

**Dawlish & District u3a**  
**Annual General Meeting, Monday 18<sup>th</sup> September 2023**  
**Chair's Report**

After years of anxiety and uncertainty, it is a pleasant change to report on a substantially uneventful year! That is not to say that it has been dull or unenjoyable, or without significant achievements. Indeed, I believe that the past year shows that our u3a is substantially in good shape and should be able to face the future with confidence.

Our membership continues to be stable with our Membership Secretary, Kate McCarthy, reporting a steady flow of enquiries about joining every week, with most of these people deciding to join us. Obviously, there is movement in the opposite direction as well, but overall membership remains steady at over 150, significantly above pre-pandemic levels. I believe that we could grow further, and the Committee would welcome more input from members on how we can get the word out there to encourage more people to join us. After all, there is a great deal of new housing in and around Dawlish, and there must be many people new to the area who will be interested in what we can offer them.

The range of interest groups continues to evolve. Dog Walking has been added to the list, many members are enjoying the opportunity to get together for Tea and Chat and play board games, Boules, French Conversation, Art Appreciation, the Adventure Group, book groups, Art and Craft and many others are flourishing but sadly Natural History has had to go into hibernation pending a volunteer to step up to the plate as convener to succeed George Lipscomb who felt he needed to step down.

Attendances at our monthly meetings have been curiously uneven. In the early months of 2023 we were becoming accustomed to having to find extra chairs as queues formed at the door, and we had nearly 50 members attending on at least three occasions, unprecedented in my time in Dawlish. It was disappointing therefore that in the last three months, attendances suddenly dipped to below 20 on each occasion. I don't think it was the kind of speakers we had but if any members have any comment on this, do let me know.

I double up as Speakers Secretary, so am responsible for inviting our guest speakers – so blame me if that is the problem. This can be an enjoyable job as it brings me into contact with all sorts of interesting people. In the past year this has included writers, people working with the homeless, in the health service, the police, a director of Exeter City Football Club, a local historian and many others. In the year ahead, we can look forward to talks about Shaldon Zoo, the Met Office and the ancient buildings of Exeter Cathedral Close and the devastating fire which did so much damage. I am already making bookings for speakers in October and November 2024. I am particularly looking forward to Toby Sherwin's talk on Life Between the Tides early next year, which follows Kerry's talk on the role of a Prison Visitor. I am very pleased to have recommendations and suggestions from members about who might be invited to speak as, inevitably, some of the choices will be influenced by my own interests and connections. Please let me know your thoughts as I want to have a programme which has wide appeal.

As everyone is aware, all households and organisations face rising costs. While we are not acutely pressed in this regard, we do need to be aware that costs are rising, and we need to ensure that we manage our finances accordingly. As we have heard from the Treasurer, our finances are well managed and sound, and we need to keep it that way. Those with a long memory may realise that our membership subscription has not risen for many years – if ever. I advise that the new Committee

elected by the AGM needs to keep this under review – but as that election hasn't happened yet, it may be nothing to do with me!

Our u3a is well served by hard working and capable committee members. They frequently do far more than their job title suggests. We will discuss the proposed new Constitution and the reasons for recommending some changes later in the meeting but for the moment, suffice it to say that one of our continuing issues which prompts this proposal is a very familiar one: in common with every other voluntary organisation I know of, we struggle to get members to take on positions of responsibility. According to our existing constitution, we are breaking our own rules as we have no-one prepared to take the position of Vice Chair. And we have only the bare minimum of committee members prescribed – a rather precarious position to be in. This remains a matter of concern, and I repeat all my previous appeals to members to put themselves forward for the committee or other roles.

Not all posts need to entail serving on the committee – not that it is actually too onerous and time consuming, and is usually enjoyable and sociable. Several members are doing valuable work without being committee members. We are served very well indeed by our Webmasters, Miggie and Dave Pickton. They have designed an outstanding website and manage it throughout the year with great efficiency. Most u3a organisations would be thrilled to have something half as good.

Another 'non-committee' post is that of Newsletter Editor. For the past couple of years we have been very well served by Dana Dima who has been reliable and creative in producing this for members. Following her decision to step down, Roz Summerton and Natalie Brophie have offered to take over and I am delighted that they will be doing his. However, for various reasons, neither has been able to get started over the summer but they promise me that they will take over very soon! In the meantime, I have been learning some new editing and design skills. It's been interesting and satisfying – but I am happy someone else will be able to share the fun before too long!

In conclusion, I would like to pay tribute to George Lipscomb who has decided he's not able to continue as a u3a member. George was one of the founder members of the Dawlish u3a and has played a major role in its life over the past decade. He served as Chair for several years and gave a strong lead in establishing the ethos of our group. He was a member and often convener of a great many interest groups – History, Scrabble, Great Lives, Natural History immediately come to mind but I am sure there were others. His many friends and admirers in our u3a will miss his remarkable energy and enterprise. Few people exemplify the u3a ethos better than George, and demonstrate how to make the most of life in the Third Age.

John Vick

Chair

September 2023