

CN u3a – Letter to members regarding 2026 subscription

Dear members,

Since we were elected at the AGM in March this year, the new CN u3a committee have been reviewing the state of the region's finances. This has revealed that for four out of the last six years, the Chipping Norton & Area Branch of the u3a has been running at a financial loss. This was partially enabled by a period from 2013 to 2016 when the annual subscription was raised and a substantial float was built up.

The CN u3a subscription this year was £15, exactly the same as when the Chippy area u3a started in 2001. This is considerably less than that of other organisations to which some of our members subscribe e.g. RSPB from £60 annually for adult membership; National Trust adult membership £96 a year; the WI 2025/6 £51.

Whilst we are no longer heavily exposed to postage costs as most of the information previously sent by post is now distributed via email, total UK inflation from 2001 to 2025 has been 86.2%. Over the last 5 years alone, the average UK inflation rate has been more than 5% per annum with the result that average prices now are 22.4% higher than in 2021.

Since 2001, the cost of hiring the hall for speaker meetings has more than doubled, the per capita contribution to the national u3a has doubled from £2 to £4 per person, average speaker fees have more than doubled and a charge of £1 per person has been introduced for the Beacon system which enables individual u3a's to manage the membership and communicate with members.

All this together means that the float built up over previous years has been almost totally eroded and maintaining the present low subscription is clearly unsustainable.

As an organisation we have relatively few ways of reducing our operating costs. Apart from our contributions to the national u3a and Beacon, both of which are based on the number of members, our largest expenditure is on speakers and hall hire for our monthly meetings. We are very reluctant to reduce the number of speaker meetings as these events are valued by members.

Next year we will be celebrating the 25th anniversary of the formation of Chippy u3a and we would like to be able to do this via an event to which all members can be invited.

Taking all the above into consideration, we need to increase our income which is possible by a combination of recruiting more members and raising the membership fee.

You will already have seen that we are doing our best to increase our membership by introducing new special interest groups and widely advertising our events. This is already bearing fruit but on its own will not be sufficient to balance the books in 2026.

We are therefore compelled to increase the annual membership subscription for 2026 to £20 per person. At the same time, the subscription for joining for the half year after July 2026 will be increased to £12.50 per person and the charge for visiting non-members to attend our speaker meetings will be increased to £5.

Whilst not commensurate with the increased costs outlined above, we believe that introducing these changes, rising membership numbers and the continuing support of our members should enable us to offer another successful and enjoyable year to you all.

Pat Lake

Chairman, Chipping Norton and Area u3a