

Chairs Notes
Trustees Residential weekend meeting
Othona West Dorset
February 2022

It was great to meet as a Trustee team at Othona West Dorset this February. We were able to use the lovely Four Seasons Studio for our meeting.

The pattern of the meeting was similar to that held at Bradwell in November. Trustees arrived on Friday night and left at lunchtime on Sunday. Many hours were spent in discussion, but there was of course time spent; eating together, worshipping in Chapel, taking a tour of the grounds and buildings to better understand the recent achievements and on-going challenges and meeting the staff team.

Reports were given by both centres, highlighting events and developments since November. All were delighted by the appointment of Richard and Debbie to the centre manager role at Bradwell. Both centres are currently recruiting for staff team members. Although visitor numbers were good in the summer, the winter has been much quieter at both centres. West Dorset was able to open for Christmas and New Year with good numbers attending.

A significant amount of time was given to understanding our current financial position as a Trust and the budget positions of both centres. We are expecting to end the year in a break even position, well done to the staff teams and volunteers for their hard work. Looking forward, we are expecting the coming year to be challenging. Although we generate a significant amount of energy at both sites we will be exposed to increasing energy costs, increased food costs and anticipated repairs and renewals. Nationally, fire regulations have recently been made even more stringent, fire safety inspections are being arranged and we are expecting to have to further upgrade the fire safety systems at both centres. Re-establishing bookings after 2 years of disruption will take time and effort. There will need to be on-going fundraising from members and supporters to cover repairs and renewals. The importance of legacies was noted, legacy leaflets are available at both centres with details of how to leave a legacy in a will. A legacy can be very tax efficient for the legatee as well as the recipient charity.

A grant of £27,500 has been obtained from the Cambridge and Peterborough Energy Hub to pay SceneConnect to prepare all the documents needed to support the planning application for a wind turbine at Bradwell. The grant is expected to cover the full cost of getting the planning application documentation together to meet the requirements of Maldon Council, it does not guarantee a positive decision from the Council, but SceneConnect have a good track record. Well done to Clare Stone and Richard Sanders for this successful bid. Bradwell also received a grant of £10,000 from the Lottery Communities Fund to fund a weekend environmental festival later in the year. Well done to Debbie Sanders and Matt King for that grant application. Trustees realise that grant applications will be part of our fundraising efforts. There are Trustees and members of the management committees with experience of this. Elizabeth Sayers needs to train up a successor, Elizabeth gained a lot of experience whilst fund raising for the Four

Seasons Studio and it would be good if she can hand this knowledge on. Someone who could coordinate fundraising across the two centres would be a great asset.

Trustees spent time hearing the founding stories of Othona West Dorset, hearing about Adela Curtis who originally bought the land in 1921 and later founded the Christian Contemplatives Community, known affectionately as The White Ladies because of their white habits. Adela sold her flat in London to fund and build the main house in the 1930s. The Chapel was built later in 1937 funded by private donations. Liz Howlett, staff team member at OWD has done a large amount of primary research during lockdown using documents shared with her by Adela Curtis' great nephew who lives next door on the coast road and other members of the extended Curtis family. We also learnt about how the site was given to Norman Motley and the pioneer wardens who have lived and worked there to make it what it is now, including the 27 years that Tony has been warden at OWD.

Governance and legal issues were discussed including safeguarding and the advances made in health and safety compliance.

Both Ruth Bull and Elizabeth Sayers are coming to the end of their maximum 10 year Trustee term and we thanked them for their committed and excellent service. Both have been involved in the management committees for a decade or more before becoming a Trustee. Ruth was on the core staff team at Bradwell in the 1980s and was Community Secretary before and after becoming a Trustee and BCC Chair. Both hold an extraordinary amount of organisational memory and will be very much missed.

Paul Coleman, who is currently a central Trustee and lead for Safeguarding felt called to move onto the Bradwell committee to serve as a link Trustee. Ruth Bull, Steve Barnes and Sasha East were pleased to nominate Paul as the new chair of the Bradwell Centre Committee. Paul has very wide experience as a charity Trustee having been a member of 18 different boards and many years working in personnel management. Paul brings good skills along with his Christian faith and a commitment to the work at Othona Bradwell. This leaves a vacancy for a central trustee who is able to take the lead for safeguarding and who will work alongside our Trustee lead for Compliance, Dan Dutfield.

As Ruth moves on in June there will be a Trustee vacancy on the BCC, finance and business experience is needed. There will be two vacancies on the OWD management committee. Recruitment is underway, expressions of interest warmly welcomed.

A discussion was had about the relative merits of a virtual vs in real life Annual General Meeting. It was decided to hold a virtual AGM again this year, it is the greener option, it has allowed much higher attendance and is accessible to people from a much wider geographical area. The date for the **AGM is Saturday 24th September 2022.**

Clare Gough 08.02.2022