

# Background Information - Caterer at Othona West Dorset 2022

This paper is not the job description but is a bit of background for your information, specific to this moment in Othona's evolution and to the individuals who make up our core community right now. Please read it alongside the "Three Keys" document.

## Who We Are

The resident core group at present are:

**Tony Jaques** - an Othona member since the 1970s and warden here from 1995, Tony is the one with whom most bucks stop. He leads on developing the events programme, and on the general running of Othona. He has been heavily involved in our two current building projects. Among his enthusiasms are singing and lyric-writing, dance and occasional cycle-camping in France.

**Robin Shaw** - married to Tony, she has lived here since 2011 and volunteers as a community member. She and Tony delight in their cat Otto and the latest addition to their family - nephew Emerson, two years old, who lives with his parents in Bridport.

**Liz Howlett** - office coordinator since April 2019, Liz had been a regular visitor to Othona since the early 1990s! Her chief responsibilities include bookings and recruitment. Among other things she enjoys crafting, photography and singing with Rock Choir. The pandemic year has allowed her time for extensive research into the first community on this site. She assists on the ministry team of the Bride Valley (our local parishes).

**Andy Davey** - book-keeper of many years' standing, Andy doesn't live here but comes in once a fortnight to keep our finances and related matters in order. He is also a saxophonist, potter, choral singer and has worked as a counsellor. Until recently he was chair of trustees of another local community.

**Megan Simson** - our housekeeper since July 2021, Megan is an Australian who has lived on and off in Britain for a number of years. She loves creating a home environment that visitors will appreciate. She enjoys the natural world, photography, spirituality and writing.

## Renewal

Othona has recently come through a period of long-anticipated physical renewal. We've made key alterations to some of our core community accommodation. In 2020 we completely rebuilt most of our visitors' toilet and shower facilities.

Between August 2019 and February 2021 the Four Seasons Studio rose from the ashes (figuratively speaking) of the old art and craft room. With the completion of this new studio we've also re-greened areas that were a building site, improved some of our access and created a circular gladed seating area in the woods.

We see these material changes as necessary but by no means sufficient. Othona's sense of purpose and the way it operates also need to move with the times, we know. What worked well in 2000 may be hopelessly beside-the-point in 2025. Although this house is a much-loved home from home for many people, we aren't here just to do the same old thing year after year so as to keep it all familiar!

Like many organisations we have been improving our approach to recycling, waste management, reducing plastics etc. We currently cook and heat the house using LPG ('calor gas') but we've set a target of getting the whole place carbon neutral by 2030. Already we generate a good deal of our own electricity and employ various other green technologies. We're very blessed in the Othona grounds, which we manage consciously for bio-diversity and which are a rich habitat for all kinds of flora and fauna.

## **Feeding Body and Soul**

One of the areas for renewal is in how we feed ourselves and our visitors. Meals prepared from scratch, with love, by people who will also sit and eat them alongside everybody else, are a vital part of Othona life, deeply appreciated by so many visitors. The shared table is a heart of the community. We don't want to change any of that. But just as with our buildings, there are some improvements we have in mind. Not only to refresh the food experience on offer, but also to make life less stressful for those who are planning and buying and preparing it.

We aren't - and don't have plans to be - a vegetarian or vegan community. Nonetheless, for a quarter of a century we've aimed at a menu with less meat and more vegetarian dishes than the average UK diet - for reasons of planetary sustainability as well as health. That trend is liable to continue.

And we are looking to make even more of what we do eat, locally sourced. Othona doesn't have the person power to grow lots of its own food on site (though with volunteer help we're now doing more), but we can be good supportive customers to small local producers with high ethical standards.

With the growing awareness of different individuals' allergies and dietary restrictions we see a need to streamline the ways we devise menus and support those who are doing the cooking. Where you want to be seasonal and to minimise waste, there will always be scope for happy improvisation in the kitchen! But the bedrock of reliable menus and standard recipes is an area where we must be a lot more systematic than we've been in the past.

If the idea of helping shape this kind of change appeals to you, then it could be a very good time to think about the Caterer role at Othona.

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