

ANNUAL REPORT 2026

Mike Freemantle, Chair Southwell u3a

This time last year I had only just joined the u3a and now I have the pleasure and privilege of writing my first Chair's Report covering the past year's activities. It has been a great experience taking on such a role, certainly a lot of fun and with plenty of learning to keep the body and brain active.

Southwell u3a continues to grow, steadily. At the August 2025 AGM we had a membership of 885. In November 2025 we passed the milestone of registering our 900th member, and even with the routine turnaround of around 70 members, we gained 160 new members and so approach the 2026 AGM with a current membership of over 970.

For a town the size of Southwell (and the surrounding villages) this is a major achievement. It is also a great marker of the success the u3a group has become and is a recognition of all the hard work and commitment from my predecessors as Chair, all the various officers and committee members, the group leaders and so many others in key roles who took on the task of setting up the group and growing it over the past 20 years as the place to continue to learn, laugh and live.

Reaching the 20th Anniversary year was another landmark. This was celebrated by bringing all the surviving chairs together to cut a cake in February, a light-hearted look back over the past 20 years at the monthly meeting in July, and the 20th Anniversary celebration at Norwood Park where nearly 100 members gathered for a mid-summer's evening of friendship and entertainment.

Our activities remain at the heart of what we do. At the last count, we had 87 separate groups and activities available. Madeline Oliver and Rosemary Milton, as chairs of the Trips and Social Committee and supported by their great team of helpers, have organised and put on 8 events since last August, with another four in the pipeline for this year. Those undertaken, so far, include visits to Rockingham Castle and Nottingham Forest Football Club, and a successful liaison with Southwell Lions to hold a Burn's Night Supper in the Great Hall.

Roger Bennett continues to run the successful and very popular coach trips to concerts at the Royal Concert Hall and the coffee mornings continue to grow and attract members to the twice monthly events. The monthly meetings continue to be well attended, and John Cook has arranged for a wide and varied selection of speakers, including talks on The Beatles, Infectious Diseases and the Air Ambulance.

Our interest groups remain one of our greatest strengths and I'd like to give a particular thank you to all of the Group Leaders for the dedication, time and effort you've put into running the groups. Two successful Group Leader's lunches were held the past year to offer thanks and hear updates, and also included an update on risk assessment. Whilst we did lose the Spanish group this year, we gained four new groups in Art History 2, Book Club, Violin Group and Vinyl and Vino (all covering quite a broad range of differing activities).

Pickleball have also started a second day each week for new members, rather than a second group.

We've also run a very successful programme of short courses and workshops and have run 14 different events since the last AGM. These included courses on cybercrime, safe driving, calligraphy, violin virtuoso, the solar system and a visit to the Augustinian Priory in Thurgarton. Many thanks to Brian, Michele and Liz for all the work they've done in supporting the groups and organising the workshops and short courses.

Publicity and continuing to keep you all informed remains important. New members are needed to bring new energy and enthusiasm, and we also need to retain our existing members by remaining relevant and interesting. For new members, two very successful and well attended meetings for New Members were held, and many thanks to Liz Neesam for organising those.

A major step this year was in the updating of the website, and a huge thanks goes to Steve Dickman, Richard Peacock and Rik Ludlow for completing that. I'm sure you'll all agree the new site is not only informative and easy to use, but it's also kept more up-to-date with older items being removed, regularly. The site is certainly well used with, regularly, around 6,000 views per month.

On the publicity side, Tony Mellor and his team have had a stall on Southwell market twice, attended Farnsfield village fair (with great help from the woodworking group) and taken part in 2 x leaflet handouts. On top of that are the regular articles in such as the Bramley, the Newark Advertiser and other regional magazines.

Facebook also continues to prove popular with around 300 followers (including several u3a's around the country). 28-day reports show, regularly between 8,000 and 13,000 views and around 90% of those are often from non-followers. Additionally, the "old-style" forms of communication still prove popular and last September we had a display of photographs in the library.

Underpinning a lot of our internal (and external) communication activities is the monthly Newsline. Last year saw Anne Greenaway and Linda Savage step down after six and four years, respectively, of managing Newsline, but we are extremely grateful and thankful to Rik Ludlow who has, single-handedly, been putting together the issues over the past few months.

None of the above would happen if we didn't have a good control over finances. Once again, Jan has done an excellent job here and will be presenting her report and recommendation for the annual subscription, separately. There will be proposed changes to roles suggested for next year as Jan takes over the Group Treasurer from John Langly (who stepped down this year) and Liz Neesam takes over as the Main Treasurer.

I'd hoped to try and keep this report short. However, as you can read there is a lot happening within Southwell u3a and, even now, I have a fear I've missed something out. As a brand new member myself, stepping into such a lively and active organisation would not have been possible without the support of many people. Included in this are the whole

committee, who with a great range of experience, along with new ideas, continue to support the u3a with a lot of dedication and time. My own personal thanks go to Jean Hogg and Brian Platts who were great mentors to me and always on the end of speed-dial over those first early weeks of trying to understand it all.

And, of course, thank you to all the many, many volunteers who help to keep Southwell u3a as successful and vibrant as it is. The u3a is a peer run and led organisation that depends entirely on the goodwill and efforts of all its members. It's not possible to mention everyone who contributes but that does not mean that your help is not recognised or appreciated. I give my heartiest thanks to all of you who run groups, arrange and organise monthly meetings, ensure refreshments are available, arrange trips, maintain the membership records, sort out Beacon or keep the website updated and relevant etc.

Over the past year, I've certainly learnt a lot. Your own laughter and smiles at all the meetings have been welcomed. Above all, the u3a is helping so many in Southwell and the surrounding areas to lead a more interesting and sociable life.