

## Trustees Highlight Report AGM September 2024

It is a great pleasure and privilege to give this report to Members and friends of The Othona Community on behalf of Trustees. This is my last report as Chair, I am standing down, after 6 years with effect from today for health reasons. I hope to be able to remain on the board for a while to effect a good handover. I want to reassure you that The Community is in very capable JJ and safe hands going forwards. Michael Hunt our Community Treasurer will be the interim acting Chair and Jane Pearse will continue as Vice-Chair. Many thanks to them both as they serve the community in this way.

Trustees have 2 overarching responsibilities in law, firstly to see that the charity is well governed and secondly to ensure that the resources of the charity are used exclusively to further the charitable purpose of the charity as specified in the registered objects. The day to day management of the centres sits with the centre managers and their work is overseen by the local management committees.

I would like to give a brief overview of what I think has been achieved over the past 6 years and to sketch out what I think are the priorities for the next 6 years.

The top strategic priorities 6 years ago were to;

- Significantly improve the infrastructure at both sites, but most particularly Othona Bradwell.
- To make both sites safer for staff and guests and bring operations within the law, mainly fire safety, health and safety and food safety.
- To effect a generational shift within the guests, visitors, staff and members
- To recruit good people to lead, work and volunteer at the centres
- To recruit Trustee/Directors with the knowledge and skills to serve the Community
- To develop a sustainable business model

Norman Motley states in his book *Much Ado About Something* that he was against what he called “institutionalism”. What we have been doing these past years can certainly be called “institutionalism”. But there are good reasons for that. There have been very significant changes in society since Norman wrote those words and significant changes in the value of the assets that the Community holds. It was possible to avoid institutionalism when the assets were just £250 cash and some repurposed nissan huts. Today the site at West Dorset has been recently valued at about £3.3M, and although the site at Othona Bradwell is less salable it would cost many millions to replace the buildings and plant on the site. Both sites now have permanent resident staff, they are open year round and welcome up to 150 guests at a time, including many children.

To do that safely, responsibly and within the law takes a lot of work and a lot of oversight. It has been a great delight to recruit and work with an excellent team of Trustee/Directors with specific expertise and skills who have steadily improved the governance of the charity.

Mentioning a few, Michael Hunt has brought our finances and financial procedures up to scratch, Dan Duffield has provided excellent leadership to the safety agenda and Mark MacDonald is very diligent in checking our safeguarding procedures and giving oversight. Caroline Walker and Ruth Bull were excellent chairs of the local management committees and line managers of the wardens. Chris Wilson, Steve Barnes and Chris Jones have ably succeeded them.

At the centres; Tony Jaques has been very ably assisted by Liz Howlett at OWD and has recently recruited a deputy, Kathryn Brookes. Tim Fox was ably assisted by Richard and Debbie Sanders, and then Richard and Debbie succeeding Tim have been supported by Phil Martin. The paid staff, in turn have been supported by an army of dedicated and cheerful volunteers, too many for me to mention here. It has been a privilege to work alongside you all.

The main infrastructure projects have been the energy installation and new kitchen at Othona Bradwell, new fire safety systems, upgraded showers and new art rooms at both sites. Othona Bradwell have been steadily upgrading the rooms for staff, volunteers and guests.

As to making the generational shift, Othona Bradwell have been particularly successful in bringing in new groups, new families and networking with local and national organisations. This has brought about a significant generational shift, whilst also keeping and valuing the many 3rd and 4th generation Othona members who both enjoy and welcome new people into the Community. With the increased number of events and the increased numbers of people booking into events Othona Bradwell has made an operating profit which enables further investment in the site. Othona West Dorset continues to hold its own.

The Othona Community is a rare and fragile thing and Trustees don't take any of this progress for granted. Attracting new people as guests, staff and volunteers, whilst also valuing and retaining our longstanding members is key to our ongoing success.

It is good that The Othona Community is special and held in dear regard by many, but the shadow side of this is that it can slip into being cliquey, a clique of personality or of cronies, insufficiently diverse. Being integrated in the local community, the Parish, wider Church groups and working with other organisations with overlapping interests is a good way of guarding against this trap, as well as being an effective way of bringing in new business and growing The Community. The spirituality of the centres needs to be distinctive, radically inclusive, welcoming to people of all faiths and none and also recognisably Christian.

And now looking forwards

For me the key strategic priorities for the future are:

- Clarity about our aims and purpose and how that is actualised at both centres
- Ensuring the wellbeing of our staff through good employment practices, adequate private accommodation and attention to the spiritual life of the resident community
- Continued attention to the good governance of the charity

- Good financial management such that the centres make enough profit to repair and maintain the buildings and plant
- Linking locally and nationally with organisations of overlapping interests to increase our reach and impact
- AND MOST IMPORTANTLY OF ALL
- Being an example of Christian Community with practical concern for people and planet

It is the quality of the experience of our guests, volunteers and staff that is key to the success of The Community.

For me the key components of a good experience are; a warm welcome, nutritious food, clean toilets, a feeling of care and safety, a deep sense of spiritual holding and grounding in faith and the demonstration of a hopeful way of living together.

We continue to pray for one another and for the flourishing of The Community.

Clare Gough  
September 2024