

## Chairs Report October 2021

Without a doubt it has been an exceptional and challenging year for all u3a's. Shepton Mallet has been no exception.

In fact, it has only been in recent weeks that we have sent out guidelines to our Group Leaders advising that, if they feel ready, then they can officially restart their groups. This is not to say that everything is back to how it used to be because I do not think it is.

The pandemic has had an effect on existing groups, many are needing new Leaders or venues. Some will close. Some new, proposed activities garner no support at all which is terribly disappointing when a member is so willing to take on the role of Group Leader and the responsibility of organising and running them.

Throughout this past 12 months The Trust and the National Office have led us. We have been bombarded with advice, information, updates, and emails on what, when and how to stay connected with our members in lockdown.

SMu3a went into hibernation as we could no longer hold meetings, or coffee mornings, or group activities but the Committee was bolstered by your support. We remain functional and financially viable.

Our monthly Newsletter proved to be a real beacon of communication keeping us all in touch and providing information and humour during the months when we could not meet. So, to everyone who submitted photos, quizzes, recipes and jokes - (you know who you are) I send you a huge vote of thanks.

This extends to Julia and Keith who produce, type, edit and continue to send out each issue every month.

Committee meetings continued also, early on we used emailed communications as there was little to discuss or agree. In November we embraced technology by purchasing a one year Zoom licence and we were then able to hold virtual Committee meetings, courtesy of Jane, who set it all up and kept us connected.

Although the Zoom facility was made available to all groups to use, there was a reluctance to take advantage. However, we know that many of you stayed connected through your own zoom accounts and friendship groups.

Our NSA network meetings were also held virtually and seemed none the worse for that but certainly saved us the expense and journey time to Burnham on Sea.

The Committee voted to keep our membership fee to just £10 again this year in recognition of the uncertainty ahead and we hope this will encourage renewal and generate new interest. We are still updating our records following the September renewal days and I will be able to tell you soon how many members are enrolled and how many are eligible to vote at this year's AGM.

The Trust decided to rebrand their image and logo last autumn – have you noticed? We had a new leaflet printed which reflected the new format and style, I hope you have seen it, approved and like it.

On your behalf, I thank the nine Committee members for keeping calm and carrying on despite everything that has happened since the last AGM. They have summoned their energy, thoughts and

time to ensure that not only has SMu3a survived but also has a future. They have helped and supported me as Chair for the past 3 years – I could not have done it without them.

Finally, thank you to all our members and please continue to support SMu3a in any and every way you can.

SMu3a though small in numbers compared to other local u3a's in neighbouring towns has proved to be resilient, valued by its community, a source of old and new friendships and a support to all in the past year, long may this continue.

Liz Nash