

“Othona Bradwell Open Gathering, Thursday 25th October 2018, 10am.

This was a chance to meet Tim Fox, Manager, and Roo Bull, Trustee and Bradwell Centre Committee Chair, over a morning cuppa, to ask questions about Othona, hear about plans, share views, and find out how to join in more.

The Meeting gathered with a time of quiet, followed by introductions. Most people present were staying at Othona for the Half Term Activity week, also joined by Debbie and Richard Sanders (staff team) Zoe Moran and Dave Bull (volunteers.)

Ruth Bull (Roo) gave a brief introduction to Othona. She spoke of its opening in 1946 as a place for people to continue to meet, after shared time in the RAF in WW2 with their Chaplain, our Founder Norman Motley. They were joined by others from nations formerly at war, spivs, business men and many others. Othona grew, through Work, Worship, Study and Play together, first as a Summer Camp, then in huts, now in permanent buildings. The current structure of Othona was described. Trustees are responsible for the Othona Charitable Trust that owns the buildings and investments. Directors (mainly the same people as the Trustees) are responsible for the Othona Company that runs the two Othona Centres, Bradwell and West Dorset, through the wardens/managers, staff teams, volunteers and Centre Committees. Tim spoke of the ways we are developing at Bradwell, through strategic plans that are influenced by contributions from the Community.

Othona has always had long-term development plans as well as spontaneous actions. Currently we are looking at Communication, Education, Reconciliation, Christian Spirituality in a Community open to people of all faiths and none, Othona as a Local Resource, Sustainability, and the Resources required to deliver the plans. People take leadership for topics, some have Sub-Groups.

There was a short discussion about **Communication**, how important it is to reach people and hear views. We then spent a longer time discussing **Education**.

Dave spoke of the Education Group he leads, aiming to reach more schools to come in the School Group times, mainly May to early July; to offer the children the experience of living and sharing in community, and planning to reach out to secondary schools by linking what we offer to the National Curriculum. The Meeting was asked views on a proposed development of The Hut in the Old Field as an Education Centre with potential use as occasional bedrooms. There was general agreement. Views were shared that the experience of living in

Community was more important than the equipment, which students can bring in. Education is a theme not only for schools but in community times. Dave raised the need for more, younger volunteers to assist with school groups. It was suggested that we might have a paid and suitably experienced person or trainee teacher, maybe via Essex Wildlife Trust, Forest Schools or School Link, for the few weeks we need extra hands.

We could consider Secondary Schools, Colleges and inclusion of people studying “A” level and degree programmes in fields such as Conservation and Ecology.

All ideas and all offers of help are welcome— do contact Tim or Roo, who are also available to hear any concerns or worries.

Reconciliation continues to be central to the way we work together at Othona. People spoke of the way Othona helps them with reconciliation within their own families, as we are a Community where the barriers of age and stereotype relationships are broken down and people see each other with new eyes.

The Community this week is developing as a friendship group of people who return in the “Three Weeks” time of special rate half-term weeks for families. There was discussion about the difficulties we have with balancing the need for each of us to have a special, relaxing and welcome break meeting old friends and making new friends; with, on the other hand, encountering people with different outlooks and backgrounds, who may seem to gel as an inward-facing group.

Tim, Richard and Dave gave insights into the ways we at Othona try to work through these encounters in the spirit of welcome and inclusion of all, at any time, whilst seeking to avoid conflict. It was suggested we might make a wider range of “affordable” weeks such as at Easter or for one week in the summer, to give a wider choice for families on lower incomes. It was suggested we reach out to more struggling families, such as through Home Start; as well as reaching out to asylum seekers etc. There are lower rates for those on means-tested benefits, but anyone on a low income who finds it difficult to manage these rates is strongly encouraged to speak to Tim, in confidence, about a bursary – many have been awarded this year.

Widening out the Meeting, there was insufficient time to discuss the other strategic areas, but discussions will be ongoing. People in the room shared how emotional they felt at the very special experience of being welcomed and included as families within the Othona Community.

We shared quiet time together to end a positive and lively meeting.