

## Volunteers at the Heart of the Network



This month we held our annual Volunteers Lunch at Bathgate Golf Club. It's a small gesture, but an important one, and a chance for West Lothian 50+ Network to properly say thank you to the volunteers who make everything we do possible.

Our Chair, Sue Bedford-Visser, spoke honestly about the year we've had. Financial pressure across the third sector is real, and demand isn't easing, particularly with the growth in West Lothian's ageing population and the corresponding increased need for connection and purpose. The easy option would have been to pull back. Instead, our leaders, volunteers and members stepped forward, reached more people, started new groups, and kept showing up week after week. That's why the Network is still here, still growing, and still playing its part in the wider community.

We were delighted to be joined by 64 of our volunteers at the lunch. Between them, they've given thousands of hours over the past year, with plenty more never formally recorded. Those hours have meant connection, confidence, learning and belonging for over 700 members. That impact doesn't happen by accident. It happens because people care and act on it.

Our volunteers support the Network in so many ways. Some lead groups, some help at events, others support the Hub team, assist with admin, and even pitch in with the practical jobs that keep things running smoothly. We also want to recognise our Board of Trustees, who volunteer their time behind the scenes to oversee the charity and help secure the Network's future.

A special thanks to Home Instead Charities for recognising the importance of our volunteers by contributing to the cost of the lunch.

## National Lottery Community Fund

Shortly before Christmas, West Lothian 50+ Network received confirmation that we have been awarded a multi-year grant from the National Lottery Community Fund.

This support is a very welcome boost for the Network. It helps strengthen our financial stability, gives us more confidence to plan ahead, and supports us to continue delivering the groups, activities and opportunities that matter to members across West Lothian.

We also want to recognise the huge amount of work that went into getting the application for this grant over the line. A massive thank you to our fundraiser Laura, who led the process and put in a tremendous amount of work behind the scenes. As part of the application, the funder also carried out interviews with our Charity Manager and some of our members, alongside reviewing our plans and the work we have in place to support older people across West Lothian.

It's a real vote of confidence in the work we do, and we're grateful to the National Lottery Community Fund for backing our charity and the difference it makes in local communities.



## Coach Trips and Holidays



*Members had a brilliant time on our Twixmas getaway in Harrogate*

### Summerlee Museum and Garrion Bridges Garden and Antiques Centre – Saturday 31 January 2026

On our first trip of 2026 we'll start the day at Summerlee Museum of Scottish Industrial Life before heading on to Garrion Bridges Garden and Antiques Centre. Plenty to see and do at both stops, and indoor space for winter weather conditions.

**Cost: £21 per person**

**Now on sale: Bookings can be made in the Hub, by phone, or online.**

### Exclusive Access to Abbotsford House & Free Time in Melrose – Saturday 28 February 2026

A full day out to the Scottish Borders, with exclusive early access to Abbotsford House before the season opens. Members will enjoy a visit around the former home of Sir Walter Scott, without the usual crowds. After that, we'll head into Melrose for free time when you can explore the town, browsing the independent shops, enjoy a relaxed coffee or lunch, visit the Abbey or perhaps have a stroll along the river Tweed.

**Cost: £35 per person**

**On Sale: Wednesday 28 January 2026 – Bookings can be made in the Hub, by phone, or online from 10am.**

### Isle of Man Holiday – 13–17 April 2026 SOLD OUT

We have had great response to our Spring holiday and all places have now been taken. We're starting to look at options for a holiday later in the year so please let us know if there's anywhere you'd love to visit.

**For more information on any upcoming trips and events, please contact the Hub team on 01506 635510 between 10am and 2pm, Monday to Friday.**

**Please let us know if you have any accessibility needs when booking.**

## First Step Into the Network



An excellent turnout at our first New Members Get Together this month, with over 20 people coming along to find out more about the Network.

Our Member Support Team gave a clear overview of what we're all about. It was good to have current members there to share their own experiences and help answer questions.

We're really looking forward to welcoming you along to groups over the coming weeks.

Over the next couple of months, we'll also be introducing more drop-in style sessions to make getting started even easier, with a relaxed and friendly first step into the Network.

## A Community Space in Action

Our Hub on George Street continues to grow as a real community asset, supporting not only our members, but the wider West Lothian community too.

Each week, we're proud to provide space for West Lothian Foodbank to operate from the Hub, helping make support more accessible for people who need it most.

This month, we also welcomed Bathgate Men's Shed, bringing more local activity into the building and helping create new connections across the town.

We are also pleased to host Carers of West Lothian for a session focused on carer awareness and their MIST programme, helping to highlight the vital role unpaid carers play and the support available to them.

It's a strong reminder that the Network and our Hub are about more than recreational activities. They're about community, partnership, and making sure our space is used in ways that benefit as many people as possible.

## Membership Fees 2026-2027

In recognition of members' magnificent response to our fundraising appeal last year, and the amazing outcomes, it was unanimously agreed by the Board of Trustees that no increase in the membership fee will be made for 2026/27. Your renewal fee of £36 is due on 1<sup>st</sup> April 2026.

## Activity Groups Update

### Gaelic for Beginners

Join us for a relaxed five-week Gaelic for Beginners course at the WL50+ Hub in Bathgate. Running Mondays 12:00pm to 1:00pm from 23 February, the sessions cover practical phrases and a simple introduction to Gaelic in Scotland. Perfect for complete beginners.

### Writers Chat Group

Our Writers Chat Group meets monthly at the WL50+ Hub and is a relaxed space to share ideas, chat about writing, and get inspired by others. Whether you write stories, poems, memories, or you've never written a word in your life, you'll be made welcome.

### Table Tennis

Table Tennis meets at Xcite Craigswood, Livingston and we're planning to launch a second session on Friday mornings. It's a relaxed, welcoming group and all abilities are welcome, from beginners to experienced players.



*Our new Bathgate Brunch Club at 1912*



*Dawdlers walk in Beechraigs Country Park*



*Members enjoying our Twixmas meet up in the Hub*

## Twixmas Getaway to Harrogate

Our Twixmas getaway to Harrogate was a proper winter escape, with 30 members heading off for a few days of exploring new places and a well-deserved change of scenery. There were plenty of cosy café stops along the way, which went down a treat and helped everyone to meet and chat to fellow travellers.

We kicked things off with a couple of great stops on the way down south, taking in Gretna Green and Richmond before arriving at our comfortable hotel in Harrogate.

Day two was all about York, with plenty of time to wander its historic streets, enjoy the museums, and take in the sights, including the city walls for anyone up for a walk.

On day three we headed to Knaresborough, with riverside views and a relaxed pace, before returning to Harrogate for free time to explore the town, browse the shops, and enjoy the sales.

On the journey home we squeezed in two stops, at Barnard Castle and at Moffat, rounding off the trip nicely before heading back to Bathgate.

It was one of those breaks where there's something for everyone, from history and scenery to shopping and a good blether. The best bit was seeing members getting to know each other and make new connections over the four days.



## Have Your Say In Our Member Survey

We're inviting all our members to take a few minutes to complete our Member Survey 2026. Your feedback helps us understand what's working well, what could be improved, and what you'd like to see more of across West Lothian 50+ Network.

As a thank you, everyone who completes the survey will have the option to enter a prize draw to win a £100 Steamship Sir Walter Scott Gift Card (Loch Katrine), kindly donated.

If you use email, you should have received a link to complete the survey online this week.

Paper copies are also available in the Hub, and you can return them using the post box at reception.

## Volunteer Spotlight



This month we're shining a light on Ann Alexander. Ann has been a member for nearly ten years and has become a driving force across the Network. You will find Ann at the heart of our Art Group 1 where her talent speaks for itself. Yet it is the graft behind the scenes that really shows her character. She sorts materials orders, measures up displays and helps build our art exhibitions from the ground up.

She is also the woman responsible for many of the posters you see around West Lothian. If an event needs shouted about, Ann is the first to get her coat on and head out with a smile. She has now stepped up again by joining our Events Team, bringing her energy and creative thinking to everything we do.

Ann shows what volunteering with the Network is all about. Warm, talented, willing to roll her sleeves up and get stuck in, never shy of going the extra mile. We are chuffed to bits to have her on the team.

Thank you Ann. You make a huge difference and we are proud to shout about it.

## Behind the Scenes at the Network

Over the past couple of weeks we've been taking the first steps in developing the Network's new 3-year strategy. This is about making sure we're clear on what matters most, where we want to be in the future, and how we keep delivering strong services for members right across West Lothian.

We've also been continuing discussions at Rosemount Gardens, including a meeting with the residents' group and council officers, about the future of the café space and how it could be used more by community groups. The key focus is getting the balance right, keeping it a welcoming and positive social space for residents and families, while also opening up more opportunities for connection and community use. There's real potential there, and we'll keep members updated as things develop.

We're also getting ahead of venue changes. Bathgate Partnership Centre will be introducing charges for room hire from April, so we're gathering full details now and looking at what options are available. The aim is simple: to make sure groups have clear information early, that we can plan properly to protect what's affordable and sustainable, and to explore alternatives where needed. Our priority is keeping groups affordable and protecting what matters most to members.



All smiles at our volunteers lunch

## Dates For Your Diary

### Musical Afternoon (with Alex and Carol)

 Saturday 14 February, 2pm to 4pm

 WL50+ Hub, 14 George Street, Bathgate

 £4 – Tickets available from the WL50+ Hub

A Valentine's themed afternoon, for the obvious reasons, but you don't need a Valentine to come along. We hope to see everyone up dancing.

### Next Members' Meeting

 Saturday 21 February, 10:30am to 12:30pm

 WL50+ Hub, George Street, Bathgate

 Lord Lieutenant for West Lothian, Moira Niven will be our guest speaker, sharing updates on her work since her last visit, including the State Funeral and Coronation.

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[www.oscr.org.uk](http://www.oscr.org.uk)

**Registered  
SCIO  
SC051335**



[hub@westlothian50plusnetwork.co.uk](mailto:hub@westlothian50plusnetwork.co.uk)



01506-635510