

Othona Community
Bradwell Centre Management Committee
Zoom meeting, Tuesday 20th May 2025

Minutes


Attendance

Chris, Nicholas, Geraldine (note-taker), Susanne, Emma, Ann, Maria. Richard, Debbie, Clare (with a warm welcome on her return after looking after her husband, Steve) and David (his first meeting since being appointed our new warden). Apologies from Paul Lucas (temporary deputy warden).

A brief pause to focus our thoughts and pray.

Previous minutes taken as read  BCC minutes 25-03-04.docx

No alterations noted and matters arising are reflected in this agenda.

Warden's report  Bradwell report for BCC 05142025.docx

Another positive report from Richard and Debbie. A very significant achievement to note is the restoration of our 5-star hygiene rating in the kitchen. A collective sigh of relief and massive congratulations to the core team who achieved it.

How's the handover going?  Warden's Induction Checklist

There's a lot to learn! Transferring the extensive knowledge accumulated over seven years is a challenge, and most of it is in people's heads, not on paper. David says the moment you think you've grasped something, a further issue or question can arise and you realise there's a whole new layer of complexity to get on top of.

After Debbie and Richard's departure we trust Paul will have enough experience and knowledge of the place to fill in some of the gaps in knowledge. Also, Susanne said there was a lot of knowhow embedded in the committee and other community members, to be called on when needed. This is a handover, not just to David but the whole community.


Action: In the office is a list of who to call on for certain eventualities. Richard, Debbie and Kirsty, in the first instance, to check this and update it as necessary.

Recruitment of a caterer

Of all the observations David made, the most urgent, vital need is for a caterer, and more important than a deputy. Advertising hasn't attracted any enquiries to date. One hopeful prospect, however, is from a young caterer called Ewan. He attended the Orthodox Church weekend and got chatting with Paul about our vacancy. He is unhappy in his current position and was very interested in coming to Bradwell. He returned yesterday and today (19 and 20th May), got on famously with all the core and demonstrated spectacular skill in the kitchen. David wants him, we want him and he wants us, but the sticking point is salary.

We are currently offering £10k pa. He was expecting more like £20k! David suggested to him that he/we might be able to squeeze the offer to £12k. And thus ensued a full discussion of what the job is worth and what Bradwell can afford. General opinion was that it is worth more than £10k, some expressed shock it was that low. We were also reminded that we already have a deficit budget, that extra costs have to be balanced with extra income and that trustees have declined a salary rise in the past.

Emma did some hasty research and discovered that the average monthly expenses for a single person in Essex can range from about £1,800 to £2,300.

 Living Expenses in Essex 2025

Nearly all these expenses are provided by the community, so the salary we offer is nearly all disposable income and the gross salary looks more like £30k+. Emma also researched that the salary for Ewan's grade, a 'chef de partie' typically ranges from £22,000 to £29,000. David reminded us, though, of the challenges facing a young man from a nice flat in the centre of a culture-filled town vs. the isolation of Bradwell and living in a single room with shared toilet.

Action: Steve, Chris and Maria to approach trustees with the suggestion to raise the catering salary to £12k pa. They acknowledge that this has repercussions for OWD, too.


[Since the meeting Ewan has accepted the role, and at the advertised rate, but Chris says we mustn't be complacent about this matter and we will still take it up with trustees.]


David highlighted immediate staffing needs, with only one volunteer confirmed for an upcoming retreat for 70 people. Susanne, Ann and Emma started to sort out dates with each other when they may be able to stand in and cover cooking duties in June.

Core Accommodation

The lack of accommodation which even approaches modern-day expectations is a grave issue affecting recruitment. Chris (with initial help from Mark Ringrose) has developed a 'decision matrix' which should assist us in determining a way forward.


Action: Chris, Steve and Maria to first refine the matrix before all of us then study it and comment on the criteria, the weightings and scores given to each of them.

 DecisionMatrix_CoreAccommodation.xlsx

 Core Accommodation Options

The question was raised, could we use a caravan in the short term, as has been done at OWD? They are cold in winter but adequate for a summer season.

Recruitment of a Deputy Warden

 Deputy Centre Manager Job Description and Person Specification.docx

Action: Maria will look at this, in the first instance, and modify it to make it a more attractive offer

Service contract for heating and energy system

Richard showed us a renal contract that Kevin has very recently presented. He is now looking to us signing, not for the one year he was suggesting a short while ago, but for three years, and at a vastly higher price, increasing each year. Kevin said, in conversation with David, that he was making the company more sustainable for the future and for his daughter. *[Kevin has subsequently sent us the following email:*

*Dear Richard and David,
Further to our recent discussions, I am excited to share with you the forthcoming plans for Neutron Electrical Solutions Ltd. In the upcoming months, we are seeking to add a skilled Maintenance Technician to our dedicated team. This individual will undergo comprehensive training on both our internal systems and those of our esteemed clients, including yourselves.*

The appointed Technician will play a vital role in supporting our operations, ensuring a seamless continuation of service in my absence due to scheduled leave or unexpected circumstances. Upon finalisation of the new Service Agreement, a dedicated contact number will be established for your convenience, connecting you 24/7 with our on-call representative to address any urgent service matters promptly.

As we progressively integrate the new Technician into our daily operations over the next three years, our aim is to secure the sustainability and growth of our services well into the future, guaranteeing continued support under my personal supervision, or that of my wife or Daughter, who are valued shareholders of Neutron Electrical Solutions Ltd.

Warm regards,

*Kevin Knight
Neutron Electrical Solutions Ltd]*

Chris has a contact, John Bumstead, who might be a strong contender for the same contract. He hasn't offered us a quote yet and would need much cooperation from Kevin to bring him up to speed. This, in the circumstances, is probably unlikely to happen. The issue is that we have no idea whether or not Kevin's is a realistic and reasonable quote. The contract is due from August and we have until mid-June to make up our minds.

Action: Richard or David are to speak with Kevin to see if he will reduce either the time commitment or the price or give us a fixed price for the three years, like the contract that is just expiring.

Night-time Access to the Bradwell Centre

In consideration of safeguarding and security of the centre it has been suggested that external doors be locked at night time. This was debated thoroughly:

- It puts too much responsibility on the core, one of whom must be the last one to bed and another to be the first up in the morning. This is unreasonable as guests often talk late into the night and others get up before dawn for a run or their first cuppa.
- There are about a dozen external doors; by the time the last one is locked, someone could easily have wandered out through the first for a last cigarette.
- People in the yurts need access to the toilets during the night. It is guaranteed someone will forget the key code, or not be able to see the pad in the dark.
- Many folk appreciate the open access and freedom of the site. If they want security they are able to lock their own room. This rightly places responsibility on individuals and not on the core or Othona as a whole.
- Although extensive maintenance has recently been done on the doors, some are still a tight or noisy fit, not for the faint-hearted to struggle with whilst others sleep.

The committee voted unanimously against the idea.

Recognition of Debbie and Richard's time as wardens

By this time Debbie and Richard had had to leave the meeting and on behalf of us all, David acknowledged the sheer sacrifice of time, commitment, emotion, and energy, and seven years of their life that Debbie and Richard have devoted to running this centre. Debbie and Richard, from the bottom of our hearts, we thank you.

David also asked that we schedule a detailed discussion at the open meeting in August, that those present would better understand and appreciate the operation of this site.

By this time the meeting had been going over two hours so we brought it to a hasty close by saying the Grace together.

Date of next meeting,

Open Meeting on Saturday 16 August, 11.00am at Bradwell (with Zoom link-up)