

The Othona Community 277843

Report of the Trustees for the year ended 31st March 2022

Achievement and performance

The year has been characterised by a gradual reopening of the Centres as we adjusted to living alongside Covid infections. The number of visitors was less than in previous years, but we were able to stay open throughout the year. With a combination of government grants, donations, careful cost control by our managers and the continued commitment of our volunteers we were able to finish the year in a balanced financial position. This has meant that we were in a good position to start the summer season 2022, with a full programme of activities. This is a significant achievement.

Othona Bradwell

Programme in 2021/22

Having started the year in a continuation of lockdown and a realisation that without community the place didn't make sense we resolved to be open as much as covid restrictions allowed. We reopened the Centre on the 12th of April 2021 for community picnics. Following government guidelines, we had limited opening for guests from the 17th May and had a community midweek booking with limited numbers followed by a Sixth form group. Most of our regular groups cancelled their visits before summer but some rescheduled for later in the year or for 2022. During the spring period we offered commercial camping on our new land.

We continued with restricted numbers and following social distancing guidelines during May/June but still managed to run half term with several new families and a working weekend. Following the lifting of the legal limits on social contact on the 19th of July 2021 we started the summer with a week of Wild Worship, led by Rachel Summers which attracted many new families. We changed the normal pattern of summer to make events run from Monday to Friday, allowing time for cleaning, and quieter weekends with no specific activity. This proved popular for those who wanted to come for a relaxing time. We had our usual art and music weeks and ran a very successful permaculture week with input from Trustlinks staff members.

The rest of 2021 was very busy with our own events and many groups that had booked earlier but had to cancel. Due to family commitments, we did not open for guests at Christmas and New Year, but we did have a small number staying after David and Marie Martin agreed to be here over that period. The start of 2022 was quiet as usual but by March we had a great leaving party for Tim Fox with live music, which was well attended and a very popular Spring Retreat.

Groups

We managed to keep most of our usual groups in the autumn despite being closed for covid for sometime and had some really great new groups come along. These include YMCA residents, If Only (sexual abuse survivors), YMCA staff members and Trustlinks staff away day. We were fortunate that

Matt King, CEO of Trustlinks, secured a grant to cover the costs of running a Green weekend in partnership with us at Othona which was held at the end of April 2022. We have formed a partnership with A Rocha, the Christian environmental group as a partner in action and they came here to run an event in March, and we hope to develop that relationship.

Staffing

Tim Fox, the Centre manager left in April 2022 after nearly 8 years of working here this time. Following a recruitment campaign Richard and Debbie Sanders were appointed as joint wardens, as a job share, on the 1st of May 2022. We had our last long-term volunteers with the European Solidarity Corps (ESC) scheme during 2021/22. The four volunteers (Paula from Spain, Olivia from France, Nico and Alessandro from Italy) stayed with us from the end of August for 10 months. They were a great asset to the team and provided invaluable assistance. There is currently no equivalent scheme, but we are exploring other options with Volunteer Action for Peace (VAP), who arranged the ESC scheme for us. We had a fantastic team of summer volunteers including the Martin family, summer cooks and chaplains. All of them helped to ensure the summer ran smoothly

Othona West Dorset

Covid. This year has been significantly impacted by the Covid pandemic. The first few events in late Spring/early Summer 2021 took place when legal social distancing restrictions were still in place and then later in the year, a number of events were affected by last minute cancellations owing to Covid infections. We were thankful when in 2022 all restrictions could be relaxed, although continuing to be aware that the virus was still very much active in the population.

Site development. The Four Seasons Studio (4SS) really started coming into its own, with a number of regular outside bookings beginning during the year, alongside the resources and flexible space it offered resident groups for creative work and play. The newly established 4SS management group produced some excellent advertising materials for the Studio, plus set up systems for managing outside bookings. A new circular space for sitting and enjoying a fire pit was created in the woods, thanks to Pete Baird and Paul Owens who initially levelled the land to make it possible.

New people and topics. In terms of the core team, during July 2021 we welcomed Megan Simson as the full-time Housekeeper. V Churchill also joined the team as Caterer at the start of the summer season and stayed until March 2022. Her replacement took the form of two people, Tom and Eleanor Farley, who job-share the catering role, in addition to caring for their toddler Teddy. Kathryn Brooks began as a 6 month short term core member at the beginning of April 2022, having previously been an excellent volunteer declutterer in January '22.

Amongst some new facilitators and topics, we welcomed Simon Parke who led an event based on his book Gospel: Rumours of Love. In July 2021, it was good to celebrate the centenary of the purchase of the land on which Community House now stands. This weekend included a lecture on Adela Curtis, the founder of the first community, by Professor Jane Shaw. Martin Palmer, the Secretary General of the Alliance of Religions and Conservation (ARC), an organisation founded by him and His Royal Highness Prince Philip, also has long-standing connections with Othona and he was one of a

number of contributors to an online event in January on the theme of Climate Crisis: What Can We Do in '22?

Both Centres

Regular newsletters, virtual events and hybrid events have meant that we have kept in touch with Community Members and visitors. Two virtual study groups; looking at care of the environment and social justice, enabled those restricting social contact for health reasons and members from overseas to meet together.

Building Work & Land Management

There has been no major capital improvement at either site during the past year. Essential maintenance has continued. The 11 acres of Bradwell Othona land previously managed by the farm has been fenced, trees and wildflowers planted, the top field has been used for camping and overflow car parking. We are working with A Rocha to manage the lower fields near the sea wall.

At West Dorset a grant of £8,000 from the Truemark Trust is enabling us to expand the habitat conservation and other work done by our groundsman.

We will continue to prioritise essential maintenance, to provide a good experience for guests and to preserve and enhance the value of our estate. The accessible toilets at both centres need refurbishment.

Public Benefit

At Bradwell we ran 25 residential events involving more than 600 people and hosted 21 groups comprising around 320 people along with several day visits. We supported 38 visits with our own bursaries and 7 more through the Association for Promoting Retreats NHS scheme. We continued to work closely with the diocese and local churches, schools and community groups. We continued to develop partnerships with local YMCAs, abuse survivors charities and a local mental health and environment charity. We started to develop links with A Rocha a Christian conservation charity with a view to becoming a member of Partners in Action, a network of Christian land managing organisations with an interest in creation care.

The West Dorset centre, restricted by Covid precautions, ran 29 events during the year [2021/22] and welcomed some 375 resident visitors as well as many day guests. We supported 5 visitors through Othona bursaries and participated in a 50% bursary scheme for NHS workers on retreat, funded by the Association for Promoting Retreats. For the first time we offered the new Four Seasons Studio building for public rental by the day or part day, providing a superb new facility for local groups.

Investment Policy

The Community has appointed Epworth Investment Management Limited to act as Investment Managers.

The objectives of the charity's investment are:

- To support the religious and other charitable works carried on by the members of the Community.
- To establish and maintain a sound financial base for the organisation, for today and in future years.

To secure these objectives the charity seeks to produce the best financial return within an acceptable level of risk, seeking to balance income and capital returns. The investment funds are managed to maintain the real capital value of the funds, whilst generating a sustainable level of investment income to support the charity. The current income target is set at approximately £20,000 per annum (a starting yield of 3%) and as such the overall total return sought can be quantified as inflation plus 3% per annum.

The investment objective for the cash balances and short term reserves (including restricted funds) is to preserve the capital value with a minimum level of risk.

The trustees review its investments on a quarterly basis and have an agreed Investment Policy that is reviewed annually. The Investment Policy was last reviewed in June 2022.

Reserves Policy

The trustees of the charity have considered the need for reserves and have agreed that reserves are required to (a) provide contingency funds to maintain operations, (b) to allow time to respond to significant reductions in expected income and (c) in the event that it is required, to enable the managed closure of some or all of the charity's activities.

The trustees have assessed the amount required to be held in reserves on a risk basis and consider that a minimum sum of £100,000 should be held for these purposes. At the end of the year the freely available reserves held by the charity were greater than the minimum required reserve amount.

Financial Review

The two centres operate through a wholly owned subsidiary company. The Community has taken advantage of the exemptions available to it to not prepare consolidated accounts. However, the Trustees wish members to know that the company reported an unrestricted net surplus of income over expenditure during the year of £22,330 (2021: £19,701) and had a net asset surplus as at 31 March 2022 of £45,146 (2021: £22,816).

The income received from investments, membership fees and donations has been utilised towards the governance and management costs of the Community. After these costs have been applied there was a residual surplus of £1,844 (2021: £4,084) which has been retained within the

Community. Depreciation of £28,502 (2021: £28,457) was charged in the year leading to an operating deficit of £26,659 (2021: deficit £24,463).

The investment portfolio income continued at lower levels following the capital expenditure of previous years. However, the investment portfolio showed an increase in value of £46,998 (2021: £84,123) which resulted in an overall surplus in the community's funds of £30,529 (2021: deficit £61,271).

During the year no capital withdrawals were made from the investment portfolio to finance either capital projects or the working capital needs of the Centres (2021: £150,000).

Trustees are grateful to individual members and supporters who responded to fundraising appeals included in emailed newsletters, donations totalling £6,901 (2021: £9,164 were received).

Trustees have been monitoring spending at both centres on a regular basis and the Community Treasurer meets with the warden every quarter to review financial performance.

The charity maintains a number of restricted funds - these are funds where the donor has placed restrictions on how the money can be used. At the end of March 2022 restricted funds totalled £40,662 (2021: £30,969).

The trustees have chosen to designate some of the unrestricted funds for specific purposes. This is at the discretion of the trustees and the need for the designation is kept under regular review. At the end of March 2022 designated funds totalled £64,488 (2021: £72,838).

Structure, Governance and Management

Trustees have continued to meet virtually at least quarterly. Trustees were pleased to have a face to face meeting at West Dorset in February 2022. The new safety subcommittee has met and is prioritising the areas of highest risk. The coming year we will focus on fire safety, both centres will have an independent fire safety inspection.

We have considered the financial sustainability of the charity and have revised our investment and reserves policies.

Mark MacDonald has taken over as lead Trustee for Safeguarding in addition to his role as Board Secretary following the resignation of Paul Coleman.

Future Plans

The focus for the coming year 22/23 will be to recruit staff teams at both Centres and to have a full programme of events, both old favourites and new ventures.

We will continue to network with organisations with similar values for our mutual benefit. At Bradwell these include A Rocha International, Essex Wildlife, RSPB and local bird watchers, Trust Links, the Parish Church and Chelmsford Diocese. At West Dorset these include Faith Works, Tamarisk organic farm and Dorset Wildlife.

Communication with our Members and supporters is key. We will continue with regular newsletters for the centres, open meetings for those staying during the summer, feedback forms for guests and

an open management committee meeting at Bradwell. Facebook and Instagram accounts keep supporters informed of events at the centres. The AGM will take written questions. There will be a consultation exercise with all who visit the centres, this will guide our planning and decision making.

Trustees of The Othona Community September 2022

Charity Number 277843