

# EPSOM AND EWELL U3A – AGM 2024 - CHAIR'S ANNUAL REPORT

## Committee Review August 2023 – July 2024

### General update

The Epsom and Ewell u3a continues to grow strong, the steady rise in our membership total is evidence of this. Our interest group listing continues to rise and now stands at 147. New dance groups, card games, and walking groups have been of special interest to our members. This has meant that the year has been a busy one once again for our group coordinator.

Our social calendar has been very busy over the past 12 months, although not all events went as expected. The social calendar continues to be a very diverse list of events with interests to satisfy all our member's tastes. Our collaboration with a local tour organiser has helped both them and our u3a fill coaches.

We have outgrown our venue for committee meetings at Lower Mill, a letter was sent to the Centre Manager thanking her for her support and hospitality. We now meet at Atkins Realis in a larger room that better suits our requirements. I am pleased to advise that this has been offered to our u3a free of charge as part of their programme to support local charities.

We continue to build bridges into the community by supporting local initiatives such as the Safe and Well program run by Surrey Fire and Rescue, the rebuilding of Glyn Hall in Ewell Village, and Route 406 Bus Heritage Day.

The Third Age Trust is putting more effort into the '**Fit For The Future**' project. They will put a resolution to the movement at the TAT AGM in October and if passed, it will represent the biggest change to our movement since its inception. We all hope that this will bring a new voice to the local movement and make our National Organisation stronger as we move into the future. We have been assured by the Trust that these changes will not affect the operational independence of the local u3a groups.. There are strong feelings regarding this resolution, and what it will bring, on both sides of the debate. Some members are saying it is what we need, while others have an opposing view. If any of our members are interested in this you can find more information at <https://www.u3a.org.uk/>

### Administration and Governance

I am very pleased to report that three members have put their names forward as nominees to serve on our committee. If they are successfully elected by the membership, they will take office after the 2024 AGM closes on October 7<sup>th</sup>, 2024 and we will have a new Chair, Vice Chair, and Membership Secretary.

The committee decided to exercise the powers given to them by our constitution and create the new role of President. This would create a three-tier structure at the head of our committee. The Vice-Chair would be assisting the Chair and gaining experience and if willing move up to take the Chair. The Chair would lead our u3a and if willing move to the role of President at the end of that term of office. The President would be there to support and advise as a non-voting member of the committee on an annual basis.

It was felt that this setup would relieve some of the anxiety that can surround a member who may be considering a role of this type. The commitment can be shared making the demands on the individual a lot less daunting.

### Finances

Our finances remain strong and continue to be managed by our existing Treasurer. We make use of the many options open to us to safeguard our account and protect our financial future. Full details of our finances can be found in the Trustees Annual Report and Statement.

### Membership

Throughout the past year, our membership has been growing at a steady rate and to date now stands at 1106 and continues to grow month on month. This I put down to the huge variety of groups and events that are on offer to our membership.

Our existing Membership Secretary completes her term of office at our AGM this year. I am happy to report that she has found a suitable replacement who has been receiving training ready for the handover in October.

### **Monthly meetings**

Bourne Hall continues to be our main residence for monthly meetings and this year we have had a very diverse mix of talks, covering an extremely diverse range of topics that range from the poisoning of the **Russian spy Alexander Litvinenko** and **A Schoolgirls War to Literary Paris** and **Protecting our Pollinators**. Our Social Committee will take on the official responsibility of organising these events after the AGM and are already off to a great start by booking speakers for the whole of 2025.

### **Groups**

As is common in our movement, our groups continue to be dynamic. New groups are formed while others reach their natural conclusion and close. Our Groups Coordinator does a brilliant job of organising and supporting new groups that come online, as well as advising our existing groups.

We continue to encourage as much diversity as we can, taking the stance that if it is legal and decent our committee will support it. You can be taken by surprise at times as has been proved in the past by our trips to a Clay Pigeon shooting range (fully supported by trained marksmen and coaches), guided tours of underground caves and tunnels, and visits to stately homes and gardens. Proving that our members, despite our demographic still have an adventurous spirit.

### **Social**

The Social Committee we put in place a year ago, has gone from strength to strength. Regular meetings are held for brainstorming events with each member taking responsibility for the organisation of a particular event.

The constantly rising costs of transport (coaches) continues to be a challenge, and trying to find local companies with acceptable rates is not as easy as it was a few years ago. However, our Social Committee remains determined and has already started putting together a programme for 2025.

### **Communication with members**

Our website has now been running successfully for nearly two years, replacing the old site provided by Site Builder. With extensive use of email, our website, social media, and the E&E Newsletter we continue to keep our members up-to-date with all that is going on within the Epsom and Ewell U3A. The 'E&E News' is now an established monthly feature and is greatly supported by our membership. Group leaders as well as members are actively contributing to the news items with pictures and updates, the contributions are growing. Our new Website has proved to be the go-to place for all current information on social events.

### **Non-Internet Members.**

We continue to offer our Newsletter service to non-internet members. Any member can send a pack of stamped addressed envelopes to the Membership Secretary. The Newsletter is printed off, an envelope is selected from the pack and the newsletter is sent to the member by return post. Introducing this service has achieved a shared expenditure while reducing waste and supports our inclusivity policy.

### **Open House**

Our open house event this year was well attended with many group leaders supporting the event to promote their interest group or the u3a as a whole. As part of our community support programme, we have encouraged and supported a visit from the Surrey Fire and Rescue Service who were promoting their 'Safe and Well' project.

### **The Future**

The Epsom and Ewell u3a continues to look toward the future with more diversity, variety, and inclusion. We push hard to reach out to all those who are no longer in full-time employment. We encourage a younger demographic and recognise the need to keep our membership strong and vibrant. However, we also recognise the important contribution and loyal support that our long-term members still offer.

The Epsom and Ewell u3a is still one of the best, if not the best in the Surrey Network. We have a strong administration and packed program to offer anyone looking for fulfilment in their third age. In my time as Chair, many extraordinary things have happened as the world still struggles to find a peaceful path, tragedy and success walking hand in hand. Despite all of this the u3a movement has stood firm and with its unique principle is still the best organisation for those who seek a new interest, new friends, and new challenges after retirement.

Tony Skelton

Epsom and Ewell U3A

Chair