

THE OTHONA COMMUNITY

REPORT OF THE TRUSTEES FOR THE YEAR ENDED 31 MARCH 2024

Both centres offered a full programme of activities throughout the year. The number of visitors continues to increase particularly at Othona Bradwell where the energy installation enables all year use and camping increases both capacity and affordability for guests.

Othona West Dorset

This was a year in which we devoted significant resources and effort to the gradual preparation for generational change and renewal at this centre. The Othona trustees completed a Human Resources Review to address in particular a more sustainable allocation of management responsibilities within the resident core community. It was accepted that Tony Jaques' workload as warden had grown beyond what any one person could maintain. The result of the review, in brief, was a decision to recruit a deputy warden/manager who will carry particular responsibilities within operational matters and business development. Recruitment to this post would take place in 2024.

We were glad to interact with architect James Gallie, tasked by the trustees with an initial feasibility study for major redevelopment of the site including Community House. No such project is imminent, but we welcome this consideration of the potential for building works that might solve many of the existing shortcomings in our built assets.

On a smaller scale, however, to allow for the new deputy post – without surrendering one of our other team members – we have recognised the need for at least one more unit of staff accommodation. Proposals for the best way to achieve this, whether by alterations to an existing building or by replacing a dilapidated one, were brought forward through our Centre Management Committee with particular input from building industry professional Mark Gallagher.

That committee, chaired by Chris Wilson, is now receiving more statistical information on bookings, room occupancy and so forth (thanks to book-keeper Andy Davey and office coordinator Liz Howlett). This gives valuable extra perspectives on the raw data of financial outcomes.

This year saw the planned expansion of our system for volunteers who support the core community. We now look to welcome one 'Supervol' for each of our bookable events, to share in the work and life of the core. Their help is invaluable and most of them report finding the experience very rewarding. There are now nearly twenty splendid individuals on our Supervols list.

Liz Howlett is in the process of writing a book about Adela Curtis and the community she founded on this site, whose land and buildings were later gifted to Othona. In the autumn Liz was able to spend a month on a research trip to the USA. She has enrolled over 200 followers

for her blog that reported on that trip and continues with updates on her research into Miss Curtis - mystic, author and inspirer of communities.

Othona Essex, Bradwell

We had a varied events programme for 2023/2024 with an intentional focus on the environment among other areas. Thank you to all our amazing facilitators for their hard work in making the programme run well. Some of the highlights included:

- Easter was taken by Rev Andrew Gough, the Bishop of Chelmsford (Rt Revd Dr Guli Francis-Dehqani) took the dawn service at the Chapel and around 70 of the worshippers present came for breakfast here.
- We held the 2nd Essex Green Weekend here over the Bank holiday weekend in May in partnership with Trustlinks. It was a fantastic weekend of talks, music and workshops with over 150 people attending.
- We had a book launch for ***St Peter-on-the-Wall: Landscape and Heritage on the Essex Coast***, with a series of talks and workshops, as part of the Essex Book Festival.
- Summer began with our 3rd Wild Worship event, led by Rachel Summers. This event is wonderful for children and has built up a following of families new to Othona. We have made a number of links with those coming which has led to new programme events.
- The environment theme was very much continued with the usual Spring and Winter Watch weeks, led by Nastassja and Hugh, environment week in the summer with some A Rocha associated links and our Autumn retreat on Greening the Soul with Revd Imogen Nay.

Art and music also featured in many events with a summer art week run by Ali and Gwenda, music week, festival of Song and an Art & Soul retreat.

Around 40% of our schedule involves hosting groups, many of whom come to Othona on a regular basis. We have made links with like minded organisations and work in partnership with a number of these. Some of the highlights include:

- The Orthodox Fellowship of St John the Baptist, who hold their annual youth fellowship here, attracting around 70 people for a weekend of teaching and worship.
- A Rocha UK, who we work with as one of their Partners In Action. We attended their annual retreat in November and hosted some of the members here in the summer to run an environment week.
- YMCA staff and residents, who came four times last year, who come for rest and run their own programme of events.
- We have three primary schools for residential trips, for which we deliver a national curriculum based programme, and another for regular day visits.
- St Ethelburga's Centre for Peace and Reconciliation, who ran hedge planting weekends as part of their Life Lines project.

The team on site consisted of Richard & Debbie as Wardens, Phil as Kitchen manager, Amanda as volunteer gardener/general help, Chris as a general volunteer, Pete as groundsman for one

day a week and Kirstie as admin support for 12 hrs a week. This was greatly supplemented by all the fantastic volunteers we have, some coming for the whole summer, others for whatever time they are able to spare. We appreciate the help they are able to give.

Grants, Donations and Legacies

Donations to support the general work of the centres and Trust totalled £35,425 (Bradwell £13,576, OWD £13,500, Trust £8,349). In addition significant donations and grants were received towards projects at Bradwell totalling £84,676 in relation to the replacement sewage system (£50,562), recanvassing the yurts (£12,285 Grant from Maldon Council), improvements to the Motley accessible bathroom (£15,389) and providing bursary support £6,439). This generosity from supporters and friends is making a real difference to the operation of the sites and we are most grateful.

Public Benefit Statement

The trustees have referred to the guidance contained in the Charity Commission's general guidance on public benefit when reviewing our aims and objectives and planning our future activities.

The purpose of the charity is enshrined in its objects as described, and the trustees ensure this purpose is carried out for the public benefit of all persons that we serve by delivering a range of services at Bradwell Community Centre and Othona West Dorset Community Centre, to those in need of respite and spiritual refreshment.

Investment Policy

The Community has appointed Epworth Investment Management Limited to act as Investment Managers on a retail client basis.

The objectives of the charity's investment are:

- To support the religious and other charitable works carried on by the members of the Community.
- To establish and maintain a sound financial base for the organisation, for today and in future years.

To secure these objectives the charity seeks to produce the best financial return within an acceptable level of risk, seeking to balance income and capital returns. The investment funds are managed to maintain the real capital value of the funds, whilst generating a sustainable level of investment income to support the charity. The current income target is set at approximately £20,000 per annum and the overall total return sought can be quantified as inflation (measured by CPI) plus 3.5% per annum assessed over a rolling 5 year period. In the year to 31 March 2024 an overall return of 6.96% was achieved on the investment funds.

The investment objective for the cash balances and short term reserves (including restricted funds) is to preserve the capital value with a minimum level of risk.

The trustees review the investments on a quarterly basis and have an agreed Investment Policy that is kept under regular review. The Investment Policy was last reviewed in July 2023, and will be reviewed again in November 2024.

Reserves Policy

The trustees of the charity have considered the need for reserves and have agreed that reserves are required to (a) provide contingency funds to maintain operations, (b) to allow time to respond to significant reductions in expected income and (c) in the event that it is required, to enable the managed closure of some or all of the charity's activities.

The trustees have assessed the amount required to be held in reserves on a risk basis and consider that a minimum sum of £150,000 should be held for these purposes. At the end of the year the freely available reserves held by the charity were greater than the minimum required reserve amount.

Financial Review

The two centres operate through a wholly owned subsidiary company. The Community has taken advantage of the exemptions available to it to not prepare consolidated accounts. However, the Trustees wish members to know that the company reported an unrestricted net surplus of income over expenditure during the year of £37,678 (£57,928 in 2023) and had a net asset surplus as at 31 March 2024 of £140,752 (£103,074 in 2023).

The income received from investments, membership fees and donations has been utilised towards the governance and management costs of the Community. After these costs have been applied there was a residual surplus of £10,185 which has been retained within the Community. Depreciation of £29,688 was charged in the year leading to an operating deficit of £19,503 before transfers and capital gains / losses.

The investment portfolio income continued at lower levels following the capital expenditure incurred in 2020 and 2021. Market conditions improved slightly on previous years and at the end of the year the investment portfolio showed an increase in value of £29,271 (2023: loss £56,058) which after transfers from designated reserves resulted in an overall surplus in the community's funds of £9,768 (2023: deficit £48,823).

During the year no capital withdrawals were made from the investment portfolio to finance either capital projects or the working capital needs of the Centres (2023: £nil).

Trustees are grateful to individual members and supporters who responded to fundraising appeals included in emailed newsletters, donations to the Trust totalling £8,837, including gift aid.

Trustees have been monitoring spending at both centres on a regular basis and the Community Treasurer meets with the warden every quarter to review financial performance.

The charity maintains a number of restricted funds - these are funds where the donor has placed restrictions on how the money can be used. At the end of March 2024 restricted funds totalled £75,181 (2023: £31,870).

The trustees have chosen to designate some of the unrestricted funds for specific purposes. This is at the discretion of the trustees and the need for the designation is kept under regular review. At the end of March 2024 designated funds totalled £51,800 (2023: £52,833).

Structure, Governance and Management

The structure of the Trust and the wholly owned Company limited by guarantee remain the same. There is a good range of expertise amongst the Trustee/Directors. Appointments made during the year were; Mark Ringrose and Michael Dyer link Trustees at Othona Bradwell.

Janet Webster, John Smith and Sasha East stood down as Trustees, we thank them for their valuable input.

The main focus this year has been the appraisal of our built assets and a strategic review of the work of both centres, bringing Trustees and Managers to a shared understanding of the short and medium term priorities. The cost of the desired work to Community House West Dorset was found to be prohibitively expensive, we need to think again about the West Dorset site. A new website was commissioned and work is ongoing to populate this to launch at the end of 2024. The main focus for governance the previous year was the complete review and rewriting of the Safeguarding Policy and Procedures. Audits in year at both centres show good operational implementation. Trustees acknowledge that this is an administrative load on the staff team when recruiting staff and volunteers.

Future Plans

To increase access to the centres by: keeping the cost of visiting as competitively priced as we can, offering bursaries to those who need them and having the option of camping at Othona Bradwell. Keeping prices low decreases our profit, this necessitates fundraising for any capital developments.

To fund raise by appeal to Members, visitors and friends and by applying for grants when these are available.

To continue to explore ways of increasing the privacy and comfort of the core staff accommodation at Othona Bradwell and to increase staff accommodation by one unit at Othona West Dorset.

To continue to recruit and appoint Trustee/Directors and Committee Members to manage the charity and the centres. There is a vacancy at Othona West Dorset for a link Trustee.

To continue to manage our land for nature conservation.

To continue the strategic review of the Charity ahead of our 80 year anniversary, looking at our charitable aims, being clear about our public benefit and updating our Charitable Objects.

Trustees of The Othona Community September 2024

