



Bedford & District Group Newsletter September 2026

"A week is a long time in politics", a saying attributed to Harold Wilson in 1964! We've had three months since my last newsletter and without postponing the summer break, also known in the trade as "the silly season" we have managed to inherit a new Prime Minister, number seven in 10 years, one Andy Burnham, former mayor of Manchester, and without a drop of blood being spilled. I wonder if we weren't in the throes of the hottest summer in history, we would have made more fuss about the fact that there was no general election!

Romy Neeves
Editor

Chair Report

There have been a few changes since our June newsletter. The country has a new Prime Minister (as already detailed above) and the CSPA has a new General Secretary. Sally Tsoukaris retired at the end of July at the end of her contract. On behalf of all our group members I'd like to thank Sally for her hard work over the past three years representing us all in our negotiations with the powers that be. I'm sure we'll wish her well in her ongoing career and life. The new CSPA General Secretary is Josie Irwin. Josie comes to the CSPA from UNISON where she oversaw the Equalities Unit and her responsibilities also involved looking after the interests of 170,000 retired members, so handling some 32,000 CSPA members shouldn't be a problem.

The National AGM takes place at Chesford Grange Hotel near Kenilworth again on

the 7th and 8th of October. Regrettably, the numbers who may attend from each group are again restricted to two, a Delegate and a Sponsored Representative. Our Bedford group has had four motions for debate at the AGM approved, one to make an improvement to the CSPA rules, once relating to the predicted chaos following upon Capita again being awarded the administration of our civil service pensions, one with regard to the delays in the progress of implementation of the McCloud remedy relating to pensions, and the fourth concerned with the future of the triple lock uprating of state pensions. The last one is important, because it seems likely that triple lock will become an unsustainable burden on public finances before long and will either be amended or abolished. The CSPA **must** become involved in the planning of what should replace it. Your views on this would be welcomed, and I will pass them on to the CSPA Executive.

After the long hot summer, the weather has finally cooled down again. As I look out of my window, the lawns resemble those that I used to see in Africa at the end of the seven-month dry season. It is to be hoped that we now don't get forty days and forty nights of rain in the autumn.

John Abington
Chair and Membership Secretary

Contribution from Peterborough Group

Fran Hunter wishes to promote two local organisations that (1) provide information on local help and support and (2) provide volunteering opportunities and information on local charitable events.

The first How are you Peterborough www.haypeterbrough.co.uk includes information and contact details for local activities from yoga to singing, sports groups to arts clubs and more, plus supportive local services on a massive variety of topics. And secondly, check out PCVS (Peterborough Council for Voluntary Services) www.pcvs.co.uk which supports and promotes local charities and voluntary groups. The Volunteering page and the "What's Going on Members Events Page. PCVS have a matching service for volunteers and organisations. It promotes local events their members put on through publicity. You'll find opportunities to learn, fun days, friendship club, sports and exercise for all ages and more.

Fran Hunter

Science

AI scans could give a new insight on dementia – and diagnose it earlier

Dementia could be identified earlier, after AI-powered brain scans provided fresh insights into how the debilitating condition develops. The scans have shown for the first time how patterns of neuro-degeneration in specific brain regions relate to changes in cognitive function as people grow older. Moving beyond a single measure of "brain age" represents an "important advance" for neuro science and could lead to better treatments for dementia patients, according to the US team behind the research. AI was used to generate detailed maps that highlight differences in how distinct parts of the brain age, with magnetic resonance imaging (MRI) from nearly 15,000 cognitive healthy people provided to train a deep-learning AI model. The data provided a baseline against which the model could measure local brain age. When the AI model was then used to analyse MRI images from people with mild cognitive impairment and Alzheimer's disease, it revealed

"distinct" patterns of accelerated aging in brain regions known to be affected early in neurodegeneration. There are estimated to be 982,000 people with dementia in the UK, but more than a third of people with the condition do not have a diagnosis. The number is expected to rise to 1.4 million by 2040.

Society

Home nursing unable to keep up with demand

The number of patients getting care at home from community health nursing services in England has not changed in a decade, despite referrals rising by half in the same period, according to analysis. Patients are also being seen for shorter periods of time in research said to show the pressure faced by community nursing care services. As this kind of care includes palliative care for terminally ill people and those close to death, a University of Hull doctor behind the research said the findings support Prime Minister Andy Burnham's comments that end-of-life care must be resolved first, before any assisted dying service could be considered in law. Professor Fliss Murtagh, director of the University of Hull, and her team analysed national district and community nursing data. Their paper was published in the Journal of Clinical Nursing.

Opinion

One small step for scientists

This little snippet was found by the editor on the Letters Page of The I paper. "Experts at East Anglia University and Norwich Hospital have found that walking up stairs is beneficial for your health". Instead of the study they could have asked me or anyone else as it's blooming obvious. Louise Cave, reader, East Sussex.

Nature

RHS may move plants up north to protect them from heat

The Royal Horticultural Society (RHS) may move plants up north to survive the extreme heat. Gardeners plan to duplicate plants from the RHS flag-ship garden at Wisley, Surrey, to create an "insurance" collection of rare species in northern England. *The longest dry streak*

*was recorded at Wisley where 62 consecutive dry days were observed between 17th June and 19th August. Concerned by soaring summer temperatures reaching up to 36 degrees C, gardeners at Wisley have taken cuttings from its prized hydrangea collections. They will establish new stocks at RHS Garden Bridgewater in Greater Manchester, where conditions are expected to stay cooler and wetter, giving the crops a better chance to thrive. But staff are still reviewing whether there are shadier spots at Wisley that could be a new home for the hydrangeas. A conservation adviser at Plant Heritage said duplicating entire flower collections was "a new concept". As the climate changes gardeners "will have to be more selective about where they plant hydrangeas" the chief horticulturist told The Times. *Coincidentally, in Manchester, No10 North is open for business, marking a new era of power flowing out of Whitehall and into every postcode.**

Environment

How many data centres have been built in the UK this century? 450. How many inshore wind farms have been built in the UK this century? Over a thousand. How many miles of new motorway have been built this century? Over a hundred. How many new reservoirs have been built in the UK in the same period? None, Nada, Zilch. In fact, not a single reservoir – vital for the prevention of water shortages and the management of river flows – has been built in the UK since 1992. Meanwhile, since 2000, approximately 20 new large dams or reservoirs have been built in Germany, and in France, where there are more than 100 water storage projects under construction. This litany of comparative statistics is being used in case anyone is wondering why millions of households in the UK have hosepipe bans in force. The managements of one of the nation's most precious assets has simply not been a priority for more than three decades, which roughly coincides with the time that our water supply has been privatised, and the requirement to pay dividends to shareholders took precedence over providing a reliable source of water.

In March last year, Clive Lewis, the Labour MP for Norwich South and a vigorous campaigner against water privatisation, told Parliament: "In the 35 years before privatisation almost 100 reservoirs were built. In the 35 years since privatisation, not one major English reservoir has been built." Today, ten of our water companies have hosepipe bans in force. But we haven't suddenly run out of water: we lack the infrastructure needed to capture, store, transport and conserve it. Clearly, heatwaves have exacerbated the problem, but it's not as if climate change has suddenly come upon us. What has caused the current emergency is more than 30 years of neglect and underinvestment. We are responsible people, and research shows 66 per cent of the population support restrictions to conserve water. But increasingly we feel that we are paying the bill, while the water companies are running off with the profits. So, we won't water the garden or fill the paddling pool. We take our share of the responsibility because a hosepipe ban subtly suggests the problem lies with us. But the problem is not with the homeowner with a garden hose. It lies with the companies who have plundered our national assets for private gain. And every dead tree or plant should remind us of that.

It continues...

Increasing water bills is galling

It is enough to make your blood boil. Five major water firms have been given the green light to increase bills by an additional £3.4bn between them, while also losing more than one billion litres of water a day to leaks. Water companies will argue that this is the exact investment needed to safeguard ourselves against future extreme weather. But these price rises, which come on top of previous hikes agreed in 2024 – are more than galling when we know how much money has been siphoned out by investors over the years. Our new Prime Minister, Andy Burnham, said recently that "customers cannot be treated as a blank cheque", and it remains to be seen what his government will do to challenge firms passing costs to households.

That is not to say the problems and the need for improvements are not real. Around 165,000 people in Hampshire are at risk of running out of water if action is not taken to shore up their water supply – a stark warning of how close parts of the country are to widespread shortages. Keeping the taps flowing will come at a price. Continuing to take water from the River Test when it reaches such low levels will be devastating for the ecosystem in this chalk stream. Of course, there are solutions out there. Water companies are building nine new reservoirs, the first in more than 30 years. It has also been heartening to see photos of nature restoration projects, both big and small, that have helped keep water on our land during this drought. The solutions are there. Perhaps the events of this summer will spur some into action.

Cheese waste to be converted into biofuel

Scottish researchers have teamed up with an agricultural company to explore new ways of turning a cheese by-product into fuel. Researchers at Heriot-Watt University worked with Take Root Bio to turn salty whey – a high-volume by-product from cheese production – into usable fuel, bioethanol. A dairy producer can generate tens of thousands of litres every week, creating both environmental and economic pressures. The researchers were interested in what happens when you stop looking at something as waste and start asking what else it could become. They said that if we can help turn something that costs money to manage into something with real value, that's a positive outcome for dairy producers and the environment.

Ecology

Ospreys are recovering in Britain thanks to "pioneering pairs" that prefer to nest away from the main population, research reveals. They could be the key to increasing the spread of the raptors which became extinct in the British Isles in 1916 before recolonising in 1954, say conservationists. Researchers looked at a rare long-term data set covering 54 years of recolonisation of ospreys in northern Scotland.

Romy Neeves, Editor and Secretary

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