

## **Chair's Report for 2026 AGM**

Welcome everyone to the 2026 Stanford-le-Hope & District u3a Annual General Meeting.

The past year has been one of challenges and changes.

Our membership has levelled out in the past year, due to deceased members, lapsed members and members resigning. The reasons for the last two categories are unknown. However, we do know we have been successful in attracting new members, filling the places left by others.

Monthly meetings continue to attract an average of some 140 members. We have been entertained by a range of speakers, some good, some not quite so good, singers and quizzes. Booking good speakers has become an increasing challenge. Thanks to those members who have recommended speakers to us. It makes our lives a little easier.

Another challenge in the past year has been the weather. Whilst our preference is to admit members via the side door, in the past winter months we have had to use the front door. This is to contain the heating in the hall. In the spring and summer months, we have been subjected to abnormal hot weather. As a result, we have let members in earlier than our planned 1.30pm start to protect them from the sun. On these occasions, we commissioned the air conditioning in the hall – an additional cost.

Organising and conducting our monthly meetings is not down to the committee alone. The Buddies welcome and support new members, the refreshment team serve your teas and coffees, the raffle organisers find the prizes and handle ticket sales and our day trip, theatre trip and holiday organisers spend considerable time researching and booking everything before sales go on at our meetings.

On behalf of the committee and the membership, I thank you all for your efforts.

We currently have 45 interest groups, all of which are listed in our monthly newsletter. Whilst some interest groups have ended over the past year, new groups have emerged, including a Disabled Amblers group.

Ideas for new groups are always welcomed. If you can't see a group that is of interest to you, but have an idea for one, have a chat with our interest group co-ordinators. As we have around 440 members, it's possible someone else will be happy to join you in forming a new activity group. It only takes two to form a group.

Our interest group leaders give their time freely, researching, organising and leading their groups for your benefit. Again, on behalf of the committee and our membership, I thank you all.

At each AGM a new committee is elected. All committees bring together people with different backgrounds, different life paths and therefore different skills and experience. But that is the strength of committees.

Not everyone knows everything. A committee acts as a team to bring their individual skills and experiences together for the benefit of the organisation they serve.

All your committee have played their part, on your behalf, to keep your u3a operating and planning for the future.

In 2024 we learnt about plans to redevelop The Springhouse. The plans included a hall to replace this venue we currently use. However, the new hall will be smaller than this. As I reported last year, we have considered alternative venues, each of which has pros and cons. Whatever the future holds, change is inevitable.

This year we have invested in and adopted the u3a Beacon database and management system for administrative functions. It is fair to say this has not been without its challenges, a few of which we are still battling. However, it has proven beneficial, especially for our membership secretary and trip organisers.

Many of you will have received emails via Beacon which appear addressed to you personally.

Thanks go to Michael Farman, Chris Gomm and Danni Tate for their time and efforts in setting Beacon up. At this time, we have not adopted the finance module.

Michael has also worked diligently to maintain our website on the SiteWorks platform

The decision to purchase a card reader to enable card payments to be taken as an alternative to cash, cheques and BACS transfers has proven successful. As we move forward over time, the committee will be encouraging members to utilise BACS transfers and card payments more.

Membership renewals continue to present a challenge. Whilst Beacon has proven an asset to the membership secretary, the organisation and volume of membership renewals is disruptive. We tried some organisational changes this year with varied degrees of success. This remains a challenge the new committee will look to address.

Another success this year had been the delivery of our monthly newsletters to The Springhouse. Following failings in the previous delivery service, we thank the management here for their consent to having our newsletters delivered direct to The Springhouse. This has calmed the nerves of our Newsletter Editor

Compiling, editing and arranging the printing our monthly newsletter is hard work. We are indebted to our newsletter editor for her dedication in producing a monthly news and reference booklet for members, as well as the Advance Notice.

Emailing our membership with the Advance Notice has highlighted the continued problems we have with emails. Some 40 members (9% of our membership) claim not to have email addresses. Officers have tried a variety of methods to contact individuals, but without success. It remains a challenge to resolve this

Our Interest Group Co-ordinators have worked hard to identify and support new interest groups. The numbers permitted in some groups are governed by factors, e.g. the size of the venue. However, this can provide the catalyst for an additional group.

Our Welfare and Disabilities Co-ordinator sent cards to those members identified as being sick, ill or hospitalised, or have a bereavement. They may also be able to advise members of organisations that can provide support in some circumstances.

Change has come from submissions in our Suggestion Box. The suggestion to commence meetings at 2.15pm rather than 2.00pm came via the Suggestion Box. This allows more time for the booking of trips after doors open at 1.30pm, together with more time for speakers to set up.

Everyone on the committee has played an active role to ensure our u3a operates to the benefit of all members. We know we cannot please all of the membership all of the time, but we hope we have pleased everyone some of the time.

Please remember, every committee member, interest group leader and volunteer gives their time and efforts without reward for your benefit. Rules and conditions that are set by the committee are to ensure meetings, interest groups, trips and events are organised and operated for the enjoyment and safety of members. Please help the committee to help you by keeping to these rules and conditions.

As u3a's are run by volunteers it is vital that enough members are actively volunteering. When not enough members actively volunteer, the u3a may be at risk.

On your behalf, I wish to thank all the committee for their hard work and support in the past year.

Change is one of life's constants.

One change is that our auditor, Peter Victory, is also standing down. Peter has provided invaluable support to our u3a to ensure that our accounts have been accurately recorded and presented. Thank you, Peter on behalf of our u3a.

This means of course that we seek a replacement for Peter as auditor for our u3a accounts. If anyone present is able, or who knows of a person who may be suitable and independent from the committee, please speak to our Treasurer.

Your committee is also changing.

For personal reasons Pam Tate is not standing for re-election.

After 5 years, Sandra Isaacson is also standing down and vacating her position as Interest Group Co-ordinator.

I thank them both for their time and efforts on your behalf.

I am also not seeking re-election. There are a number of reasons behind my decision, but two main ones. One is personal and the other is that I have volunteered on a variety of committees since I was 18 years old. After 60 years, I now feel I have done my bit and deserve a break.

I am of the opinion we need new blood on the committee. The average age of committee members is around 80 years young. I believe we need new ideas, new skills and the benefit of others' experience in key areas such as finance and critical analysis.

Firstly, I thank the members of all the u3a committees on which I have served for their guidance and support.

Secondly, I wish to thank my wife Joyce who has been incredibly tolerant over the years, allowing me to spend my time working on a number of committees. Now is right for us to spend more time enjoying ourselves together.

Finally, thank you – the members. Thank you for your support, engagement and comments. Without you, we do not have a u3a.

Kevin Brice  
Chair  
Stanford-le-Hope & District u3a.

Presented on 10<sup>th</sup> September, 2026