Beacon newsletter – autumn 2026

In case you missed it...

Security

Beacon was offline for a short period recently, following the discovery of a security vulnerability affecting PHP.

Throughout this year we have focussed on Beacon security and stability, making sure that everything behind the scenes was fully updated. So, we were in a good position to be able to apply the update as soon as it was ready.

As AI continues to develop, it's likely that another, previously unknown, vulnerability is discovered in commonly used code or components. We will always take the action needed to protect your data and in extreme circumstances, as in this situation, that may mean taking Beacon offline.

Keep contact details updated

Emails about Beacon are always sent to each Beacon site administrator, so it's vital that these details are kept updated. Changing your details within the committee portal is very important but the Beacom team does not have access to the Trust's database, so please let us know any updates to your Beacon site admin's details. The process for updating your Beacon admin is outlined in the user guide here.

Disaster recovery for your u3a

We continually take backups of Beacon. These protect your data in the event of system failure and are not accessible by the Beacon team. We can't provide these to u3as if Beacon is taken offline or if one of your users accidentally deletes records.

Most u3as download their data regularly. But how often? Who does it? How is it secured? These, and other questions, suddenly became more significant for many during the PHP incident.

We would like to pull together a resource to help u3as put together their own plans for how to cope in the event of a Beacon emergency. Are you willing to share what you do? Where and how you store downloaded data? Tips on security

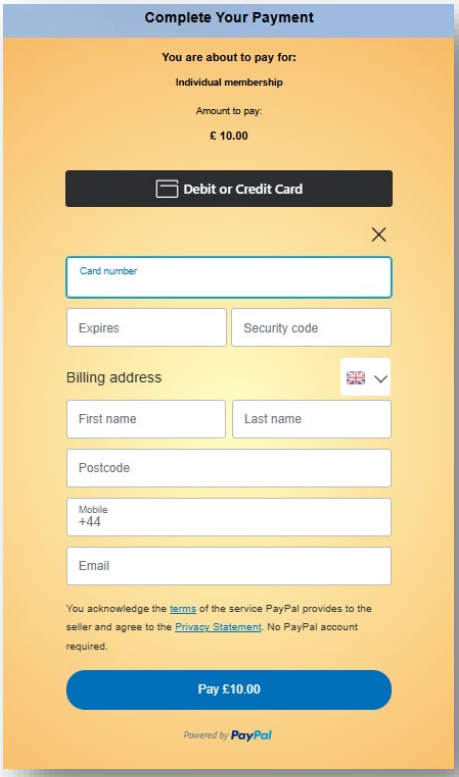
or how you find the balance between that and having enough people with access and anything else that you have in your plan.

If you have any information that you think might be useful to others, please send it to info@beacon.u3a.org.uk by the end of November 2026.

PayPal integration

Please note: if your u3a does not use PayPal for online joining and/or renewals, this change does not apply to you and you do not need to take any action.

If you have yet to complete the move, please refer to the emails previously sent and the support resources. It's not a difficult process – just a little fiddly – and the new integration works instantly.



We expect that the old integration will stop working by January 2027, but it could be sooner. If you have any questions or problems, please contact info@beacon.u3a.org.uk

Cloudflare timeout

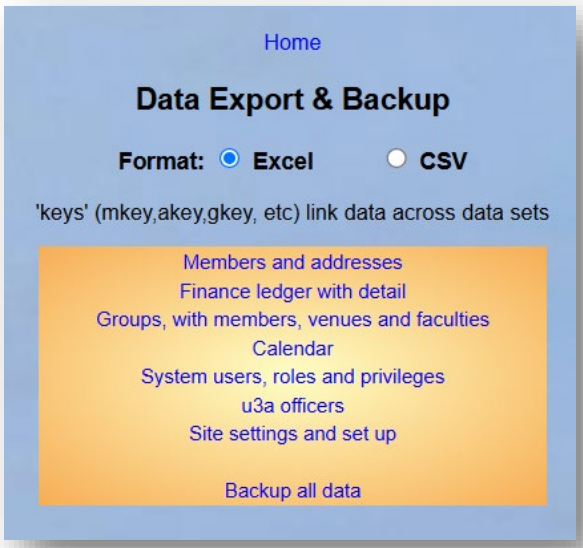
If your u3a is particularly large or was one of the earlier Beacon users, you may have experienced a Cloudflare timeout when using the *Backup all data* option in *Data Export & Backup*. This currently affects only a handful of u3as but, over time, the numbers would rise.

To resolve this problem, the process of creating the downloadable file has been completely re-engineered and is due for release. However, there may be a delay due to the need to implement other developments first, which include coding changes used in the new process.

In the meantime, if you are affected, there are two ways to work around it and you are still able to get all of your data downloaded.

a) Try a quieter time. The internet generally is busier once the USA is up and about, so Cloudflare is also more in demand then. As a result, the earlier in the day, the better. If you're a night-owl, 1am – 6am is the really quiet time! But u3as have managed to get the download by doing it at 9:30 am instead of late afternoon.

b) Individual downloads. The *Backup all data* option simply provides everything in one workbook. But you can download each file individually instead. Many u3as only take weekly backups of the first two downloads, as member details and finance may change while *Site settings*, *u3a officers* etc will normally be fine on a monthly download cycle.



Training and support

All training sessions are advertised on the Beacon website, where people can self-register. These Zoom courses are very popular and we generally run them each month, with new dates added regularly.

We're gradually developing more sessions, that are shorter and task-focussed. But there are also now two courses for group leaders as well as the other key roles. Please share this link with all of your system users: https://beacon.u3a.org.uk/training/

Volunteers

We are keen to hear from experienced trainers, from any walk of life, who would like to help deliver Zoom training. Beacon knowledge can be learned, so it would be great if you would share this with all of your u3a members, as there will be many retired trainers or teachers with these skills who may be interested.

Take a look at the Trust's website for more information, and if there's nothing listed that is of specific interest, please still reach out to the Volunteering team

Emails being blocked or bounced?

We're seeing increasing non-delivery of Beacon emails with the error *Bounce 550.5.7.515*. This is because Microsoft has tightened requirements on mass mailers sending to its servers. All of these emails must be fully authenticated or Microsoft will reject them with *Bounce 550.5.7.515*. As 30 million emails are sent through it each year, Beacon falls into this mass mailer category.

Blocked		25 Sep 2026 14:18
	550 5.7.515 Access denied, sending domain U3ABEACON.ORG.UK doesn't meet the required authentication level. The sender's domain in the 5322.From address doesn't meet the authentication requirements defined for the sender. To learn how to fix this see:	

Beacon's email is fully authenticated, so a Microsoft mail server receiving an email directly from the Beacon itself will be accepted as normal. However, when forwarding is used, the mail server will not receive the Beacon email directly but from the forwarding server instead. This causes the email to fail authentication, due to an "SPF alignment" error. This results in Microsoft bouncing it and a blocked error is recorded in Beacon's *Email delivery log*.

If your u3a uses forwarding through your custom email service or the forwarding service on your website, this must have SRS (Sender rewriting Scheme) enabled and active.

If a member automatically forwards Beacon emails from their personal email address, they should cancel the forwarding and add that original receiving mail account to their email app. Alternatively, they can update the email address in their Member record to be the one where they want to receive emails, with no forwarding then required.

Improving GDPR compliance



By collecting and storing data, in any format, u3as need to follow the legislation. This is where Beacon can help, keeping data safe and secure. But these are not the only GDPR requirements and a key one has been missing from Beacon.

We will be releasing an improvement soon that will make sure that you are able to collect data consents as part of the online joining or renewal process. It will also be available if someone updates their details through the members' portal.

We will provide lots of detail and support in advance of the release of this feature, which the developers are currently working on. Many of you will have questions, but please hold them at the moment. However, you may want to review your privacy policy so that it is up to date and published on your website, as this will be required to use the feature.

Now, next and later

Full information is published on the Releases page of the website, before developments are deployed. We also push changes to demo sites *at least a week before the production release* so you can see them there. This is a summary of the work that is in progress, at the moment. However, please note that these are our current plans and priorities may change.

Now

Production release planned: 1 December 2026

- Ledger downloads – added missing columns
- Associate transactions with multiple groups
- Block resign members
- Filter groups' list
- Replace StreetMap with Google Maps
- Fix: LASTRENEW token
- Fix: Send email to venue contact
- Fix: Cloudflare

Next

- Groups report
- Member number added to downloads
- Fix: Incorrect renewal fee when £0 joining fee set
- Fix: £0 online renewal fee
- Fix: PLASTFEE token
- GDPR improvements (see section above)

Later

- Grant account access to named user
- Statistics page improvements
- Gift Aid tweaks following feedback
- Groups' improvements

Useful links

Beacon Training

Find and register for Zoom-based training sessions (updated regularly):
https://beacon.u3a.org.uk/training/

Service announcements https://beacon.u3a.org.uk/service-announcements/

Release notes https://beacon.u3a.org.uk/releases

User/help guide: direct access or via the Help button in Beacon

Forum: https://forum.u3abeacon.org.uk/

Demo sites: https://demo.u3abeacon.org.uk/

Beacon login: https://u3abeacon.org.uk/

Helpdesk: support@beacon.u3a.org.uk