

Othona Community, Bradwell Centre Committee (BCC)
Zoom meeting Wednesday 21st June 2023, 7.30pm.

In attendance: Steve Barnes, Debbie Sanders, Richard Sanders, Geraldine O'Grady, Chris Jones, Emma Anderson, Sacha East, Phil Martin, Clare Stone (minutes)

Apologies: Mary Grimson, Susanne Kelly, Simon Thomson, Nicholas Mannoukas

Welcome and prayer

People

- Staff and volunteers update

There is a good strong team at the moment, with great volunteers. There will be a pinch point in a couple of weeks until the start of the summer, as some are due to leave soon. There has been interest from another potential volunteer but this is currently undecided. Debbie has been in touch with the Korean Volunteer Agency, who were looking for placements, and there is potential for 30 day placements (due to restrictions of tourist visas). Someone might join in July or September. The French Civic Service may also result in a volunteer in September, with potentially two interesting candidates. This will be helpful as there are a lot of jobs to be done.

A permanent long term housekeeper position still needs to be filled, to cover times when Debbie, Richard and Phil are not there. Accommodation is an issue in recruiting for this role. A female would be preferred to balance the gender mix. It was noted that the current staff are all 50+ white people. Ideally in recruiting for future roles it would be good to encourage diversity and aim for a staff group that is representative of wider society.

- Support needs

Dave Hodgson-Brown - Bradwell Pilgrimage weekend is 30th June - 2nd July. Probably on the Saturday evening there will be a memorial ceremony for Dave, followed by a big party as per his wishes. All are invited. We have committed to having a stall at the Pilgrimage so it would be good to have some help staffing that, and also someone to lead a sea wall walk. Othona is not providing catering, but it will still be busy. **CJ suggested a GDPR-compliant form to collect details from people attending the event.**

- Membership

A possible interim report on the membership survey that Phil distributed early in the year was suggested.

- Keeping in touch

The Newsletters are brilliant; thank you Debbie (and Tony). SB wondered if there was a way to make the newsletter more two way – but acknowledged this was already happening on Facebook. It has been suggested that there could be page on the website where people can upload things, but this would be difficult to monitor. CJ reflected that it was wise for the community not to engage with comments on facebook etc, from previous experience. It would need very good moderation. Some comments on facebook posts are very unhelpful – a diplomatic silence is sensible. A way for people to submit occasional articles might be helpful, which could be included in the newsletter. There should be a word limit and editorial control, if this was to be offered.

Programme

The season so far, attendance, bookings: The centre has been almost at capacity this year, with notable events including the very successful Green Weekend and the Orthodox Church staying for three days, bringing in around £9k. Wild Worship and Art week are fully booked. Other weeks are not yet, but it is expected that they will fill up. There is not a speaker confirmed for Music week yet which is concerning. There is not a good take up for Scything week yet.

Outside groups - schools, Buddhists, etc: The school groups have gone well, and are ongoing, but these groups have dwindled a bit. PM is keen to work with schools so this might be promoted. It is a large amount of work to run these visits, but they are worthwhile. CJ encouraged promoting this to help ensure young people are around for the membership of the future. PM noted that there is a lovely cohort of younger members in the current Othona membership. Nurturing the youth through e.g. half terms is going well. Wild Worship is bringing in lots of new families – this is a great way to attract new and younger membership. New people don't know which are the best weeks to go for, and possibly they might not choose the ones which would give them the best experience. PM would like to explore how to build on and make the most of the great young people that are coming to Othona. **PM and EA will chat about this outside the meeting – how to develop the next generation.** CJ supports having youth focused weeks to build up the stocks of younger people. RS noted that ghettoizing young people into a particular week is not necessarily the best approach. There are quite a few cross generational, three generational families that visit. SE suggested thinking about grandparents relating to/looking after grandchildren as a potential area to explore. Gold DoE opportunities might be worth promoting. SE taught a young leadership course – this sort of thing could be explored. Tim Fox had tried to set up a youth weekend previously, which had not taken off. EA suggested a youth council, a youth takeover week, with a lot of support, where they would get to try taking responsibility for running things. Essex Council for Voluntary Youth Services could be worth approaching, although PM knows them well and thinks they would not see Othona as a youth organization.

ACTION (PM/AE) to meet to develop ideas around how to invest in this group of younger people

- Main 'duty' roles - chaplain, maintenance coordinator, recreation coordinator. David Martin will be there in the summer and will take on the duty list. Claire Guillot may take on the role of chaplain. There are cooks for all the weeks.
- Open meeting at Bradwell, Saturday August 12th, 11.00-1.00. Last year this served for bringing the membership and attendees up to date with what's going on at Bradwell, issues we are facing, changes to personnel etc. Using Zoom didn't work too well last year so probably won't do that this time.

Development

- Accessible shower room – a contractor has been appointed who will undertake this work over the summer. The fundraising effort needs a push. The cost is £15k, of which about 10% has been raised. The net could be spread a bit wider. Debbie is looking into lots of different grants. This is essential work. **All to keep a look out for grants that might be helpful.**
- CJ reflected on the gender neutral bathrooms at Othona West Dorset, due to the layout. This would be beneficial, but the underfloor heating is a significant issue with reconfiguring things. This has been discussed with Suzanne. Cubicles with wash basins result in longer occupancy. It will be good to think further on this. Debbie has already made the cathedral toilets gender neutral. This solves the issue of men having to change baby's nappies in the female toilet, and is a more welcoming signal to trans or non-binary people.
- Double glazing – a date of 12th/13th July has been arranged for this work to be done. Paul the volunteer is fixing the windows that don't shut, which is very helpful.
- The development sub-group has gone quiet, Richard will follow it up.
- Wind turbine – Debbie asked for input on the appeal against the planning decision. Time is running out to lodge an appeal. It will require photos from around the site etc. The application was thrown out before it got to the planning stage. At a minimum we could appeal with some pictures and well argued points with regard to the footpath, context etc.

ACTION (CJ) will help with putting together a case for the appeal. Debbie to send the relevant documents to CJ.

There is a list of Councilors to approach, but staff don't have capacity to contact them. They will send photo's to CJ and SB who will work on this. A site visit of relevant Councilors is a key next step – PM will forward the list of Councilors.

- Septic tank – the situation in the reed beds is becoming quite problematic. Even just the equipment will be around £40k. It will cost more if the design has to cater for optimal capacity, which is sensible. A larger system will provide more flexibility

Money

- End of year figures going into the annual report. Figures look very good for last year but there are a few caveats to consider and a number of reasons why they look more favourable than they might. E.g. £9K in EVS receipts which should probably have been accounted for in the previous year.

Strategy

The meeting to discuss Phil's strategy document did not take place due to difficulty finding a date and disappointing response to the doodle poll. PM asked the group to consider 'do we want a strategy?' and if so does this one look valuable and relevant? We could build upon that by trying again to arrange a meet up. This could be attempted at the August 12th open meeting, or at the Pilgrimage weekend, though both are problematic as staff will be busy. A working party to take it forward was proposed. As a committee we need to own the strategy and support the staff in making it happen. Discussing strategy should form part of the agenda for future committee meetings. The strategy should also be part of governance responsibility, line management, performance etc.

ACTION: (All). Each committee member to read the strategy document and respond with comments, by 30th June.

ACTION: (CJ) An additional meeting to be fixed in July. CJ to send a spreadsheet round to find a date.

Annual report

This has to be compiled over the coming months (it is made public at the Community AGM on 23rd September, starting at 10.30am). This task has fallen mainly to Roo, Richard and Debbie in previous years. SB will input on it this year. The committee is invited to input. SE recommends keeping it short, mainly pasting in from the previous year, focusing on numbers and benefits provided to the visitors. The visitors book is a good source of testimonials, if anonymised.

Anything we've not mentioned?

The trustees have sent revised job descriptions to the centre staff, with charity law compliance in mind. It is part of a proposal to increase staffing at both centres. However there has not been an audit of the current situation, or a consultation. CJ stressed that this was a strawman poll and should be taken as such. RS has responded to the Trustees raising concerns about why it was felt this was needed. It is a knee-jerk reaction to the fact that both centres had said the job they were doing was unsustainable. However they have not yet looked into other ways of making the roles more sustainable. A more consultative approach would have been much more helpful. The issue of staffing levels is to do with an unfilled housekeeping position. DS and RS are already working full time, despite being on part time contracts, and this should be recognized. There was the best of intention behind the report, but it has not come across well. A response has to be delivered to the trustees from the centre. CJ would like to respond on the questions that weren't asked. The constraint in having to respond on just four questions was not helpful.

PM noted that a true consultation would include a process of review, evaluation, discussion, audit, exploration, rather than an initial proposal. PM has been asking Janet for a meeting with RS, DS and himself, plus relevant trustees.

Action: CJ, SB and SE will work with on a response with DS, RS and PM.

The grace and farewells

The meeting was closed