

12th March, 2018 Bishop's Stortford U3A AGM

Chairman – Keith Hicks Speech

At last year's AGM Richard, our former chair, began by saying "time flies when you are enjoying yourself" and it hardly seems like I have been carrying out this roll for all of a year. The year has certainly been eventful and overall I have enjoyed it.

We have about 65 groups in operation some of which have had a difficult year with group coordinators retiring from their roles and some moving away from the area, however many of them have found volunteers to allow them to continue and flourish. We have also had a number of new groups starting and many more in the pipeline to open in the coming months organised and encouraged by our groups manager Sandra Baker and we thank Sandra for that and hope that success continues.

We do still need members to volunteer to assist with these new ventures and take an active part in them.

Bishops Stortford U3A were asked to take part in the consultation for the Castle Park Development and even if the original idea was for a state of the art community area and we are now only getting a part new and part refurbished development Richard Cawse has represented B/S U3A and put our case and we will hopefully get some of what we want. So thank you Richard.

You may have heard of RUGS (Really Useful Group) and they do much work behind the scenes such as distributing literature around the town advertising B/S U3A and helping out with Information Technology like the Beacon project, shielding the chairman from criticism and helping me in particular in complex matters. I would like to thank Jeff Poynter and the rest of the team involved for all their hard work and valuable assistance.

We have Alan on our committee who organises the IT at our main Monday meetings, produces our twice monthly e-mail information sheet and oversees and organises us on information, thank you very much and Ken our new committee member who has extensive IT experience and is working with Alan and a number of other members to bring some information to our committee, thank you for your contribution to date.

The organisation offered a large number of organised trips, visits and educational tours over the year and they are very popular and I would like to thank all of those people who helped make them happen. A lot of organisation is required and all of those people I thank very much but there is one person in particular I would like to thank as they organised many fantastic days out all of which were sold out and were all enjoyed by those who participated Christine Miller thank you very much for many days of pleasure in sun and rain.

However Christine is organising at least one other this year to one of my favourite local places Southwold so will keep our fingers crossed.

I began to think I had bitten off more than I could chew early last year when we could not find volunteers for the vacant posts particularly that of Secretary, raising the prospect of closure if nobody volunteered, thankfully a number of members came forward and you are soon to vote to appoint them to your committee officially. I would very much like to thank them for coming to our aid and in particular Kim Shaw, who has agreed to become our secretary welcome Kim and thank you for your contribution to date. That is if you agree to appoint all the nominees.

Thank you to Susan our outings co-ordinator who does a wonderful job and is calm and patient particularly when discussions get heated, and they do occasionally.

I would very much like to thank our outgoing secretary for her years of hard work and keeping us all in line, representing our U3A at many meetings, and getting the paperwork out in a professional and timely manner. Thank you Christine, and welcome Kim.

We still have a number of vacancies on the committee and if we are to improve what is on offer we need you to come forward and help. Otherwise we will just tread water and that is not what I volunteered for.

A special mention for those retiring, our treasurer who looks after your money and produces reports and advice in a form that can be understood and is usually patient with us when explaining the intricacies of finance. He has kept us solvent and in the black for many years a great big thank you to Alasdair. Welcome to Jack who has done good work in the last year in changing the way we look after the group's cash and thank you.

Rose who handles our membership records and with a team has produced an electronic system which for the first time can produce some statistics for us to use. Thank you for your advice given from your extensive experience and knowledge.

Jenny an ex chair with vast experience, offering us sound advice especially in difficult circumstances and bringing us some outstanding speakers from music, comedy, writing, journalism and crime thank you very much for bringing us all so much pleasure.

Welcome to Jim and thank you for taking over.

There has been a slight gradual reduction in membership numbers over the last five years that has been brought to our attention and we are looking at ways of improving numbers. There are quite a few U3A's around the area and it is important that we all flourish and increase our membership and not look on it as competition but working together.

I have already helped and joined two, June my wife has joined three. Can anyone beat that?

You can play your part by encouraging friends and relatives to join, let us know if you have any ideas to help enrol new members, and participate more in your U3A to make the organisation more attractive to prospective members.

I am in discussion with the local Age Concern Group with a view to looking at ways of working together to our mutual benefit and already we may be involved through the plants and gardens group with horticultural projects.

I have spoken to a few local organisations about our branch and if you know of any that would benefit let me know.

The Annual Show last year was a success but we want it to be even better this year, we already have a number of sponsorship deals so finance is pretty secure, your committee has purchased an additional trophy for a new category and is currently busy organising the event so your support is needed let us know if you can help and most important enter some exhibits, and come along on the day and take part, it is a lovely afternoon out.

The winter newsletter came out in January and the editor Colin informed us after five years this was to be his last one. We thank Colin very much for his contribution over that time and wish him well for the future.

We had been trying for some time to find a replacement when at one of our committee meetings a volunteer came forward and agreed to take over editorship thank you to Lesley.

I would like to introduce Lesley to you, who is now looking for articles for the summer magazine, please would you all try to contribute a report from groups, trips, or comments send them to Lesley.

I have missed many members out but I thank all of our committee, those that help with groups and they are many, those that organise holidays, those that come to meetings and events, those that make the tea and stack the chairs, remember U3A is a safe place that can supply companionship, friendliness and education.

Keith Hicks Chairman