

# ANNUAL REPORT 2023

## Brian Platts, Chair Southwell u3a

The past 12 months seem to have flown by since my last report, but I'd like to think that Southwell u3a and its members have continued to fulfil our u3a mission statement of "Learn, Laugh, Live" throughout that time. Thanks then to all of you for taking part in and supporting our u3a activities during the past year.

We commenced with an Open Day on Southwell market square during national u3a week last September. This was both to celebrate 40 years of the u3a in the UK and to showcase our own u3a's many and varied activities to existing and potential new members. We did indeed gain quite a few new recruits, but footfall was not quite as good on that cool and cloudy September Sunday as it was at our similar event the previous summer. Thanks though to all our Group Leaders and musicians who took part in the day.

Recruitment has gone well in general over the past year. By the end of our membership year in March we had reached 783 members – only a few short of our record pre-Covid number of just under 800. Although there's always a dip after the end of the membership year, my hope is that we can now recruit even more new members and reach a new high over the next few months. Our Publicity and Recruitment & Retention groups are already looking at ways of spreading the word through social media, as well as by more traditional methods. A larger membership helps us to support more interest groups, more social activities and to achieve economies of scale, all of which are good for existing members. Please then do your bit by introducing your friends and neighbours to the u3a. Maybe we can soon do a feature in Newsline about our 800th member!

A new departure this year has been a programme of short courses and workshops on a wide variety of topics – everything from spinning wool and violin lessons to smartphones and home plumbing. The idea to run the programme came to me on a trip to Australia last year when I saw the large number of short courses being run by Canberra u3a on a visit to their office. Except for one or two small glitches, the programme has been very successful and well-attended. It was particularly gratifying to have members offer their expertise to act as course leaders and our thanks go to them all. We will soon be giving some thought as to whether we should repeat the programme again next year, maybe with similar subjects on different days and locations or new subjects that members would like to learn about. Please feel free to email me with suggestions for new topics or offers to act as a course leader for a particular subject.

We have an impressive range of over 70 interest groups in Southwell u3a and my thanks go to all the leaders of these groups for their efforts in organising their groups' activities. The only complaint that I ever hear is that some groups are a victim of their own success and that members are sometimes unable to join some of our more popular groups. If you are a leader of such a group, please do look at whether you can start a second group or at least keep a waiting list until you have vacancies or enough members on the list to make a second

group viable. New groups of any sort are always welcome and we will always try to support new group leaders and make their role as easy as possible.

Our programme of trips and social activities over the past year has been remarkably varied, including trips to Bletchley Park, Doddington Hall and a dairy farm near Melton Mowbray. Several were oversubscribed, as members seem keen to get back to sociable outings and events following the periods of isolation during the Covid pandemic. The programme has been ably organised by the Trips and Social committee, led by John Elkington. John feels it's time to stand down now though and to hand over to someone new to chair the committee. Any offers folks?

Our monthly meetings have also continued to be popular, with a remarkable range of subjects covered by our speakers over the past year, thanks to the programme put together by 'speaker seeker' Chris Bentley. To my mind at least, the meetings alone are worth the annual membership fee – not to mention the free tea and coffee! We can always fit in some more members though and so do come along and join us in the Leisure Centre for our first Tuesday of the month get togethers. Talking of tea and coffee, I was at one of our twice monthly coffee mornings at Southwell Garden Centre recently. They seem to be proving very popular amongst members who just fancy a sociable chat over a cup of coffee or tea. No need to book - just turn up at 10.30am on the second or fourth Thursdays of each month if you'd like to join in.

The state of our finances will be covered in our Treasurer Jan Clarke-Humphries' report, but I must say that we were very pleased to have been able to keep our membership fee at £20 for yet another year. Balancing the books is proving to be ever more of a challenge with inflation causing a marked increase in our overheads but the move to a much smaller office in the Minster Chambers has helped us to do so. You can be assured that Jan and the rest of the committee will continue to run our u3a as efficiently and cost effectively as possible.

Southwell u3a exists and functions due to the communal efforts of many people. There is a long list of people that I should thank for their contributions over this past year but I'm afraid there isn't space to name them all. I do wish though to thank all the members of the management committee for their hard work, commitment and support throughout the year and all those in non-committee roles who work behind the scenes, including webmaster Rik Ludlow, Anne Greenaway and the Newline team, Richmond Kingsbury and the rest of the membership team, technical wizard Andrew Hills and the refreshments and welcome teams, all of whom make the monthly meetings go so well.

Finally, I would like to give particular thanks to committee member John Elkington who will be stepping down from the management committee at the AGM. He has done an enormous amount for our u3a over the years, not just for the management committee but also as a Group Leader and Chair of the Trips and Social committee. I'm sure we'll still see him taking part in our u3a events and activities for many years to come though.

I hope that you will all remain fit and able to enjoy another year of fun, frolics and further education with Southwell u3a and I look forward to joining you in doing so.

