

Chairman's Annual Report – 2021-22

1. Introduction

Welcome to my third and last Chairman's Annual Report covering the period from November 2021 to October 2022. Like last year, this has been an "interesting" and often challenging year for the management committee, however, with the trials of Covid abating, I am delighted that all our normal face to face activities have returned. In fact, so much so, our u3a has "returned" with even more vigour resulting in increased membership and even more interest groups. As they say, "always good to end on a high"! I am also delighted to be able to hand over the chairmanship of our u3a with such confidence in its future.

2. Highlights of the Past Year

- During the earlier part of the year, whilst we were still experiencing some restrictions and quite rightly, members continued to be wary of face-to-face meeting, we maintained a high level of electronic communication and support. The web site structure and information formats were significantly improved to offer us a clearer one-stop "shop" for everything Petersfield u3a. Connect improved its look and appeal to give us vital weekly up to date events and news. Our data protected platform, Beacon, continued to send every email enabled member important updates and News & Views, our quarterly electronic magazine continued to give us varied and interesting articles about members and our u3a as well as catch-up news roundup.

All of this has required a great deal of work and our thanks go to John Donlan, Peter Lake, Les Jarman, Chris Bird, Andy Borthwick and the whole Publication Team.

- To support the vital work of the Group Conveners in keeping their interest groups going through lock downs, the management committee continued financial support for Zoom (and the like) licences. And now that we can meet face-to-face, this financial support is available to groups and Open Meetings to cover venue and speaker costs until 31st August 2023. Whilst this support has come from our reserves, it has the potential to benefit every member and the results are the high level of activity and vibrancy in our u3a we see today. Our thanks to all the interest Group Conveners and those members organising the four Open Meetings each month.
- A major success for the year is the continued development of the Welcome Team. Originally set up to just "welcome" new members and especially those with no electronic communication means, the team also arranges regular coffee mornings at the Community Centre, now open to all members. These excellent social events have expanded to include web site instruction and IT help as well as promoting new interest groups to members and introductions to the management team. Members of the Welcome Team are also on hand at the Open Meetings to support new members to feel at home in our u3a.

We thank Marjorie Day, Sue Hampton, Angela Ray, Barbara Hague, Frances Ewing-Press, Kate Napier, Pamela Ritchie and Hilary Bonney.

- Right at the start of this year (6th October 2021) our whole u3a came together to stage another Open Day at St Peter's Church in the Square. The purpose was to promote our u3a, showcase our wealth of activities and very much announce that we are definitely "open" for business after the last dreadful 2 years. This was the second Open Day I had been involved with and I know every member would agree, this one was a resounding success. There are too many members and conveners to thank so I will just say well done to everyone; you certainly did our u3a proud. Thank you all.
- As members are aware, the major challenge the management committee faced in the year was that of attracting new volunteer committee members and trustees to the team and to the essential role of Chair as my successor. Through a concerted advertising and email campaign (some members would say too concerted) and with the support of Group Conveners and the Welcome Team identifying potential members, we have successfully welcomed Louise Fox and Marjorie Day as nominee committee members and trustees and Charles Price as nominee Chair and trustee (all subject to member vote in October). However, the search for volunteers to the management committee and the many other important roles within our u3a continues for on-going succession planning and development. The u3a is totally reliant on members offering their skills and interests for the benefit of their fellow members. Whatever your talents, however insignificant you may think they are, our u3a will always welcome you. Please come forward.
We thank Louise, Marjorie and Charles.
- Again, referencing volunteers, Liz Wright took on our public relations to promote our u3a through local media and to work with the teams producing the web site, News & Views and Connect. Liz also supports Lynn Battersby-Vogt (Speaker Secretary) to help promote monthly speakers. Joyce Borthwick has also developed a new team of members to provide the refreshments at the General Interest Open Meeting and the Projection Team gained a new member.
As ever, all members' thanks go to the many and thankfully increasing number of member volunteers who help keep our u3a active and vibrant.
- Members were advised last year of the management committee's intention to update our Constitution; this being long overdue to meet new Charity Commission rules as well as the latest u3a Trust model. Following much detailed work by our Secretary, Robina Whitehorn, we are delighted to nominate our new Constitution (which has been agreed by both the Charities Commission and the u3a Trust) for member adoption at this AGM. Our thanks to Robina for her vital diligence and detailed work on our behalf.
- New interest groups continue to be developed (see note 7).
- In the face of many u3as closing and the u3a Trust reporting a half million drop in overall membership throughout the UK, our membership continues to expand (see note 6).
- We held a Queen's Jubilee Celebration picnic on the Heath and also recognised 40 years of the u3a movement.
- Many members volunteered to support the Covid vaccination effort at the Festival Hall providing public marshalling, a friendly face and guidance. This was an amazing whole Town effort and our members' input was recognised by the Swan Medical Group with a generous donation to our funds.
Our thanks to all the volunteers and especially Les Jarman and Mietek Piatek who organised the u3a effort.
- We part sponsored the purchase of a defibrillator installed outside the Community Centre.

- The bar code registration system for the Open Meetings is now fully operational.
- I have already mentioned that I am standing down as Chairman at the end of this AGM, but also standing down is our President, Les Jarman, again after serving 3 years. I would like to record my personal thanks and those of the MC to Les for supporting and promoting the activity of our u3a as President over the last 3 years.

I am also pleased to confirm that the MC has asked Andy Borthwick to become President for the next 3 years and delighted that Andy has agreed. Andy is known to many members, being very active himself in many aspects of our u3a, I know he will be an ideal ambassador for us and successor to Les.

- And finally, we have launched a “Member of the Year” to showcase those members who have “gone the extra mile” for our u3a. Any member can nominate another member by explaining why, in their opinion, the member deserves to be nominated. If successful, we intend to run Member of the Year each year. Good luck to everyone.

3. Finance

- Financial year ended 31 August 2022

During the year to 31 August 2022 Petersfield u3a made a deficit of £3,735 compared with a surplus of £2,582 in the previous year. During 2021, the management committee decided to fund the external venue and speaker costs of our groups, in order to encourage them to meet again after the pandemic. The 2022 results reflect a full year of this policy, compared with only 3 months in 2021. In 2022 we therefore incurred £7,340 on group expenditure, with no associated income, compared with only £723 in 2021. Not only have we seen a resumption in groups meeting face-to-face, but also an increase in the number of our groups. I am very pleased to see that this policy has been successful, and we have agreed to continue with it for another year.

Despite the deficit our reserves at the financial year end stood at a healthy £31,211, made up entirely of cash balances in the bank. Our accounts therefore continue to show a strong picture moving forward.

4. Constitution

- Following announcing that the MC would be reviewing our Constitution at last year’s AGM, the management committee is now seeking the membership's adoption for the completed administrative upgrade to our Constitution at this AGM. The key changes made are;
 - General modernisation and adoption of prevailing charitable rules,
 - to allow future virtual AGMs if necessary (as a result of the last two years of lockdowns) and
 - timeframe alterations to management committee/ Trustee membership, tidying how long each may stand.
- It may be an appropriate to also remind members of Petersfield u3a's constitutional status as a registered charity. Each local u3a is a mutual aid organisation, operationally independent and registered individually with the Charity Commission, and at the same time is a member of the Third Age Trust, which requires adherence to the guiding principles of the u3a movement - which you can find on our website. The members of a u3a’s management committee take on the role of Trustees of the charity. They are

responsible for the governance and management of Petersfield u3a in accordance with the Charities Act 2011 and supporting Charity Commission guidance.

The Trustees must make sure that the u3a is carrying out the purpose for which it is set up, and that all resources and funds are used only in furthering its Charitable Objective, as outlined in the Constitution.

The Charitable Objective of Petersfield u3a is: *The advancement of education and, in particular, the education of older people and those who are retired from full time work by all means, including associated activities conducive to learning and personal development in Petersfield and its surrounding locality.*

- Trustees are collectively responsible for ensuring that a u3a fulfils its Charitable Objective and does not stray beyond it, and also for the safe custody of members' money. The whole business of governance may sometimes seem to be overly bureaucratic and daunting but need not be so; nowadays good governance and legislative compliance are an inherent part of the business and professional environment, albeit defined differently according to circumstance, and have provided the structure for many of us in our working lives. Quite simply, it boils down to careful and tidy organisation, good record keeping and transparency of operation. The skills required are second nature to most of us, and often u3a members have more to offer than they realise. Our management committee is always keen to welcome new volunteers, with a range of experience and perspective, to support the administration of Petersfield u3a. Please don't hold back!

5. Volunteer Opportunities

- We welcome the number of members volunteering during the past year, but this must not stop. It is vital that the MC receive a steady flow of members coming forward in order to identify and match skills with tasks and to ensure a gradual succession planning for those members needing to step down.

There are opportunities in;

- Management Committee
- IT and new media channels
- Speakers and events research/ booking
- Projection and sound at the open meetings
- Group Conveners

The u3a movement only exists and thrives based on every member contributing a little time and energy to their u3a. Please come forward.

6. Membership

- At the beginning of last year there were 628 renewed members. Over the following 12 months 89 new members joined, including 18 immediately following the Open Day in October.
- Following the closure of HSBC in Petersfield and the imminent closure of other banks, together with the decision of our bank, CAF Bank to make a substantial charge for paying-in of cheques, it was decided that we would no longer be able to accept cheques or cash in payment of the annual subscription. We requested that members either pay by Standing Order or direct bank transfer. Understandably, this has resulted in a certain amount of complication for the renewal procedure, but by and large has been well accepted. We have not received any complaints or resignations as a result of this decision

and in future it will make renewals much more straightforward and reduce banking and postage costs considerably, helping our reserves.

- We are exploring the possibility of an “on-line” membership application, joining and payment systems via the web site as on-line subscriptions are rapidly becoming commonplace.
- We are also in the process of trying to improve our knowledge of what our members are looking for from membership of our u3a so that we can fulfil their expectations going forward. To this end, we have re-designed the membership application form to include some relevant questions, such as why they are joining, what particular interests they have and, importantly, what could they contribute themselves. We are looking at ways to use this information for the benefit of all members and also hoping to request similar information from existing members in the future.

7. Interest Groups

- Our groups have blossomed since the covid restrictions have eased. We now have 66 groups with diverse activities from the newly formed outdoor swimming group “Petersfield Dippers” to Bell Ringing and Cafe Philo (philosophical discussion).

The new groups this year, include:

Amblers, Environment and Climate, International Affairs, Petersfield Dippers, Play Reading, Singing for Fun, Spanish Hola, Wine Appreciation 2 and 3 and the Welcome Team.

- Our innovative and stoic Group Conveners have found inventive ways to meet and continue their interests. The ongoing legacy from our Zoom days during covid, with some groups occasionally preferring to continue this method to avoid physical travel. For many, our u3a groups kept our sanity during lockdown, offering conversation, friendship, and camaraderie. Our thanks to all our Conveners.
- For those who find navigating our website daunting, we have started to have a computer handy to demonstrate the valuable information to be found and available interest groups and events at the bi-monthly Welcome Coffee Morning meetings. All members are welcome to these.

8. Open Meetings Roundup

- There are 4 Open Meetings each month held at the Community Centre covering different topics: General Interest, Science & Technology, Arts & Heritage, and Health & Wellbeing. Being “open” meetings, all members are welcome and indeed non-members are also encouraged to see if the u3a is for them.
- All 4 meetings are run and organised by small groups of volunteer members who seek and arrange speakers and presentations, promote the events, registration, sort the audio and projection, arrange refreshments, arrange the room and “host” the meetings. Our thanks go to all involved.
- Lynn Battersby-Vogt took over the role as Speaker Secretary in 2022 and we have had a varied programme for the General Interest Open Meetings, including talks by two of our own members.
- In July we held a combined meeting of all the volunteers to discuss what was going well, issues and how we could improve them in the future. All reported that whilst the number of member attendees had dropped from pre-covid levels, numbers were gradually increasing. The common key issue was finding good and relevant speakers and their

increased costs. The management team will be working with and supporting the teams who find speakers to try to improve this situation to ensure interesting, fun, and relevant speakers and presentations in the future.

- All members of the u3a are welcome at future meetings – as are suggestions for future topics! We are also aiming to make the meetings more sociable and to encourage people to stay for refreshments after the talks.

9. Management & Support for our u3a

- I would like to record my thanks to every member of the management committee for their input and support for our u3a and me personally.
- Subject to your vote and adoption at this year's AGM, the new Management Committee and Trustees will be;

Charles Price

Robina Whitehorn

Gordon Watts

Linda Hutton

Jenny Thwaites

Peter Lake

Louise Fox

Marjorie Day

I also wish to thank our volunteer advisors, conveners, and the many members all working behind the scenes; without you our u3a would simply not exist.

Interest Group Conveners

John Donlan – IT

Peggy Pye/ H&W Group – Health & Wellbeing

Malcolm Muggeridge/John Charnock-Wilson – Science & Technology

Joan Shepley – Arts & Heritage

Marjorie Day – Welcome Team

Connect Editorial Team

News & Views Publication Team

Lynn Battersby-Vogt – Speaker Secretary

Liz Wright – Public Relations

Projection Team

Refreshment Team

And not forgetting our Honorary President:

Outgoing - Les Jarman

Incoming – Andy Borthwick

10. President's View

Just for information - The role of President in Petersfield u3a is largely an honorary one, for which I thank you. Whilst the President is an officer of the u3a he/she has no executive role and is not a member of the Management Committee (MC). Views expressed in the following should not be taken as those of the MC. They are the author's personal opinions.

- 2021/22 has been a year of continued consolidation after the traumas of Covid-19. Whilst we lost some groups most have returned and there has been a number of new groups starting. Groups are the centre of our activities and without members putting in the effort to set up and manage them there will be no u3a. One of the successes of the year has been the Welcome Group. Starting as a meet and greet idea it has developed into a bimonthly social coffee morning for newer members to get know others. It has now been extended to cover all members. Congratulations to all concerned. The year has seen the Health Group become an Open Meeting and is thriving. The Environment and Climate Group has got going and already has one great success with the collection of used medicine blister packs for recycling. Ideas for new groups appear regularly in Connect and I encourage members always to respond if they are at all interested.
- On the downside I am disappointed with the difficulty there has been finding a Chairman for the next three years. The excessive length of time spent by the MC on this matter probably could have been better spent on other issues. The Group basis of the u3a causes a tendency for far too many members only to consider the Group(s) to which they belong as THE u3a and are unwilling even to think of helping the whole organisation. This must change. Without a flow of members sharing the u3a's admin work we will eventually collapse. No one should be expected to take on the tasks for life – a steady line of succession is needed. As a charity our u3a MUST have a Chairman, Treasurer and Secretary to be a legal body. A steady flow of members to the MC ensures that there is enough experience to run the u3a and fulfil its legal commitments. But no one should serve more than four years in a row.
- At this year's AGM I complete my third year as President and am standing down. Largely due to Covid-19 it has not been a demanding role, but I have been glad to help when I can. I wish my successor an enjoyable time.
- Before signing off may I say thanks to our outgoing Chairman, Steven Watts, for his help over the last three years. We've had the occasional disagreement but have dealt with these amicably and with the wellbeing of Petersfield u3a always being the objective.

Les Jarman

11. Conclusion and Thankyou

- As we reflect back, the last 12 months have been especially satisfying for our u3a. We have together navigated our way back to normality from covid, we are more active and vibrant than ever, our member numbers have grown, the number of interest groups has increased, our finances are in good shape, and we look forward to new leadership (subject to vote) of Charles Price taking over as Chair.

Yes, we still face challenges, especially around encouraging more members to volunteer their skills, but I am optimistic for the future and look forward to enjoying even more groups as I step down from the role of Chairman.

Steven Watts

Steven Watts

Chairman Petersfield u3a

September 2022