have to pay the full £174.50 cost of the charge and face visits from enforcement officers and a potential £1,000 fine for non-payment.

A spokesperson said "TV is a lifeline for a lot of people and now they are afraid strange men will come banging on their door. TV Licensing said: "We continue to liaise with the managers of St Crispin's Retirement Village and hope to have this matter resolved as soon as possible."

People who are retired and over 60 qualify for a discounted £7.50 annual TV licence if they live in an eligible residential care home or supported housing.

That's all folks!

Officers and Committee:

Chair and Membership – John Abington, 4 Duckmill Crescent, MK42 OAE Tel 07954 129749.
Johnabington1582@gmail.com,

Treasurer – Irene Ward, 56, Biggleswade Road, Upper Caldecote, Bedfordshire SG18 9BN
Tel: 07899 825777 wardirene603@gmail.com

Secretary and Editor – Romy Neeves, 31 Turner Way, Bedford MK41 7ND 07484 741116
raneeves@gmail.com

Committee

Janet Jefferies, 6 Tamar Road, Bedford MK41 7EE Janetmjefferies@virginmedia.com

John McLaughlin, 64 Middlesex Drive, Bletchley MK3 7EU johnmclaughlinQPR@gmail.com

Sidney Miller, 33a Bushmead Avenue, Bedford MK40 3QW smiller@tiscali.co.uk

Steve Lewis: 40, Letchworth Road, Luton LU3 2NU Steveandrea1066@yahoo.co.uk