



## **Bedford & District Group Newsletter September 2025**

I sincerely hope that you all have had a good summer, the long sunny days and warm evenings have been idyllic, but I am sure we all would like to have had a lot more rain and it was a little hot if you don't have a swimming pool! I have just heard on the radio that trees are losing their leaves much earlier than normal, and this raises concerns that birds and insects will not have enough to sustain them throughout the winter. I have been saving my washing up water to give the grass a bit of a soak but, as they say, it's a drop in the ocean! Apart from the Autumn budget in the next quarter (I think) and with Parliament still in recess, the main topic to report is the National AGM in October, but I'm sure John will mention this in his report.

Romy Neeves, Editor

### **Chairman John Abington's report**

There has been much in the media about the state and civil service pensions of late, not all of it encouraging. The Office for Budget Responsibility (OBR) has warned of unsustainable UK finances due to healthcare and pension spending, with adherence to the Triple Lock

expected to cost £15.5bn by 2030. A review of the State Pension Age (SPA) has also been announced, considering health and life expectancy data.

CSPA continues to support the National Pensioners' Convention's "68 is too late" campaign. I also noted an article claiming the government was considering means testing of the state pension. These and other CSPA campaigning issues have been excellently summarised in Group Circular 974. If you don't already receive Group Circulars and Newsletters by email from the Executive then please register to do so. If you don't have email, then you can always request copies to be sent by post. All will doubtless be covered in the debates at the National AGM which is to be held once again at Chesford Grange Hotel on 8<sup>th</sup> and 9<sup>th</sup> October. However, the numbers of delegates attending this year's meeting has been severely curtailed by force of circumstances both administrative and financial. As you will be aware we absorbed the members from Cambridge group earlier this year. We shall shortly be taking on board members from the

former Peterborough Group who we shall welcome.

### **Universal**

I am following with interest the progress of the biggest news to hit Bedford since Adam was a lad! This is that Universal Studios are seeking planning permission to build a theme park, scheduled to open in 2031, and would become one of the biggest visitor attractions in Europe. More than 8.5 million visitors are expected each year. It probably won't affect many of our members but will bring opportunities both in employment and suppliers. According to my newspaper this morning 18,000 people have registered an interest in jobs.

### **Health**

Eating one avocado a day could be the key to getting a better night's sleep, a study has found. Adults who ate the fruit as part of their daily diet over the course of six months reported better quality sleep compared to those who didn't according to Penn State University. An associate professor of nutritional science said, "sleep is emerging as a key lifestyle factor in heart health, and this study invites us to consider how nutrition – and food like avocado – can play a role in improving it."

Another factor to consider improving our sleep pattern is exercise. Our bodies are designed to be active. Being inactive makes us both age quicker and more vulnerable to disease. Walking and being outdoors boosts mood, health and happiness. Even a small amount of regular exercise can help to keep degenerative diseases, such as Parkinson's and dementia and inflammatory diseases such as arthritis, at bay. Start simple: begin with a 10-minute walk round the block. Pop down to the shops to post

a letter or grab some lunch, instead of using the car.

### **NHS Ten Year Plan**

I'm not sure how many of you read the Group Circular's that John distributes to all who have email, but it's worth repeating. On 3<sup>rd</sup> July 2025, the Government's policy paper "Fit for the future: 10 Year Health Plan for England" was published. Wes Streeting MP, Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, has referred to it as an "ambitious blueprint to get the NHS back on its feet and make it fit for the future". At a recent Age Sector meeting attended by CSPA, Caroline Abrahams, CEO of Age UK said she had read the draft, noting the shift from hospital to home, which brings together community teams including GPs. She went on to say that it wouldn't be without problems and would take extra staff, money, and a lot of time to get running. The Government have said that they will create another workforce plan to go along side it, but even with the extra money the NHS has been given, its progress will likely be slow. Age UK are supportive of the Plan, pointing out that the voluntary sector has a large part to play in making it a success. The following is a summary of the report.

**The** choice for the NHS is stark: reform or die. Transformational change is required to guarantee its sustainability for future generations.

**Science** and technology will be key to that reinvention.

**The** service must be equipped to narrow health inequalities.

**Despite** the scale of the challenge, there are more reasons for optimism than pessimism. The NHS is the best system in the world to harness the advances we are seeing in artificial intelligence (AI) and genomic science and can lead the world on developing

treatment and technologies for the future.

**The** plan aims to reinvent the NHS through 3 radical shifts, from hospital to community, from analogue to digital and from sickness to prevention.

**To** deliver the core components of the new care model at scale, the plan aims to shift the NHS at pace through a new operating model, by ushering in a new era of transparency, and by creating a new workforce model with staff genuinely aligned with the future direction of reform.

Let's hope we are all around to see the difference.

### **East West Rail Link**

Despite outrage over HS2, the new East West Rail link has plans for a similar costly structure. The Prime Minister has branded them "absurd", the Environment Secretary described them as "ludicrous", but as part of plans for the new East West Rail link, the Government is expected to fund the construction of another "bat tunnel". Bedford and District Group has members in most of the five counties that this rail link will cover, so I feel that it is of interest to all our members. According to an article in my weekend newspaper apparently Sir Keir Starmer and Steve Reed highlighted the decision to build a £100m protective tunnel in Buckinghamshire as an example of all that was wrong with England's sclerotic planning system, as they promised to bulldoze through the red tape to get Britain building once again. But proposals to build a new rail line between Bedford and Cambridge as part of the wider East West Rail link will include the construction of another bat tunnel, this time to protect the barbastelle bats that live in local woodland. The plans are for a 700m tunnel near Haslingfield in Cambridgeshire.

When completed the link will run from Oxford, via Milton Keynes and Bedford, to Cambridge, helping to realise what Whitehall has described as the "Oxford-Cambridge arc" and earmarked as a major growth opportunity capable even of rivalling California's Silicon Valley. It resurrects the old "Varsity Line" between the two university cities, which was scrapped in the 1960s in the wake of the notorious Beeching cuts (although Dr Richard Beeching, then chair of the British Railways Board, never actually recommended axing that particular line.

While the first section of the line, from Oxford to Bletchley, is complete, services will not begin on the line until the end of this year at the earliest. The second section aims to upgrade services between Milton Keynes, Bletchley and Bedford, while the third section will build an entirely new line from Bedford to Cambridge via towns such as Tempsford and Cambourne that are earmarked for expansion.

The Bedford to Cambridge plans are still in the design stage and are unlikely to be realised until the mid-2030s. To put this into perspective, since the EWR scheme was first mooted, Spain has transformed its entire rail system by building more than 2,000 miles of high-speed rail!! The new A1/A421 Black Cat dual road connection to Cambridge should be finished soon.

### **Consumer**

Pensioners living in water poverty are cutting back on showers and baths and even flushing their toilets less often to keep their bills down, research by the charity Independent Age has shown. Almost half (46 per cent) of adults over 65 in England and Wales living on a low income are cutting back their water usage either by "a great deal", or a "fair amount", polling carried out by the charity through YouGov found. The survey

suggested that 46 per cent of older people had reduced the number of times they flushed the toilet to reduce their bills in the first half of this year, while 41 per cent had cut down on their washing machine use and 31 per cent had restricted the frequency of bathing. Forty-three per cent of respondents said they were worried about meeting the cost of their water bills over the next six months. One respondent said she had moved to a water meter to reduce her bills from £40 a month to about £12 at the start of this year, but she was then told that the bill would rise to £29 from April. She said that "if council tax and everything else goes up, even by 5 per cent, she would soon find that her annuity which pays for bills, would not cover them, which was really worrying. Her annuity provides an increase of around £4,000 a year on top of her state pension, which has gradually pushed her further over the income tax threshold because of the triple lock increases. This means that the amount she gets from her annuity has reduced from £360 a month to £280, which "barely covers" her bills. Independent Age is calling for a national social tariff for water ensuring that people of all ages on low income would qualify for consistent financial support to lower their water bills.

## France

I have recently visited France to see some friend and the journey from Caen to their home near Orleans took us very close to the museum housing this most famous artefact. The Bayeux Tapestry, with its scenes of sword wielding knights and King Harold's famous death, pierced by an arrow to an eye, has served as a sobering parable of military might and Anglo-French relations since its creation in the 11<sup>th</sup> century. I thought that someday I would like to see it, but now, by sheer coincidence, the

tapestry, commissioned as propaganda for Normandy duke William the Conqueror after he took the English throne from Harold, is being readied for a new temporary home. The fragile treasure will be transported from its museum in Bayeux to an exhibition at the British Museum in London, which opens next year. The Bayeux museum's curator said its first UK outing in almost 1,000 years would be a homecoming of sorts as historians believe it was embroidered in England, using woollen thread on a linen canvas. Moving the work made from nine pieces of linen and showing 626 characters, 37 buildings, 41 ships and 202 horses and mules in 58 scenes – is further complicated by its age.

Adieu, mes amis  
Romy Neeves, Editor

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