



Bedford & District Group Newsletter March 2026

I hope you are all well. I am going to try to compose this Newsletter without resorting to the relentless topics that have smothered the national newspapers since Christmas.

John will do the serious stuff when he returns from his Spring break, but I am going for stories that catch my eye, are informative, useful, quirky, and hopefully amuse you.

Romy Neeves- editor

John Abington – chair

I am devoting this report to an important possible change in the legal status of the CSPA. At the 2025 National Annual General Meeting the Executive Council (EC) introduced a motion which was concerned with changing the status of the CSPA from an Unincorporated Organisation, into a Company Limited by Guarantee or a Charitable Incorporated Organisation. This would be a fundamental change in the legal status and organisation of the CSPA, and an undertaking was given to consult with the CSPA membership before this EC. There will be a survey questionnaire in the Spring Edition of *The Pensioner*, and I would urge as many members as possible to complete this survey and make their view known to the EC. Bedford and District Group will be sending two delegates to a meeting in London on 21st of April, and if you have strong views in favour or against the proposed change that you would like to have presented to the meeting, then please send them to me, and I will make sure they are heard. My contact details are given at the end of this Newsletter. Please include your name and CSPA membership number in any response.

Otherwise, may I reiterate my request that you participate in the survey when you receive the Spring edition of *The Pensioner*, which will set out the pros and cons of the change. Based on the analysis of the replies to the survey received from CSPA members, a motion will be put to the 2026 National AGM to be voted upon to change the legal status or not of the CSPA.

Bedford and District AGM

This is to give you notice that the Annual General Meeting of the CSPA Bedford and District Group will be held at the North End Social Club, Roff Avenue, Bedford on 13th March 2026, commencing at 1.30 pm. Within the past year, members of the CSPA former group areas of Cambridge and Peterborough have been incorporated into the Bedford Group and are welcome to attend. In practice because of the distance from Bedford the majority will not be able to do so, a restriction that also applies to many of our group members who live to the south and west of Bedford. However, if any member wishes to propose motions for debate at the above AGM, and which they would like to be given due consideration to be proposed for debate at the 2026 CSPA National AGM, then please send them to me. Contact details are at the end of this Newsletter.

Broadcasting – The TV licence fee is to increase from £174.50 to £180 per year from 1st April, the Department for Culture, Media and Sport has said. The increase in the fee, which is the main method of funding for the BBC, could give the corporation “stable financial

footing to deliver for audience and support the wider creative industries" and is in line with inflation, a spokesman for the Government said.

I know it's a pain, but I personally think our BBC is without comparison in the world and well worth the fee, particularly since we get all the radio channels as well, what would we do without the shipping forecast?

Television – talking about value for money, if any of you enjoyed watching *The Detectorists*, you should seek out a new Mackenzie Crook comedy series currently on BBC2 called *Small Prophets*. It has a similar oddball charm and interest in folklore. I watched the first programme and loved it so much, watched a further 2 episodes. Six in all and I shall certainly watch them again. So good.

Government – Newly retired civil servants are struggling to pay their bills after a "fiasco" which stopped them receiving their monthly pension payments. Around 8,500 former government workers have spent several months without any money due to "unacceptable" failures in working through a case backlog. Major problems emerged after private contractor Capita took over the running of the public sector pensions scheme in early December. The Government is now scrambling to provide interest-free hardship loans of up to £10,000 to those waiting for their payments to begin. A Cabinet Office spokesperson said "The service levels following the move to Capita have been unacceptable." A spokesperson for Capita said "Capita expects to restore service levels for the most urgent cases by the end of February, with full recovery of the remaining cases to follow" Didn't this happen the last time Capita was in charge?

Consumer – Smart meter customers facing delays or failed installations could receive £40 compensation from next month, the energy regulator has said. Ofgem said that tougher smart meter rules will come into force from February. Households with automatically receive

£40 when they have to wait more than six weeks for a smart meter appointment.

They will also get the compensation if an appointment fails due to a fault within the supplier's control, or when a supplier does not provide a solution for a reported issue within five working days. I thought this scheme was already in operation since I got a rebate when the Ofgem operative arrived a day earlier than the appointment made.

Environment – Britain's greenhouse gas emissions fell by 3 per cent in 2024, the latest government figures show. Climate-warming pollution was also 3 per cent below the baseline year of 1990, even as the economy grew 80 per cent over that time.

The biggest fall in emissions was from electricity supplies, as a result of higher electricity imports, more generation from renewables and the closure of the UK's last coal-fired power station, at Ratcliffe-on-Soar in Nottinghamshire.

Domestic transport was the largest contributor to pollution, account for nearly a third (30 per cent) of emissions. Pollution from buildings and use of products also rose by 4 per cent due to high gas use, probably driven by an easing of energy cost pressures.

The Minister for climate Katie White, said "The science is clear, from record summer heatwaves to frequent flooding, climate change is being felt by families, businesses and communities across the UK.

We are doubling down because positive climate action brings energy security, good jobs and a better future for children."

The kindness of strangers!

A farmer is facing potential prosecution for failing to clear a 200-tonne fly-tip on his land.

The elderly farmer, who asks to remain anonymous, is legally responsible for clearing the debris dumped on his property in Hertfordshire last summer. He was looking at an estimated bill of between £40,000 and £50,000 to removed it before an online fundraiser raised more than £57,000.

The Environment Agency said although it tries to ensure those who dump the waste pay for removal, it becomes the landowner's responsibility if that is not possible.

Gardening – I thought we might have a bit about gardening, not something we've had before, and I think a few of us would appreciate some tips. According to Vogue magazine, cabbages are trending, replacing kales and cauliflowers in the public's affection – and with good reason. Flavoursome cabbages are versatile and can be harvested all year round and are very heavy-yielding. They are also rich in vitamins, minerals, fibre and other health-giving constituents. Mild-flavoured sweetheart cabbages have a crisp texture, and make fine summer vegetables, whether cooked or grated in salads.

There are many varieties of these pointy cabbages, including "Caraflex", "Regency" and "Summer Jewel". They should be sown from February to mature in late June. They hold in condition for a week or two, but after that they split and spoil. However, like all cabbages, when cut, clingfilmed and put in the fridge salad compartment, they will last for several weeks.

As recommended by Gardeners' Question Time, they can all be started off on sunny windowsills and then transferred to a cold frame.

Once the summer cabbages are on their way, you can sow autumn crops in March for red cabbages and April for green and white ones.

Still on the subject of gardening, and as part of the Royal Horticultural Society's "daffodil's diaries" scheme, gardeners could help bring a rare pink daffodil back into cultivation.

A particular focus will be on Mrs RO Backhouse daffodils – a bloom with a solid coral pink trumpet and ivory flowers thought to have been bred by the hybridist Sara Backhouse. Any finds can be donated to Scamps Daffodils, which hopes to bring the flower back into widespread cultivation.

Nature – A road in Somerset has closed for six weeks to allow toads, frogs and newts to cross to their breeding grounds.

The Charlcombe Toad Rescue Group is hoping to help more than 3,000 amphibians reach their breeding lake. Charlcombe Lane, near Bath has shut until 29th March as volunteers go out on patrol each night at dusk to help the little amphibians on their journey. Collectively they will spend more than 600 hours walking up and down the road. They are carefully picked up and taken safely back in buckets to drop-off points.

Before the road closure the casualty rate was 62 per cent while in 2025 it was 3 per cent. A changing climate is affecting amphibians, with milder winters leading to them waking up from hibernation more frequently.

Bedford once had a rare amphibian, so called Midwife Toads, living in the grounds of The Moat House, behind the old convent in Bromham Road. I'm not sure what happened to them when the site was developed.

Devon – Alien-looking sea slugs rarely found in UK waters have been discovered by a group that studies rock pools in Plymouth. The depilatory sea hare is more usually spotted in the Mediterranean but was discovered at Mount Batten Beach in the Devon city by the Rock Pool Project.

Warming waters may have meant that the species feels "more at home on our shores", the Marine Biological Association said. The project leader said the creatures were "alien-like".

Olympics (fake news?)

Japan is lobbying for snowball fighting to become a sport at the next Winter Olympics.

Sobetsu, a town on Japan's northern Hokkaido Island, hosts a snowball competition each year, known as the Yukigassen.

This year's competition featured more than 1,000 helmeted participants. A team from northern Hokkaido came top out of 118. Players use perfectly

spherical snowballs shaped by a machine in three-minute fights.

Yuji Ano competition president said "our ancestors were surely doing the same thing. It's the oldest winter sport on human history."

And more History – A trove of ancient objects, some of which may date back at least 40,000 years, has been unearthed during excavating works for the HS2 train line.

About 1,000 archaeologists have been involved in 60 digs along the route between London and Birmingham since 2018, with some 450,000 treasures being discovered.

The "unprecedented" number of items stored across 7,300 boxes in a Yorkshire warehouse, will help provide new insights into Britain's past, the Centre for British Archaeology said.

Highlights of the collection were shown to the BBC, including a 19th century set of gold dentures and a Palaeolithic hand axe found in Northamptonshire, thought to have been made by Neanderthals more than 40,000 years ago.

Mementoes of the Roman occupation include a gladiator tag, the heads of statues and a 12th-century pendant showing golden lions.

A spokesperson of the Council for British Archaeology, said, the number of objects was "extraordinary". They added "it is the length of the scheme and the landscape that HS2 passes through that makes the collection of sites and material so interesting. The research potential is remarkable.

A spokesman for HS2 told the BBC that under English property law, the items legally belong to the government or landowners.

"Landowners may wish to retain objects, in which case they will be returned", they said.

The archive manager for HS2 has encouraged landowners to donate items to allow others to enjoy them.

Archaeologists have said that their work is largely complete, despite HS2 not being due to open until after 2033.

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