

Bradwell Committee Open Meeting

Held at the Bradwell Centre on the 12th August 2023 at 11:00

People

Who's who

Steve Barnes chaired the meeting and introduced himself as chair of the Bradwell management committee, a task he shares with Chris Jones, to whom we are indebted for the following comprehensive record.

Steve introduced the Wardens, Richard and Debbie Sanders. Debbie introduced the current core team members, Phil Martin, Amanda MacKenzie and Chris(?), and explained that we now have volunteers through the French Civic Service scheme.

Other members of the Bradwell Committee were introduced; Mary Grimson, Nicholas Manoukas, Susanne Kelly and Emma Anderson (with Gereldine O'Grady, Simon Thompson and Sasha East unable to attend). Steve, Chris and Sasha represent Bradwell on the trustee body. A welcome was given to visiting trustees Mark McDonald (Trustee Board Secretary and safeguarding lead) and Jane Pearse (Vice Chair). A brief resume was given of the working groups that support the core teams here and at West Dorset (health and safety, safeguarding, site development).

Debbie gave a summary of current recruitment efforts, in particular a vacancy for a housekeeper to take on the day to day cleaning of the centre buildings and facilities. There are applicants under consideration but more applications are welcome.

Membership

Phil Martin gave a summary of his role as membership secretary and expressed thanks for the 225 people that submitted survey forms as the start of the consultation exercise. This has provided valuable information to decide on policies to promote membership and he is due to present an analysis of the results at the AGM in September this year.

Kate Mulkern noted that it is unusual that membership of Othona does not confer voting rights at general meetings in relation to the selection and election of trustees. She expressed the view that a more democratic process might foster more engagement from Members.

Richard commented that elections might be useful.

Jonney Aldridge expressed the opinion that the recent virtual AGMs are not "proper AGMs" and miss the opportunity to bring community members from both centres together. [It was later pointed out that AGMs were once called 'AGM and Reunion']

Rosie Sinden Evans noted that Membership is an expression of our desire to align ourselves with something we believe in deeply and that £12 per year is a small price to pay for this.

Ali Tebbs observed that elections can result in well known people being selected rather than those with the skills and experience required to manage the charity and its centres. She also noted there must be more candidates than positions to be filled to initiate an election, but this has not been the case for some time.

Governance - Richard Sanders

Richard explained the division of key responsibilities amongst the core team. Richard is responsible for Health and Safety, Debbie for Safeguarding and Phil for Food Hygiene.

Phil reported that the Health and Hygiene inspection in March 2023 had gone well with the centre retaining a 5 star rating. Documentary records are much improved which was critical to providing evidence of hygiene rotas, supplier lists and assessments etc.

Debbie reported that Mark MacDonald and Claire Gough have brought safeguarding policies up to date. All core team members have to read, sign and observe a code of conduct and DBS checks are carried out as required.

There is now an extra page in the guests' welcome file which outlines some of the expectations placed on guests. Steve asked those present for their response to this.

Jan Darley noted that we all have a responsibility to keep the site clean and tidy, putting waste in the right places to save the core team time and effort.

Amanda noted that the members living and working at the centres are not 'staff' but 'core' members with roles needed to facilitate community, a totally different model from the staff / visitor relationship in most organisations. She noted that it is important for members to observe this usage to keep this difference in mind and that it is appreciated by the core team. Richard and Debbie endorsed this comment fully.

Emma Anderson noted that Sunday night Warden's talks are no longer being delivered and noted that these would have been helpful to her, when first attending, to understand expectations.

Susanne Kelly noted that the core team face many challenges and the repetition of the Warden's talk may not be the most effective way to achieve this (it can be a bit like the pre-flight drill on airlines). She suggested community events could have an "officer" appointed to whom new people can go to seek guidance. The chaplaincy role can also be useful for keeping an eye out for people seeming to be a bit lost.

Jane Pearse noted that, as a retreat leader, she values being provided with a list of attendees with notes to identify new people.

Communication

Debbie reported that the Othona website is undergoing a major update. Chris noted that this was precipitated by the current web platform reaching the end of its support lifecycle so the migration to a new platform was essential but also opens the opportunity for a review of layout, features and content.

Debbie explained that Tom Farley has managed the project thus far to develop specification and review of bids and appointment of a new company to implement the update. However, Tom is leaving his position at Othona West Dorset in August and will not have time to manage delivery and oversight of the implementation phase, though he has offered to support and handover. A “volunteer” position has been advertised for 6 months to cover management of the implementation and applications are welcome.

The new structure will have common content transferred from the centre websites to a central site. Mark explained that a strong central “landing site” gives a better impression of a unified organisation to funding bodies and other supportive organisations. One community with two centres. It also avoids duplication and potential for conflicting information.

Rosie asked if the central site would contain information about the trustees and governance. Debbie responded that these are amongst the items identified as content for the central website.

Susanne noted that the rolling visual image banner on the current website is a valuable feature and should be retained. It tells a positive story and gives a strong visual impression of community life.

Rosie noted that the community magazine “Full Circle” had been a forum for community contributions and essential information that has been lost since it ceased to be published. Ali noted that, as a former editor, it was frequently a struggle to get contributions from members in a timely manner. Rosie noted that changes in the way we communicate in the modern world make it unlikely that a printed version of Full Circle could be a realistic proposition.

Cathrin Jones noted that a Members area might be useful for members to share pictures and other media though she acknowledged that security and data protection would need to be addressed. Debbie also noted that open forums need moderation and this can become time consuming and even a full time job for a busy site. Martin Riemer observed that images with people give the best impressions of community life and worship.

Infrastructure

Jonney Aldridge noted that, in spite of the addition of acoustic tiles in the main hall of the Motley Building, the transmission of kitchen noise to the lounge area remains a problem.

Richard listed a number of improvements that have been made recently:

- New glazing in the Motley building.
- New curtains in the solar building that cover the windows
- Contract placed for complete refurbishment of the accessible bathroom, due to start in September. There have been generous donations towards the £15K cost but further donations would be welcome.

The site sewage system has a problem with the septic tank such that there are leaks between the first and second chambers sufficient to compromise the digestion process. In consequence the water in the pond is no longer “bathing quality” and wildlife sessions with school groups have been suspended. The trustees infrastructure sub-committee, headed by John Smith have agreed that this issue is the top priority for development at Bradwell. A

modern treatment plant will be needed to meet current standards and regulations and will need to be sized to accommodate the maximum flow conditions when the site is at full capacity. The cost could be in the order of £70K.

Emma asked if the sizing estimates include future expansion of the site. Richard confirmed that it does.

Trevor Darley noted that the pond also serves as the firefighting resource for the buildings and maintaining it was a condition of planning permission being granted for the Motley building.

Richard reported that the planning application for a new larger wind turbine had been unsuccessful. Efforts are ongoing to consider how the application could be changed to make an acceptable improvement in the wind generation capacity available. This is, however, a lower priority than resolving the sewage problem.

The lower field hut has suffered considerable movement of the screw post foundations during the heat of last summer. Ultimately this is sited on poor ground which is prone to movement. Trevor Darley is working on a plan with Mick Crowe and Mick Brash to underpin the hut with Steel RSJs on plinths so that they can be jacked up and “shimmed” periodically to level the building as the ground moves.

Plans for the 11 acre buffer strip are developing. The higher end field is to be used for camping and activities or features like the newly created Labyrinth. The two lower fields are to be a nature reserve. A hedge is to be planted to mark the boundary with the farmland and we have partnered with St Ethelburga's Centre for Peace and Reconciliation as part of their lifelines project to host a team of volunteers to do this in December.

The nature reserve is to include two new ponds. Funding for this is available from a scheme where developers who fill in ponds which are habitats for great crested newts have to provide funding for new ponds to be created.

Roo Bull noted that the last stretch of track has subsided badly. Filling the ditch has helped to slow the subsidence, but she feels that this will need some remedial work soon. Richard confirmed that this is on the “to-do” list.

Roo also requested that the issue of accessible accommodation with en-suite facilities remain on the list of future infrastructure projects. Richard confirmed that this is on the list, but beneath several significant and more pressing priorities.

What we do - Programme

Steve noted that the programme planning for next year is in progress and elicited comments on the events this year.

Jan Darley suggested that a feedback form or suggestions card could be helpful for members to make suggestions for events and speakers as a routine feature of community life.

Rosie noted that the website could helpfully include information about the Bradwell Committee and working groups with named contacts, such as Nicholas Mannoukas for the programme working group.

The Fireworks event is under review at the moment in light of more recent evidence of the impact on wildlife and the environment. Typical spend on fireworks is £900 and mostly include significant pollutants. Current regulations stipulate that displays should not be within 100m of buildings, which is difficult for us to comply with. Though the event generally generates significant revenue, the outlay is also significant and profits are no better than hosting an outside group for the weekend in spite of considerably more effort required.

Dave Bull suggested that drone displays might be a good alternative. Kate Mulkern observed that these are more vulnerable to disruption from wind and rain. Jan Darley suggested that the event could be used to involve other local bodies such as the school in Bradwell.

Amanda noted that it may be time for a change. The green weekend in May has strong support from the local community and with people staying for three days, there is more chance to forge links and get cross-over with locals coming to other events.

Several ideas were mooted for alternative events like an Autumn festival or daytime fete. A Lantern procession might be a draw with lanterns made and then used.

Finances

The infrastructure (heating and electrification) project incurred significant cost overruns and the money borrowed has to be repaid to the trust from operational revenues. Last year the centre made a surplus, but not sufficient to cover the cost of the major projects that have been mentioned.

Jo Harp asked if there is an option for members to make interest free loans. This was done to help fund the Motley building and in the event many lenders converted the loan to a gift.

Trevor Darley noted that Greenbelt encourages those who can to pay above the basic rate to help cover costs for those that cannot afford the full cost. Richard reminded us that Othona already publishes a benefactor rate for the same purpose. The additional sum is treated as a donation to reclaim gift aid.

Steve concluded the meeting with a prayer of thanksgiving.

And the kitchen crew topped it off with...

Lunch!