

EDP WI WEEK 7th December

Liz Barker, Chairman Norfolk Federation of WIs PA Committee

### **What does the WI Public Affairs Committee do?**

What does PA stand for? No, not the Press Association on this occasion! We used to be IPA – International Public Affairs – but recently we dropped the “international”, although part of our remit still is to promote international understanding. So, it is “public affairs” which is a vast brief and our meetings certainly reflect this!

Who are we? There are 8 of us at present on the Committee. I am the chair and also the Resolutions Coordinator for the Norfolk Federation of WIs. This shows you one of our main responsibilities – Resolutions and Campaigning. The WI has an amazing reputation for campaigning and it all begins with a WI member having the conviction to pursue an issue and write a resolution. Eventually, the Resolution becomes a campaign. In June the National Federation of WIs passed 2 resolutions – “A call against the decline in local bus services” and “Don’t fear the smear” - so these are our current campaigns alongside many ongoing campaigns such as “End Plastic Soup”. The WI has campaigned on the provision of buses previously so a few years ago the Norfolk Federation of WIs was able to accept the invitation to chair the Norfolk Bus Forum which has been a very successful initiative.

Hazel Jones, who is Vice-Chairman of our Committee, particularly concentrates on organising events which reflect our educational brief, often with an international flavour. We have had events based on Bastille Day, Nelson and Norfolk’s links to the sea, St George and most recently an event focussing on the life of the landscape architect, Humphrey Repton. At the moment we are preparing a day about the Vikings and their influence here in Norfolk.

Another event which is very important to us is International Women’s Day each year at the beginning of March. We have worked with many other organisations in Norfolk for some years under the umbrella of “Women reaching Women” including a meeting in the Cathedral last year.

One of our main international commitments is our link with the Associated Countrywomen of the World charity. The WI is affiliated with this organisation which brings together about 470 women’s societies in 80 countries worldwide, potentially giving voice to 9 million women at the United Nations. Brenda Packman is Norfolk’s representative to this organisation for which WI members in Norfolk have been collecting ‘Pennies for Friendship’ for over 70 years. All these pennies, which mount up over a year into quite a useful number of pounds, are sent to ACWW to deliver the financial help requested by women and girls involved in their own, local, initiatives. At the moment we are supporting a literacy project in Papua New Guinea. Norfolk WI members also walk at the end of April along with many women worldwide to raise awareness of the issues as part of the Women Walk the World day.

You may have noticed in February that many organisations come together to form the Climate Coalition which is concerned with the changes happening to our world and tries to get people to think about what is happening. The “Green Hearts” which

people wear are to provoke a conversation around this issue. Elaine Weymouth is one of the WI's Climate Change Ambassadors and we shall be supporting this event next February.

Jean Wilson was on the PA Committee for some years and was at one time Chairman of the Norfolk Federation. She had many links to health and caring organisations which is another part of our remit. Her links with AgeUK Norfolk were beneficial for both them and us but she is particularly proud of the Admiral Nurses which she helped to bring to Norfolk. These nurses work in a similar way to the Macmillan nurses and support the whole family of someone suffering with dementia. Norfolk WI became involved after hearing the CEO of Dementia UK speak at one of our Annual meetings.

Jay Page has been a WI member for many years and is passionate about the importance of the movement in the community as a means of social support and friendship. She now represents us on many organisations linked to carers, especially Carers Matter Norfolk. As a former nurse herself, she has much experience to share and is particularly pleased with her input to the Carers charter produced by Norfolk County Council which helps support carers.

So, our committee is moving forward into 2020 with our usual enthusiasm. Jan Colbert, who has recently joined us, has this to say about being part of our plans "As the new kid on the block so far as the Public Affairs Committee is concerned, I have been very impressed, not to say overawed, by the amount of hard work put into bringing the many projects and concerns of the WI to public attention". Yes, certainly hard work but well worth it! Here's to the next 100 years of the WI in Norfolk!

## **OBITUARY**

**We were all saddened by the sudden death of Jean Wilson at the end of November. Jean worked tirelessly for her community, both locally in Newton Flotman and across the whole of Norfolk. Among other things she was a Parish Councillor, Church Warden, and CAB adviser, but at the heart of her life was the WI. In Newton Flotman WI she was secretary for many years and then President, and more recently one of the Vice-Presidents. Her passion was the campaigning aspect of the WI and she served on the Norfolk Federation Public Affairs Committee for many years. That led her to being elected to the Federation Board of Trustees and becoming the Chairman Jean always got involved and was never happier than when she was promoting the WI and its values and achievements. She will be sorely missed in both Newton Flotman WI and in the wider WI world.**