

To the Othona Community

Dear friends,

You will know that there is much activity at Othona Bradwell. As Othona has been closed since the New Year, we are in the unusual situation that you will not have been able to come and find out for yourselves what is going on. Before you all come and see, here is what it is all about.

Over its entire and wonderful lifetime the Othona Community at Bradwell has made do and mended. Even when we have had “new” buildings in the top field in the past 45 years, we have added, connected, repaired and replaced all sorts of systems and services. However, the community has developed in recent years and it has become clear that the current electricity generating provision was unable to cope with the increasing demands placed on it by additional electrical loads, and that this would prove an obstacle to future development of the site’s amenities. In addition to this we were aware that the existing Liquid Petroleum Gas (LPG) powered central heating system was effectively at the end of its life and would need to be replaced in the very near term.

When, at the request of Trustees, we set out to complete an Energy and Electrical Systems Audit last summer, we selected a competent local Electrical Engineer Kevin Knight of NES Services. Kevin knight specialises in renewables. Kevin’s audit was carried out in relation to our current and predicted use, bearing in mind our desire to move towards a green and carbon neutral position and to complete the Norman Motley Building with a disability-accessible extension in the future.

Kevin's proposal suggested that the Community stop using LPG altogether, and instead switch to a biomass boiler for heating and hot water, and additional renewable electricity generation which would allow the kitchens to be powered almost exclusively by renewable electricity. A new backup diesel generator would also be required. Kevin’s estimate seemed huge for Othona, being inclusive of a biomass boiler to replace our LPG one, and a second wind turbine to maintain our off-grid position. The proposal also included entirely new up to date lithium batteries to replace our old bank of lead acid batteries, which were difficult to maintain and reaching the end of their useful life; and an Energy Management System to ensure the most efficient use of our electricity just where we need it.

Last summer it became clear that the very old LPG boiler was beyond repair, and it was condemned.. This put trustees under pressure to make a decision to go ahead with the Othona Energy and Electricity Project (OEEP), or face the necessity of an expensive LPG boiler replacement and ongoing reliance on the LPG generator, locking us into this expensive fossil fuel for the foreseeable future. With Othona Bradwell’s strategic aim of Sustainability in mind, the trustees, at their October 2019 Meeting, opted for the OEEP. This meant a tremendous financial commitment by Trustees, particularly when seen alongside Othona West Dorset’s improvements and developments. The choice of a biomass boiler is also an investment opportunity as it qualifies for the Renewable Heat Incentive, meaning the Othona will get a government subsidy for every Kilowatt hour of energy produced by the boiler for the next 20 years.

While we would have preferred to have more time to survey and prepare for the work, the replacement of the boiler could not be put off for another year. January and February of 2020 was an ideal time to carry out what were extensive building works in the heart of the

Norman Motley building. This meant the centre needed to be closed for a period of 2 months while the works were underway.

An OEEP Project Board was set up, with myself as Chair reporting to Clare Fuller-Gough, Trustee Chair; and with Tim Fox and Richard Sanders, with Debbie Sanders taking minutes, and Angie Smith, who is both the Bradwell and Community Treasurer now, as the second trustee for the OEEP Board, and our financial lead. A contract was signed with NES and Kevin Knight was appointed as Project Manager, with the project to be completed before Easter 2020.

It has not been an entirely smooth run. The Project is coming in above the projected budget for the following reasons:

We had made an additional appointment of an architect which began to escalate costs until that situation was resolved before Christmas;

We made some necessary changes to the building works. We had relied too heavily on Prime Cost (PC) sums for large items and were not prepared for the higher actual costs in some instances;

We had been assured that Planning Permission for a second wind turbine would be relatively easy - it is not, it is ongoing with costly demands upon Othona from the Maldon District Council Planners - who have also required revisions to our planning application for the biomass boiler flue.

In addition to this, all our make-do-and-mends, installed so lovingly by us all over the years, are no longer fit for purpose. Every day our Project Manager is unearthing some new eccentricity in the electricity, plumbing and communications infrastructure. Some of it may have been in compliance with regulations at the time, some not. All unsafe installations must be replaced as part of this scheme in order for the whole installation to get signed off - otherwise none of the Project will comply with regulations. And each one is adding more to the overall Project Spend. Please note this work has been important and necessary to bring the electrical and plumbing infrastructure up to date with current requirements, and will provide us with a fully compliant and fit for purpose installation which will allow flexibility for future development of the site. We have also identified and repaired a leak in the underfloor heating system, and refined the zoning of the underfloor heating to allow us to operate it in a more flexible and energy efficient way going forward. All this work needed to be done, and we were fortunate to have the project team on site to complete it within the agreed timeframe.

The money committed by the Othona Trustees comes from our investments. Our investments came from some historic donations, but mainly from the sale of East Hall Farm. East Hall farm was purchased through a mortgage arranged by faith and huge personal commitment, by our Founder Norman Motley, to protect the Othona Community for future generations. We are those future generations - and some of us are looking at handing on Othona to the **next** generation, building on all that work, Worship, Study and Play together.

The bottom line is - all the money, that the Trustees committed to withdraw from our Financial Investment portfolio and invest in Bradwell - has been fully committed in the OEEP to date. We have the biomass boiler; we have a new array of Solar Panels, purchased from some of the wind-turbine budget to give more flexibility of electricity supply. We have an Energy Management System to ensure energy is directed to where it is most needed, and

we have all the associated infrastructure. The Project will not be complete without the final spending, on a 30kw wind turbine. But we are all spent up. On top of this, Bradwell is committed to a 20-year payback period to give the Trustees the necessary return on their investment in Bradwell. The larger spend already means a longer, more financially demanding payback period - we greatly appreciate Angie's tireless efforts to keep Bradwell's head above water.

So, what next?

Tim has the challenge of squeezing more money into the Othona budget - and will really need the support of us all to develop and sustain new ways of generating income without compromising the heart of Othona.

And we all have the challenge of raising around £110,000 to purchase the new wind generator. Already, as this idea has been floated, we have offers of help with strategic and practical fund-raising, and before our fundraising has really started the giving has started.

Now the Othona Community will need to go up a gear and get things moving. Through the Bradwell Centre Committee we are developing a Strategy for Othona Bradwell's Sustainable and Inclusive Future, to share as widely as possible. But I want you, as Othona regulars and visitors to our Website and multimedia, to be the first to know about these developments - and to watch this space for ways you can make your financial contribution to Othona's future at Bradwell.

Tim and the resident team at Bradwell, and the Bradwell Centre Committee members join me in sharing this message with you, we are all looking forward to hearing from you and seeing you all again soon.

With love,

Roo

(Ruth Bull, Othona Trustee and Chair of the Bradwell Centre Committee.)