

Cotswold Link u3a network
Minutes of half yearly meeting held on 26 March 2026
at The Larruperz Centre, Ross-on-Wye

Present:

Alan Russell (Chair), Marion Collighan (Secretary), Ann Kelly (Treasurer), Jenny Harrison (committee member), Claire Henderson (committee member), John Lang (committee member), Sue Russell (Chair of u3a Council), Susan Parker (South West council member). Mike Pritchard, Gillian Thompson & Lynne Craig (Bishops Cleeve), Steve McHale (Bourton and District), John Dawson (Cam, Dursley & District), Rod Griffiths (Cheltenham), Jane Moore & Gavin Laubscher (Churchdown), Chris Boydell (Cirencester), Lesley Short & Sue Ackrill (Droitwich Spa), David Daniels (Evesham & District), Christine Blackwell (Fairford & District), Clive Harper (Gloucester), Kim Brinkworth & Sue Moller (Hereford), Sally Holliday (Ledbury & District), Sally Whyte & Helen Barrett (Persore), Sue Gee (Redditch), William Lyons & Mark Eardley (Ross-on-Wye), Dilys Warren & Peter Toon (Stroud), Mike Jones (Tewkesbury), Paul McDonald & Lynne Smith (Winchcombe), Christine Scott & Stewart White (Worcester).

1) Apologies for absence

There were voting delegates representing 20 u3as out of the 28 Cotswold Link members, which is 71%, making the meeting quorate.

Apologies had been received from: Marian Luck (South West council representative), Jean Jackson (West Midlands council representative), Anthea Whitehead (Bromsgrove), Malcolm Hackman (Forest of Dean), Jeremy Furtado (Gloucester), Mike Goodwin (Leominster), Alan Torbet (Malvern), Jane Ryan (Newent), Lindis Dobson (Northleach), Margaret Oliver (North Cotswolds), Dan Freeman (Thornbury).

2) Acceptance of minutes of half yearly meeting held on 11 September 2025

No issues were raised with the minutes from the previous half yearly meeting in September 2025. The minutes were approved.

3) Matters arising from the minutes

Peter Toon suggested that the meeting welcome our newest u3a, Forest of Dean. This was noted although they had been unable to attend this time.

4) News from the committee

a) Special Interest Day 2026

Alan advised that the title of the special interest day this year will be "From Pen to Reader – The Journey of a Book" This will be held at the Pavilion in Cheltenham on 2nd June 2026. The flyer for the event was distributed to u3a contacts at the end of January and so far, we have had over 40 registrations, including a few from outside Cotswold Link. This year we are trialling an online registration option, along with the options to apply by email and post. Ann added that each participant would be sent the programme for the day closing to the date of the event.

b) Peer support groups

The Cotswold Link committee facilitate 4 successful peer support groups for role holders, which meet over Zoom every 2-3 months.

i) Treasurers

Ann facilitates the Treasurers' group, which contains all 28 treasurers of the Cotswold Link u3as. This year there have been quite a few new treasurers joining the group, who have been helped by more experienced treasurers. There has been increasing interest in Beacon from those who don't yet use it for finance. Speakers are often invited to address issues that have been raised. Christine Blackwell added that she finds the group very useful.

ii) Business Secretaries

Marion has been facilitating the Business Secretaries' group, which contains 14 people. Recent subjects discussed have included: How money is managed by u3as; Documents needed by the Charity Commission; Storing documents; Committee Structures; Open meeting speakers and attendance monitoring. The group will now self-organise using the Cotswold Link Beacon.

iii) Groups Coordinators

Marion has been facilitating the Groups Coordinators' group, which contains 12 people. Recent subjects discussed have included: Payment machines; use of WhatsApp by groups; Beacon usage by group leaders; Committee structures; Accessibility; Risk Assessments; Group presence at Open days. At the next meeting the group will agree how they will organise going forward.

iv) Membership Secretaries

Marion has been facilitating the Membership Secretaries' group, which contains 12 people. Recent subjects discussed have included: The Beacon Portal; Problems with renewals; Identifying members not in groups; Security of members data; Making new members feel welcome; Combining committee roles. Claire Henderson has volunteered to facilitate this group.

v) Chairs

At the Autumn meeting Alan suggested that he would like to restart this group, which is currently on hold. This activity is still pending. Other groups for chairs, such as the National Chairs Forum, are too large to have a proper discussion of local issues.

vi) Speakers' Secretaries

Marion advised that the peer support group of Speakers Secretaries in Gloucestershire coordinated by Anne Cox from Tetbury is no longer

meeting. Some delegates expressed a wish to find a way to keep this group going.

It was suggested that a list of recommended speakers be added to the website. Alan agreed to consider this. Marion advised that Anne Cox had taken part in a detailed investigation about adding recommended speakers to the SW regional website. However, there had been considerable practical difficulties, so the idea had not been pursued. She will look out the notes on the discussion to share with the group.

Peter Toon asked if there would be any conflict with the National Speakers list but Alan advised that he did not think this would be the case.

5) Report from the West Midlands – Sue Russell Chair of u3a Council

Sue Russell gave the report for the West Midlands as Jean Jackson, the only West Midlands council representative, was unable to attend.

Sue explained that nobody has put themselves forward as a council representative for the WM, so when Jean steps down in a few days there will be no representatives. All other regions now have 2 representatives. The council needs to hear what's important to u3as in the region. The council takes learning from other u3a to the national level.

4 people from the WM are operating at National level, Sue and Alan Russell, Lawrence Wale and Allan Walmsley. They plan to try to create enthusiasm to facilitate activities in the region.

Sue advised members that Cotswold Link is one of the most successful networks. Sue mentioned that she and Alan had recently had a very enjoyable visit to North Cotswold u3a. Sue can be contacted on sue.russell@u3a.org.uk

Discussion

One of the delegates had heard that some people were interested in the council posts. Sue explained that 2 people had originally expressed an interest, however, in the end did not apply. She would be interested to hear why they did not continue with their application.

Sue agreed that all the regions are badly shaped but there is no easy way to make regions with more helpful shapes unless the sizes of the regions are reduced.

6) Report from the South West – Susan Parker, SW council representative

Sue Russell explained that Susan Parker is stepping down as a SW representative in the few days, having served for over 5 years, initially as the SW regional trustee. She has made many visits around the region, travelling from Plymouth.

Susan Parker gave the report for the South West on behalf of herself and Marian Luck, our 2 SW council representatives. She mentioned that she started her term of office during covid when we could only meet over Zoom. Today's meeting is the second of 3 consecutive network meetings she is attending round the SW region.

The new regional trustee for the SW is Paul Ward. He will start next week, joining Marian Luck.

A meeting was held in Taunton recently, which was attended by 78 representatives from u3as around the SW. It is hoped to arrange another.

The regional meetings are moving to a new format. Twice a year there will be a face to face business meeting in the morning followed by a workshop for u3a committee members, particularly Chairs, in the afternoon. The next workshop will be on volunteering. There will also be 2 business meetings over Zoom.

There were no questions.

7) AOB

There was no other business.

8) Date and time of next meeting

The Autumn half yearly meeting will be hosted by Cheltenham u3a on Tuesday 22 September 2026. The venue will be The Pavilion, Hatherley Lane, Cheltenham, GL51 6PN.

Signed..... Date