

Wadhurst & District



Membership Survey July 2023

We present the results of the survey that was carried out earlier this year.

The questions were included in the June issue of NEWS in order that every member of Wadhurst & District u3a had the opportunity to take part. It is disappointing that out of a membership of just over 200, there were only 22 replies. Nevertheless, valuable information was gained from the replies. We describe below the results of the survey together with some of the actions we have undertaken, or will undertake, in response to the suggestions made. We thank those who have replied to the survey.

Signed replies to the survey were entered into a prize-draw to encourage participation. Pauline Willis is the lucky winner.

The Committee of Trustees.

11th December 2023.

THE SURVEY

1. Circle topics that would appeal to you at our monthly talks:

Architecture / Art / Books / Cookery / Entertainment / Gardening / History / Nature / Nostalgia / Science / Theatre / Transport /

Other suggestions?

Topic	no. of replies
Nature	18
History	14
Theatre	13
Gardening	13
Art	9
Entertainment	9
Nostalgia	8
Books	8
Architecture	7
Cookery	6
Science	2
Transport	1

Suggestions	no. of replies
Travel (2), Other countries	2
Medical	1
Fashion	1
Photography	1
More on period of 50's to today. less about WW1, WW2	1
Famous people (new names). More discussion/talks on future developments. Topics have too much focus on the past. Need to be more modern/forward-looking.	1

Comments:

The talks we have had in the past 10 years correspond more or less to the replies given in the table on the left. We have had more talks on the topics with a high percentage of replies and fewer talks on those with a low percentage.

Half a dozen speaker coordinators organised the yearly programmes during this period. They aimed to find topics that have not been covered before to obtain a good mix of talks over a calendar year. Although the coordinators listened to suggestions by members and others, their own taste invariably left a mark on the programmes they put together. We welcome these personal choices.

We shall take the above suggestions into account as far as possible. However, the talks that are on offer by speakers in our area will limit on the choices we make.

As we often have no firsthand information on the speakers, we do at times find the odd one who did not speak clearly or gave an uninteresting talk for one reason or another. On the other hand we do discover some very good ones unexpectedly.

2. Circle social events in which you would like to take part:

dances / sing-alongs / wine and cheese /
jazz / quizzes / films / entertainers /
Other suggestions

Suggestions	number of times
Classical music , concerts & recitals	2
Musicals	1
Magician	1
Barn/Square/Scottish/Folk dances	1
Murder Mystery Dinner	2

Event	no. of replies
Wine & Cheese	15
Jazz	12
Entertainers	9
Quizzes	7
Films	7
Sing-along	5
Dances	4

Comments:

Our social committee are always looking for ideas for social events. Note that some of our events, such as the Birthday and Christmas parties, are members-only while others are open to the general public. We shall definitely take Cheese and Wine into consideration for a future members-only event. Magicians, singers and others have entertained us at these events. For events open to the public, we shall be offering a musical quiz in March, and the possibilities of a jazz concert in June are being explored.

Usually we consider concerts which involve high costs and expensive tickets are best left to the likes of the Lamberhurst and Mayfield Music Societies/Festivals, and others. However, we do support open events which attract a good number of our members and others outside the u3a. Jazz appears a popular choice from the survey. We have put on barn dances, a tea dance and a race night in the past. These are low-budget by comparison.

We leave commercial films to Wadhurst Community Cinema, and we actively promote WCC in our monthly Bulletin.

3. What new interest groups would you like to see?

Comments:

Sunday lunches a good idea
Local History: liaise with existing groups
Women in conversation about women who made/are making history
Ballroom dancing
Pickleball
Quite happy with what's on offer

We rely on members coming forward to start new groups and we appreciate very much those members who have given their time and energy to offer others the opportunity to take part in an enjoyable activity. Croquet, Singles Sunday Lunches are two groups that were started in 2023 and the Poetry Group has also been brought back to life in November. It would be good to see History and Ballroom Dancing (or similar) restarted again. As for local history, we have already the

Wadhurst History Society which is a well-known resource that draws enquiries from all over the world, and who provide excellent monthly talks.

Further information on new groups being formed can be found on our website. Members wishing to start a new group are invited to contact Jan Whiteley, our group coordinator, to get the ball rolling.

4. If you have not attended many events, can you tell us why?

other commitments / transportation / too far /

Other commitments	4
Transportation	1
Too far	0

Others reasons ?

I always come to the monthly meetings except when I am away.
COVID left its trail behind. Did several good outings before. Outings/visits seem much more expensive now.
I attend regularly but I do not think we are very welcoming to new members/visitors. We need to identify people to welcome new people.
Events/topics not of interest to me.
Switching the speaker meetings from Wednesdays to Thursdays clashed with my commitments.

Comments:

It is unfortunate that we had to move our monthly meetings from Wednesdays to Thursdays some three years ago. When the Hall introduced a new booking system, there was a free for all at one stage and we changed to a Thursday to resolve some booking squabbles.

See 'Meet and greet' under Q7.

5. How do you rate the contents of NEWS Magazine:

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 (10 = highest)

Suggestions for improvement:

no rating	1
5-6	5
7-8	7
9-10	9

6. NEWS is expensive to produce, would you like to change

- the number of issues to bi-annually?

yes / no / not sure

- the format to electronic?

yes / no / not sure

Bi-annual ?

Electronic ?

Yes	8
No	12
Not Sure	2

Yes	4
No	14
Not Sure	4

Suggestions for improvement / comments

No suggestion as the magazine is only as good as the material available.
Letters from members?
Layout, fonts and styles need editing.

Shorter and snappier newsletter rather than long articles. Deliver by hand. Too much focus on the past.

Stop wasting money on postage. Collect at meetings or Carillon Cottage or suitable venue in Ticehurst.

Comments and Actions:

The replies show that:

- The general rating for NEWS is high, with 70% rating it 7 and above, and 40% rating it 9 - 10.
- A clear majority, 64%, would NOT like to see NEWS in electronic form.
- A small majority, 55%, would NOT like the number of issues reduced to two per year.

During the past months the committee have considered the views expressed in the survey and have made on the following decisions:

- a) NEWS should continue to be published in paper form.
- b) It is noted that NEWS overlaps in function with our electronic Monthly Bulletin. In future the Monthly Bulletin will be charged with short announcements and notices while NEWS will carry longer articles that are not time critical.
- c) Reducing the number of issues of NEWS per year is necessary to reduce cost. The survey suggests that twice a year may be too drastic. The committee has therefore decided that NEWS should be published three times a year: in April, August and December.
- d) To reduce postal charges, there will be a trial delivery of copies by hand, by volunteer members, to the relatively densely populated pockets in Wadhurst and Ticehurst, leaving outlying and distant addresses to the printer who has a discount with Royal Mail.

Collection of NEWS from Carillon Cottage, or similar, has several drawbacks. First, members living far away need to be catered for. Second, Carillon Cottage and others cannot be expected to deal with copies collected by mistake, left uncollected etc.

We hope that the reduction in the number of issues per year and the trial delivery scheme will produce the desired cost reductions. Of course, against the continuing rise of printing and postal costs, we may only manage to just stand still.

The Quality of NEWS (from the editor)

When NEWS was launched at the start of this u3a, its remit was to be more than a bulletin. We wanted a magazine that was pleasurable to read, and which provides a creative space for members, for reporting, story-telling, poetry, art and photography. In my opinion, we have done quite well. I personally enjoy especially the poems by our poets and the wry comments on various subjects that I find in many articles. If we have a tendency to recall the past (but I hope not to dwell in it) my explanation would be that past events, pleasurable or horrific, often leave deep impressions on our consciousness. Perhaps we need to be more like the god Janus, who faces forwards and backwards at the same time, as his month, January, approaches.

Letters from readers are a good idea. For the next issue of NEWS in April 2024, members are invited to write the figurative letters-to-the-editor. The deadline is 20th March.

Matters of style are purely subjective. One person's tired font may be another's retro-chic. One of the few perks of the editor is to set the overall tone of the magazine!

7. How do you rate your satisfaction with your u3a?

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 (10 = highest)

no reply	2
5-6	2
7-8	7
9-10	11

Suggestions for improvement

Please have proper 'blackout' so can see screen properly.
Based on my age of 58 and not wanting to disrespect others, a more modern image perhaps
invest in recruiting younger persons
Good idea to have a welcomers at meetings
To newcomers, the monthly meetings are not very friendly. Need nominated people to 'meet and greet' and chat/circulate/
Gear more to younger members, not 80+
More activities at monthly meetings?

Comments and Actions:

The Hall has effective blackout screens. However, on very hot days we have to let in some fresh air, and some sunlight sneaks through!

Meet and Greet is an important subject that is also raised in Q4 and Q10. It has fallen by the wayside since the epidemic, together with 'Welcome Coffee Mornings' for new members. We now have a new role in the committee of trustees, the Welcome Coordinator, who will look to improve matters.

The STAR (Small Tasks As Required) system, a list of volunteers on call, has been revived. Helping in whatever way is always much appreciated by everyone; being able to help reinforces the sense of belonging for the helpers.

We shall try to provide more activities at monthly meetings. Those with ideas for such activities are encouraged to contact a committee member.

The image of the u3a - some of the comments suggest that a number of our members think our image may be less than 'modern', that we must 'invest in recruiting younger persons'.

To answer these points, it is useful to remind ourselves what the u3a movement is about. First, the u3a welcomes anyone who is retired or semi-retired, of any age. The second is self-help. That is, whenever possible, we do everything ourselves, to enable members to learn, laugh and live to the maximum.

If self help is to be taken seriously, we need members with ideas and energy. Ideas come from members of any age; energy tends to diminish as we grow older: no matter, as long as we have a broad spread of age among members. We need this spread not just today, and but for the u3a to flourish into the future. Nevertheless, we must be true to ourselves in the image we present to the outside world. We do what members enjoy doing. We provide activities for those who are physically active, as well as those who lead a more sedentary life. We cater for the ones who enjoy discovering new things as well as the others who prefer to pursue a life-long interest. Some activities may have a 'modern' image, others may not. We do not mind. We are what we are.

Recruiting - we average about 30 new members per year for the last two years, a healthy number. We do not ask for a date of birth on the application form but new members appear to have the usual age spread in our catchment area.

8. Is Wadhurst & District u3a good value for money?

yes / no / not sure

Yes	17
No	0
Not Sure	5

Suggestion

- Cheaper subscription and 50p for biscuits?

Reply

When expenses such as hall rental and speakers' fees, printing costs and postage charges continue to rise, we must react to keep afloat, either by increasing our subscription, or reducing costs, or both. We prefer not to increase subscriptions except as a last resort because it will hit those who are feeling the pressure the hardest. This leaves reducing costs. See Q5 and Q6 for the measures that we are taking to reduce costs.

Charging for tea and biscuits brings in very little. On the other hand, free tea and biscuits encourage members to stay a few minutes longer after meetings, to chat to each other. Helpers will also be spared the hassle of taking in and counting up the pennies. It is a practice worth keeping.

9. Do you consider yourself an active member of the u3a?

yes / no / not sure

Yes	14
No	3
Not Sure	5

10. Please add any comments / suggestions?

I think attendance will increase during the winter. Post Covid lethargy.	We hope so too.
Why not charge something for NEWS or put a collection tin at monthly meetings — to help with cost	We are financially sound and the new measures with NEWS will help. See Q6.
Enjoy holidays with Gardening Group.	Thank you.
Since losing my husband, I find the u3a good for meeting people of my own age and interests.	We are pleased that you find the u3a useful for your needs.
I found it virtually impossible to hear speaker at the May meeting. (Same applies to film shows in winter). I wear hearing aids. Is this a problem only affecting me?	No, it affects many others. Hearing aids help but they are not as good as good ears. Also, some speakers are clearer than others.
Need to be more fun and friendly. Need to facilitate more feedback from members. Need to launch an active recruitment campaign.	<i>Live, laugh and learn</i> apply to everything that an u3a does, including the way the committee tries to get things right, especially <i>learn</i> .
The card swipe machine at monthly meetings is too slow and impersonal. Old system was better.	According to those who operate the machine, it is faster, and they will continue to say 'Hello' and 'How are you'.
Monthly meetings need to be more welcoming-meet and greet. Invite new members to a welcome meeting (coffee/tea)	Yes indeed. See Q7.
Restart coffee mornings. New members welcome meeting.	Coffee morning has been replaced by Tea and Chat in the afternoon.

Am quite old but will always give a helping hand.

You are destined for 'STAR'dom! See Q7.

Please state your

Age group: 50's / 60's / 70's / 80's / 90's

5%	5%	32%	59%	0%
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Length of membership:

1-4 yrs	25%
5-7 yrs	25%
8-10 yrs	45%
no reply	15%