

The Othona Community in Bradwell-on-Sea, Essex

East Hall Farm/East End Rd, Southminster CM0 7PN

Mission Statement

Othona is an open and inclusive Community rooted in the Christian faith and drawing on a wealth of other inspirations. We welcome people of all ages, abilities, backgrounds and beliefs. Through sharing in a daily rhythm of work, learning, worship and play, we seek personal renewal and glimpses of the sacred. In community we explore the relationship between faith and life, and encourage one another in caring for the world and its people.

Situation

The Centre is on the Essex Coastal Nature Park at the mouth of the Blackwater estuary. The site abuts farmland on one side and the coastal path and beach on the other side. It is 2 miles from the village of Bradwell on Sea with its community shop, parish church and two pubs. The Centre is served by the local bus, on request, and is 9 miles from the station of Southminster which connects through to Stratford and Liverpool Street stations in London.

History

The Othona Community was founded in 1946, initially as a summer camp, by Norman Motley, an RAF padre and Church of England priest. It is situated in a field adjacent to St Peter's on The Wall, the 7th century cathedral of St Cedd, who was invited from Northumberland to evangelise the people of what is now Essex. St Peter's was sited on the Roman Fort of Othona. The oldest church in England still used for regular worship, it is part of Chelmsford diocese and the Bishop is a regular visitor to St Peter's and our centre. St Peter's, known to us as "Chapel" is used twice daily by The Othona Community, it is a short walk across a field from our site and being off grid, all our evening worship is by candlelight.

Facilities

Over the decades the site has been developed by members of the Community, initially a few Nissan huts gathered from the surrounding farms, to wooden dormitories and huts, through to the current buildings. The Motley building completed in 1993 comprises 11 bedrooms with 30 beds, toilet and shower rooms, recently refitted well equipped, all electric kitchen, dining room seating 60 or more with full length glass doors opening into the gardens. The solar building added in 2011 a self build eco project constructed from straw bales, rammed earth and recycled materials, has 5 bedrooms and 15 beds, quiet room and toilet-shower rooms. There is also a small newly renovated art and education building adjacent to the sea wall and coast path.

Green Energy

The site has always been off grid, in the early days water was carried in from a nearby stand pipe. We have recently completed phase one of a green energy generation project, having installed a biomass boiler (wood pellet), doubled our solar panels and refurbished our wind turbine. We have a backup diesel generator and there is the ambition to install a second larger wind turbine. The majority of the site has been rewired and fire safety systems have been brought up to current regulatory standards. The reliable generation of power has enabled the state-of-the-art kitchen which is making catering for large numbers a joy.

Environmental Stewardship

Over the decades the site has been carefully managed for wildlife and habitat diversity with a sustained programme of tree planting. Our septic tank drains through reed beds, enjoyed by birds, dragon flies and other wildlife. Trees both contain and shelter our site, making it a safe place for children to play and explore.

We keep a few chickens, have many fruit trees, a polytunnel and vegetable beds. We have good links with local permaculture organisations.

Education and Schools Work

During school holidays the Centre is open to families, singles and couples. During term time mid-week, we have visiting school groups. We are keen to enlarge our educational offering, wanting to inspire the next generation to take care of the earth and live responsibly. Weekends in low season are a mixture of individual retreats, organised working weekends and group hire by local churches and other organisations.

Residents and Accommodation

The Centre has a full time, live in, manager and a small number of other staff, supplemented by a bank of enthusiastic, committed and capable volunteers. Core residents accommodation is provided in a core block, with simple bedrooms, shower and toilet.

Charity Structure and Governance

The Othona Community consists of a charitable Trust, with associated members. The Trust owns the buildings and land. A wholly owned subsidiary charitable company leases the Centres from the Trust and runs the Centres (Dorset & Essex). The Trust and the Company are governed by Trustee/Directors recruited for their expertise in finance, safety, law, HR management, education etc. Each of the Centres has a local management committee which supports the manager in the running of the Centre. The Centre manager is appointed by the chair of Trustees and line managed by the chair of the local management committee.

The Membership

The Othona Community Charitable Trust is a membership organisation. Members pay an annual subscription of £12 per year and commit to support the community through prayer, volunteering, talents and time. The summer programme at Bradwell is heavily supported by volunteers who host, clean, cook and work in the grounds for a week or weeks at a time. Working weekends are very popular with members who through physical engagement have strong emotional and spiritual investment in both the site and the community. Sharing in the common table and simple worship are key to our community life.

We have always strived to be accessible to those with limited finances, our rates are low and bursaries are available to support those unable to cover the cost of staying. We regularly welcome people whose health and abilities exclude them from wider participation.

Further Information

Our websites

Othona Bradwell <https://www.othonaessex.org.uk/>

Othona West Dorset <https://www.thonawestdorset.org.uk>

Persons

Richard/Debbie Sanders Joint Managers of the Bradwell Centre essexwarden@othona.org

Please contact the Centre managers to discuss the positions in more details and to arrange an exploratory visit.