

Chairman's Report for the Chorleywood u3a AGM – 26th November 2025.

I hereby present the annual report for the year 2024/ 2025 on the conclusion of my first year in the chair.

The Fifteenth Anniversary.

2025 was the Fifteenth Anniversary Year of the founding of our branch of u3a. We celebrated the achievement of the intrepid pioneers with an anniversary lunch attended by over 100 members. We also worked with a number of groups to widen as far as practical the involvement of our overall membership in the anniversary. A Local History display on Chorleywood featured in the Chorleywood Library. Festive u3a bunting was produced by Patchwork and Quilting. A special Wine Tasting for the general membership was produced by our Wine Group. A team of History Group authors launched their new book "Chorleywood at War 1939/1945" with the enthusiastic support of The Chorleywood Bookshop. Nine members of our Striders walking group embarked on the Chilterns 3 Peak Challenge raising over £10,000 for the Rennie Grove Peace Hospice. A huge thanks is due to the large number of members who contributed so much of their time and ingenuity to making these events such a success.

Finances.

The report from our Treasurer confirms the finances of your u3a remain robust with adequate reserves. We were able to avoid an increase in the subscription fee and turned in a modest surplus from our income whilst maintaining a full programme of activity. The Gift Aid issue remains under review and is the subject of discussions between The Third Age Trust and HMRC.

In January we faced an unusual financial challenge in a legitimate claim for payment for media rights for group slide material on our website. Many u3as have had this type of issue with payments in the thousands being involved. Our own Residents Association have had a similar claim. We eventually settled for a payment of £100 but Mike Stansfield had to carry out a herculean review of all the website content to identify and remove any similar material.

Membership.

At the close of the membership year for 2024-2025 we had 417 members, a reduction of 2 over the final total for the previous year. During the year we had a very healthy 63 new members join us which was the largest number since 2019. We have continued with online membership renewal which was introduced last year. This year 290 members renewed in this way which has reduced administration and importantly postage and printing costs and helps our u3a greatly. The membership total in late September was 364 including 8 new members since September 1st and several pending renewals. This renewal status was well ahead of the previous year. As last year, several members from our early days have decided not to renew and we wish them well.

Groups.

The number of groups has increased slightly this year to 50 with a variety of new ideas coming in. New groups for Cribbage and Italian have been set up and we are currently working to get a Portuguese group underway. The pickleball group started

last year has grown by over 70 per cent to 31 players. It is now the largest u3a pickleball group locally and has been very successful in attracting new members to u3a. There is a pipeline of new group ideas for the coming year. Some of our groups have started to use the impressive rooms at the Beaumont Care Home which are being provided free of charge in return for discounted CW u3a membership for their residents. We continue to welcome new ideas and anyone willing to lead or assist in leading our groups.

Profile.

During the year we focused on increasing our profile in the local community. We developed a poster campaign, a house mailing and obtained permanent promotional sites at the station with the support of the CRA. We have endeavoured to obtain regular coverage in the local free press and the CRA newsletter. I hope you will agree that our reinvigorated newsletter clearly shows what an energetic and enterprising membership we have.

We benefitted from the invaluable support of Alun Morgan whose background in graphic design transformed the quality of our promotional material. So much so that The Third Age Trust has now featured our recruitment poster as an example of national best practice.

We need to recognise that due to societal changes potential recruits are often now in their 50s, have wider experience of social media and regard technology as a given. We need to look for new activities which appeal to their interests whilst maintaining the best of our current portfolio.

Website.

Our revamped website is now into its fourth year of successful operation providing a valuable source of information for our members, alongside being an attractive advert for prospective members. We are once again thankful to Chorleywood Residents Association who are sharing their website resources at no cost to Chorleywood u3a. We have continued to see a small but steady increase in the number of visitors, now at over 4,100 visitors in the year, 38% up from the previous year. Another 45 members have registered taking the total to over 180. It is good to see new members also registering on the website shortly after joining.

One challenge at the start of the year was undertaking a full audit of all media files – images, photos, videos, documents – held by the website to ensure that we were not using any copyright or licensed materials. To support this effort, a guide for the use of Media by Chorleywood u3a was produced and made available to Group Leaders. This is the second year that we have provided an online form as an option for membership renewals. It takes only minutes to complete and saves substantial work for our membership secretary. Thank you to all members who used this form to renew. We are also introducing online forms for booking of some events including so far, the study day, 15th anniversary and wine tasting evening.

Feedback and suggestions about the website and the electronic forms is appreciated. Please mail to webmaster@cw-u3a.org.uk

Social media.

An important feature of our focus on profile was the reactivation of our Social Media presence concentrating on Facebook, by far the dominant platform amongst retired people. By regularly posting photos and accounts of our activities, and advertising

upcoming trips and monthly meetings we have sought to encourage recruitment, especially amongst the newly retired. We have shared our posts into the main local Facebook Group (RCCG, Rickmansworth, Chorleywood, Croxley Green and Villages Community) to raise awareness of our activities in the medium term, so that more local people know what we can offer. It is also useful for reminding existing members who are on Facebook of upcoming events.

Educational Visits.

After a noticeable increase in numbers attending our educational visits last year we have had a fall in numbers in 2025, so much so that we had to cancel one of the trips due to lack of interest.

We finished 2024 with a Christmas trip to Waddesdon Manor. This trip attracted reasonable numbers, was much enjoyed by all and managed to break even financially. Following this we had much less enthusiasm for our trip to Chartwell and Hever Castle in April. This was a shame as, on the day, the sun was shining brightly, both properties were stunning and a good day was had by all. Due to lack of interest and the risk of further financial loss we then had to cancel our next trip to Kenwood House in June.

Our next trip was to Anglesey Abbey and the Wimpole Estate in Cambridgeshire. We supplemented numbers by extending an invitation to Rickmansworth and Sarratt u3as and, as a result, this trip enabled us to make up for the losses made earlier this year. The last trip of the year will be to Kew Gardens for "Kew at Christmas". In order to ensure that we can make up the numbers that we need to run the trip we will likely extend an invitation to join the trip to other local u3as.

We still see the trips as a key part of our services for members and despite the challenges we broke even financially for the year. Going forward, due to volatile numbers and the high cost of coach hire, we are considering ways of working more closely with other local u3as to ensure that we can continue to run the educational visits.

Main Meeting

The monthly meeting continues to be the mainstay of our members' events. Andrew York and Doug King have arranged a galaxy of fascinating speakers with subjects ranging from an organic farm, life as a prison officer, survival on Mars and WW2 espionage. Although the numbers of attendees have improved post COVID we still only see an average of 50 attendees out of a membership of approaching 400 in a hall which has ample space for far more. We need to review how we can attract a larger attendance and what issues are driving the present numbers. Ideas from members on ways we could improve the attractiveness of the meetings would be very welcome. Mike Field deserves our thanks for his pivotal role in coordinating the hall arrangements and handling the AV, as well as the army of volunteers who provide the teas.

We do not hold a monthly meeting in December and instead we have had many well-supported Christmas concerts. The December 2024 Concert was most enjoyable and I would like to thank the volunteers and participants who made it possible. We are not holding a Christmas Concert this year, but I hope members will join us following the talk from our speaker, for festive mince pies and mulled wine accompanied by our u3a ukulele group, Uke-N-Smile.

Local and National Links.

We continue to be part of the West Herts Cluster of u3as with whom we exchange ideas and best practice. The Third Age Trust has elected a new Board and Council. Many of their activities are focused on digital strategy implementation, including a new website platform and an expansion of their centrally-managed online course offering.

The Committee.

Due to David Grigg's efforts we opened the year with a relatively new and energetic Committee. We benefit from David's continuing presence on the committee and I am delighted that he has agreed to serve for another year. Our long-standing Treasurer Mike Field stands down this year and will be very much missed. I am delighted that Martin Walker has agreed to stand for election in his place. He brings very strong IT skills as well as the experience of serving as Chair of Chenies PC.

David Carter (Membership), Clare Morrison (Newsletter), Judi Shoffren (Groups), and Mike Stansfield (Webmaster) are standing for re-election to their present roles. Jayne Morgan (Groups and Educational Visits), Susan Williams (Secretary) and Rik Edwards (Vice Chair) will all continue in the present roles. I hope members will join me in thanking them for their hard work on your behalf especially with the increased levels of activity in the Anniversary Year.

Even so, we operate with a committee which is small compared to some of our neighbouring u3as, one of which fields a committee of 14 for 290 members compared to our 10 for just over 400. It continues to be hard to attract new members. We intend next year to seek non-Committee Assistants for the main roles as the only way to maintain our current levels of activity with such a small core team. As an initial step we have reduced the number of meetings to 6 and deal with many issues on a more informal basis. I would be delighted to hear from members who feel they could devote some time to help in the organisation of our u3a, either on the Committee or on a more informal basis.

In Memoriam.

John Hankin, John Sallis, David Morgan, Linda Brown, Gregory Hill. Our condolences are sent to their families and close friends and they will be missed

2026.

Your u3a enters 2026 with strong finances, a stable membership base, a record number of new members and an enthusiastic portfolio of groups and other activities. Along with other small charitable organisations, we face the commonly-shared challenges of increased costs for many of our activities and the difficulty of running a members-based organisation with societal changes leading to a shrinking pool of volunteers.

I would like to end by thanking the Committee, our invaluable volunteers and all our members in continuing to support so enthusiastically such a great and worthwhile organisation.