

Minutes of virtual BCC meeting held Saturday 14th November

Present

Tim Fox, Richard Sanders, Debbie Sanders (Othona Bradwell Management Team), Ruth Bull (Trustee/Bradwell Chair), Steve Barnes (Trustee/BCC member), Susanne Kelly, Nicholas Mannoukas and Geraldine O'Grady. Apologies from Phil Martin, Simon Thompson and Mary Grimson.

Agenda

- Welcome
- Update from Trustees
- Business planning
- Update from Othona Bradwell Management Team (OBMT)
- Discussion
- AOB- including usage of the additional 11 acres of farmland
- Summary

Welcome

- Meeting was started with an opening prayer from Richard
- We had a short moment of sharing anything that has been in our thoughts recently and this focussed on care of elderly relatives during these difficult times and missing our families.

Update from Trustees

- Ruth and Steve updated us with news from the Trustees. There had been a Trustee confidential meeting recently and they were able to share the main points from this. The meeting had a sense of being a shared Community between both sites
- A recent letter from Clare described the slightly improved financial position with the investments doing better than thought and the return of the furlough Scheme. A decision was made at the meeting to not top up the staff wages with the extra 20%. However, as the basic staff are paid less than the minimum wage this would prevent NI contributions being made so for these staff members there will be a 20% contribution from Othona.
- Three specialists with extensive business expertise have been asked to look at the finances and business plans for Othona. They will provide advice on the level of reserves necessary to sustain Othona and critical appraisal of any plans. Both Centres have been asked to provide costings for income/overheads, business plans and a building condition survey for the groups to see by early December.
- The advisors are giving their time for free and plan to have three sessions before the end of February.

Business planning

- It was agreed that a summary of the required details will be sent to all the committee members and if they have any ideas then comments can be sent to the office.
- The time taken to generate the details required will be logged by staff as work. The OBMT will pull together the different scenarios and Angie will generate the financial contribution for each.

- Richard stated that this was very speculative. We have no idea of the global situation next year and therefore what we can offer here, for new ventures such as Airbnb we have no information on which to base any figures.
- We need to emphasise how Othona Bradwell is different from all the other Retreat Centres that operate in the UK and how we can build on that.

Update from OBMT

- Tim thanked all those present for their help and support with opening and running over the summer. It was agreed this had gone well with a lot of positive feedback. Simon was thanked for all his work in getting the H&S documentation ready for opening.
- Some of the changes in running over the summer could be introduced in other years as a new way of working.
- The energy project is completed, and the paperwork submitted for the RHI, there are still a few questions to answer before this is finished. We are having to run the generator more often now that there is less solar power. NM asked how often this is filled and at what cost, RS answered that this was done recently after the last fill in April costing £500. We will monitor the usage over the winter but expect much greater usage over this period.
- The full report on the energy project is due to be completed at the end of this month, this will go to the Trustees. A summary of this will be freely available to members afterwards.
- The wind turbine application is still ongoing. SK mentioned that if permission is granted the work will have to be done within a three-year period. RS mentioned that the government might be introducing incentives for onshore wind turbines early next year, which could be of great benefit.
- Tim discussed the upcoming events of Advent/ Christmas/New Year and implications of the restrictions post lockdown on these. It was difficult to run the October Half Term event once Essex became tier 2. Many of the families who came knew each other leading to some mingling of households. It may be difficult to hold some Community events if we are still classified as tier 2 in December. We have not advertised February Half term yet and it was agreed that with this and the other events we may have to cancel if we feel the event cannot run in line with the guidelines. We will discuss this with Simon once it is clear what the guidelines are.
- The solar building is now listed on Airbnb. We have had one enquiry so far for December but this was for a group of 14, which is not allowed under the guidelines pre-lockdown.
- RB will check on the Grant application from Essex Community Foundation, this could provide £10,000 towards the running costs here.
- The recent fundraising events have been very successful, particularly the Paycation. It would be a good idea to send another reminder before Christmas.
- There is no further news of Bradwell B. It is still a good idea to encourage people to write to their MP with the most effective message pointing out the role of China in the project.
- The ESC volunteers are with us until early January. They are finding the lockdown difficult but are coping well. We have a structured day for them with work either outside or maintenance inside. Maria has produced a Newsletter for November which will be sent out next week. The bid for volunteers for 2021 is in and the decision will be made in January.

Discussion

- The programme for next year was discussed. NM is going to keep in contact with all the organisers from last summer's programme with the intention of running those events in 2021. At the moment with all the uncertainty there is little point in making a detailed programme, but we should be ready to respond when the time is right.
- The Youth weekend event could be combined with Advent or run as a virtual event
- Tim suggested a model for more spontaneous community led events in the short term.
- We should plan that next summer will be more normal and be flexible with events. It would be good to keep some of the weekends for group events as these are popular times and could generate much needed income.
- Events for the working weekend were discussed, there is fencing to be done on the new 11 acres, but this requires the purchase of specific materials at a cost of ~£2000. Susanne is ordering 5 of the sound baffles for the dining room and these could be fitted over the weekend.
- The camping event for Greenbelt went well and this would be a great event to run again and repeat for other themed weekends.

Summary

- Ruth mentioned communications and how we could improve on this. All agreed that keeping a high profile in digital media is really important. Currently the ECS run the Instagram account and Tim/Debbie the facebook page. Ruth writes an Othona update for the Village View. We need to look at ways of increasing our outreach.
- Geraldine suggested a virtual book club as a way of reaching the Community, this could run on Zoom and involve both Centres.
- RS suggested that we need to look at getting more young people involved through Church youth groups. One possibility is through Youth for Christ (YFC) which have national groups. This would help to recruit a new generation of young people involved in Othona. Geraldine suggested Church newsletters and was happy to look into inclusion in diocese magazines.
- It was suggested that a flyer for schools would be good to encourage pupils to return with their parents/carers next time. These could be sent to the school following their visit.
- This meeting was supposed to be a whole day of strategy planning and it was decided that we should make another meeting for this early in the New Year.
- We closed with a finishing prayer from Steve.

Action Points

- DS to send out summary of the business plans required by the OBMT and collate any suggestions from the committee.
- RB to contact Essex Community Foundation next week regarding the grant application
- NM to keep in contact with event organisers for next year
- RS to contact YFC to find out about advertising Othona as a Centre for youth groups
- Geraldine to investigate advertising in Church newsletters/magazines.
- Geraldine to explore the idea of running a virtual book club
- Strategy Meeting on 6th March 2021, hopefully in person at Bradwell.