

Othona Community Bradwell – Strategy 2017-2020

London Community Consultation meeting 8th Feb 2017.

The meeting was led by Phil Martin who opened with welcome, reflections. Prayer and introductions.

Those in attendance: Al Fitzjohn, Kate Portal, Tim Fox, Dave HB, Sandra HB, Peter Musgrave, Sue Penny, Paul Winter, Hannah Smith, Portia Roelofs, Rosie Sinden-Evans, Phil Martin, Ruth Bull, Pete Baird, Andrew Watson. **Apologies** – Nicholas Mannoukas, Katie Miller, Susanne Kelly, Sheila Maxey.

The Video of the outline strategy was shown, with its focus on themes and statements. The context was explained – that this was drawn up in September 2016 by Bradwell Centre Committee members with the guidance of Andy Redfearn, and is intended to set the scene and prepare for business planning and action over the next four years, to be reviewed annually. We need to make changes, there is a lot to do.

A strategy opens up the opportunity to prioritise what is important to the Community, put ideas into order, and identify what we will all do to achieve this. There will be working groups for each topic and volunteers to join are welcome.

General brief open discussion.

Phil asked if the video and especially the values felt and sounded like Othona Bradwell. Because the values underpin everything we do in the strategy and future action plans. Everyone present felt that the values were right and had captured the ethos and character of Othona Bradwell. Rosie added that we had received feedback that we had not included environmental and this was now being included and worked on.

From Portia, Kate and All: we still need to be challenged, to meet and interact with all sorts of people “not like us.” There is a huge demographic of older people; Othona brings together young and older, and should support people better – there is only one disability room. But Othona is subtle in the way we integrate people and include people with physical, sensory and learning disabilities. Post Brexit Othona should work with a fragmented society.

Andrew spoke of his parents’ contribution to building Othona in the 1940s, when they were concerned about ecumenical, international and outreach situations, when Norman established a Community with a tremendous mix of people. We can now acknowledge a diversity of people through the internet but the impact of being **at** Othona is totally different, due to the atmosphere etc., people need to stay.

Paul led thoughts on how at Othona conditions come from “bottom up” not “top down” as we learn so much during washing up. There is a connection between the daily round and the strategy coming up from the basic things. Roo said the development of the Strategy with the members came ahead of its adoption by Trustees, rather than being a “top down” directive. Portia was glad Othona is awake to the world; sharing thoughts from Martin Riemer in Germany that Othona looks at the current rifts and divisions in the world and speaks back. If different groups of

people at Othona make you feel awkward and you sense the chaos at times during your stay, this helps you to grow.

Peter spoke of his love for the friendships and family feeling at Othona where you can be yourself, speak your mind and not feel threatened or attacked, whatever your background or faith. It is sad that there are negative reactions at the mention of a “Christian Community” when people should come for an experience that cannot be explained. Sue spoke of the values that you can identify with – Rosie reminded us that this is a living document.

We have been counter-cultural and radical – which starts with a warm welcome. We are trying to be an example to all who come in. Themes start at home, are developed through Othona and carry on back at home. This can be demanding on the Warden and team, who need the support of other members, and the resources they need. Around 25% of Othona Bradwell’s time is in the open Programme events, for 75% the team are doing other things. Paul referred to the Community as a “microcosm” of society, Peter and Andrew helped us to consider to balance being a local resource with being open to the wider themes of reconciliation through unity of faith. Phil shared Sheila Maxey’s input: who is “we?” Community is all of us, Common Unity.

Discussions in three groups.

One group agreed that the proposed themes were right, and gave highest priority to “reconciliation.” Group members living locally to Bradwell gave higher priority than others in the group who ranked “Othona as a local resource” last. There were mixed views and discussion about Christian-based spirituality, and they felt there should be more outreach to younger people.

One group considered the priority areas were correct, need to be focused, and that any other suggestions could be included within the topics already identified. The group did not rank the themes by priority, seeing them instead as interlocked, to be mapped in a “hub and spoke” diagram. Some themes are much newer and so may need prioritization. Addressing future strategy plans they queried that the themes are either “local” or “international.” Communication of year-round activity beyond the summer Programme would continue the links between the two aspects of Othona Bradwell, and we need to ensure quality as well as quantity of visits. Members of that group felt able to contribute: Peter – environmental, multi-faith events, would like to invite his Muslim friends as long as there is a strategy in place to include them. Andrew picked up the ambassadorial role, the opportunity for team-building events at Othona, and communication of values. Tim can contribute as part of the Community too, Othona is not just the hub of change, it must continue outside – what are we taking away?

One group accepted the themes, provided it was said that Othona is open to people of all faiths and none. Reconciliation was seen as a key priority, continuing with the post-war original purpose. There should be of flexibility on the forms Chapel service – open to people of all faiths and none, ecumenical, and accepting those who are not Christian but see in Christianity something they want and need. Chapel services form a scaffolding, a structure – tension over the label “Christianity” but it is also

core. There should be more interaction between “outside groups and “community time,” both fulfilling our purpose. The themes are linked, refugees are contacted through networking and spreading the word, which is achieved through outreach and more on the website for outside groups, helping us to proactively find groups. Education should be kept open, aiming to reach more secondary schools, and seeking ways to organize more groups, from local to international. Themes emerged of networking, diversity/difference, hands-on work and outreach.

Summary, Conclusion, Next Steps and Thanks.

Feedback from the groups led lively discussion. People spoke of the need for a strong focus on the next generation of people coming through Othona. The view that we are missing the young people was balanced by the commitment of several 18/25s. We have opportunities for young people to be active, not just sofa-surfing – we need to get projects going, try something new to create interest in Othona. The Warden’s Talk is based on practicalities but has to get groups involved in core founding beliefs. How? E.g. Bargain Breaks are an opportunity for people from outside groups, people who have been before, and long- standing members to meet. We must beware of “self-selection” to sessions that only appeal to certain sections of society. Networking is a challenge, all of us are responsible. Tim said it is very helpful to keep the response focused on our strategy.

We discussed the different problems encountered over the years, with changes in emphasis from direction to encouragement in sharing community through Work, Worship, Study and Play. A phone call to first-timers after three months would keep up contact and encourage returners. Tim said in 2016 we spent £6,000 on bursaries to support those less well off. Andrew spoke of going out to Othona from the East End being a very important aspect to help young people make contact with nature. People may not be so much “disadvantaged” as “disaffected.” Othona’s ambassadorial role is to come in, then **take out** the message, the community spirit – point people in the direction of Othona through leaflets, carry them in the car.

We need to keep questioning and encouraging people in what Othona is for, moving the message from old to new members, and keeping in contact with “dormant” members who matter too. We need to spread the love that makes people long to come back as soon as possible, not just as an annual event.

Thanks to Kate for use of the Oxo Building room and to Phil for leading the lively discussions, with Roo taking notes and feeding new ideas into the Strategy.