

### **What is the u3a?**

The University of the Third Age (u3a) is an organisation for retired and semi-retired people to come together so that the members can organise activities of their choosing. It is a founding principle of u3a that members should be actively involved in the running of their group, using their knowledge, skills and experience.

At the time of writing, there were over 1000 individual u3as in the UK, with over 400,000 members in total. Each u3a is an independent charity, organised by a committee of volunteers.

### **The national scene:**

The U3A movement is supported by its national organisation, the Third Age Trust. The Third Age Trust runs a small national office with a resource centre and full-time staff. A national magazine, *Third Age Matters*, is circulated to all members five times a year. A small part of each member's annual subscription goes to fund this office as well as the centrally provided insurances and other support services.

### **The Blackwater u3a:**

Formed in 2004, the Blackwater u3a is one of three groups in Maldon. Members pay an annual membership fee to cover running costs. Interest group activities are paid for by those participating.

The Blackwater u3a's membership fee is currently £22.50 payable by 1<sup>st</sup> April each year; new members pay a reduced amount pro-rata to the number of months remaining before 1<sup>st</sup> April.

The eight u3as in the wider Maldon area have formed a Cluster Group. Membership of one U3A entitles members to attend other u3a group meetings, although each may have their own local restrictions due to size of meeting space, available resources, etc.

Membership cards are issued each year; these serve as proof of u3a membership, as a receipt for the current subscription, and as a name badge which all members should wear at our main meetings.

Members paying UK income tax are strongly encouraged to complete a Gift-Aid mandate which provides the Blackwater u3a with a valuable source of income at no additional cost to the individual.

### **Meetings:**

We have a monthly general meeting to which all members are invited. It starts at 2.00pm on the first Wednesday of each month at the West Maldon Community Centre, Sunbury Way, Maldon, CM9 6YH. In addition to a varied range of talks by invited speakers, the meetings provide an opportunity to meet with Group Coordinators and to sign-up for groups' activities. These meetings are also a valued social opportunity to meet with other members.

A rota is arranged for members of each group who take turns to set out the chairs, serve refreshments, and to be Meeters & Greeters. It is hoped that everyone will take their turn to support the smooth running of our meetings.

At this meeting, many of our Interest Groups advertise their forthcoming events and activities. Sign-up sheets are provided with collecting boxes for any money that will be needed to fund events such as a theatre visits, coach trips to places of interest, etc. Members have an opportunity to go round all the tables both before and after the speaker to choose what activities they would like to do.

Payment for activities is by cheque, cash or direct payment to the Treasurer.

**Interest Groups:**

The Blackwater u3a has over 30 interest groups covering a wide range of subjects. Each group plans its own meetings, visits and activities.

Please see our website for full details [www.u3asites.org.uk/blackwater](http://www.u3asites.org.uk/blackwater)

A number of groups arrange visits to places of interest - historic houses, gardens, theatres, etc. Sometimes there are sufficient members to warrant hiring a coach, but often the travel arrangements depend upon members sharing their cars. We have an agreed scheme for members to share the costs incurred by their driver.

Our Groups Coordinator provides central support for the individual group leaders and for members who are thinking about starting up a new group.

**Keeping in touch:**

Our monthly newsletter has details of forthcoming activities and reports on past ones. It includes contact details for the committee and for all our interest group leaders.

To keep costs down we prefer to distribute newsletters by e-mail.

Newsletters can also be viewed on our website and paper copies are available at the monthly meeting for those without email. Copies may also be posted to members who cannot attend meetings – in this case we ask for a payment of £10 per annum to cover postage costs.

**What to do next:**

If you are interested in joining the Blackwater u3a, please contact our Membership Secretary whose contact details may be found on the website: [www.u3asites.org.uk/blackwater](http://www.u3asites.org.uk/blackwater)



## **An Introduction to the Blackwater u3a**

(Vn 2 April 2023)