

Chair's Report (Sue Blackshaw) – 2026 AGM

We have experienced a heavily expanding membership year – the committee meeting five times kindly hosted by Susan Brett - enjoying time together and keeping our branch moving forward. So what have we done.

We felt remiss in not having a Safeguarding Policy, **Susan Brett** was able to help develop this and agreed to be our Safeguarding Officer; the policy document was sent out to Group Leaders and is also on the website.

We have been able to support several new groups this year, expanding our interests in new and exciting ways; Janet will detail further in her report. Our monthly speaker meetings normally run like clockwork with thanks to **Gill Gelder** for being able to book varied and interesting talks – some more light hearted than others, but all learning subjects; Gill is always open to recommendation from members and would also appreciate feedback from the talks.

Our summer event here in August served to showcase our groups – thank you to all who were able to participate and to the catering staff Jackie, Suzanne, Terry and others. Many thanks to all who were able to make and donate cakes – it really made a difference. Otherwise, we rely heavily on **Jackie and Suzanne** to organise the refreshments each month – they do a great job and take a worry away

A big thank you to **Penny Pedley** who continues to keep our finances in order. We still offer small equipment grants to groups and Mah-jong & Art group were able to benefit this year. Also thanks to **Susan Brett** for so ably managing the membership system, especially renewals which is no mean task now our numbers have doubled.

Our communication with members relies very much on email. Our mailing system BEACON is very secure and safe for groups to use; a short training session is offered to any group leader able to move over to this system. Always good for everyone to check junk mail and there is more to come on the safety of systems after our AGM, from *Oxfordshire Age UK*. But huge thanks to **Andy Pedley** for continuing at the helm of our IT systems – both the website, which is now the main reference place for all information, and also his help with other elements, and BEACON training. For those not on an electronic mailing system it remains time consuming to get regular information out but can be managed with good will and extra care. Attendance at speaker meetings is then essential - everything is well forward planned; otherwise telephones/mobiles still work! **Pat Holding** has been drawing us into the world of social media, in that she will put each month's speaker meeting onto local Facebook a few days beforehand – thank you Pat and for covering the meeting minutes again this year. Other marketing included the local charity Christmas Tree events where we display our u3a tree and leave printed information to be taken away – with thanks to Andy for looking after St Marys, Kidlington as I did the Woodstock Methodist Church.

We continue with placing our posters onto local noticeboards and have very much welcomed **Sian Wallworth** our Press Secretary this year and she has been able to continue the submission of monthly articles into seven local residential magazines- thank you Sian.

We decided to keep the ability to use an enquiry phone number with thanks to Alan for donating a smart phone this year. We are only able to check up on messages now and again – it is an information line – potentially for new interest. Andy would like more blogs i.e. short write-ups about a current activity for the website and anyone willing to assist with this would be most welcome. We stress that all updated information is on the website and urge all group leaders to look at their sections regularly and so keep the information and photos timely.

We are experimenting with permanent electronic storage of documents; it would be good to have some of the originating information of the branch safely away 'on a cloud'. Sorry **David** we've not yet got around to tackling the two boxes you are still storing. Any historical records enthusiast who would like to help out with this – do please offer. Meanwhile thanks to David for organising the room-setup at our speaker meeting.

So the AGM is a time to reflect on the past year and what I have said mostly does this, but we do have to look to the future organisation and having 'younger' folk come forward to help. We are a **membership organisation run by its members.**

You will have read that several of us come to the end of a three year term – which according to our Constitution makes us ineligible to re-stand in the same post. As you listen to the remaining reports – do think about whether you could help in the year to come. We are offering a short-term fix in order to continue to be viable, as all/most committee members are willing to remain in post. We have the offer of one new committee member BUT we do need one/two more willing to come in and take on or shadow an admin job for the branch.

Myself and Vice Chair **Alan Campion, and the committee** have spent much time recently considering the Constitution and thinking about what to recommend for the future. We do need **the umbrella organisation – the u3a Trust** which offers good guidance, insurance and very many learning seminars by Zoom, therefore we have to behave and have a Constitution which the Trust has to confirm. We all understand the reasons why the term of office is limited; and each committee post **does** have to be re-elected each year.

We also appreciate the link to the u3a Thames Valley Network which offers a zoom speaker once a month and this is promoted to you in the monthly newsletter.

The national u3a residential festival is at York in July and this has been promoted in our newsletter and through the national magazine which many of us take. York is a good distance away from us and we are so spoilt in this area for much to fill our 'spare' time. Mostly I know we enjoy our own interest groups, which often become a friendship group – and these are central to the ethos of the u3a. I thank **Janet Frost** for continuing as Groups Co-ordinator this past year but she has made murmurings of wishing to hand over her role if someone would step forward to shadow this year.

It remains for me to conclude this report by stating how much I have enjoyed my three years as Chairman. In an ideal world we would have folk leaping about to replace those due to retire but our world is sometimes far from ideal. We will be suggesting some work arounds if there is no offer of a new Chairman this afternoon.

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