

**Chair's Notes**  
**Trustee residential meeting**  
**Othona West Dorset 10-12 February 2023**

Trustees gathered at OWD, together with Richard and Debbie Sanders and Tony Jaques (Wardens at Bradwell and West Dorset).

One of the main themes that emerged from the agenda was long term sustainability. Sustainable workloads for the staff teams, for the Trustees and volunteers, for the charity itself, both financially and the buildings and land that we own.

We heard from Tony, that there is a need for increased management staff resources to run the place and make the workload doable. The main guest house is 100 years old and consideration needs to be given to how the building can be adapted for modern use and disabled access. The question of increased staff accommodation was raised together with the need for balance between guest income and overhead costs which are mainly staff costs. These issues were further discussed in the afternoon when we considered the work that John Smith is leading, pulling together maintenance and development plans for both sites. The Centre had a good Christmas and New Year. The team had just had a volunteer recruitment weekend that had gone well.

We heard from Richard and Debbie. They have had a very good season with activity continuing into the winter months - the energy installation enables the Centre to be used in the winter. However, without the increased energy output of a second wind turbine the standby generator is being used much more than originally planned with associated fuel and maintenance costs. The planning application for a second wind turbine had been turned down due to an objection from Natural England. The planning consultant who submitted the application on our behalf has advised us that going to appeal could prove very expensive, we hope to get some information from informal contact with local Councilors. Christmas and New Year had been good. They are working hard to recruit both staff and volunteers, this has been much more difficult than they thought it would be. They have also been working to get short term volunteers and "Work-Aways". They have received £12K in grants to support the Green Weekend and hope to use it as an opportunity to showcase our work and influence local Councilors. The Centre is being used by local groups for day meetings, staff away days and training, quiet days for local clergy etc. There is a list of maintenance work needed on the site. Costs of running the Centre have gone up very much, mostly food and fuel, the wood pellets for the biomass boiler have gone up significantly. Prices have only been increased £3 per night which will not keep pace with inflation. The hope is that with the cost of staying at the Centre being one of the lowest available anywhere, that the prices will be affordable to most people and that the Centre can be full. A donation button is on the front page of the website to make donations easier.

Michael Hunt the Community Treasurer reported on the financial performance to date. The Trust is in balance, OE is in a strong position having had a very good level of bookings, although the team have been working flat out and this cannot be sustained. The activity at OWD is up a little

on pre-Covid levels and costs are being well controlled although there will be costs resulting from the Fire Risk Assessment that was conducted recently.

Michael led the discussion about the budgets for the coming financial year. For the sustainability of The Community we want to at least break even across the charity, but this may not be possible for the coming year. There will be expenditure on surveys of the main house at OWD, the website and the software that underpins the bookings needs updating, there will be IT consultancy costs and both sites need one or more additional staff members to make the workload sustainable. Both Centres are looking again at their forward financial planning, the budgets will be signed off by Trustees on 9th March 2023. There will need to be fund raising for any development works.

The investments of the Trust have picked up in value as the markets have recovered. We have new signatories for the Barclays bank accounts. The insurance premiums are being reviewed. Bradwell is not covered for flood.

We talked about the structure of the charity and agreed to do some fact finding about other models and legal entities which might make fundraising and running the Centres more straightforward. We are not in a rush to make changes and fear that it may be a lot of work. We will see if we could get some legal *pro bono* (free!) help with this.

Phil Martin, Membership Secretary and core team member at Bradwell, joined the meeting to present a questionnaire that he has designed with 2 Trustees to go out to both the membership, people on the database of contacts and guests staying at the Centres. Phil has just taken on the membership secretary role and wants to know what members and others think about membership and other aspects of The Community.

John Smith is the new Trustee Lead for Asset Development and is chairing a sub-committee for each Center to look at the maintenance and development needs. Richard and Debbie had only just got back from holiday so the plans for Bradwell were at the time of meeting less well advanced. Tony presented ideas for a cabin and or two pods on the OWD site. Trustees decided to get surveys of the main house and surrounding land at OWD to inform our thinking and decision making.

Mark MacDonald leads on Safeguarding. There had been no reported incidents at either Centre since our last residential meeting in November 2022. The code of conduct was signed by each Trustee and is now being used at both Centres, for staff and volunteers, even long standing volunteers. Mark did a spot check audit at OWD and the omissions were quickly corrected. He has also done the same Audit at OE.

Dan Duffield leads on Safety. Both Centres have had independent Fire Risk Assessments and are working through the recommendations, all of which are doable, but there will be some costs particularly at OWD.

Warren Douglas, Link Trustee for OWD, has agreed to lead on the website/Drupal software update working group. We need to migrate from our unsupported version onto Drupal 10. We will need to employ IT consultants to do this work for us. Costs are being obtained.

Clare Gough has completed 5 years as a Trustee. The Board unanimously voted to extend her term. We will actively recruit to the post of vice chair. There is space for one more central Trustee and another Link Trustee for Bradwell. Someone who wants to lead on fund raising would be welcome.

Trustees enjoyed worshipping together in Chapel, eating together and hearing from Liz Howlett about her research into Adela Curtis (the Christian Contemplative, writer and teacher, who founded the first community at West Dorset). Liz is planning a trip to the States this autumn to see further primary research sources held by a relative of Adela's. Liz will also visit New Thought Churches to experience first hand what this movement is and understand how it influenced Adela's early thinking. Liz has started writing a book on Adela's life and work. Her early chapters have been favorably reviewed by a commissioning editor. Liz is looking for crowd funding for this project.

My personal reflections are that The Community has emerged well from the uncertainties of the Covid pandemic. The refurbishments at both sites have delivered meaningful value. It is very pleasing to see Othona Bradwell being so well used. We have a very talented group of people running the centres and involved in the management committees and the Board. We are impacted by high inflation in food and fuel. Having fantastic volunteers at both centres enables us to keep the cost of staying low. We will need lots of visitors, continued donations and fundraising to cover ongoing maintenance and more significant developments. The life and vigor of The Community depends on the love and prayers of you, dear friends and supporters. May the eternal love of God illuminate our hearts and minds.

Clare Gough 27.02.2023