

Chair's Notes Trustees meeting 2019.10

Trustees and both wardens gathered at Othona West Dorset 11-13th October 2019.

Renewable Energy Project Othona Essex

Our major focus for the weekend was the proposed energy project at Othona Essex. The current LPG boiler is beyond repair and needs immediate replacement. Trustees commissioned an energy audit earlier this year. The audit revealed that the centre can generate energy much more cleanly and cheaply. The plan includes installing a biomass boiler and hot water storage units, linking the solar building to the main house, removing all LPG boilers and water heaters, providing heating to the "Lads" building, installing a new wind turbine and a refit of the kitchen - removing all gas appliances. There is a considerable amount of enabling work needed to support these changes.

The biomass boiler attracts RHI (renewable heating initiative) payments for the next 20 years and will result in very significant savings on fuel; wood pellets being much cheaper than LPG. The project will allow the centre to be open for a longer season and it should be possible to pay back the capital investment over 20 years. The new system has built in spare capacity to allow for further expansion of the accommodation, which would generate an even larger return.

This very considerable investment represents a shift in financial strategy for the Trustees. As a Board the Trustees are mindful of their need to steward our investments wisely, alongside our need to steward the planet. We are also concerned to facilitate the ongoing development and success of the centres for the next generation.

Subject to Othona Essex establishing a suitably constituted energy project board with clear lines of accountability and reporting, Trustees agreed to invest £380,000 of Charitable Trust reserves in this project. Not only will this package of developments deliver a 95% reduction in CO2 emissions it will allow future expansion of the accommodation.

Four Seasons Studio Othona West Dorset

This project is progressing well. Much of the money has been raised to cover costs through grants, gifts and legacies. The Charitable Trust has committed £70,000 from reserves. There is a £50,000 gap which the Trust has agreed to underwrite whilst further grants and gifts are awaited. A building project board is overseeing the work, reporting to the Centre Management Committee and Trustee Board. Foundations have been laid and the contract is just about to be signed.

Washroom Upgrade Othona West Dorset

A proposal to upgrade the washrooms, which are very tired and outdated with poor water flow, was put forward. Plans are being drawn up and contractors invited to tender. Trustees will be presented with plans and costings at the end of November for a decision at the beginning of December. Trustees felt that the four seasons studio would result in increased bookings and the

current poor condition of the washrooms would prevent OWD from reaping the full benefit from their otherwise enhanced facilities.

Governance

Trustees spent a block of time reviewing our responsibilities for safeguarding children and vulnerable adults and for health and safety. Both policies are being renewed and all staff and key volunteers need to be made aware of their responsibilities and duties and to have the appropriate training. Risk assessments are key to both. These items are of utmost importance to Trustees and both are standing items on our agendas. Over the coming months Trustees will be leading a culture change across the organisation to ensure that the Community complies with the law and can demonstrate how we are keeping visitors, staff and volunteers safe.

Clare Gough
Chair Trustees
2019.10.14