

## Chair's Report March 2024

This last year had been another successful one for Saxon Shore U3A. Our numbers are growing slowly, so that we now have more members than we had before the pandemic, 550 at the last count! This is mainly due to the best form of publicity - word of mouth! We tell our friends how much we enjoy being members of Saxon Shore, and they tell their friends. Many members speak to us of the fun and friendship they have found in being members. This is the greatest source of satisfaction for the committee who keep our branch running smoothly.

Many thanks are due to all the volunteers who work ceaselessly to keep us entertained, interested, and learning new skills. Firstly, I know you would all want me to thank the members of the committee once again for all they do on behalf of Saxon Shore. We meet monthly, but we keep in touch with each other between meetings by email and telephone, to ensure that all is well. After several appeals, we have welcomed several new members to the committee so there are, at present, 9 of us. Special thanks are due to our post holders: John the Membership Secretary, Linda, Groups Organiser, Glenda the Treasurer and Theresa the Secretary. These hard-working people are the life blood of the branch, without whom we could not function.

We now have a thriving number of interest groups, around 50 in total. These are as varied as we could hope, from cycling and walking, to poetry, creative writing, drawing and painting, singing and ukulele. I would like to thank all the group leaders for their hard work in keeping our interest groups so lively. If anyone has an idea for forming a group, you have only to approach Linda Griffiths, our groups co-ordinator, who will support and guide you through the process of setting it up. Thank you Linda, for all your excellent work! We also have a new speakers' organiser. Wendy Powell has replaced Lesley Potter, who for several years brought us an array of interesting speakers. Many thanks and our best wishes to Lesley, and a warm welcome to Wendy who is already doing a wonderful job in bringing speakers to our monthly meetings. She is happy to receive your suggestions of topics or speakers for future meetings.

There are many people I would like to thank, who work tirelessly behind the scenes to keep our U3A healthy and flourishing! My thanks to Sue Walsh, our website administrator, who keeps our public face bright and interesting. Thanks also to Steph Brunton for continuing to produce our brilliant newsletter! Thanks to all of our 'kitchen' volunteers, organised by the incredible Joanna Odell, and who diligently serve our teas and coffees every month and without whom we would certainly be a thirsty bunch! A big thank you to Jenni Bedford and Marian Elliott, our two minuting secretaries who have helped so much with our record keeping.

I must also thank those who have volunteered and now have stepped down, including Marian Elliott who has done a fine job minuting meetings and who will be replaced by Pam Dullage. Thank you both. After the AGM our Secretary Theresa Shields will step down and be replaced by committee member Kim Todd. Thank you Theresa, for doing a magnificent job, and welcome to Kim. Lastly huge thanks to Pat and Mike Butcher, who have organised such amazing and well-planned trips, always with enormous efficiency and great good humour. We will miss you! Thank you to John Wakeham who has stepped up to continue the good work of taking us to new and fascinating places, as well as joining the Committee. Welcome John!

As you all know by now, I have decided to step down this year as your Chair. I have held this position since the very first meeting of the volunteers who started Saxon Shore nearly 7 years ago. "We'll do it," they said, "if you will be chair!" I agreed somewhat timidly, as I've never chaired anything in my life. It has been a steep learning curve and we were well supported by our U3A mentors, whilst we got ourselves together. It has been an adventure I have been proud to be a part of, and now we need someone new to take over. I am ready for a rest, and maybe to join some of our great groups! As I have said already, we will be there to hold your hand and guide you through the start of your taking up the position. You will be as well supported by the committee as I have been. You can make the job as simple you would like it to be - if you're shy about addressing the members, someone else can do that. Please don't be afraid to give it a go - we need you!! The U3A is all about its members. It is thanks to all those who volunteer that keep it running, and without whom we wouldn't be able to function. Don't hesitate to come forward - you'll enjoy yourself more than you anticipate! Many, many thanks to you all.

Val Johnson