

ANNUAL REPORT 2024

Brian Platts, Chair Southwell u3a

This is my last annual report and I must start by saying that it has been (mostly!) a pleasure and certainly a privilege to serve as Chair of our u3a over the past 3 years. We seem to have come a remarkable way in that time. Back in August 2021, the Covid social distancing restrictions were still in force and monthly meetings and group meetings were still being held on Zoom. Even the musical and spoken word contributions for our Christmas party that year were on Zoom from individual members' homes but it somehow all worked. Post-pandemic, our u3a has steadily returned to its former strength and this past year has seen a continuation of that progress.

August saw us back on Southwell market with a stall to publicise the u3a to potential new members, followed by a whole wall of u3a photos and material in Southwell Library throughout September to let people know what we get up to. Recruitment went well with Rosie Barnes of Upton becoming our record 800th current member in October. On the strength of that, I was even invited onto Radio Nottingham to let a wider audience know all about the u3a. Membership has continued to increase, with a further new record of 845 current members by the end of our membership year in March.

Thanks to all of you then for spreading the word about our u3a to friends and neighbours and thanks also to our Publicity and Recruitment & Retention groups for coming up with successful initiatives. Most recently, we have been trying to increase our presence on Facebook and this seems to be working well for us. Please keep up the good work and don't forget that more members means more interest groups, more social activities and the ability to maintain low membership fees.

We had meetings at Southwell Baptist Church in October and March for all those new recruits and thanks go to Marjorie Bramhill for organising the meetings. It was great to see the enthusiasm of our new members, as we really need such individuals to start new interest groups, re-invigorate existing groups and to put themselves forward to join our various committees. Do get in touch all you new members, if that sounds like you!

Our interest groups remain our greatest strength and so a particular thank you to all of our Group Leaders for the time and effort you've put into running your groups. We have continued to see a healthy number of new groups set up over the year, most recently an indoor Kurling (with a K!) group. Jean Hogg arranged 2 thank-you lunches for our Group Leaders during the year and it was good to hear their constructive comments and feedback. I will hopefully be taking over from Jean as Groups Co-ordinator following the AGM in August and I look forward to even more contact with our GLs after that time.

We have also been running another programme of short courses and workshops during 2024. These have provided something for members who don't want to commit to further long term group membership and for us to cover topics that perhaps don't lend

themselves to regular groups. Where else could you attend free sessions on everything from wine tasting, family history and improving your driving skills to basic first aid and bowls – toilet bowls in the plumbing course and flat green in Farnsfield!

Miriam Tate and her Trips and Social Events committee have put together a very impressive programme of events and activities over the past 12 months. These have ranged from our usual well-loved murder mystery at Southwell Library and a Lunch and Food Quiz at the Saracen's Head to most recently a sell-out afternoon tea in Rolleston, with forthcoming trips to Sandringham Flower Show and Castle Howard. Many thanks to the team for all the hard work they have put into running these events.

Our speaker-seekers Chris Bentley and John Cook have continued to serve up some remarkable speakers for our monthly meetings – everything from Cheesemaking at Long Clawson to most recently the Confessions of a Country Vicar! Even speakers whose topics I thought might be a little “niche” have given fascinating talks that have kept our members entranced. We hope to further improve the overall visual experience in a few months' time with a new projector and a considerably larger screen.

None of the above can happen though without sound finances. Our Treasurer, Jan Clarke-Humphries, will be giving you a detailed breakdown of our financial situation in her separate report but safe to say that all is going well. Our influx of new members, limited capital expenditure and lower-than-expected inflation costs will allow us to keep our membership fee at £20 for yet another membership year from next March. I can only say again that this remains the best bargain in Southwell to my mind!

The u3a is a peer run and led organisation that depends entirely on the goodwill and efforts of all its members. There are too many people and not enough space for me to thank everyone who deserves a special mention. I would though like to thank all the members of the Management Committee for their support and commitment during the year, and all those in non-committee roles, such as the Webmaster Rik Ludlow, Membership Secretary Richmond Kingsbury, Anne Greenaway and the rest of the Newline Team, for all their work behind the scenes. Many thanks also to those of you helping at our monthly meetings, including the refreshments team, welcome team and membership team and our technical supremo Andrew Hills.

Well, it's over and out from me now as Chair of our u3a. At the AGM in August, I expect to be handing over to Jean Hogg as our new Chair for the coming year and I'm certain she'll do a great job. During the next year, it will be important to address the issue of succession planning for future Chairs and for other important roles. All easier said than done and – like everything else in the u3a – it will very much depend on members stepping up to give a hand. Please do then consider whether you might be able to help in any way. I'd like to think that I am leaving the Chair with our u3a in good shape and, that being so, it is down to the cumulative efforts and activities of all our members. Thanks again then to you all for everything you have done for Southwell u3a over this past year.

