

November 2025



A word from the Chair

A brief summary from me about the Kenilworth AGM 8-9th October which Colin, Martin and I attended on your behalf – Colin as our group sponsored representative, Martin our delegate and myself as a challenger candidate standing for one of the five National Executive Member positions on the Executive Council which, without a ballot, would have been rolled forward unopposed. I was not elected but, thanks to your support and the support of other groups in the South West and other regions, I was very pleased to receive more than double the votes I received last year to come very close to being elected. But this will change next year following a vote at the AGM to pilot a ballot of all CSPA members to elect the Chair, Vice Chair and National Executive Members for the next two years to be reviewed after AGM 2027.

Moving on to motions – there were 46 of them - these all were carried or remitted except for two. This was especially heartening in pensions and related matters, where we had submitted a motion for the protection and improvement of pension provision in the Government's pensions review, and in health and social care. Our motion to preserve the single person's 25% council tax discount was also carried unopposed. Finally, Martin did particularly well to get our motion for an organisational review of the CSPA remitted for the EC to consider alongside their own motion to investigate the costs, benefits and risks of establishing the CSPA as a Company Limited by Guarantee or similar Incorporated Organisation. This was a very good result, rather than risk losing the motion altogether, so well-done Martin.

Colin also stood in a couple of times to cast our vote and to move a motion on behalf of Crawley and District who were unable to send a delegate. Here he is with his wife Jean at dinner celebrating CSPA's Certificate of Merit which was awarded to him by the Chair, Les Priestley, to recognise Colin's 20+ years of devoted service to the CSPA in his various roles as Group Secretary, Membership Secretary, Honorary Treasurer and SW Regional Representative – three and more recently two of which he has successfully managed to combine. So very well done and well-deserved Colin from all of us at Bristol, Bath and West.



And, last but not least, may I add our thanks to Sue McCaig a member of our committee who volunteered as one of three online panel members at the request of Head Office to judge CSPA's recently revived Annual Newsletter of the Year award which this year went to the Gloucestershire Group. Anyway, enough from me, wishing everyone a very happy Christmas and New Year to come.



Balloon over Bath

It all started with the question from my sister Jane:

“What do you want for your 80th Birthday?”

After a certain discussion she came up with the idea of a balloon trip. She would combine with my brother Robert and sister Libby. I jumped at the idea!

My Birthday was in September 2024 but it was March 2025 before I could book my trip with Flyaway Balloons. Unfortunately the day before it was due to take place, it was cancelled, because of forecast high winds. They told me it would take us over the Bristol Channel. Not a good place to land!

I was rebooked for Sunday 27th April for 5.30 pm, taking off from Victoria Park, Bath. Not wanting to be late, my wife Christine and I left early in two cars and parked in Charlotte

Street Car Park and eventually found where the balloons were due to take off. We waited and waited until various balloons arrived on their trailers. But where was mine? A bit after 5.30 pm the Flyaway Balloons 4 X 4 vehicle arrived and the inflating started.

My job was to hold the balloon open for the air blower. Cold air at first, then hot air. Gradually the balloon became upright and was straining at its tethers. The basket returned to an upright position.

There were eight passengers and we were told to clamber into the basket. I ended up in an undignified heap! There was an old lady who couldn't clamber in, so they opened a door in the basket. Why couldn't I have used the door?

Imperceptibly I noticed we were airborne. Such a thrill.



Looking down, I could see our shadow over the park. We drifted higher and higher in an easterly direction. It was so quiet, except when the burner went on. However, the views were sensational.



On and on we drifted. People looked up from their back gardens and waved. Gradually we left Bath behind and headed for Bathford. It was a long way down. I looked at my fellow passengers and our pilot Hugo, enjoyment in all our faces.

Sadly our flight was coming to an end and Hugo had to look for somewhere to land. It had to be an empty field, no animals or crops. Also, he knew which farmers were friendly, so quite a juggling feat. Then we were down in an enormous field.



There was work to do as the balloon deflated and we all had to fold it up, to get it into a very large bag. Eventually Scot arrived with his 4x4 and trailer. The basket and balloon were loaded on the trailer and we were soon being driven to our starting point. We delivered a nice bottle of whisky to the farmer as we left.

Back at the Victoria Park, Christine had already driven home. I phoned her and then thank you calls to my sisters and brother. What a wonderful 80th Birthday

present.

Andrew Sherriff, 3rd October 2025.

Increased taxation of pensions?

A letter from your chair to Sadik Al-Hassan MP for North Somerset. You may wish to send a copy to your MP.

Dear Sadik,

Recent reports in the press and media that the Chancellor of the Exchequer is preparing to break Labour's manifesto commitments not to increase national insurance, income tax or VAT has set alarm bells ringing, with the Chancellor reportedly making preparations to increase income tax by 2p in the £1 in the Autumn Budget on 26th November 25.

In particular, unless accompanied by a corresponding age-related increase in the state retirement pensioners' personal tax allowance of £12,570, this increase will mean that pensioners will bear the full cost of a 2p in the £1 rise in income tax. This will draw an increasing number of pensioners through fiscal drag into the tax net, whereas those in work with earnings up to £50270 will have the 2p income tax increase fully offset by an equivalent cut from 8% to 6% in their NI contributions. This hardly seems to be fair when what we are seeing here (as we have seen with the government restricting eligibility

to the Winter Fuel Payment) is a cynical attempt to shift the burden of paying for the Government's increasing debt and failure to rein in public expenditure from those in work on to the narrow shoulders of pensioners who are least able to protect themselves.

Moreover, should this go ahead in the Autumn Budget Statement on 26th November, then such an increase in personal taxation will almost wipe out next April's annual pension 4.7% uprating increase, assuming the Government does not, as the Conservative Government did before them in 2022, cynically take the opportunity to temporarily suspend the triple lock for next year's uprating whilst promising to restore it by the end of this Parliament in 2029.

Secondly, by reducing NI from 8% to 6%, with not far to go to achieving 0%, this again seems to be a return to the last Conservative government's playbook of planning to abolish NI altogether in favour of increasing personal taxation, thereby breaking the insurance principle on which entitlement to the state retirement pension is based in opening the door to means-testing future state pension provision.

All of this runs counter to the Labour Party's manifesto election commitments in 2024 and whilst the time remaining to the Autumn Budget of 26th November is now very short I would be very grateful to receive your assurance that you will do all that you can to bring these concerns to the attention of the Government and the Chancellor of the Exchequer in particular, to influence Government policy thinking away from hitting pensioners again, this time with what appears to be a clear and certain intention to mount a tax raid on pensions and pensioners as a group.

Bristol, Bath and West Group Membership and Finance Report

All 1800+ members of the Bristol, Bath and West Group are now included in the regular newsletters which the 'committee' produce and sent out by CSPA HQ. Some, I am aware, are not receiving newsletters, and one or two received more than one! If you can let me (Colin Fender) know I will inform HQ and I have been told confidently - it will be sorted.

The aim of the wider BBW group is to try and ensure that the Democratic process, on which the Alliance is shaped, can apply even to those members physically very distant from the 'local Bristol hub'. The committee recognise that Bristol cannot be said to be at the centre of this grouping, but we have more people who are retiring from still active major Government offices in the Bristol and Bath area. The next issue of the 'Pensioner' magazine will include the report from the AGM held in October.

Our group finances remain in good order with the current bank balance standing at £2374.85 after all outgoings for the AGM and the last group meeting held in September.

Colin Fender – Hon Membership Secretary and Treasurer

Final note

Our next meeting will be held at the Toby Carvery (Almondsbury), Woodlands Lane, Bradley Stoke, Bristol, BS32 4QB on Thursday, 11th December commencing at 11am. Your committee hopes you can join us then for Christmas Lunch or virtually by Microsoft Teams. Please let Colin (colinfender@btinternet.com) or myself (martin@mjlrobertson.org.uk) know if you plan attend or want to join us by MS Teams.