

## Chair's Notes - Trustee Weekend 14-16 February

Trustees gathered at Othona West Dorset for the first residential weekend of the year. All of the trustees attended other than Dan Duffield who was otherwise occupied in one of his other roles with the Royal Navy. We were delighted to welcome Maria Freeman as a Bradwell link trustee who was able to join us for her first trustee meeting. Along with Tony and Kathryn, and Richard and Debbie (and the team at OWD) we enjoyed being in community.

Worship on the Friday evening was led by Liz Howlett, enabling us to settle into the weekend, with Richard and Debbie encouraging us to imagine community during worship on the Saturday morning before the busy-ness and business of the day.

The first business of the day was to elect Mark Ringrose as Chair of the Othona Community, and to confirm the appointment of Maria Freeman as trustee. Disappointingly the first round of recruitment for the centre manager and deputy centre manager roles at Bradwell had been unsuccessful. However a second round was initiated in early January and several good applications had been received. An interview process is in hand and (hopefully) an appointment can be made soon. Alongside this, trustees are also exploring interim options to supplement staff resources over the busy summer period and to allow a smooth transition for whoever takes up the roles.

Saturday morning, as usual at these weekends, focussed on the operations and activities of the two centres. OWD reported on the successful recruitment of a new caterer - Esther Gooch - who started in the role in early December (along with her partner Karim Rekaya and their one year old daughter Mariam). A successful autumn, Christmas and New Year programme had been held with some full attendance and plans for the 2025 programme are in full swing. Behind the scenes more work is planned on the house and building, including some improvements to staff accommodation. Work is also in hand to update the computer facilities, much of which has been funded through generous donations from the online 'Life after Doom' group.

Bradwell reported on a good programme over the winter period, especially film week and foraging weekend. Staffing has been stretched at times and there is an urgent need to recruit a catering lead to relieve pressure on Debbie and Richard.

Trustees also received updates on safety, safeguarding and the website. Unfortunately it was not possible to implement a new website by the end of December. A final concerted effort was agreed to get the new site up and running by the end of April at the latest.

The final session on Saturday looked at money - including a first look at the proposed budgets for the 2025/26 year. The current year (2024/25) financial position of the trust and the centres continues to be healthy despite a few additional costs (eg for the website development and necessary maintenance).

The projection for next year is more challenging with an anticipated deficit of around £40k likely - this includes a prudent approach to activity at Bradwell to enable a smooth transition

of leadership, as well as maintaining higher levels of expenditure on repairs and maintenance at both centres to address known problems. Trustees recognise that deficits of this level are not sustainable long term, but the level of reserves is currently more than sufficient to meet the temporary deficit. On a more positive note, trustees confirmed an intention to move away from Barclays for banking services given Barclays poor environmental and ethical record. This may not happen for a while (changing bank is never an easy exercise) but the direction of travel was agreed.

After a busy day evening worship was led by Michael Hunt, using the story of Jesus at the Wedding in Cana as a way of seeing the abundance of God's provision in the ordinariness of life.

Worship on Sunday morning, including the sharing of bread and wine, was led by Steve Barnes, before a final round of business - further consideration of future governance changes and agreeing action points and priorities. Following the November residential meeting further exploration about updating the community's legal structure had been obtained and a possible way forward for completing the work of incorporating the charity (started nearly 15 years ago) is starting to form taking into account the considerable changes in the legal environment for charities that has taken place in recent years. Initial legal advice has identified a cost effective plan that was agreed in principle by the trustees. Work on progressing this will continue over the coming months.

In the immediate future trustees confirmed immediate priorities as recruiting a new centre manager and deputy centre manager at Bradwell, implementing the website and continuing to develop proposals for improving core accommodation.