

CHAIR'S BULLETIN No. 34 – 8 September 2026

When I first joined the u3a Committee some 18 months ago, Susie, my predecessor, observed that it was a good time to be joining since two important pieces of work had just been completed. She was right. These pieces of work are: (1) the Witney u3a Strategic Plan 2025 and (2) our Members' Survey.

It's said that 'new brooms sweep clean' but, new broom though I may be, I'm not in favour of that approach in organisations. In my years in the NHS and University sector I've witnessed too many new eager beavers taking up senior positions and seeming to willfully ignore the good work that had gone on before they arrived. That way results in a management phenomenon sometimes called 'organisational amnesia' – a phenomenon to be avoided at all costs!

For that reason, I'm going to remind us, in this issue of the Bulletin, of the main points of the Strategic Plan. In the next, I'll do the same for the Members' Survey.

The Plan was drawn up in the first few months of 2025 and was intended to shape our activities for the next three years. That takes us pretty much up until the AGM in 2028.

The Strategy can be summarised in five overall aims - that we will, over this time:

- Seek to bring greater variety, vibrancy and flexibility into our activities;
- Broaden our appeal to a younger membership, without neglecting our longstanding members;
- Attempt to engage more fully with our local community, so that fewer people are heard to say "what is u3a?";
- Maintain our involvement with other local u3as and the wider u3a network and where possible share knowledge, information and resources to the mutual benefit of us all;
- Ensure our new developments are guided by our members through regular consultation and ongoing communication.

At the last meeting of your Committee we looked at these again and felt that, in relation to the first of these aims – variety, vibrancy and flexibility – we’re doing quite well. We have a large number of thriving Groups and outings that are varied, superbly managed and varied in their destinations. There’s our ‘Living Well, Living Better’ Programme and a series of Speaker Meetings that is second to none – witness last Thursday’s session by Paul Little. If that’s not vibrant, I don’t know what is!

As far as encouraging younger members is concerned, when I was Vice-Chair I suggested to some of our local employers that we might supply information about the Witney u3a for use in their pre-retirement seminars. After some initial interest this came to nothing. Maybe we should try again?

In connection with this, we had cause to look again at any age-related criteria that exist for membership of the u3a. The short answer is that there aren’t any! The nearest we have to a criterion for membership is that people ‘should no longer be in full-time employment’. This does seem strange since we have the phrase ‘Third Age’ as part of our title. But there it is.

This aim, therefore, as well as the third and fourth aims, are ‘work in progress’, as they say.

As for the last aim, only you can judge whether we come up to scratch in this. Answers (not on a post-card – remember those?) in an email please, to chair.witneyu3a@gmail.com.

Important Notices

Your Committee has been giving some thought recently to keeping **emergency contact details** for members. As you can imagine, we regard this as important. We already have emergency contact details for many members either via Group leaders or by means of the membership application form. Provided, of course, that the person you have nominated has agreed to being named, storage of their name, telephone number and relationship to you on Beacon is wholly compliant with data protection legislation.

If you haven’t already provided us with this information I would encourage you to do so (although it is, of course, by no means

mandatory). You can do this via your Group Leader if you are a member of a Group and further details will be collected when membership applications are due. However, it's a good idea to have 'ICE' ('In Case of Emergency') data on your mobile phone. This, as has been mentioned in a previous Bulletin, can be accessed when required without your needing to activate your phone. I'm told emergency services make extensive use of this. Michael Hopkins, our Webmaster, has posted instructions of how to do this on our website. These can be accessed through: 'About us' / 'Our documentation' / 'Accident and Emergency' / 'ICE Configuration'. Do please take a look at this and, with your contact person's permission, upload the details. This is useful not only for u3a purposes but as a general safeguard.

It's so easy I shall be doing this with my grandson beside me! I will also suggest that he gets himself an ICE, too.

Other notices

Our audio-visual team is looking for new members!

Many of our speakers comment on how professionally the audio-visual back-up is managed when they speak at our regular Speaker Meetings. If you would like to join this crack team contact Mike Collier at: macollier80@hotmail.com.

.....

The next session in our 'Living Well, Living Better' Programme will take place at 2:00 pm on Monday 21st September in the Methodist Centre. The subject will be 'Driving in Mature Years'. An email has already been sent inviting you to sign up and pay your £2 (free tea and coffee available). In case you missed it, this is a reminder to register by paying that token sum to:

Account name: University of the Third Age; Sort Code: 60-24-60; Account no.: 15511642. Please use your name(s) as reference.

Incidentally, you may have noticed that we have two bank accounts. One, ending in '1440' which is used for membership subscriptions and the above which is used for everything else. These are sometimes confused since they inevitably have the same name!

Via our virtual office

I've been contacted by Natalie Lerigo-Smith who is a Doctoral Student at the School of Medicine in the University of Nottingham. She is embarking on a research study called 'PLUS'. Here I quote from the information sheet she has supplied:

"PLUS stands for *Practice Listening and Understanding Speech*. The PLUS listening and thinking games were developed with people who experience listening difficulties due to hearing loss.

"We don't yet know which settings in the PLUS games help people the most with everyday listening. We want you to test one of four different settings in PLUS. Some settings are easier, and some are harder. This will help us study how listening and thinking skills make a difference to progress.

"We are inviting people who have trouble listening in noisy places to try out different settings in PLUS. This will help us find out which settings work best. Those who are willing may also join a focus group to share their thoughts about the games."

The proposed research does seem to be fairly demanding on the participants. However, since I am one of those who 'experience listening difficulties due to hearing loss' – very definitely! I am thinking of taking part myself. I gather you are eligible whether or not you wear hearing aids.

If you wish more information to be sent to you, contact Natalie at: Natalie.Lerigo-Smith1@Nottingham.ac.uk and mention that you heard about it here.

.....

I've also been asked to mention a concert taking place in Worcester Cathedral's Old Palace on Saturday 26th September and featuring de Mowbray's Musicke [sic] (www.demobray.info). I'm told, by the person who contacted me about this – Peter Barnard (peter.barnard@me.com) that the ensemble has often played at u3a branches. Perhaps we should engage them?

Group News

An advert for new members: Book Group 2 meets on the 4th Wednesday of each month at 2pm rotating between members' homes. The books discussed are titles suggested by members and cover a wide range of interests. Usually there's planning for the next 3 months allowing time to acquire the books through the library service, charity shops or online. New members welcome. Contact our Groups Coordinator, Cathy Bajpai, at: cathy.bajpai@gmail.com.

We've received the following message: "Is there a wine making group or do you know of any members who make wine? I have a large crop of sweet white grapes this year which will otherwise go to waste." Sounds too good to miss! If anybody is interested, contact Cathy (details given above).

Members' Notices

I've been contacted by Chris Longson whom some of you may know through the table tennis Group. Chris works part-time as a research manager for two local general practices – Eynsham and Windrush. I gather that recruitment will soon be commenced by those practices for participants in research studies – mainly clinical trials. Future issues of this Bulletin will have some brief details of these opportunities and information of how you can find out more if you wish to take part.

Next Outing

As mentioned in Bulletin no. 33, our next outing – on Wednesday 30th September – will be to the Royal Hospital, Chelsea, the home of the famous Chelsea Pensioners.

.....

While we're on the subject of outings, I had the pleasure – on the way to and from Brighton – of sitting next to someone who must be one of our most senior members – 93 years old if he's a day. I asked him whether he had been able to see the eclipse. "No" he said. "I'll wait for the next one!". I won't name him, even though I'm sure he won't mind but well said that man!

Witney u3a Next Speaker Meeting

The next Speaker Meeting (17th September) will be given by Jeremy Mainwaring-Burton and his title is: 'After the Gold Rush, My Californian Mining Adventure.

You may recall that Jeremy has spoken to us before. He gave us an entertaining glimpse into the late Queen Mother's love of jewellery.

He graduated from Durham University with a degree in geology and visited California, as he says, 145 years after the Gold Rush. He will talk about the events of 1849 and also about his adventures in the 1990s prospecting for gold in Venezuela and Colombia then mining in California.

A Selection of upcoming Trust u3a Online Learning Events - NB a full list can be found on www.u3a.org.uk/online learning events

(Free to all members on zoom via: www.u3a.org.uk/events)

U3a National News

As your Chair I am entitled to vote in the upcoming election of a Trustee on the Third Age Trust Board. The deadline for voting is 24th September. There are three candidates: Cynthia Condliffe (Basingstoke u3a), Jill McLaughlin (Islington) and Neil Stevenson (Up Holland and District). Their personal statements can be viewed on the u3a website.

If you have any views on their relative merits, please contact me in good time before I cast the vote (we have a weighting of three on the basis of our membership numbers) on your behalf on the 24th of the month.

What's on in and around Witney

(With grateful thanks to Wendy for gathering all the information. There's more than last month. Witney has obviously woken up from its summer stupor!)

EVENTS SEPTEMBER 2026

Please note that screenings at Cineworld Witney are subject to change of date and time. Please check.

Until 19th September The Natural World – an exhibition bringing together the work of eight talented artists, interpreting nature in their own way through painting, ceramics and textiles. West Ox Arts Gallery, Market Square, Bampton. Open Tuesday to Saturday 11.30 to 4.30 and Sunday 2pm to 4pm. Admission free.

10th – 12th Buttercross Theatre Productions presents Cluedo at the Corn Exchange, Witney. Six guests, one mansion, a murder, or maybe more than one. Based on the iconic board game, Cluedo brings the world's most infamous dinner party to life. Show starts 7.30pm. Adult ticket £16.26, child £10.84. For more information see cornexchangewitney.org.uk

11th Occupations at the Bishop's Palace: Exploring Medieval Witney. Join Witney & District Museum at Bishop's Palace, once the residence of the powerful Bishops of Winchester. Uncover the story of the palace and its role in medieval Witney. The event is free. Please drop in at any time 12.00 noon to 4.00pm.

11th and 12th Lives In Stone: Witney's Everyday Histories. A Witney Town Council Heritage Open Day at the Tower Hill Cemetery Chapel. Dive deep into Witney's past. Uncover unusual historical professions and explore intriguing burial records. Open 11th 3pm to 8pm, 12th 9am to 1pm. Free entry.

12th Witney Horticultural Society are holding an Autumn Flower and Vegetable Show. This is an open show. Non members welcome to enter. Entries must be registered by 10am on 11th September. Public viewing 1.30pm. Prize Giving 3pm. High Street Methodist Church.

12th and 13th Oxford Open Doors. A weekend dedicated to opening historic buildings, community spaces and all kinds of places that are not usually accessible to the public. For more information see oxfordpreservation.org.uk

13th to 15th Witney Feast. A large funfair on the Leys. The unique Golden Gallopers Carousel church service held on Sunday at 1.00pm.

13th Makers, Merchants & Market Days: A Walk around the Square. Join Witney & District Museum for a guided walking tour of Market Square and discover the stories hidden in one of the town's most familiar places. Sensible footwear is recommended. To book your free spot please email admin@witneymuseum.org.uk or call 01993 775917. Places are limited. Morning tour 11.00am to 12.30pm, afternoon tour 2.00pm to 3.30pm. Meet at Ye Olde Cross Keys, 1 Market Square.

16th Cineworld Witney is screening National Theatre: Les Liaisons (Last chance to see) at 7.30pm

18th Quiz Night at the Corn Exchange, Witney. 8pm Tickets £6 per head. Teams of up to 6.

19th Cineworld Witney is screening Met Opera 2026-2027: An Anniversary Celebration at 6pm

19th Witney and District Museum – Heritage Open Day – Family History Surgery. 11am to 2pm. Do you have a question about your family's history? Are you interested in finding out more about genealogy? Discover how researching your family can provide

a unique window into the everyday lives of past generations. This is a free event with no booking required. Drop into the Museum at 75 High Street.

20th Coombe Mill, Blenheim Palace Sawmills, is holding an in steam crafts and skills event. Open 10.30am to 4.30pm (last entry 3.30pm). Refreshments available. Dogs on leads welcome. Adult ticket £9.50, seniors £8.50. For more information see combemill.co.uk

22nd Cineworld Witney is screening National Theatre: The Misanthrope at 7.15pm. Also screening on 24th at 7.15pm and 27th at 12.00 noon

23rd Secrets of the Herbaceous Border. Rob Jacobs, Horticultural Manager at Waterperry Gardens, will be speaking at a meeting of Witney Horticultural Society. Talk starts at 7.30pm in the High Street Methodist Church. Entry for non-members is £4.00.

24th Quiz Night at Cogges Kitchen Café, 6pm to 10pm. A £20 ticket includes a curry with sides, quiz and prizes for the winning team. Bar available (paid for separately). For more information and booking see cogges.org.uk

25th Professional musicians, The Adderbury Ensemble, plus Viv McLean, piano, will be performing Ravel Sonatina, Dvorak Piano Quintet in A op81 no2 at the High Street Methodist Church at 7.30pm. Tickets £17 available at the door. For further information see adderburyensemble.co.uk

25th – 27th Burford Literary Festival. A programme of events and authors covering a wide range of topics and genres, including artist and illustrator Matthew Rice and Simon Mason, author of the DI Ryan Wilkins mystery stories set in Oxford. For more information see burfordlitfest.co.uk

26th Witney Horticultural Society are holding a plant sale, plus coffee morning with cakes. 9.30am to 12.30pm. High Street Methodist Church

26th For lovers of musical theatre, Candelabra Concerts present The Sound of Musicals at St Mary's Church. This string quartet breathes new life into great songs from the stage. Two performances at 2.30pm and 7.00pm. Duration 70 minutes. Tickets from £29.99 available from eventbrite.co.uk

26th Fine Food and Craft Market, Marriotts Walk, Witney. 10am to 5pm.

26th Witney Model and Collectors Club 2026 Show. High Street Methodist Church. 10am to 4pm. Entry free.

Rhys Williams
8th September 2026