

## **ANNUAL REPORT 2022**

### **Brian Platts, Chair Southwell u3a**



Well, what an eventful year it's been! When I became Chair at last year's Zoom AGM, I certainly had some trepidation with regards to the year ahead but I did at least feel confident that we would soon be moving into the sunlit uplands of a largely Covid-free world. How wrong I was. Our resumption of live meetings and our excellent Christmas party in the Leisure Centre proved to be a false dawn and we were soon forced back onto Zoom by an increase in Covid cases. So much for optimism!

Since Spring of this year though, we have seen Southwell u3a gradually getting to a new normality. We've resumed our live monthly meetings in the Leisure Centre and have had a succession of excellent speakers, thanks to "speaker seeker" Chris Bentley. Numbers attending the meetings have steadily increased, as members have regained motivation and confidence to do so. That said, as I write this piece, another surge in Covid cases is now denting that confidence again – hopefully only on a temporary basis.

The activities of our interest groups have also resumed, although again there is a new normal in many cases. These educational, wellbeing and social activities of our groups are the raison d'être of Southwell u3a. My thanks then go to all our Group Leaders and our Groups Coordinator, Pam Baisley, for their efforts in getting us up and running again.

The pandemic has also inevitably had an impact on membership numbers. Although we don't appear to have been as badly affected as many other u3as (I've even heard of one complete closure!), our numbers are down by around 10% from pre-pandemic levels. This is undoubtedly as a result of reduced group and social activities over the past 2 years, Covid and other health issues and members simply getting out of the u3a habit.

Getting back up to pre-pandemic numbers is therefore a priority for us, as high membership numbers help us to maintain the viability of existing groups and to start an even wider variety of new ones. Our Retention and Recruitment Group has been taking a lead on this over the past year and we are seeing a healthy number of new recruits. As part of this drive, we hope to further boost recruitment with an Open Day in Southwell market square on 18<sup>th</sup> September. I hope that all you Group Leaders will take a stall to showcase your activities, both to new and existing members alike. Recruitment though is something that all members can help with and so I ask you all to encourage any friends and neighbours to come along to our Open Day, our monthly meetings or "taster sessions" of interest group meetings, in the hope that we can turn them into new u3a members.

Boosting membership numbers has one other benefit and that is to help us keep annual subscription rates down. Southwell u3a has been deliberately run at a loss for several years, in order to run down a surplus from some years ago. This will clearly not be possible in future though and so the management committee has taken the proactive decision to close our existing office in the Minster Chambers from 1<sup>st</sup> November. The office has had very

limited usage, even in pre-pandemic days, and its closure should allow us to “balance the books” and avoid any increase in our subscription rate for the immediate future.

I have a long list of people that I should thank for all their efforts over this past year but I’m afraid there isn’t space to thank them all. Firstly though I would like to thank John Elkington and the Social Events and Trips committee for getting our social programme going again, including the sell-out Trent cruise that many of us recently enjoyed, Ann Powers for organising the holiday trip to Northumberland and Jane Zdanowski for putting our first toe into social media waters with our Facebook page and group. Thanks too to the considerable number of members in non-committee roles who have worked very hard during the year, including Anne Greenaway and the Newslite team, Richmond Kingsbury and the rest of the membership team, the refreshments team and all the others who make the monthly meetings go so well and last but not least our irrepressible Webmaster, Rik Ludlow, for chasing us all up and keeping our website lively and up-to-date.

Finally, I would like to thank Vice Chair Marjorie Bramhill, Secretary Nadina Lincoln, Treasurer Jan Clarke-Humphries and all the other members of our current management committee for their efforts and support over the past year. Particular thanks go to our retiring members, Pam Baisley and Chris Bentley, for their many years of service on the committee and I know they will both be continuing their other u3a activities.

You can be assured that all of us involved in the running of Southwell u3a will be doing our best to make your u3a even bigger and better over the next year. My thanks to you all for taking part with us along the way!